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Title	Cognition and recognition: on the problem of the cognitive in Honneth
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Publication date	2012-05-08
Original Citation	Strydom, P. (2012) 'Cognition and recognition: on the problem of the cognitive in Honneth', Philosophy and Social Criticism, 38(6), pp. 591-607. doi:10.1177/0191453712442141
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0191453712442141 - 10.1177/0191453712442141
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Download date	2026-11-07 12:06:33
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/7579



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Published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38(6), 2012, pp. 591-607.

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Cognition and recognition

On the problem of the cognitive in Honneth

Abstract While concurring with Honneth's reconstruction of reification as a form of forgetfulness, this article questions the way in which he arrives at that conclusion as well as the conceptual status he ascribes to recognition – the instance with reference to which reification is exhibited as distortion or deformation. It argues, first, that Honneth's dualistic mode of argumentation falls behind the left-Hegelian tradition which he himself seeks to revitalize, thus causing a serious architectonic problem; and, secondly, that while polemicizing strongly against the cognitive approach, he at crucial points actually reverts to the very resources made available by that mode of thinking. Being the central concern of the article, this latter aspect is treated as the cognitive problem in his work, especially in his Tanner Lectures.

Key words cognitive science · critical theory · Dewey · Habermas · Lukács · Peirce · reification

Published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38(6), 2012, pp. 591-607.

Introduction

A characteristic feature of Axel Honneth's work is a consistently expressed critical attitude towards the cognitive approach. Although always negatively referred to, it is obviously an important device of which he makes regular use. Throughout his writings, he employs it as a contrasting foil against which to characterize and give profile to his own unique position. While his work covering a number of decades is replete with references to it, his recent Berkeley Tanner Lectures (Honneth 2008) on reification contain an exemplary systematic treatment to which is central the relation between cognition and recognition – the latter of which, as is well known, serves as Honneth's philosophical signature. As such, the Lectures provide a less textually disparate, more coherent and thus convenient source for an analysis and critical assessment of his understanding of the cognitive dimension and its significance or lack thereof.

In the following paragraphs, I propose to undertake just such an analysis and critical assessment in two parts. The first part briefly documents Honneth's conception of the cognitive and equally briefly then shows how he employs it to stylize and give profile to his recognition-theoretical position. In the second part, I point out and elaborate at some more length on two concomitant problems which arise in the course of the development of his position. The upshot of the account is that Honneth not only operates with a rather narrow, traditional conception of the cognitive, but that he at crucial junctures in fact falls back on assumptions which are close to and even derive from the contemporary stage in the development of the very approach he repudiates. The source of the problem is not just his partial misunderstanding of the cognitive problematic, but also his mode of argumentation which, giving rise to a serious architectonic or conceptual problem, falls short of the

resources available in the left-Hegelian tradition of which he himself is a representative.

In pursuing this line of argumentation, needless to say, it is not possible to follow in detail and to do justice to the intricacies of Honneth's admirably clear argumentation aimed at restoring Lukács' concept of reification in a new idiom. The particular and thus limited focus of this article is on the architectonic structure of his highly commendable effort to make reification available once more as a key concept of contemporary critical theory. Special emphasis within this structure is reserved for the place he affords the cognitive dimension.[1] It should be made clear at the outset that the argument presented here does not affect Honneth's interpretation of reification as forgetfulness. What it does intend to do is to question both the way he gets to that point and the manner in which he presents the conceptual status of its counterpart, recognition.

Honneth's conception and use of the cognitive

The cognitive

Honneth understands the cognitivist approach of which he is so critical in terms of the particular model and hence orientation which it adopts, according to him, due to its assumption of and even fixation on the 'subject-object schema' (30, 33, 36).[2] Following this figure of thought, the subject is a 'cognitive subject' (30) who places itself in opposition to reality which its treats as an object, as its 'objective circumstances' (33). This requires of it to take up an 'intellectual…objectifying relation to the world' (38, 40) which it accomplishes through engagement in

'cognitive acts' (46, 50) of various kinds. They stretch from 'perception' (58), through the adoption of an 'observer perspective' (34) or 'spectator model' (37) enabling a 'detached…neutral encounter' (48, 30, 32, 38) with reality, to 'conceptual…objectifying thought' (57, 54) which spearheads a 'process of abstraction' (38, 42). These acts eventuate in 'propositions' (37) or 'statements' (48) which represent 'cognitive knowledge' (49) or 'rational knowledge' (37) making possible a 'rational understanding of the world' (36). What starts as a merely objectifying relation to the world is thus transformed in the process into an 'epistemic relation to the world' (47) crowned by 'certain knowledge' (49). The 'cognitive subject' can thus be equated with the 'epistemic subject' (30, 48) as well as 'cognition' with 'knowledge' (48).

While this overview of associations and relations, despite its brevity, raises a series of questions that will have to be attended to, let us for the moment just make a general observation. It may be that some versions of the cognitive approach fit Honneth's characterization, yet the question is whether such versions can be taken as definitively defining of it. From the overview it is apparent that Honneth tends to follow a certain relatively widespread predisposition among social scientists and philosophers to conceive of the cognitive in a traditional way which equates it with the intellectual and the epistemic and sees it as being defined by objective, rational or certain knowledge. As against this tendency, however, it should be pointed out that since the cognitive revolution of the late 1950s the cognitive is more adequately understood not as simply coinciding with knowledge or 'know that', but rather as covering more fundamentally also capacities and competences or 'know how'. The latter capacities and competences indeed include ones which make possible the generation of knowledge, but they by no means admit of being confined just to the

intellect. The cognitive subject, therefore, entails much more than the merely epistemic subject, as Honneth conceives it, and hence cognition cannot summarily be reduced to knowledge.

Before proceeding with the pursuit of these and other questions, let us first see how Honneth employs the cognitive, as he conceives it, in the development of his own characteristic position.

The relation of cognition and recognition

Honneth's characterization of the cognitive dimension essentially serves as a foil against which to present and give profile to his own particular position centred on the concept of recognition. For the most part, therefore, cognition and recognition appear as polar opposites in the course of his argument. Whereas a negative key is reserved for the former, the latter is sounded in a positive one. If the cognitive can be identified by reference to such characteristics as intellectual cognitive acts which proceed by way of detached, disinterested, neutral conceptualization and abstraction aimed at objectifying reality for the purpose of gaining certain knowledge about it, then recognition has to be conceived as exhibiting diametrically opposed features. To be fair to Honneth's argument, he does take pains to forestall misconstruing cognition and recognition as starkly opposed. For this purpose, he (28, 29, 54-5) engages on more than one occasion in criticism of Lukács' unjustifiable tendency to regard all forms of objectification without exception as nothing less than instances of reification. In various domains of modern social life, activities are required for the reproduction of society which are indeed characterized by detachment, disinterestedness, neutrality, observation, contemplation, objectification and so forth but which, to be sure, can by no means without distinction be branded as reified practices or as being regulated by

reified ideas. It is apparent throughout the Tanner Lectures, nevertheless, that the contrast between the negatively presented cognitive approach and his own recognition-theoretical position is the principal figure of thought Honneth uses to give structure to his argument. As will be demonstrated in due course, it is this mode of procedure that not only leaves a trace of dualistic conceptualization in the Tanner Lectures, but in fact causes also a severe architectonic disjunction in Honneth's thinking. The latter most remarkably exhibits insecurity in his relation and appropriation of a central aspect of the left-Hegelian tradition which he himself has been seeking to revive for some time now (e.g. Honneth 2007a, 2003). Before elaborating on this and other related matters, however, it is necessary to textually support the claim regarding Honneth's use of the device of contrasting cognition and recognition.

In developing the contrast in question, Honneth starts from three philosophers who represent vastly divergent traditions yet nevertheless converge in their thinking – at least, judging by their concepts which are of key relevance in this context: Georg Lukács' Hegelian-Marxist concept of 'true or genuine human praxis' (26) or 'empathetic engagement' (35); Martin Heidegger's existential hermeneutic-phenomenological concept of 'care' (30); and John Dewey's pragmatist concept of 'human beings' primordial relation to the world' (36). The common assumption underpinning all three these concepts is that of a 'practical human relation to the world' (26) which Honneth plays off against the 'merely cognitive stance to their surroundings' (58) or 'epistemic relation to the world' (47). While this cognitive or epistemic relation is characterized by a 'detached…neutral…contemplative mode of practices and attitudes' (48, 30, 29), Honneth goes to all sorts of lengths to bring out and stress the exactly contrary features of the contrasting practical relation. The latter

is realized through 'proper…genuine… true human praxis' (26, 27) in which the agents take up a 'non-epistemic…empathetic and engaged relationship' (57, 27) with the world, including their social and natural surroundings and themselves. 'Empathy' (27, 29, 50) or 'sympathy' (49) and 'engagement' (27, 29, 50) with the world infused with such 'feeling' (36) and 'emotion' (42, 48, 50, 58), all absent from the cognitive approach in Honneth's judgement, are of central importance to his nuanced core argument. Far from registering disinterest as in the case of the 'observer' (34) who, along cognitive-epistemic lines, is oriented towards 'objectifying' (49, 54) reality for the purposes of arriving at a 'statement…[of]... propositional…[and hence]…certain knowledge' (37, 47, 48), the contrasting process of 'emotionally saturated practical dealings with the world' (37) exhibits its own unique qualities. Among them are the 'interestedness' (27, 30) of the 'participant' (34) who relates to the world in an 'affective' (45) mode and is therefore able to maintain an attitude of 'openness' (45) and 'receptiveness' (44) towards others and the natural surroundings, including occurrences of all kinds, as well as the self.

Honneth finally sharpens the basic contrast he so meticulously built up by not just drawing a distinction between the 'cognitivist model of social interaction' – which, by the way, is represented by Habermas among others – and the 'model of reciprocal affectedness' (49), but actually by replacing the former by the latter. More significantly still, he argues at some length in favour of the priority of the 'recognitional stance' over the cognitive stance, indeed, over 'all other attitudes toward the self and the world' (36). With the assistance of authors covering the developmental psychological ground like Peter Hobson and Michael Tomasello, he is convinced that it is possible to demonstrate the temporal or ontogenetic priority of recognition over cognition, and by appeal to Stanley Cavell's philosophical theory of

intersubjectivity he maintains that the conceptual or categorical priority of recognition can be established as well. The priority Honneth ascribes to recognition or the 'recognitional stance' (38), as he calls it, becomes intelligible once one considers that he understands by it a primordial, existential, embodied mode of relation to the world which is realized through the constantly active assessment of the value which persons, the self and the physical surroundings, including animals, plants and things possess in themselves. It is in this vein that he is willing to claim on numerous occasions that the priority enjoyed by this mode of relation can and must be taken in the sense of being the 'basis' or 'origin' (35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 46, 57). As regards this claim, he admits in a self-critical moment that it is a form of recognition which is more elementary not just than cognition, but even the kind of recognition he had identified before: 'I now assume that this 'existential' mode of recognition provides a foundation for all other, more substantial forms of recognition…' (90).

The scene is now set for a more penetrating analysis and critical assessment of Honneth's understanding of the cognitive dimension and the conceptual framework within which he incorporates it.

From the architectonic to the cognitive problem

Tension between the dualistic and tripartite models

The first thing that strikes one on studying Honneth's Tanner Lectures is the dualistic mode of thinking which runs like a red line through it from beginning to end. He indeed intermittently attempts to mitigate it, for instance, by denying a relation of opposition between cognition and recognition in favour of declaring the latter as the

condition of possibility of the former (54); or by criticizing Lukács' equation of reification and objectification (28, 29, 54-5). Considering that this untenable equation inevitably results from Lukács' idealistic productivist paradigm according to which all objectivity can be traced back to the activity of a world-constituting subject, Honneth instead appeals to an alternative interactionist or intersubjectivist theoretical framework. Despite these efforts, however, dualistic thinking effectively continues to structure the principal argument of the Lectures. Although avowedly adopting the alternative paradigm, there is ample evidence that he fails to follow it through consistently to the end. Had he actually done so, he would have freed himself from the fetters of dualistic thinking, yet all indications are that it persists and predominates. In accordance with it, the relation between cognition and recognition is presented as one of asymmetrical dependency. Cognition appears as the figure and recognition as the ground. The former is derivative, while the function of origin, basis and foundation is ascribed to the latter. This position, which is clearly the product of conceiving the relation between cognition and recognition in dualistic terms, gives rise to the unfortunate impression of a new version of foundationalism or philosophy of origins. This impression leads to a serious question regarding the cogency of Honneth's argument.

On closer inspection, it becomes apparent that neither the ontogenetic priority of recognition as plausibly established by developmental psychology warrants a claim to a new foundationalism, nor does the conceptual or categorical status of existential involvement in reality. It is evident particularly from the latter that the dualistic mode of thinking leads Honneth astray. This is the case since the clarification of the sense of the conceptual or categorical status of existential involvement in reality requires a more differentiated and complex mode of thinking than the two-dimensional figure

and ground or edifice and foundation schema effectively underpinning Honneth's argument. It is at this stage of the investigation that a remarkable finding asserts itself. Present in the Tanner Lectures are in fact two distinct figures of thought or models – the predominant dualistic model and another more adequate one which becomes momentarily visible from time to time, but is not allowed sufficient sway to shape the argument. What is even more remarkable is that this more differentiated and complex model is to be found in a number of the authors Honneth discusses in detail, namely Lukács, Adorno and in particular Dewey. Considering these three names, it means that the model in question, the one able to dissipate the spectre of dualistic thinking and foundationalism, is characteristic of the left-Hegelian tradition, since not just critical theory but also pragmatism is an heir to this heritage.[3]

A closer look at the Tanner Lectures brings to the fore Honneth's oscillation between the two options and, thereby, also the nature of the more adequate model. This model becomes unmistakably apparent beyond the dualistic one for the first time when he turns his attention to Dewey. As in the case of Lukács, Honneth selectively appropriates Dewey's ideas from the point of view of establishing his concept of recognition. What he seeks to accomplish is to make a connection between Dewey's conception of the human practical relation to the world as a relation laden with qualitative experience and his own concept of recognition. As a pragmatist in the tradition founded by Peirce and as a former Hegelian, Dewey writes in a manner that exhibits the logical structure of his thinking more readily than is the case with Lukács. It is this feature of Dewey's work that leads Honneth to offer an analysis which, although falling back into a dualistic presentation, allows momentary glimpses to be caught of the more adequate model.

Published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38(6), 2012, pp. 591-607.

At the very outset of his discussion of Dewey, Honneth gives a one-sentence summary of the core of the American philosopher's position: 'Dewey's reflections boil down to the assertion that every rational understanding of the world is always already bound up with a holistic form of experience, in which all elements of a given situation are qualitatively disclosed from a perspective of engaged involvement' (36). From this the conclusion then follows for Honneth that Dewey's highlighting of the role of qualitatively significant, engaged involvement allows the demonstration of 'the primacy of this kind of recognition over all merely cognitive attitudes toward the world' (36). The discrepancy between these two positions jumps off the page, as it were – at least, for anyone who is familiar with pragmatism from Peirce and Royce, through Dewey and C Wright Mills, to Bernstein and Brandom. It would be even more obvious to anyone who is familiar with the close relation between critical theory and pragmatism – a relation, nowhere adequately attended to by Honneth, which has been moving closer and closer to the centre of attention since Karl-Otto Apel's (1995) groundbreaking Peirce studies of 1967 and 1970 and his (Apel 1974, 1980) and Habermas' (1992, 1996, 2003) acknowledgement of the logic or structure of thinking commonly shared by the two seemingly very different traditions. In summarizing Dewey's position, Honneth actually offers a statement of this common core which represents nothing less that the alternative, more complex model at issue here. By contrast with two-place dualistic thinking, it is the three-place sign-mediated or semiotic process model which, as Apel (1974) pointed out, was *in nuce* present in the early Marx but worked out in detail by Peirce, and later continued to play a basic structuring role, even if in a subterranean manner, in both pragmatism and critical theory, including Dewey in the former tradition and Lukács[4] and Adorno[5] in the latter. Captured in terms of Peircean logic, the tripartite sign relation – a sign (1) signifies or

refers to something (2) for an interpreter (3) – entails that three kinds of signs – icons, indices and symbols – have a role in all processes of meaning creation and knowledge production and application, which thereby bring into play three mutually implicated yet analytically distinct dimensions of reality – felt quality or 'firstness', confrontation with and reaction to an object or 'secondness' and, finally, interpretation, understanding, concept, theory, knowledge, agreement, confirmation of reality or 'thirdness' (Peirce 1960: paragraph 5.6; Apel 1980; Habermas 1992). That Honneth's position represents nothing less than a dualistic reduction of the more complex model Dewey operates with is apparent from the fact that his summary of Dewey's position reflects, contrary to his own conclusion, precisely this threefold Peircean logic: every rational understanding of the world (thirdness) is always already bound up with a holistic form of experience (the semiotic process of sign-mediated meaning creation and knowledge production and application which forms part of the world) in which all elements of a given situation (secondness) are qualitatively disclosed from a perspective of engaged involvement (firstness).

As suggested above, Honneth interprets Dewey's position as though it involves two distinct levels. First, there is a primary level of involved engagement with the world which is infused with qualitative experience. It is this level that Honneth takes to correspond to the kind of recognition he has in mind and to which he ascribes 'primacy' (36). Secondly, there is the derivative level of so-called 'merely cognitive attitudes toward the world' (36) where agents process actual situations and analyse their components 'secondarily' (37). Honneth develops this particular interpretation by, on the one hand, noting Dewey's criticism of the predominant 'spectator model' based on the traditional subject-object opposition and the pernicious consequences its acceptance has for the organization of society and, on the other,

stressing Dewey's corrective strategy of demonstrating that 'our emotionally saturated practical dealings with the world provide the basis of all rational knowledge' (37). Honneth follows this interpretation up by once again summarizing Dewey's position in a manner which purportedly supports his conclusion: According to Dewey, '…all existential propositions have their cognitive roots in situations that "despite their internal complexity for the acting subject are thoroughly dominated and characterised by a single quality"' (37). Instead of bearing out his interpretation, however, this summary actually provides yet a second glimpse of the tripartite model outlined above with reference to Peirce. According to the same logic, all existential propositions (thirdness) have their cognitive roots in situations (secondness) that "despite their internal complexity for the acting subject are thoroughly dominated and characterised by a single quality (firstness). The contrasting perspective that this more complex model thus provides once again shows up Honneth's interpretation as a reductive one and, furthermore, suggests that the source of his tendency toward foundationalism must be sought in this indefensible step.

It is Honneth's conceptual strategy that drives him in the direction of foundationalism. The dualistic argumentation makes him, first, focus on Dewey's attempt to restore an appreciation for the emotionally significant quality of reality felt when it impinges upon or announces itself to human beings in the form of a problem, a person, an event, an occurrence, or a physical phenomenon. Secondly, it leads him to fix on this qualitative aspect as the supposed 'origin' (35, 39, 57), 'basis' (37, 40), 'antecedent' (38, 40, 47, 50) or even 'foundation' (90) of all else that follows. The error of extrapolating such a foundation from the all-pervasive quality of some aspect of reality as human beings are called upon by it, tune in to it, have a feeling about it or develop a mood about it, becomes graphically clear as soon as one relates it to the

tripartite process model. So far from being a foundation, the felt quality of reality, or what Peirce called 'firstness', is but one of three moments in the process of meaning creation, knowledge development and application. Honneth is quite correct in emphasising with Dewey that this moment should never be 'allowed simply to vanish' or to be 'forgotten' (38). In this sense, one can agree with his understanding of reification as involving 'forgetfulness' (52), but decidedly not with any tendency to transpose it into some sort of foundation. In so far as the singular, iconically signified and humanly felt quality of reality is a moment in a process which is constantly involved in mutually implicative relations with the remaining two moments, that is, existential confrontation with and reaction to an object or 'secondness' and conceptualization, theorization, argumentation and agreement about reality or 'thirdness', it is always and everywhere present, yet not in a foundational sense.[6] In fact, freezing the process by basing it on one of its moments understood as a foundation may well be tantamount, ironically, to creating an unwanted source of reification itself.[7]

Besides the two occasions discussed thus far on which Honneth inadvertently allows the more complex model to surface, there is evidence in the text of his Tanner Lectures of another comparable case[8] as well as of at least two other revealing instances of short-circuiting of his own typical dualistic model and the more adequate tripartite model. In an outline of Dewey's methodology, Honneth (38-40) effectively shows that the pattern involves three interrelated moments. Infused with fear, concern and hope, an emotion-laden perception of the quality of a situation (firstness) opens the way and indicates the direction in which an analysis of the components of the situation (secondness) representing the object of knowledge could go in order to make possible the intellectual handling of the problem at issue, thus potentially fulfilling the

anticipated goal of the whole exercise (thirdness) – for instance, solving the problem which in the first instance gave rise to fear, concern and hope. In keeping with his predilection to primordialize the first qualitative moment, however, Honneth does not observe the mutual implication of the three moments in the process of meaning creation and knowledge production and application, but instead plays the first and second moments off against one another and, as a result, underplays the third moment captured by such concepts as 'reason', 'goal' and 'direction' (39). At this juncture it should be pointed out that what is most remarkable is that, by contrast with this dualistic reduction, Honneth's own understanding of critical theory's methodology presented elsewhere[9] matches more or less the tripartite model which is typical of the left-Hegelian tradition represented by both critical theory and pragmatism. One thing that is conspicuously missing from his accounts here and elsewhere, however, is the mode of inference of abduction over and above induction and deduction. Its inclusion, which is mandatory in any adequate account of methodology, would have forestalled the reductive tendency exhibited by his Tanner Lectures. Abduction, which is discussed by Peirce (1960), Apel (1995) and Habermas (1992) and finds graphic expression in C Wright Mills' famous concept of the 'sociological imagination' (1970),[10] is a mode of inference that starts precisely from the initial moment of the vague sense or feeling of the unique quality of a particular situation, but at the same time centrally involves also the forging of relations among the three moments which are then maintained throughout the process. In doing so, it brings fears, concerns and hopes into play which in turn activate, on the one hand, the concerned taking responsibility for the matter at issue and, on the other, the imaginative opening up of the situation, its components, the nature of the matter at issue in it, the kind of knowledge and action called for to deal adequately with the matter, and the desired

appropriate outcome.[11] The disjunction between Honneth's reconstruction of Dewey's methodology and his own left-Hegelian understanding elsewhere mirrors the architectonic problem plaguing his Tanner Lectures.

There are two further illuminating examples of the jarring of the dualistic and tripartite models in the Lectures which are worth reviewing briefly. On one occasion where he refers to Cavell and Sartre sharing a model of reciprocal affectedness which both label recognition, Honneth does not dualistically play the first moment off against the second one, but instead collapses the latter upon the former. He writes: 'Indeed, subjects are generally certain of having another subject with mental properties before them, since they are touched by this second subject's emotional states in such a way that they see themselves compelled to react in a certain way' (49). Here he incorporates the certainty involved in being confronted by an object and reacting to it, which belongs to the second objective situational moment, in the first moment of sensing and feeling the quality of a new situation which is just arising. In opposition to his usual dualistic contrasting strategy, he here begins to acknowledge the mutual implication of the two distinct moments, yet in his pervasive reductive mood of locating a primordial stratum nevertheless assimilates the second to the first.

On another occasion, Honneth seeks to counter the questionable implication of a position he had assumed earlier, which seemed to suggest that he regards recognition or empathetic engagement in principle as a positive orientation, by agreeing with Cavell that even indifferent and negative feelings are forms of intersubjective acknowledgement. In this context, Honneth then finds it necessary nevertheless to qualify Cavell's position by submitting that, in a situation of a negative emotional response to others, 'we still always have a residual intuitive sense of not having done full justice to their personalities. In such a situation, the element of

our recognitional stance which we customarily call "conscience" would be at issue' (51). That Honneth then goes on to assert that this shows that the recognitional stance is 'a wholly elementary form [which] does not yet imply the perception of the *specific* value of another person' (51), blatantly contradicts the fact that here the mutual implication of different moments are at play. So far from coinciding with the first moment of emotional affectedness, conscience is a social-cognitive phenomenon which presupposes general knowledge of the Other and of the moral rules applying to relations with the Other. As such, it indeed does not coincide with the second moment of the perception of the specific value of a particular person in a particular situation either, but rather belongs to the third moment of situation-transcendent ideas or principles which symbolically structure or regulatively generate both the second and first moments.

Both these examples of the inadvertent short-circuiting of the moments of the tripartite model instead of an appreciation of their mutual implication, confirm the principal argument pursued thus far in the present section. The aim of this argument was to reveal the architectonic problem running right through Honneth's Tanner Lectures which is indicated, despite the dualistic conceptual strategy covering it over for the most part, by his oscillation between two distinct figures of thought or models. Rather than leaving this argument stand on its own, however, it is important to me in terms of my own particular approach to the revitalization of critical theory to take it one step further. In my view, there is an inherent connection between the architectonic problem exhibited by Honneth's Tanner Lectures and his consistent attempt to demote the cognitive approach.

Published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38(6), 2012, pp. 591-607.

Re-cognition as cognitive concept

As pointed out at the outset, the cognitive dimension is one that Honneth has been attending to throughout his work over some two decades. While the pattern for dealing with it was tentatively set in an early work and in his habilitation thesis, Honneth gave it the social-theoretically relevant form it retains in the Tanner Lectures in his inaugural address at the Free University of Berlin in 1993. In the early work, it was considered in relation to a questioning of Klaus Holzkamp's critical psychology which proceeded from the unacceptable reduction of perception to its purely instrumental function. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's criticism of empiricist and rationalist theories of perception and concomitant rejection of the Cartesian ontological dualism in favour of regarding body and mind as fused in the perceptual act, Honneth and his collaborator concluded that 'perception has an essential primacy' and hence that 'the human body is itself a medium of cognitive acts' (Honneth and Joas 1988: 115, 116).

In his habilitation thesis, Honneth (1992) discusses the cognitive in the context of an analysis of George Herbert Mead's contribution. What attracts the attention of the reader is Honneth's employment of a number of distinctions directly or indirectly deriving from Hegel, Mead and Habermas in order to make sense of Mead's theory of the formation of identity or the self. Among them are the conceptual pairs practical/epistemic, cognitive/moral or normative, and cognitive/practical (1992: 122-23). In turn, these distinctions are applied to different domains. So, for example, Honneth speaks of a practical in distinction to an epistemic 'relation to the self'; of a 'self-image' which contains only 'cognitive behavioural demands' as against a self-image incorporating 'normative behavioural attitudes'; of a configuration of self, Mead's 'me', which embraces both a 'neutral instance of cognitive problem solving'

and a 'moral instance of intersubjective conflict resolution'. A question arises here as to how these different distinction relate to one another or, more specifically, whether it is possible at all to make them align. In fact, the impression of inconsistency and incoherence grows stronger as the reading progresses. The distinction between the practical and the epistemic is presented as though it is equivalent to that of the normative and the cognitive. But then the practical is conceived very differently as the combination or integration of the cognitive (problem solving instance) and the normative (conflict resolution instance). The cognitive, for its part, seems to be presented as being equivalent to the epistemic, both of these meaning something like the conscious having of knowledge, both relating to the intelligence and theoretical-empirical knowledge relevant to problem solving. But then there is the availability of cognitivist moral theories which suggests that the cognitive can by no means be confined the intelligence, theoretical-empirical knowledge and problem solving. On the contrary, it equally concerns conscience which relates to moral-practical knowledge relevant to intersubjective relations and interpersonal conflict resolution. This means that if the cognitive is to do with both problem-solving and conflict-resolution competences, the latter of which is acquired through socialisation or a moral-practical learning process in a particular form of life and the former of which is refined through a theoretical-empirical learning process, then it is much closer to the practical than Honneth's distinction between them would lead one to believe. Indeed, this is the sense that the cognitive has been acquiring in the course of the development which has been inaugurated by the cognitive revolution of the late 1950s.[12] There is evidence that the resulting narrow, traditional concept of the cognitive as well as the inconsistent and incoherent conceptualization surrounding it in the habilitation thesis

gets reproduced to some degree in Honneth's later work such as the inaugural address and the Tanner Lectures.

Against the background of a concern with the cognitive dimension in the context of philosophical anthropological, ontological and epistemological considerations in the earlier writings, Honneth (2007a) shifted in his inaugural address to a social theoretical context – one defined by critical theory. Here he specifies the problem that needs to be resolved if critical theory is to be revitalized as heir to the left-Hegelian tradition in keeping with the demands of the time. These demands are both of an external societal kind, namely the prevalence of social pathologies of various sorts, and of an internal theoretical kind, namely critical theory's inadequacies and resultant failure to diagnose and explain the persistent social pathologies. Given Honneth's position in the critical theory tradition, the leading member of the third generation, the task of dealing with the challenges consists of designing an approach that would be able to correct the weaknesses of the second generation and go beyond its achievements. The problem to be resolved thus implicates Habermas and, in particular, his assignment of too much weight – as Honneth sees it – to the cognitive dimension.

Having replaced the productivist by the communication paradigm for the purposes of which he then developed universal pragmatics, Habermas came to emphasize the centrality of linguistic rules in a way that refocused critical theory on whatever restrictions are imposed on the application of those rules. Since emancipation thus became dependent on the process of communicative rationalization and since this is a high-level process which transpires above the heads and behind the backs of social actors, however, critical theory in its new guise was rendered incapable not only of linking up with the moral experience of the members of society,

but by the same token also of diagnosing social pathologies. Honneth's response was not, as might have been expected, to abandon the communication paradigm, but rather to give it a different interpretation. Instead of linguistic rules, 'moral experience' is emphasized, and instead of impediments put in the way of the use of such rules in communication, instances of 'disrespect' in the sense of the 'violation of identity claims' acquired in the process of socialization now called for attention (2007a: 70, 71). This reorientation meant that genuine social pathologies which arise from the deformation of the conditions of reciprocal recognition in the intimate, legal and work spheres were moved centre stage. The core of Honneth's criticism of Habermas and more generally of the Frankfurt tradition of critical theory, however, rested on the place and role of the cognitive dimension. Considering the critical theorists' appeal to instrumental rationality, purposive rationality or functionalist in the sense of organizational rationality, Honneth regards critical theory from Horkheimer and Adorno to Habermas as evidently having proceeded by developing critiques of the disorder of modern society in principle in terms of the level of rationality attained at a particular stage. Deformations such as the totally administered society or the colonization of the lifeworld, for instance, could be identified only with reference to the level of development of capitalism or of the system. For Honneth, this procedure is tantamount to 'a rational-theoretic narrowing of social critique' (2007a: 73) and, by implication, simultaneously a cognitivist narrowing, since he treats the cognitive and rationality as being equivalent. In this vein, he writes: '…only those anomalies which occur in human beings' cognitive dimensions can be regarded as deviations from the ideal' (2007a: 73) and therefore figure as legitimate objects of critique.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn here is that Honneth in his inaugural address, as in his earlier work, operates with a narrow, traditional concept of the cognitive which is not borne out by developments since the cognitive revolution. His conception of the cognitive betrays that he remains under the spell and being caught up in the representational view based on the assumption of the logical vocabulary of subject and object, the internal and the external, rather than grasping the opportunity opened by recent developments of conceiving of cognition as the embodied mind in action (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1997) which significantly relativizes the traditional mode of thinking. What I understand from these recent developments, among other things, is that a possibility has arisen to go beyond both Habermas and Honneth. The first important fact is that they have in common the communication paradigm. The second important fact is that they differ from each other in that they stress distinct dimensions of communication – the one public political communication serving as the medium of democratic value- and will-formation, the other social in the sense of lifeworld and civil society communication in the medium of which identify formation takes place. The further unquestionable and vital fact that these two forms of communication are not and cannot be conceived as being completely independent and therefore isolated from one another, gives rise to an interesting and theoretically most important question: what mediates between the two forms of communication respectively favoured by Habermas and Honneth, or what makes it possible for them to become interrelated? In the wake of one of the most important, if not the most important, intellectual developments of our time, the answer to this question in my considered view has to be sought in embodied cognitive competences and cognitive forms of different levels and scope[13] which by no means admit of being summarily

reduced to consciousness, rationality, emotional emptiness and so forth and, on that basis, exiled to the margins.

Returning finally to the Tanner Lectures, we can afford to be brief. Already having reviewed both Honneth's conception and use of the cognitive in his laudable project to recover the concept of reification for contemporary critical theory, there can be no doubt about the fact that his position in these Lectures is essentially in line with its development from the early work through his inaugural address. Here we have the same concept of the cognitive which in a currently indefensibly narrow, traditional manner is equated with consciousness, purposive rationality, explicit knowledge, all devoid of both normative and emotional-motivational structure, content and significance. But there is also more specific indications of the inadequate treatment of the cognitive in these Lectures. Superficial indications of a lingering problem are to be found in Honneth's use of such concepts as attention, forgetfulness and memory. Reification is said to be a kind of 'reduced attentiveness' (59) or a kind of 'forgetfulness of recognition' (56) which is born by an 'ensemble of habits and attitudes' (26), while recognition involves 'the memory of an antecedent act' (57). Now, it does not take an expert in cognitive science to see that every one of these is in fact a cognitive concept. It of course by no means detracts from reification to conceive it in cognitive terms as lack of attentiveness or forgetfulness and a set of cognitive schemata – on the contrary. Besides the substantive examples of reification he discusses (59-60, 155-58), a particular figure of thought Honneth employs on numerous occasions in the Lectures to specify analytically what reification amounts to bears out the plausibility of his proposal to regard reification as forgetfulness. According to it, reification is neither a matter of a mere cognitive error, nor one of an injustice in the sense of the infringement of a moral norm, but rather a simplification

of a more of less complex set of practice-based relations which leads to delusion (21-2, 25, 52-3, 56, 59) – for instance, modern forms of slavery and genocide. It is equally plausible to approach recognition in terms of memory. The thrust of the argument in this article is that recognition is more properly conceived in contemporary cognitive terms. The fact that Honneth links recognition to memory, a cognitive concept, must raise a problem for him, however, considering his studiously maintained distinctions. What we in fact witness here is Honneth's completion of the gerrymandering act in which he engages in respect of the cognitive throughout the Tanner Lectures. Whereas he otherwise takes pains to draw a sharp distinction between the cognitive and recognition, here he falls back on assumptions which lead him to articulate his own position precisely in cognitive terms.

Aside from incidental indications, however, the problem of the cognitive is to be found at the very core of Honneth's argument. In order to be able to restore the old concept of reification for use by contemporary critical theory, it is necessary for Honneth to establish the concept of recognition as the foil against which reification can be showed up as distortion or deformation. From Lukács he critically draws the idea that reification is 'a form of praxis that is *structurally* false' (26), which conversely implies a 'proper…genuine…true…non-reified' (26, 28, 31) form of praxis or 'undistorted human agency' (27). Support for this interpretation is then sought in Heidegger's concept of care which Honneth takes as referring to 'that form of practical orientation that is especially characteristic of the structure of the *human* mode of existence' (32). The question arising here is precisely what 'structure' (26, 32) and 'form' (26, 31, 53) mean or refer to. Honneth on occasion also speaks of 'perspective' (55). How should recognition as structure, form or perspective be conceived? Honneth indeed gives a number of indications, yet it is remarkable that

they consistently point to something that does not and cannot provide a basis for drawing a sharp line between recognition and the cognitive. On the contrary, what he submits makes clear that we are here dealing with cognitive phenomena. Of structure he says that it refers to 'an ensemble of habits and attitudes' (26) or the 'subject's interpretative habits' (33). And form he describes as 'knowledge' (56) or, more specifically, as 'pre-reflective knowledge' (33) which he renders yet more specific by speaking of 'the genuine, involved human perspective' (54). Taken together, this means that such an ensemble gives structure or form to the human mode of existence and praxis which serves as the medium of recognition in the sense of the practical orientation of empathetic engagement with the world. The structure or form makes available a pre-reflective kind of knowledge which comes into operation as a perspective in the course of engaging with the world. Once again it is plain to see that what is essentially at issue here is a range of concepts deriving directly from the cognitive tradition. A dynamic set of cognitive structures makes possible the establishment of a connection with the world, bringing into play pre-reflective know how and the bringing to bear of a perspective on the world. To be able to conceptualize recognition, Honneth is apparently compelled, despite his painstaking argumentation to the contrary, to have recourse precisely to an approach and a mode of thinking from which he seeks to distance himself.

Recognition, to conclude, is itself a cognitive concept – as becomes clear when one takes the time to re-cognise the word, as it were. It stands to the cognitive as the metacognitive.[14] According to Brinck and Liljenfors (2009: 17), the latter concerns human beings' ability 'to implicitly or explicitly access [their] own cognitive states, judgements in knowledge and learning, feelings of knowing, uncertainty monitoring, categorization, evaluation, decision-based action, etc.'

However, the thrust of re-cognition as the metacognitive competence or constant awareness, which is given with our embodiment, nervous system and cognitive equipment as the product of millions of years of physical, social and cultural development, comes into sharp focus when one considers the nature of the cognitive problematic as such, rather than cutting it in half as does Honneth. The cognitive problematic refers to the fact that something forming part of the world is able, nevertheless, to relate to the world in a way that allows it to take a perspective on the world and accordingly to act upon it, while having the capacity to remain aware of that relation, perspective and action as well as of their consequences. Re-cognition thus concerns the metacognitive awareness on the part of human beings that they not only are and remain an inherent part of the world, but that they as such participate in virtually every aspect of its development and evolution and, therefore, have a weighty responsibility on their shoulders.[15]

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Notes

I dedicate this article to John Farrell, long-time translator of Axel Honneth, and student of mine in the early 1980s at UCC.

[1] My interest is in particular in the cognitive problem, an interest deriving from my own longstanding endeavour to revitalize critical theory. For recent windows on my cognitive theoretical approach, see note 13.

[2] In the following, page numbers without any further bibliographical details refer to Honneth's Tanner Lectures entitled *Reification* (2008).

[3] On the left-Hegelian tradition and the relation between critical theory and pragmatism, see Strydom (2011a).

[4] For his adoption of the three-place model, see the epistemological-methodological core of Lukács' (1971: 152-56) book.

[5] See Adorno (1970) for evidence of the three-place model.

[6] The argument against foundationalism is supported by contemporary cognitive science's investigation of intersubjectivity. At first sight, it indeed seems as though cognitive science supports Honneth's idea of an elementary form of recognition. For instance, Armezzani, Callieri and Di Petta (2009) report – referring to a for me inaccessible Italian interview – that Varela studies empathy 'as the essential form of our "being with others…the fact of being structurally conceived as having relations with our congeners, with individuals belonging to the same species"' (2009: 52). Yet, while the role of embodiment and hence empathy is receiving a growing emphasis, it is nevertheless held that it involves both perception and inference (e.g. Thompson 2001). A complex set of relations involving the process of mutual implication of different moments is thus recognized.

[7] It also gives rise to potentially misleading criticism. Honneth's strictures against the 'cognitivist' approach (49) make it seem as though Habermas not only excludes the opening moment of felt engagement with the quality of a situation, but is in principle unable to take it into account. On numerous occasions, however, Habermas dwells on its importance – e.g., discussing when a vague sense or feeling, such as 'uncertain[ty]', is called forth by an 'objective occasion' which lends a situation a particular quality, such as a 'problem', 'challenge' or 'threat', thereby 'opening up'

the situation and affording those involved 'privileged access' to its structure (1987: 400-03).

[8] The model makes a fourth appearance in Honneth's presentation of the human 'self-relation' in terms of three moments: (i) 'we encounter our mental states for the most part as phenomena that befall us'; (ii) 'there is *something* to which we give expression, or toward which we direct our attention'; (iii) 'we are already familiar with our desires and feelings to a certain extent, because we have learned…' (69-71).

[9] Methodological outlines are to be found in Honneth (2007a, 2004, 2007b).

[10] C Wright Mills, with both a pragmatist and critical theory education behind him, saw the sociological imagination as involving the following abductive pattern: making a creative, insightful, potentially fruitful and practically effective connection in a historically specific context among 'personal troubles of milieu', 'public issues of social structure' and 'master symbols of legitimation' (1970: 14, 46).

[11] Since abduction has virtually been displaced by the reductive mode of inference called 'hypothesis' in the course of the development of positivism, it should be carefully distinguished from hypothesis. Adorno criticized hypotheses since, being devoid of imagination, they are designed to establish regularities or what can be regularly expected, and: 'What can merely be expected is itself a piece of societal activity, and is incommensurable with the goal of critique' (1976: 69).

[12] See, for instance, Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1997) and Conein (2005).

[13] To mention just a few directly relevant references: Howard (1994), Clark (1998), Wertsch (1998), Ridgeway (2006), *European Journal of Social Theory* (2007), Carassa, Morganti and Riva (2009). Strydom (2006, 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c) contain indications of the direction in which critical theory is required to go on the path between and beyond Habermas and Honneth. Cognitive sociologically, it

articulates precisely what Honneth regards as the interrelation of 'mechanisms of mutual recognition' (2009) but leaves unanalyzed.

[14] Honneth refers to recognition plausibly as 'nonepistemic' (151), but implausibly as 'precognitive' (152). For a critical theoretical application of the idea of metacognition, see Strydom (2011b).

[15] The presupposed distinction among the cognitive, the normative and the aesthetic – as they are traditionally called – which plays such a deeply structuring yet not reflected role in Honneth's Tanner Lectures is in fact a cognitive figure of thought. It refers, on the one hand, to the embodied unconscious and conscious intellectual, moral and emotional-motivational capacities and competences of the human individual and, on the other, to the corresponding supporting cultural spheres and the structures and bodies of different kinds of knowledge they harbour. Rather than isolated components, however, these three are moments in an ongoing process of which those involved form a part and in which they participate. Honneth's concept of 'existential involvement and sympathy (*Anteilnahme*)' (150) – the German could be translated literally as taking part or participation – refers precisely to being part of and participating in this process by bringing the three moments into play in a way that allows their mutual implication. In these terms, metacognition is the constant awareness of so being a part of the process and participating in it.

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