After the terrorist attack of 22/7 in 2011, the need for making Norwegian social democracy ‘more democratic’ has been addressed, and there has been an ongoing discussion as to whether or not Norway should be understood in terms of a ‘community of disagreement’. Here, Chantal Mouffe’s post-democratic imaginary has been applied in order to address the need for this kind of society. According to her view, today’s Western states are undergoing an intertwined process of moralisation and de-politisation of democracy’s agonistic nature. Axel Honneth agrees to a great extent with Mouffe, as he also believes that conflict plays a significant role within democracies. Nonetheless, Honneth disagrees with Mouffe with regard to the relationship between conflict and morality. The lesson to be learned from Honneth is that democracies should be viewed as morally grounded in order to utilise political conflict as a potential resource.

In what follows I will argue that in order to be able to apply the Honnethian approach to the moral grammar of political conflicts in post-terror Norway, democratic disagreement should be normatively grounded in person’s embodied dignity. I will explain this claim further in four steps. In the first step, I shall reconstruct two different ways in which Honneth’s moral understanding of political conflict is normatively justified, namely Hegelian and Heideggerian. In the second step, I will show how Mouffe’s post-democracy thesis explains the relationship between morality and political conflict. In the third step, I shall analyse how the challenges of post-democracy can be solved through a recovering of a ‘democratic ethical life’ from either Honneth’s moral or Mouffe’s amoral but nonetheless normative stance. Here, I argue that Honneth’s approach is the most promising, at least when the moral grammar of democratic disagreement is read through his Heideggerian lens. In the

* My thanks to Titus Stahl, Andrew Schaap, Jonas Jakobsen, and Jørgen Pedersen for their valuable comments. I also wish to give my deep gratitude to Axel Honneth for inviting me to be a DAAD Visiting Ph.D. Fellow to Frankfurt University (2008–2009), which gave me the opportunity to discuss parts of this chapter with him.
fourth, and final, step of this chapter, I shall apply the comparison in the third step in the case of post-terror Norway. I will also argue that in order to be able to appreciate democratic disagreement in post-22/7 Norway, one should look more closely at the very way in which Honneth normatively grounds his political thought, namely in the recognition of the intersubjective preconditions of every citizen’s personal integrity. Moreover, I will argue that Honneth should reactualise the lost opportunity of his grounding of recognition in humans’ basic, invariant, and bodily need for love, which was part of his original political insight but later turned into his distinction between ‘existential’ and ‘substantial’ recognition forms, respectively. In doing so, a universal normative standard can be established on the basis of which a society may legitimise its democratic recognition struggles.

1 The Morality of Political Conflicts

One way of reading Honneth is to argue that the dialectical relationship between democracy (‘post-traditional democratic ethical life’), conflict (‘social conflict’), and morality (‘moral grammar’) constitutes his original political insight.1 The logical upshot of this relationship is a political process through which society’s democratic practices and institutions are further deepened. Thinking like this implies that the affinity between democracy and conflict is dialectical as far as citizens’ negative experiences with injustice are expressed as moral claims for recognition and thus preservation of their personal integrity.2 The lesson to be learned from this story is that a person’s disrespected dignity serves as the normative grounding of struggles for recognition. Honneth sums up what is at stake here as follows: “[T]he conflict that breaks out between subjects represents, from the outset, something ethical, insofar as it is directed towards the intersubjective recognition of dimensions of human individuality”. Indeed, political conflicts include, “from the start, not only a field of moral tensions but also the social medium by which they are settled”.3 Thus, morality plays a significant role in Honneth’s ‘social therapeutic’ understanding of democratic conflict.

The morality of political conflict in Honneth’s approach is further specified through the lens of three different but interrelated dimensions, namely moral

---

2 Ibid., pp. 171–175.
3 Ibid., pp. 17–18 (my emphasis).