CHAPTER ONE

RECOGNITION AS THE NEW PARADIGM

Introduction

With his *theory of communicative action* Jürgen Habermas intends to introduce a new paradigm. This new paradigm is characterized by making central the relation between subject and subject, and not, as in the old paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, the relation between subject and nature. As a paradigm that puts the subject/subject relation at its center, the *theory of communicative action* rightly can be called a paradigm of recognition. After all, it is evident for Habermas that the relation between subjects presupposes that they recognize one another as subjects. In this book, I will put forward the thesis that Habermas’s version of the paradigm of recognition is untenable. The relation between subjects cannot adequately be conceptualized without involving their inner relation to nature. Precisely by separating the paradigm of the *theory of communicative action* from the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, Habermas creates a one-sided emphasis on intersubjectivity which, as we will see, translates into a series of ungrounded assumptions.

An adequate paradigm of recognition integrates the philosophy of consciousness as its moment. Principally, this integration is already performed in the concept of recognition that Hegel develops in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will even defend the position that this work already contains all the building blocks to elaborate a paradigm of recognition which can play a central role in contemporary discussions. In contrast to Axel Honneth, I not only think that recognition belongs to the central concepts of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but also that this work is superior to Hegel’s earlier attempts to develop this concept (in his *Philosophy* of...
of Spirit). I will show that Honneth’s interpretation of the concept of recognition in the Self-Consciousness chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* cannot be maintained, and that instead Honneth’s concept of recognition is borrowed from Habermas.

To highlight the one-sidedness of the *theory of communicative action* I first will take up the history of its origination and will delineate how the basic ideas of this theory have their source in the young Habermas’s criticism of Marx.

*Marx’s Materialistic Version of the Lord/Bondsman Relation*

In the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* the young Marx has, on the one hand, a great admiration for Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* because, in this work, reality is conceptualized as activity, i.e. as labor, but, on the other hand, he criticizes in Hegel that labor is only understood as “abstrakt geistig”3 (as an abstraction of the spirit). Marx’s basic position in this work can be characterized as the materialistic version of the *lord/bondsman relation* as developed by Hegel. The human being is the bondsman, the laborer who cultivates nature. In the first instance, the lord is the superior nature, the nature that in last resort will defeat the laboring human being. For, it is true that the human being can, in his labor, cultivate nature and make it appropriate for consumption, but at the end he will die. His body will return unto dust and again be part of the environmental nature. The human, however, is not only a laboring being, but also a spiritual one. As spiritual being he represents the superior nature as his godhead. The relation between human being and godhead can be characterized as a relation of recognition. In his representation of nature as an almighty god, human recognizes the superior power of nature.

According to Marx, history is the history of labor, the history of the relation between human and nature, i.e. the history of the division of labor. He characterizes this history as “natural” (*naturwüchsig*). As a natural being the human being belongs to his species which reproduces itself by means of labor. The division of labor shows that his labor is part of the species: he belongs to a society that can be described as a labor system in which all have their own place in the division of labor. Initially, the

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