CHAPTER SEVEN

THE THEORY OF RECOGNITION AND CRITIQUE OF INSTITUTIONS

Emmanuel Renault

In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth states that the various forms of social injustice correspond to different types of social denial of recognition. But what precisely is social in recognition and denials of recognition? To answer this question, one has to describe the relationship between recognition understood as a fundamental expectation of individuals, and recognition produced by institutions. If Honneth fails to offer such a description, it is mainly because he understands his own theory of recognition as a moral and social philosophy focusing on the normative presuppositions of social life. However, his theory of recognition is also intended to be a political and social theory, that is, a theory of the struggle against social injustice and a theory that identifies the social processes and structures responsible for such injustices. On the one hand, as political theory, it has to describe the various types of injustice produced by institutions, because it is always in given institutional frameworks that negative experiences occur that provide the incentives for struggles against social injustices. On the other hand, as social theory, it has to elaborate on intermediary concepts to mediate philosophy and the social sciences in order to describe the various ways recognition and denial of recognition are socially constructed. Hence, it is from a political and sociological point of view that a shift to institutional analysis seems necessary.

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Firstly, I will oppose two conceptions of recognition: Honneth’s theory of institutions as expressions of recognition, and a conception of recognition where institutions play a constitutive role. Secondly, I will try and define what institutions are and, thirdly, I will propose a definition of institutional effects of recognition. In conclusion, I will ask whether this conception of recognition has to be understood as complementing Honneth’s theory, or competing with it.

1. Expressivist versus Constitutive Concept of Recognition

If the theory of recognition intends to characterise social justice, its object must be social. However, it is not easy to determine what is social in recognition. To spell out the nature of the problem, let us begin with a formal definition of the recognition relationship. The notion of the recognition relationship presupposes a complex interplay of identifications, expectations and attitudes. On the one hand, it presupposes the attribution of a propriety A to an individual B by another individual C (cognitive identification) and that a given evaluation is associated with A and embodied in the attitude of C toward B (practical evaluation). On the other hand, it presupposes that B expects given cognitive identifications as well as given practical evaluations according to which B can interpret the attitude of C either as a worthy recognition or as a denial of recognition. For a given individual (C), the experience of recognition and denial of recognition not only presupposes a recognition attitude of another individual (B) toward C (a cognitive identification and practical evaluation of one aspect of C’s existence); it also presupposes that this recognition attitude matters to C, that C understands and accepts its implicit or explicit identification (otherwise C will feel misrecognised) and evaluation (otherwise C will feel disrespected).

The recognitive relationship therefore seems to denote a simple relationship between I and Thou, and it is hard to see how this kind of

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3 Compare with H. Ikäheimo, “On the Genus and Species of Recognition,” *Inquiry*, 45, 2002. My definition of recognition differs from that of Ikäheimo because I advance the notion that recognition presupposes an expectation rather than an attitude of B, and because it seems to me that recognition has to be understood in terms of evaluative identification if it is to take into account (a) the distinction between misrecognition and disrespect and (b) the link between social classifications and struggles for recognition analysed for example by P. Bourdieu (see *Méditations Pascaliennes*, Paris, Seuil, 1997, p. 223).