The Metaethics of Political Recognition

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Within the contemporary debate surrounding political recognition, Charles Taylor, and Axel Honneth have both proposed to make a conceptual distinction between the equal recognition of universal characteristics and particular recognition of people for their individuating properties. In this essay, I aim to explicate the metaethical assumptions made by both these authors so as to go beyond the purely normative arguments that have been proposed in support of them. Through a close reading of their main works, especially The Politics of Recognition (Taylor 1992) and The Struggle for Recognition (Honneth 1995), I aim to show that both philosophers adhere to particular types of moral realism. This insistence on moral realism, I argue, leaves both conceptual frameworks unable to fulfil the emancipatory promise that they at first sight seem to make. I will show that both Taylor's non-naturalist and Honneth's naturalist approach to moral realism universalize western standards. Taylor's non-natural moral realism reduces his politics of difference down to a politics of equal recognition, which he argues against as being unjustly homogenizing and reflective of a hegemonic western perspective. Honneth's natural realism in turn lacks the empirical basis on which it claims to ground its universal validity and can therefore be considered to engage in a problematic universalization of western standards as well.

Over the past thirty years, the concept of recognition played an important role in social, moral, and political philosophy, especially when applied to multiculturalism, political integration, and emancipation movements. Two of the most important contributors to the establishment of contemporary recognition philosophy are Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth, who, though both heavily inspired by Hegel, have approached recognition from different contemporary philosophical backgrounds. As both of these writers underline the importance of both universal and particularistic forms of recognition and hold recognition to be the core demand in social struggles, they are often positioned together in opposition to theorists such as Nancy Fraser, who relativizes the role of recognition and emphasizes redistribution instead (Mark 2014).

The aim of this essay is twofold. Firstly, I aim to explicate the metaethical frameworks that both writers use in their theories of political recognition. I will be looking at the semantic, epistemological, and ontological status that moral propositions have for both Taylor and Honneth and classify their metaethical position accordingly. In this way, I mean to show that there exists an important difference between the ways in which Taylor and Honneth conceptualize both the normative demand for and the function of political recognition, but that both thinkers are rooted in a framework of moral realism. Secondly, I want to use these metaethical frameworks to reflect upon the validity and aims of the theories of recognition themselves. I will show that knowing more about the nature of the moral judgments and propositions that feature in Taylor's and Honneth's theories allows us to formulate new types of criticism against these theories.

1. Two Theories of Recognition

1.1 Charles Taylor's Politics of Recognition

Taylor's essay *The Politics of Recognition* (1992) has been credited as the main source of the contemporary revival of political recognition theories (Thompson 2006). However, this work does not constitute a complete theory of recognition. In order to reconstruct the theoretical model from which Taylor arrives at his normative conclusions about recognition, this paper draws from two of Taylor's earlier works, *Sources of The Self* (1989) and *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991).

In order to understand Taylor's views on recognition, we have to first understand his notion of the self, or identity. Identity, to Taylor, is a fundamentally moral concept, in the sense that it consists of the moral commitments we make, of those ethical principles with which we come to identify ourselves throughout our lives (Taylor 1989, 27). Though we may not at all times be conscious of all our moral identifications, we cannot do without them in our making sense of the world. The set of fundamental identifications forms a framework or 'horizon of significance' (Taylor 1991) against which particular things become meaningful, evil, or morally good. Our identities are often to a large extent made up of identifications with or commitments to certain groups of people, such as religions, nationalities, or traditions. I may define myself as a Sunni Muslim, a European or a Trotskyist, or even a combination of these identities. What we really do when we define ourselves by means of such groups, Taylor claims, is to make a commitment to the values and moral predilections that we believe this community to hold (Taylor 1989, 27). The establishment of our horizons of significance through our identification with moral commitments is a dialogical process, which means that it can only take place in our interaction with other people (Taylor 1991, 32-33). This fundamentally social nature of identity formation shows the Hegelian influences in Taylor's work and is used by Taylor to differentiate his work from what he perceives to be a monological tendency in modern conceptions of identity (Taylor 1991, 34). Rather than a mere fact about genesis, the social dimension is a constant factor in the process of identity formation. What is it about this social nature of dialogical processes that provides them with the power to generate stable normative notions or horizons of significance that monological self-definition lacks? The answer to this is that social interaction allows for recognition to take place. It is by the recognition of others that certain things do in fact have actual significance that we come to establish them firmly as our horizons of significance.

As Taylor notes in *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991), it would be wrong to assert that we can just choose any moral notion to identify ourselves with, and that this notion thereby automatically gains the significance or value that is needed for it to become a horizon of significance by the recognition of others (Taylor 1991, 36-38). It is only against the background of certain formerly established significant questions that a notion, conceived of here as a possible answer to such a question, becomes significant itself. In addition to the established significance of certain questions, Taylor holds that moral claims need to entail an ontological claim about the value of their objects if they are to be significant. It would not be enough, as Taylor points out, to hold the fact that I have the same exact height as some tree on the Siberian plain as being constitutive of my identity if I do not also believe that there is something inherently good in me having this height (Taylor 1991, 36). For Taylor, recognition is a fundamental criterion for moral commitments to become part of one's horizons of significance. The human demand for meaning, and thereby for recognition, combined with the modern value of equality has manifested itself in two ways. The first one of these is connected to universalism, in the sense that it desperately tries not to make any moral distinctions between people. In these politics of equal recognition (PER), all people are respected or recognized equally for some universally shared attribute that they are all presumed to possess. The politics of difference (POD) on the other hand are mainly derived from the value of respecting and preserving people's authenticity. Both POD and PER seek to recognize every person, but where PER recognizes all these people for what they have in common, the POD recognizes these people exactly for what individuates them.

Though both of these politics express egalitarian values, Taylor argues that it is a POD that we should pursue, as all forms of PER tend to lead to the misrecognition of certain groups of people. His argument for this claim, to which we shall return in chapter 3, goes as follows. PER present themselves as being blind to difference, in the sense that they embrace and seek to recognize those aspects of identity that are shared universally. In proclaiming such universal properties without considering the actual differences among cultures however, PERs homogenize heterogeneous groups of people by forcing them into a mould that is untrue to them. Since proper recognition, for Taylor, is a demand for the construction of the stable horizons of significance that we need in order to form our identities, misrecognition through difference-blindness may hinder our identity formation. To further problematize the homogenizing tendencies of a PER, Taylor points out that the supposedly universal and neutral mould into which different

people(s) are cast is itself an expression of the values of one hegemonic culture. Those values that we ought to recognize according to a PER then reflect a particular, dominant perspective, which forces already oppressed minority groups to conform to hegemonic standards and give up their particularity. One example of this can be found in Simone de Beauvoir's critique on Plato's conception of equality between the sexes. Though Plato says that because sex is an accidental quality men and women are equally qualified to join the guardian class, he holds that in order for women to achieve this they will have to train and live like men (Bergoffen and Burke 2020). Equal treatment or recognition for women is thus dependent on those women adapting themselves to and upholding masculine, hegemonic standards. A PER should for this reason be supplanted by a POD, which allows us to recognize people for aspects of their identity that they want to be recognized for themselves. Women, in this POD view, should not have to adapt themselves to better fit the male image if they are to receive recognition, but should instead be recognized for their own properties, values and strengths.

1.2 Axel Honneth and the Struggle for Recognition

As we have seen in the previous section, Taylor sees identity formation as dialogically constituted through social recognition, in a manner similar to Hegel's intersubjective framework of recognition. One aspect of Hegel's early philosophy that Taylor seemingly ignores, but that is rigorously adapted and integrated in the work of Axel Honneth, is the idea that the historical development of societies follows a certain inherent logic, constituted by the particular modes of recognition present in such societies. As Honneth finds Hegel's dialectical explanation of historical processes both unfinished and unsatisfyingly metaphysical however, he reconstructs a naturalized or empirical account of recognition inspired by philosopher and psychologist George Herbert Mead (Honneth 1996, 68-72). The term naturalism is used throughout this paper to indicate theories that do not invoke any super- or extranatural explanations, that is, theories that only use explanations grounded in empirical facts that can be studied by the natural sciences. Honneth's naturalized theory of recognition is largely inspired by the pragmatist philosophy of the late 19th and early 20th century and starts from the assumption that it is only when confronted with misunderstandings in social interaction that people become aware of their own subjectivity. One only becomes a self-conscious person through perceiving one's own actions from a second-person perspective, and for this an elementary form of recognition is needed, since we cannot imagine the other as having a perspective without recognizing them as a person first. This only explicates the epistemic dimension of recognition however, and thereby only marks the first step in Hegel's larger project, which is concerned with the ways in which recognition forms our practical or moral relation to self. In order to explain the normative and developmental dimensions of recognition, Honneth refers to Mead's child psychology and his conception of the way that children learn moral norms. In order to reflect upon the 'good and bad' in their own behaviour, Mead claims, the only standards that children have are their memories of their parents' reactions towards their earlier behaviour. As children grow older and are confronted with more and more different people's moral standards however, they slowly come to construct a self-image (or a 'me' as opposed to an 'I') based on their interactions with a generalized other. This generalized other in which concrete moral positions are synthesized to general societal norms is what allows Mead to link recognition to the development of one's practical relation to self (Honneth 1992, 78). By adopting the perspective of the generalized other, we come to see ourselves not just as subjects, but as members of a society in which we are recognized by a group to the extent that we recognize the other members of this group in the same way.

Following both Hegel and Mead, Honneth claims that there exist three different forms or 'patterns' of recognition, and that each of these patterns corresponds to a certain practical relation to self that is necessary for the development of an individual's positive attitude towards oneself.

1.   Love, which is characterized as a personal, affectionate form of recognition in which people's needs and emotions are recognized through emotional support. The corresponding relation to self of love is a basic self-confidence (Honneth 1995, 95-107).

2.   Rights make up the second mode of recognition, which is cognitive rather than affective and is concerned with people's moral responsibility. By mutually recognizing each other as legal entities capable of free and rational thought, people come to see themselves as members of society in which everyone is worthy of basic rights. This self-respect is the relation to self corresponding to legal recognition (Honneth 1995, 107-111).

3.   Solidarity then, is the final mode of recognition, in which a person's individuating traits and abilities come to be socially esteemed. Such esteem gives rise to the relation to self called self-esteem or self-worth (Honneth 1995, 121-28).

What is crucial here, is the fact that for Honneth, the three spheres of recognition can be seen as developmental stages for which each successive stage can only be achieved once an individual has developed the previous relation to self. Without the basic self-confidence to express one's needs and emotions as acquired through the mode of recognition called love, it is impossible to engage in the intersubjective relations necessary for legal recognition (Honneth 1992, 107). Without the self-respect and existence of a political community that arise from legal recognition, there would be no conception of the shared projects or values in communities that are a necessary condition for attaining social esteem (Honneth, 1992 p. 122).

2. The Nature of Morality

As indicated in the introduction, this essay is not concerned with the normative arguments for Taylor's two principles of political recognition or the ethics of Honneth's three spheres of recognition, but rather with the metaethical presuppositions of these positions. That is, it does not ask whether either Taylor or Honneth is 'right', morally speaking, but it asks how we should interpret the meaning of their moral commitments, what their metaphysical status is and to what extent the truth of such commitments exists objectively (Miller 2013). In what follows, I explicate these questions and provide a quick overview of the main positions in contemporary metaethics. After this, I engage in a closer reading of the works summarized above and see if we can make the metaethical presuppositions of Taylor and Honneth explicit. In the next chapter, I evaluate to what extent this has any argumentative significance and what this metaethical background means for the practical application for either theory of recognition.

One of the most important problems in both classical and contemporary metaethics is a semantic one, which asks what it is exactly that moral judgments express (Miller 2013). Specifically, this question is concerned with whether or not the psychological state that is expressed in a moral judgment is a belief or an emotion. If, as cognitivists hold, moral judgments are in the business of expressing beliefs, then this implies that such judgments have a truth value: the belief expressed in a judgment is either true or false. Non-cognitivism, in contrast, holds that moral judgments express non-cognitive mental states such as desires or feelings of (dis)approval, and that morality therefore falls outside of the domain of questions about truth altogether (van Roojen 2018). Another important question within the metaethical debate is whether or not moral propositions, provided that these propositions do in fact have a truth value, refer to mind-independent factors. Moral realism holds that this is in fact the case, and that the truth or falsity of any moral proposition or judgment therefore exists objectively. The term moral irrealism is used to designate both cognitivist and non-cognitivist positions that do not hold the thesis that ethical propositions refer to mind-independent facts (Väyrynen 2005). Finally, within moral realism we may distinguish between naturalist and non-naturalist theories, which

disagree about the nature of the mind-independent facts that make moral propositions true or false. As the names suggest, naturalists hold that such facts are 'natural' and can be described by the natural sciences or psychology, and non-naturalists deny this (Moore 1903, 40). Though this is only a rough sketch that is by no means meant to be comprehensive, it does highlight the most important questions that I mean to subject Taylor's and Honneth's theories to and provides some possible answers to these questions.

<h2 style="text-align:center">2.1 Charles Taylor's Moral realism.</h2>

As we have seen in chapter 1, Taylor sees the set of moral propositions with which we identify ourselves as constituting our identity and believes that this process of identification is a fundamentally dialogical and dynamic process. On its own, this description tells us very little about the nature of these moral propositions themselves, and in his own work Taylor never explicitly identifies himself with any of the positions described above. Despite this fact, I will argue here that *Sources of the Self* (1989) clearly reveals Taylor's position to be one of moral realism, and therefore marks him as a cognitivist as well. We can establish this categorization by testing Taylor's thinking to the following three theses, all of which have to be fulfilled in order to classify a position as being realist (Väyrynen 2005).

1. Moral predicates refer to moral properties and represent moral facts. This is called the semantic thesis, which we can also conceptualize as a cognitivist thesis. Note that this thesis says something about the meaning or semantic function of moral predicates but does not commit us to say anything about the reality of the moral facts to which moral predicates refer.

2. At least some moral judgments are true. This is the alethic thesis, which eliminates cognitivist alternatives such as John Mackie's (1977) error theory to which I will return shortly.

3. Moral judgments are true if and only if their objects of assessment possess some relevant moral qualities, and these qualities are metaphysically robust, that is, they are not metaphysically different from or inferior to non-moral qualities. This last thesis is an ontological one, as it seeks to tell us something about the actual nature of moral facts or qualities.

At first sight Taylor's theory, and especially its emphasis on the dialogical, socially constructed nature of our horizons of significance seems to hint at subjectivism. If what we take to be morally true is dependent on our contingent interactions with other people, then those moral beliefs are themselves contingent, and any truth in such beliefs must then be grounded upon the simple fact that people hold those beliefs. In *The Politics of Recognition* (PER) however, Taylor calls subjectivist theories 'confused' and 'half-baked' and rejects them on the basis of a simple argument that makes his position on (1) very clear (Taylor 1992, 69). If moral judgments are concerned not with expressing truth, but with expressing feelings of (dis)liking something, then the difference between actually finding a culture worthy and expressing your solidarity with that culture despite the fact that you do not find that culture's achievements to have worth falls away. In other words, if my judgment 'this culture has value' expresses merely my positive feeling towards this culture, then no actual value is recognized to exist in this culture despite my positive valuation of it. Since we interpret such valuations as being condescending rather than as true expressions of respect, moral expressions must be aimed at truth, must aim to say something about the actual moral status of something rather than express a subjective feeling (Taylor 1992, 69-70). Though this is not what we generally mean with the term 'subjectivism' in metaethics, the argument does allow us to conclude that Taylor supports (1) and can therefore

be classified as a cognitivist about morality.

Saying that our moral language aims at moral truth tells us something about the meaning of moral statements, which is why Väyrynen (2005) dubbed the previous thesis the semantic thesis. But the fact that moral statements refer to moral properties and are supposed to represent moral truth does not mean that such moral facts actually exist or that we have any access to moral truth; the truth of (1) implies nothing about the truth of (2). That it is possible to support (1) without supporting (2) becomes clear from John Mackie's (1977) error theory, which holds that though humans *aim* to describe actually existing moral qualities in the world, they continuously and consistently fail at this project. In order to clarify Taylor's position on (2) then, we need to know to what extent he believes that moral propositions have a truth value or ἀλήθεια (alethia), and to what extent humans have access to this truth value and are able to form true moral judgments. In order to arrive at this point, Taylor distinguishes between the affective and ontological dimensions of a moral judgment. Proclaiming that humans are worthy of respect, for instance, involves not only an affective claim (the claim that I have a strong feeling about the inherent worth of humans) but also an assent to the ontological claim that it is a moral fact about humans that they are worthy of respect (Taylor 1989, 5-6). The relevance of this second, ontological claim has been discredited in contemporary thought because of what Taylor calls the naturalist tendency to reduce the phenomenological experience of morality down to sociobiological (natural) explanations, a point to which he keeps returning in his later works (Taylor 1991, 74). Such a 'natural reduction' of the ontological claims in moral judgments fails to recognize a fundamental difference between our deeply rooted moral reactions and other types of natural reactions, such as our (un)pleasant reactions towards certain smells or tastes. In our moral - unlike our other reactions - we acknowledge that it is some internal aspect of the object to which we react those merits or validates our moral reaction. It is because of this object-validation that we want our moral judgment to be consistent, since questions of consistency only arise when we consider properties that are independent of our de facto instinctive reactions (Taylor 1989, 6-7). Moral argument and reasoning always presuppose the existence of such ontological moral claims, which is why we can never properly consider morality from the perspective of the natural sciences (Hume's famous 'no ought from an is' principle). Instead of concluding from this, as 'the naturalists' do, that moral ontology has no basis in fact, Taylor claims that we should take the strong phenomenological experience of a moral ontology seriously as indicating our access to actual moral truths.

> "We should treat our deepest moral instincts, our ineradicable sense that human life is to be respected, as our mode of access to the world in which ontological claims are discernible and can be rationally argued about and sifted" (Taylor 1989 p.8).

Despite the fact that this moral world, or 'the good' is something independent from us, we do have access to it: we grapple with it and make it our own and can therefore logically be correct in our moral judgments. Since this argument shows that Taylor believes in both the existence of moral truth and in the possibility of human beings having access to that truth, (2) must be valid for Taylor (Carkner 2006, 8).

In considering Taylor's stance on the semantic thesis and our access to the moral world, we have come very close to answering the third thesis of moral realism concerning the ontological status of moral facts. We have seen that it is crucial for Taylor that the truth of any moral judgment is determined not by our having that de facto judgment, but by some moral properties of the thing that we are judging itself. We have also seen that these moral properties are different from the properties described by natural science, indicating that if Taylor adheres to moral realism, it must be a form of non-naturalist realism. This conceptual gap between the natural sciences and the subject matter of ethics is by no means reason to declare morality to be non-objective or not real however, as such a declaration assumes without grounds that all aspects of reality can be described by the natural sciences (Taylor 1989, 57-58). The simple fact that we cannot escape using moral terms in our description of human life trumps any general metaphy-

sical or epistemological considerations about science, since such general consideration must be based upon what we find in the world and cannot serve as the basis for objecting against the reality of such findings. The moral world, despite not being explainable in physical terms, is just as real and objective as physics. Moral properties, in Taylor's conception, are therefore robust as demanded by (3), not because they are metaphysically the same as non-moral properties, but because their metaphysical status is not inferior or 'less real' as that of non-moral properties (Taylor 1989, 59; Abbey 2002, 95-98).

2.2 Honneth's Formal Conception of the Good

Honneth, unlike Taylor, embraces and incorporates the naturalist perspective in his theory of recognition, and even formulates this explicitly when discussing the limits of Hegel's early writings (Honneth 1992, 67). Honneth does away with what he considers the unfounded meta-physical assumptions of Hegel and seeks to replace them with a philosophy based on empirical, natural facts. This is why he invokes psychologists such as Mead, and why he considers his philosophy to be a social, rather than a moral or political philosophy (Zurn 2000, 118). Despi-te the gap between moral and scientific notions pointed out by Taylor in the previous section, Honneth claims that his explanation of the struggles of recognition can give rise to a 'formal conception of the ethical life', a normative standpoint that allows us to evaluate and compare different forms of social organization. How does Honneth arrive at this formal conception of the good, and what can we say about the metaethical status of this normative ideal in his work?

The ultimate normative goal, or ideal end-state in Honneth's work is complete self-rea-lization - sometimes called 'personal integrity' (Honneth 1992, 175) -, conceived of in terms of Kantian autonomy, the capacity to prescribe oneself a moral law. In order to broaden the Kantian notion of individual autonomy and overcome its focus on merely cognitive capacities however, Honneth articulates the structural aspects of a good or ethical life and the motivations for acting ethically (Honneth 1992, 172-175; Zurn 2000,118-119). This is where love, legal relations and social esteem come in, the three patterns of recognition discussed in chapter 1. In order to form a positive attitude towards oneself, a person must first successfully engage in all three spheres of recognition (love, respect, esteem) so that that person develops self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem in that order (Honneth 1992,169). Engagement in all three spheres of recognition is thus the necessary condition for attaining the good in life, and a life that fulfils this condition is called the ethical life [Sittlichkeit] (Honneth 1992,173). With this formal con-ception of the ethical life in mind, we can evaluate particular struggles as either emancipatory and progressive or as oppressive and reactionary, depending on whether they contribute to or diminish the necessary conditions for attaining the good as specified above. Honneth's formal conception of the ethical life, and especially its third component of social esteem or solidarity seems to leave room for quite a large amount of normative practices and ideals. Solidarity, as we have seen, arises when subjects mutually recognize each other's valuable contributions to some shared goal within what is called a community of value. At first sight, this seems to suggest that any specific value or goal that has the capacity of providing the basic value of a community can thereby contribute to the ethical life. Indeed, the only limits that Honneth sets for such specific normative ideals is the formal objection that such ideals may never conflict with subjects' successful engagement in the other spheres of recognition (Honneth 1992,178). As such, Honneth claims to refrain from formulating any concrete set of substantive universal values other than the autonomy gained in the ethical life.

Much like Taylor, the freedom that Honneth allows for people to form their own com-munities of value seems to suggest an elementary form of subjectivism or constructivism about values. The formal limits that Honneth sets to such values however, combined with the fact that this freedom is a normative goal in and of itself clearly show that for Honneth, it is possible for a person to be wrong in their moral judgments. The moral judgment that two women are not allowed to love each other for instance hinders some subjects' ability to gain the self-confiden-

ce associated with the recognition that one derives from love, and therefore takes society as a whole further away from attaining the good. As such, we can say that this position is morally wrong, fulfilling the semantic thesis (1) of moral realism. This same example also clarifies Honneth's position on the alethic thesis (2), since the inverse moral judgment (two women who love each other should be allowed to do so) contributes to the possibility of some people to fulfil the first sphere of recognition, and thereby brings society closer to the good life, making this moral judgment ethically true. Having established that Honneth is a cognitivist (thesis 1) who believes that moral propositions can be true (thesis 2), or, in other words, that there exists a moral domain or world to which humans have at least some amount of access, we are left to consider thesis (3) concerning the ontological status of those conditions that make a moral proposition true or false. As the self-realized autonomous life and it's necessary intersubjective conditions constitute the only yardstick that Honneth provides for the normative evaluation of particulars, it is the ontological status of the good in this good life that we are concerned with here.

The key to understanding what it is exactly that justifies Honneth in claiming that his formal conception of the good life is the right one can be found in his 2003 exchange with Nancy Fraser, where he clearly formulates that his normative goal of the good life is valid because it mirrors the expectations of socially integrated subjects (Fraser and Honneth 2003,174). That is, the demand for being properly recognized and attaining the resulting practical relation to self of living a self-realized autonomous life expresses an emancipatory interest of the human race, and for this reason Honneth feels justified in proclaiming the fulfilment of this demand as the good life. It seems then that the ultimate moral grounding on which Honneth builds his normative ideal is a psychological property of human beings engaged in social struggles. As the ontological status of psychological properties is by no means metaphysically more mysterious than or inferior to that of non-moral properties, we can safely say that Honneth's theory satisfies (3). As the psychological falls within Moore's (1903) classification of the natural, we may distinguish Honneth's metaethical framework as falling under the banner of natural moral realism.

3. Reflection of Meta-ethical Perspectives Upon Recognition Theory.

Taylor warns us multiple times that adopting a politics of equal recognition can lead us to believe that we are giving everyone equal or neutral treatment, while in actuality we are applying a particular western normative model on people(s) who do not identify with this model (Taylor 1992,.43). This is why a politics of difference is introduced, so that we don't homogenize a heterogeneous humanity under western liberalism, dressed up as 'neutrality'. We should aim to recognize people for those things that individuate them, to respect them on their own grounds. As we have seen however, Taylor holds some qualities or attributes to be objectively better than others, irrespective of how individual people or entire cultures evaluate or value these qualities or attributes. Concretely, this means that while identity development is universally dependent on mutual recognition of moral identifications, some of these identifications, be they recognized by others or not, are fundamentally wrong.

This creates a problem for the politics of difference, a problem of which Taylor is acutely aware. We cannot simply recognize every person or culture for their individuating properties if there exists a logical possibility for those properties to be morally wrong. In addition to this cognitive difficulty with applying a politics of difference, Taylor holds that we are unable to respect people based on their difference alone (Taylor 1992,69-70). In judging the ethical standards of other cultures, we always rely on our own horizons of significance, which means that we end up categorizing and judging these cultures' value systems from our own perspectives, leaving us unable to truly judge their worth (Taylor 1992,71). In order to solve this problem, Taylor proposes that we adopt Gadamer's idea of a fusion of horizons - *Horizontverschmelzung* - (Gadamer 1998,313). By comparing and fusing our own horizons of significance with those of other cultures or people, we create a new, broader horizon that provides us with a new vocabulary for comparison. This allows us to compare the relative worth of other cultures in a way

that doesn't prioritize our own standards, and to genuinely recognize any worth or value that we might find in these other cultures (Taylor 1992,67). Though the method of fused horizons solves the problem of comparing different value systems, it does not by itself guarantee that we will in fact find anything of value in a certain culture's value system.

If we suppose, as Taylor does, that there exists a moral truth to which people have some amount of access, but that is independent of their will, we are left with two options concerning the truth of various cultures' ethical beliefs. 1) Every person or culture has an equal access to the moral truth, and all cultural differences between various horizons of significance are ultimately reducible to this moral truth. The differences between various horizons can then be explained as different interpretations of the same truth, or as arising from cultures having different non-moral beliefs about the world. 2) There exists genuine disagreement about moral truth among different cultures and people, and these disagreements are not reducible to different interpretations of some universally held belief. This second thesis is called descriptive moral relativism (DMR), and in combination with Taylor's moral realism it implies that at least some of these cultures are simply dead wrong in their ethical beliefs.

Suppose (1) is true (and DMR is therefore false). If we fuse our horizons with those of other cultures, we will then always find that ultimately, both horizons rely on the same (morally true) ethical beliefs, and that our previous horizons simply did not allow us to see this agreement because of the particular way that both cultures expressed these ethical beliefs. If this is the case however, we come to recognize and respect these cultures not for their individuality, but for believing in the same morally true notions that we do. Though our own understanding of this moral truth might be expanded or altered slightly because we fused our horizons, our assumed moral realism implies that any such changes to our conception of the moral truth can never be substantive or fundamental. We have therefore returned to a politics of equal recognition, in which our respect for other people is based upon their moral similarity to ourselves. If the DMR expressed in (2) is true however, we will inevitably find that despite the fact that we have fused our horizons of significance with those of other cultures, the valuations of some cultures simply lack the moral truth that our valuations do in fact possess. If we find no genuine worth or value in such cultures, we both can't and do not have to recognize the identities based upon the horizons of significance of these cultures. We will surely find worth in the valuations of some cultures, but only to the extent that these valuations are based upon the actual moral truth. Taylor's politics of difference thus remains empty: it is not based on true difference at all. Rather we only recognize those "differences" that are not real differences, but merely different expressions of the same moral truth. This is a direct consequence of the moral realism that Taylor implicitly holds true. Regardless of whether DMR is true or not, Taylor's insistence on moral realism reduces his politics of difference to a politics of equal recognition.

Honneth, in contrast to Taylor, does not ask us to recognize people from other backgrounds for what individuates them. His conception of solidarity or social esteem, as we have seen in chapter 1, only takes place between the members of a certain community of value themselves, as these members already share a common conception of the good. As long as a culture's shared goal does not interfere with Honneth's formal conception of the good, it does not matter if different societies recognize each other for their individuating properties. The natural realist status of this formal conception of the good in Honneth's work however raises some questions of in and of itself.

As we have seen in chapters 1 and 2, Honneth aims to ground his theory of recognition upon purely naturalist premises. Both the process of how specific forms of recognition give rise to their corresponding practical relations to self and the inherent human interest in self-realization are explained as psychological facts about humankind. Now, for something that is to serve as the naturalist or descriptive basis on which his entire normative project is to be grounded, Honneth does remarkably little to show us that the deep-seated demand for recognition and the internal logic of his three stages of recognition are indeed universally shared psychological properties of human beings. In Redistribution or Recognition (2003), where Honneth aims to show contra Fraser that historically all social struggles have a basis in identity recognition, the only

concrete evidence that is presented for this claim consists of a specific, limited set of (western) historical studies (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 131-133). Furthermore, Honneth claims that since empirical studies of the actual reactions of people engaged in social struggles are informed by theoretical pre-understandings, we can only determine the necessary concepts involved in social struggles by conceptual analysis (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 126-127). Though the moral realism that Honneth espouses is thus understood as resulting from natural facts, the actual proof of these natural facts remains limited.

As Honneth's theory only seems to prescribe interpersonal and intercultural recognition and says nothing about the recognition that we owe to people from entirely different cultural traditions, it would be unjust to classify his position as one falling in Taylor's conception of a politics of equal recognition. As he holds all social struggles to be based on demands for recognition however, in line with his natural moral realism, we can formulate a critique that is very similar to Taylor's critique on PER. In classifying all social struggles as emanating from an inherent demand for recognition, Honneth is essentially homogenizing the entire human population and reducing their struggles down to a call for a particular form of self-realization. As we may very reasonably doubt the universality of both this specific Hegelian form of self-realization and the demand for a recognition in terms of self-realization in general (Zurn 2003), such a homogenization may lead to the same forms of misrecognition already described by de Beauvoir (1949). There are many conceptions of the good life, and Honneth's formal one may simply reflect the hegemonic western tradition that he comes from himself.

Both Taylor and Honneth, as we have seen here, adhere to particular forms of moral realism that, when consistently applied, elucidate some interesting and potentially problematic aspects of their theories. Where both theories are meant as emancipatory projects, the insistence on a single objective moral truth seems to thwart this goal. For Taylor the tension between moral realism and his ideal of a politics of difference manifests itself in the fact that genuine respect and recognition, within the framework of his moral realism, can only exist when subjects' moral horizons are shared to some extent, making a genuine politics of difference impossible. For Honneth, the derivation of moral standards from a supposed universal psychological demand for particular forms of recognition makes him vulnerable to Taylor's critique of the particularity of politics of equal recognition.

4. Conclusion

By applying Väyrynen's three theses of moral realism to both Taylor's and Honneth's recognition theories, I have argued that these writers implicitly adhere to non-natural and natural moral realism respectively. Such an adherence to moral realism, I have argued in chapter 3, forces both writers in the position where they either have to admit that some people(s) are not worthy of the recognition that they argue for or ascribe universal properties to heterogeneous groups of people. This last option is criticized by Taylor among others as unjustly homogenizing and reflective of a hegemonic worldview, and therefore leads to the misrecognition and unjust categorization of already suppressed minority groups.

As both Taylor and Honneth explicitly state that they want to avoid prescribing universal values to various cultures for emancipatory reasons, it seems that the moral realism they espouse is problematic for their recognition theories. I propose that further research in recognition theory should therefore be acutely aware of its metaethical presuppositions if it is to avoid the pitfalls I have described in this paper. If recognition theorists aim to keep their moral realism, it seems, there are three options of achieving this. (1) Provide some empirical basis for the claim that there are in fact universal moral beliefs or demands. If this can be shown, the accusation of unjust homogenization would lose its appeal. (2) Admit that under the current theory, some people are wrong in their ethical beliefs, and are therefore not owed recognition. This would mean that recognition loses its universalist appeal. (3) Formulate some form of value pluralism that explicitly allows contradictory value statements to be true at the same time. The only other path for Taylor's and Honneth's theories of recognition, if they are to fulfil the emancipatory promise they make, would be to base their theories on a form of either cognitive irrealism or moral relativism.

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