

Recognition Ethics and the Politics of Coexistence: An Analytical Study in the Social Philosophy of Axel Honneth

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Résumé

Cette recherche vise à aborder la question de la reconnaissance comme modèle philosophique introduit par l'un des philosophes de l'école critique, pionnier de la troisième génération, Axel Honneth. Ce modèle cognitif ou paradigmatique cherche à investiguer les problèmes sociétaux à travers la réalité, en abordant notamment toutes les formes d'injustice sociale, qu'il considère comme principalement causées par la non-reconnaissance ou le manque de reconnaissance de l'autre. Dans cette perspective, il présente trois formes qui pourraient fonder une philosophie de la reconnaissance dans la société : l'amour, le droit et la solidarité. Ces formes sont contingentes au conflit, que nous tenterons de mettre en évidence dans cette étude.

Mots-clés : autre, Axel Honneth, coexistence, reconnaissance, mépris social, soi.

Abstract

This research aims to address the issue of recognition as a philosophical model introduced by one of the philosophers of the critical school, a pioneer of the third generation, Axel Honneth. This cognitive or paradigmatic model seeks to investigate societal problems through reality, particularly addressing all forms of social injustice, which he sees as primarily caused by non-recognition or lack of recognition of the other. From this perspective, he presents three forms that could establish a philosophy of recognition in society: love, law, and solidarity. These forms are contingent upon conflict, which we will try to highlight in this study.

Keywords: self, Axel Honneth, coexistence, recognition, social contempt, other.

Introduction

No society is devoid of linguistic, religious, ethnic, and national diversity. Minorities exist in most countries around the world, to the extent that one state can recognize multiple minorities. This diversity has often led these minorities to feel oppressed and racially discriminated against by the majority. This situation often leads to conflict and confrontation, sometimes even resulting in revolutions, as witnessed throughout contemporary world history. It is from this backdrop that this research paper emerges to address the theme of recognition as a culture in contemporary societies through a cognitive model in contemporary social philosophy, represented by the German philosopher Axel Honneth. It delves into the theories he has proposed in the philosophy of recognition, stemming from issues of cultural diversity and ethnic, racial, and religious identities, and the forms of violence and oppression they have endured from the majority. Achieving peace and coexistence between minorities and the majority necessitates recognition of the other.

Honneth established the foundational principles of the theory of recognition, considering it sufficient to put an end to social conflicts based on domination and social injustice. These principles are embodied in love, rights, and solidarity. However, the question arises: Can this theory achieve the social justice sought by these marginalized groups in society?

1-Conceptual Introduction

Despite humanity's significant scientific and intellectual progress, which has elevated it to a position of mastery over nature, this very achievement has engendered a profound sense of alienation. Rather than experiencing satisfaction and realizing the perpetual pursuit of happiness, individuals find themselves increasingly estranged from themselves, their communities, families, religions, and life itself. Initially identified in industrial societies, this alienation has now permeated various other communities. However, before delving further into this discussion, it is crucial to establish clear definitions of the concepts of alienation and estrangement. This foundation will enable us to explore associated ideas more comprehensively.

1.1- Concept of Alienation

Alienation, or "al-Ghorb" in Arabic, is derived from the root word "Gharaba," which means to go away or to distance oneself from others. "Al-Ghorb" signifies exile, estrangement, and displacement. The term "al-Ghareeb" refers to someone who is far from their homeland (Ibn Manzoor, 2007, p.32). Alienation (Aliénation) can be understood as a state of loss or estrangement. According to this definition, when an individual loses their freedom within the

society they inhabit, they inevitably experience a form of alienation, characterized by a sense of spiritual or psychological estrangement. This is what is meant by "Estilab," which denotes the deprivation of the self of its essential elements, rendering it subservient to others. This submission represents one of the forms of alienation experienced by contemporary individuals. Additionally, alienation is synonymous with surrender. Rousseau considered relinquishing freedom as a form of surrender to the social partner, albeit a voluntary surrender that loses its reciprocity (Ahmed Khalil, 1984).

The theme of alienation has known significant attention from philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists. Despite this interest, it remains one of those elusive concepts that have not been precisely defined and agreed upon by thinkers. The American sociologist Merton introduced multiple concepts of alienation in 1959, each different yet interconnected: Powerlessness, Normlessness, Meaninglessness, Isolation, and finally, Self-estrangement (Barakat Halim, 2006, p. 36). Moreover, alienation conveys connotations of isolation and estrangement. Its effects are prominently manifested in human behavior, often leading to local and sectarian conflicts. Additionally, it spawns various extremist movements and violence, propelled by social movements whose members feel disconnected from the communities to which they belong.

1-2-The concept of reification:

"Tashyuh" in Arabic, became associated with post-Hegelian philosophical thought, particularly through the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács. He was the first to delve into this topic, primarily through his interest in contemporary Marxist thought, which he extensively explored in his book "History and Class Consciousness." In a dedicated chapter of approximately eighty pages, Lukács analyzed this phenomenon as it manifested in Western European society, drawing from Marx's economic ideas, particularly the notion that commodities are the primary basis of human labor. According to Lukács, reification entails the independence of inanimate objects from the human world. He acknowledges that objects associated with human labor will either reflect or invert the issue. Instead of humans controlling them, as would be the case if humans were masters in factories, banks, and other workplaces, these objects come to control humans. While in ancient times, humans sought to adapt nature to meet their material and biological needs, today, the situation has reversed. People now strive to align themselves with objects because they shape human life. This reification is evident in the lives of contemporary humans (Lukács, Georg, 1979, p.77).

Furthermore, reification is seen as a transformation of humans into objects, with their dreams revolving solely around material possessions and the world of things. Human relationships then become akin to relationships between objects. When a person experiences reification, they view their society and history, which are the products of their efforts, labor, and creativity, as forces alien to them. Human relationships become things beyond human control, rendering the individual a mere object, acted upon rather than acting. Thus, they have no control over their own affairs.

Herbert Marcuse, in his discussion of the reifying tendency of humans, observes that the self becomes estranged and stripped of its known roles. Its moral, political, and even aesthetic aspects fade away, giving precedence to one aspect. In other words, these roles disappear, leaving room for the self to be solely an observer and calculator.

From this perspective, Lukács concludes that reification's impact extends beyond the individual self to influence the entire system of social relations among individuals, governing and directing life itself. In this sense, humans become like machines, embodying and performing labor, and they must adhere to its conditions and laws without expressing refusal or opposition. This phenomenon, according to Lukács, is imposed by specific economic and social conditions inherent in capitalism, and overcoming it requires the role of the proletariat. This is because the proletariat is the oppressed class in society and has the potential to create liberation movements by changing the situation. Lukács argues: "The objective economic development could not fail to create a situation in the process of production that defined the standpoint of the proletariat; it could not fail to place in the hands of the proletariat the possibility and necessity of transforming society, recognizing that this transformation could only be the free activity of the proletariat itself" (Lukács, Georg, 1979, p.181).

1-3-Recognition concept

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur presented various meanings of recognition based on the verb "reconnaitre," which can be outlined as follows:

- Recognition as remembering or acknowledging the existence of something or someone. For example, "recognizing a signature or a stamp" or recognizing a person by their voice tone. In this case, recognition serves as a reminder to oneself about a specific idea or person.
- Recognition as identifying based on specific characteristics.
- Recognition as reaching knowledge, understanding, or discovering the truth about something. For instance, "acknowledging their innocence" implies recognizing the truth.

-Recognition with refusal or denial, as in the phrase "he only recognizes his own will." Here, recognition can also imply agreement or acceptance. In French, recognition is associated with three words: "avouer" (to confess or acknowledge), "confesser" (to confess), and "approuver" (to approve or endorse). However, these words can all be translated into a single term "recognition" (Boghra Al-Zuwai, 2012, p.23).

2- Historical and intellectual reference of the recognition philosophy:

The philosophy of recognition emerged as part of social philosophy in German universities, led by a group of contemporary philosophers and sociologists interested in researching social conflicts and issues related to marginalized classes and groups in society. They studied racial and religious minorities, as well as disadvantaged classes striving for a dignified life within the community they inhabit. In his book "**Manifesto for Social Philosophy**," philosopher Frank Fischbach outlined the key characteristics that distinguish this new type of intellectual study.

The first characteristic entails recognizing that society and individuals, in their social lives as a whole, exhibit independence. However, despite this independence, there are numerous constraints and social rules that govern both individuals and society. The second characteristic relates to the nature of social philosophy as one of the contemporary intellectual studies. It does not engage solely in abstract thinking but rather serves as practical philosophy due to its connection to the overall transformations and ongoing social changes experienced by peoples and communities. Regarding the role entrusted to this new philosophical field, it involves a thorough critique of everything related to this domain, whether accepted, rejected, or distorted. This critique draws on Kantian thought, specifically as articulated in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" (Boumenir, Kamal, 2013, p. 81).

The ideas of Hegel, particularly his work "**Phenomenology of Spirit**," serve as the theoretical foundation and initial framework for the concept of recognition in general. The intellectual background of this concept is particularly relevant to Axel Honneth, as understanding his argument on recognition necessitates revisiting the dialectic of master and slave formulated by Hegel in his philosophy. Hegel raised a crucial issue in this context, emphasizing the necessity of awareness and acknowledgment of the existence of a counter-ego, a self with its own specificity and being.

Hegel, through his aforementioned book, crystallized a new meaning of recognition, manifested in mutual recognition through the dialectic of master and slave. One of the major interpreters of Hegel's philosophy, Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968), in his book "**Introduction**

to the Reading of Hegel," as well as Jacques Taminiaux (1928-), considered Hegel to have made recognition one of the cornerstones of political philosophy. Moreover, investigating this phenomenon is inherently an inquiry into political philosophy. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur believes that Hegel's philosophy linked recognition to the will, as evidenced by his analysis of love relationships among humans, such as the love of man for woman and the love of parents for children. This same idea recurs in the philosophy of Axel Honneth, where love becomes a significant cornerstone in the trilogy of recognition he examines (Boumenir, Al-Zuawi, 2012, p. 42). Hegel's contribution involved analyzing the structure of traditional society, composed of masters and slaves, making him one of the pioneering philosophers to delve into this subject. Axel Honneth attempts to present a new concept of recognition based on the critical dialogue he sparked regarding what critical theory had offered, leading him to propose an alternative due to the demands of critique. Honneth's alternative emerged from his discussion of the works of three philosophers from the Frankfurt School, who are considered among the most prominent: Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas. Honneth criticized these philosophers for reducing the issue to its economic aspect, neglecting the social, psychological, normative, and ethical dimensions. While he appreciated and praised Habermas' communicative model, he also criticized it. His critique took two forms: direct criticism through his study titled "**Ethical Consciousness and Class Domination**" and indirect criticism embedded within his overall philosophy of recognition.

Honneth argued that Habermas' significant focus on formal rules for successful communication led him to overlook crucial issues such as conflict and disagreement, which are characteristic of contemporary capitalist societies. Moreover, he believed that Habermas' theory of communicative action failed to address forms of injustice prevalent in society and lacked a moral dimension, thus closing off critical philosophy from engaging with experiences of violence, oppression, and injustice, which should be central concerns of critical thought (Baghoura, Al-Zuawi, 2012, pp. 166-168). Habermas, through his critical project, indeed centered social relations on language, considering it the framework within which communication and cultural and social interaction occur. However, despite the significance of language and its role in life, it is not possible to reduce all social relations to language alone. Honneth, on the other hand, constructed his thesis on recognition by critiquing his teacher Habermas, focusing on the individual human problems within their social context. These problems, such as contempt, humiliation, alienation, and recognition, were considered by

Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse as social diseases, their causes attributed to the dominance of instrumental rationality, which contributed to the failure of successful societal development. Honneth was able to establish a new concept of recognition by critiquing the ideas of three philosophers from the Frankfurt School: Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas. He observed that the first generation of thinkers focused on the economic aspect, while the second generation, represented by Habermas, emphasized language. However, Honneth shifted his focus to the social, psychological, and ethical aspects of recognition. In this way, he outlined a path for Frankfurt School philosophical thought based on the recognition model.

Hegel's idea of recognition stood in stark contrast to classical political philosophy, particularly with thinkers like Hobbes and Machiavelli, who viewed human conflict as arising from conflicting desires and interests, leading to animosity and struggle. Hegel's early philosophical ideas formed the basis for social philosophy in Honneth's work. Returning to Hegel's youthful philosophical thought, Honneth found the idea that all societies seek stability, but this stability can only be achieved through conflict that leads to mutual recognition. Thus, Honneth developed the theory of recognition articulated in his book "The Struggle for Recognition," published in 1985, which was closely related to Hegel's theory of alienation. Recognition is understood as a social, political, and ethical concept within contemporary social philosophy, distinct from classical political philosophy, which focused on the nature of governance systems based on values of freedom and justice. Contemporary social philosophy is concerned with human rights, citizenship, and various forms of social conflict in the modern world.

Honneth, through his interpretation of the masterslave dialectic, arrived at an important conclusion, similar to that of Charles Taylor. This idea suggests that the formation of self and identity is closely linked to the notion of recognition between individuals or between the self and others. While many philosophical studies attribute the relationship between self and other to the German philosopher Fichte, who termed it "interpersonal shaping of subjectivity," Honneth argues that Hegel distinguished himself from Fichte by giving a broader meaning to recognition, represented in various forms and shapes. According to Honneth, humans do not easily attain recognition; rather, it requires struggle, as evidenced by human history. Recognition is achieved through ongoing conflict and negotiation between demands and responses. (Baghoura, Al-Zuawi, 2012, p. 171).

Based on his return to Hegel's philosophy, Axel Honneth constructed his social philosophy on two pillars: firstly, the necessity of diagnosing social ailments that have become

a gloomy picture for individuals and society, contributing to the spread of alienation, recognition deficits, and oppression, thereby hindering the achievement of human dignity. Secondly, the regulation of standards and forms of recognition to achieve communal living and peace among individuals in society, thereby establishing the values of social justice. Furthermore, through his theory of recognition, Honneth points out an important issue: that the social sciences, particularly sociology, have not addressed issues of social tendencies from the perspective of recognition. They have neglected the evolutionary and material aspects. For example, the sociologist Emile Durkheim did not focus on forms of struggle and the fight for recognition except for the pragmatic approach in the United States, which briefly touched upon the concept of recognition.

3- Key Features of Axel Honneth's Recognition Paradigm:

Honneth presented his thesis on recognition, suggesting that mutual recognition among humans is capable of putting an end to all forms of conflict prevalent in our world today. In these conflicts, each party seeks to assert its dominance and control over the situation, often resulting in the oppression and marginalization of minorities and dissenting voices, leading to various forms of social injustice. From this perspective, he attempted to understand and interpret the existing forms of societal conflict and their implications within a new model based on the idea of mutual recognition between self and other. This concept and framework drew inspiration from the philosophies of Hegel, particularly the master-slave dialectic, and Herbert Marcuse (Honneth Axel, 2015, p. 01).

Axel Honneth, through his articles and collective works, strives to elucidate the issue that social justice, for it to have a foundation in society, necessitates the existence of mutual recognition relationships among individuals and diverse minorities within the same social sphere. In his examination of modern societies, he begins with the premise of a theory built on the idea of social equality. As individuals achieve this equality within society, they are able to construct their personalities and identities despite their differences. The aim here is to allow all people, regardless of race, religion, or ideology, to shape their personal identities without creating distinctions or perpetuating racial discrimination. This concept is what he refers to as mutual recognition, enabling every individual to realize their selves amidst their differences. Thus, race, religion, and ideology do not matter in shaping these selves.

Honneth aimed to establish a new theory in social philosophy by integrating a fresh perspective into critical theory. This was achieved through a fusion of Hegel's concept of recognition and Habermas's theory of communication, thereby transforming the traditional

understanding of conflict from a struggle for dominance to a struggle for recognition. He formulated a new concept of recognition to address the ethical, political, and social challenges faced by contemporary societies, drawing on sociological and psychological theories to deepen our understanding of social and behavioral dynamics (Abdulrahman Rahab, 2020).

These principles formulated by Honneth were intended to delineate the guiding principles for social justice. It's widely acknowledged that the aspiration of all humanity is to achieve and establish the foundations of social justice in an era where liberalism, in its various political and economic forms, dominates the world. The formation of identity for the individual can only be realized through social recognition, where the individual becomes valuable both to themselves and to their community. This value is attained through positive interactions within one's community, overshadowing any feelings of contempt or humiliation. Such interactions significantly impact the construction of individual identities (Honneth Axel, 2015, p. 02).

For Honneth, mutual recognition is the sole solution to ending the social conflicts prevalent in contemporary society. Based on this, achieving identity and selfhood for individuals is contingent upon achieving three models: love, rights, and solidarity.

Love: According to Honneth, love is the interactive relationship between individuals. He describes love as the unique emotion capable of fostering the trust that exists within souls. This emotional force serves as the lifeline between the individual and the group to which they belong. Through love, one experiences a sense of belonging and self-confidence within oneself and society. This feeling serves as the primary motivation for participation in social life, allowing the self to be realized and affirmed. This also implies an intertwined relationship between emotional connections and an individual's ability to feel valued and respected, which enables them to develop self-respect and social recognition, according to Honneth. For example, a child's relationship with their mother represents one of the initial stages of mutual recognition. The mother fulfills the child's biological and emotional needs, expanding the child's social relationships to include others. Therefore, the mother serves as the primary model for mutual recognition (Nour al-Din Aloush, 2012, p. 150). The experience of love begins within the family, where children gain this sense of belonging and confidence, and its absence due to physical or verbal violence inevitably leads to a lack of confidence. Hence, the relationship between love and self-confidence is reciprocal. Honneth termed this initial love or relationship as "primary identification" to avoid limiting love solely to its sexual aspect. Instead, love encompasses all relationships expressed through friendship and family ties. Love initially

emerges from the realm of parenthood to extend into friendships and eventually permeates the entire society.

Rights: While the first model of mutual recognition is based on the emotional aspect, the second model, which is based on reason rather than emotion, is the concept of rights or law. Rights constitute the second form of mutual recognition among humans, particularly from a legal perspective. Recognition alone ensures freedom for individuals, as every human possesses rights and duties guaranteed by the law. In his book "**The Struggle for Recognition**," Honneth argues that the absence of justice in any society results from the neglect of fair distribution of individual rights. In this scenario, conflict arises. Honneth's notion of justice must encompass all members of a society because conflict arises from oppression, inequality, and lack of fairness, as evidenced throughout human history. Through this form of recognition, self-esteem is achieved as individuals' sense that society is morally obligated to respect their rights. Hence, the relationship between self-respect and legal recognition becomes a necessary connection. However, according to Honneth's perspective, this necessitates social respect for individuals within the framework of mutual recognition among humans, in addition to the social responsibility of all members of the community, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or religious beliefs. Rights ensure freedom for individuals, and while love may be limited to a specific group, the law encompasses the entire society, promoting coexistence and acceptance of diverse standards by ensuring equality in rights and duties.

Solidarity: Solidarity is a form of recognition that embodies the image of social mutual assistance among people. Since the self always requires social respect, appreciation, and moral recognition for recognition to be achieved, Honneth believed that the first and second models were insufficient to ensure the establishment of a conflict-free social life. He saw the need to add a third model: solidarity. Honneth reached the conviction that achieving recognition through these mentioned forms is not easy because individuals often find themselves faced with what he termed as "**refusal of recognition**," as stated in experiences of contempt and disdain within societies.

However, achieving recognition through these forms is not easy because, in many cases, it results in non-recognition, leading to what Axel Honneth called social contempt, disdain, and humiliation. Honneth stated that the experience of being deprived of rights is typically associated with losing one's self-respect, meaning the inability to consider oneself as an equal partner capable of interacting on an equal footing with peers. The state of recognition that the humiliated person is deprived of here is the cognitive consideration of moral responsibility

(Honneth Axel, 2016, p. 244). Today's societies suffer not only from the failure to achieve rights but also from the demand for respect in the name of humanity. This respect is achieved through recognition. Peoples have a great capacity for struggle and resistance; they do not focus solely on economic development but also aim to achieve the moral aspect expressed in forms of appreciation, respect, and human dignity. This is what Honneth's philosophy, in particular, and social philosophy, in general, have observed. (Baghoura, Al-Zuawi, 2012, p. 15). Through his study and research in Western cultural and intellectual history about forms of humiliation, Axel Honneth concluded that philosophers and specialists in social and humanistic studies who focused on conflict forms did not give any importance to forms of non-recognition represented by humiliation, degradation, exclusion, and social contempt. He makes an exception here for the French phenomenologist philosopher Michel Foucault. As is known to Western philosophical enthusiasts, Foucault is considered one of the philosophers of difference who raised many issues and topics that were taboo in Western thought, shedding light on them and subjecting them to analysis and critique. These issues revolved around forms of humiliation and degradation experienced by Western individuals.

Foucault delved into madness, crime, and sexuality. Madness, as an illness, garnered attention only with this philosopher, who dedicated a book to it called "Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason." He explored crime in his work "Discipline and Punish," and issues related to sexuality in his book "The History of Sexuality." However, Honneth provides some observations on Foucault's approach, noting that Foucault did not analyze humiliation in the forms he addressed in a clear and convincing manner. Honneth's philosophy emphasizes the necessity of paying attention to the victims of non-recognition. From here, the concept of humiliation and its resistance appear in three forms:

3-1-Physical and Psychological Humiliation: This occurs when physical or psychological harm is inflicted, such as in cases of torture, kidnapping, or rape. These actions often lead to a loss of self-confidence.

3-2-Legal or Legal Humiliation: This happens when harm is caused by excluding or marginalizing individuals from their rights and duties, often due to reasons related to ethnicity, nationality, or religion. This is commonly experienced by expatriates in foreign countries, as well as by racial minorities and women. Such individuals feel marginalized and humiliated, leading to a loss of self-respect. (Honneth Axel, 2015, p. 02).

3-3-Social or Social Humiliation: This occurs when individuals are harmed by not receiving recognition, leading to a loss of their social status. Examples include situations in the


workplace where an employee's qualifications are not recognized, leading to feelings of disrespect. This form of humiliation can contribute to social and political conflicts. (Honneth Axel, 2015, p. 02). All these forms lead to torture, rape, and slavery, which are manifestations of degradation experienced by individuals. Here, the self loses its essence and becomes embroiled in a state of conflict known as abjection. It becomes imperative to rescue individuals from this state through achieving recognition. This is what Axel Honneth sought to accomplish through his study of the social and cultural structures grounded in conflict for self-realization, which we previously discussed as contempt or disdain. When individuals experience a sense of social injustice and the resulting contempt and disdain, they are propelled into social and political conflicts aimed at altering the prevailing situation. This is done because the current state is unacceptable to any individual who understands the meaning of freedom, and human nature inherently rejects injustice and oppression.

Conclusion:

As a conclusion, Honneth argued for a philosophical alternative grounded in liberation based on social philosophy. He was able to offer a distinguished discourse in contemporary social philosophy, particularly concerning the theme of recognition, as one of the most important founding philosophers of this theory. He viewed recognition as an inherent characteristic of human nature, drawing from a philosophical anthropology derived from his predecessors, such as Young Hegelians and Mead, in addition to incorporating insights from the Frankfurt School through Habermas's philosophy. Through his thesis, Honneth made a sincere attempt to explore the struggle for recognition, aiming to establish a social theory. He acknowledges Hegel's ideas as his primary inspiration throughout his writings. Building on Hegel's concept and drawing from social psychology as Herbert Mead did, Honneth examined the harmonious relationship with the self, manifested in the three forms of recognition: love, right, and solidarity. The objective of this theory was to achieve social justice, which can only be realized on an ethical basis through self-esteem, facilitated by the three forms of recognition.

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