

## Multiculturalism and Recognition

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### Introduction

It is hard to see how we can make sense of multiculturalism without invoking a concept of recognition. This becomes clear as soon as we reflect on the minimum conditions that must be in place for a practice, or a society generally, to count as multicultural. For a practice to count as multicultural, more is required than the matter of fact *co-existence* of many cultures (Parekh 2000: 6). Cultures existed alongside each other long before the concept of multiculturalism came along and before it became meaningful to talk about multiculturalism as such. The concept of multiculturalism only begins to have application when, in addition to the co-existence of many cultures, some *acknowledgement* of the ‘many-culturedness’ of a practice is sought or given. It is this acknowledgement or *recognition* of the fact of many cultures, and not just the fact itself, that provides a minimal condition of multiculturalism. The acknowledgement of matter of fact cultural multiplicity was one of the first demands of the multicultural movement, and it is likely that such ‘demands for recognition’ will continue to spring up wherever practices that are in fact ‘many-cultured’ do not *take themselves* to be. This is one reason why we need a concept of recognition to make sense of multiculturalism.

But the idea of multiculturalism is bound up with another sense of recognition. Acts of recognition sometimes involve not so much the acknowledgement of some fact as the *affirmation* of something’s or someone’s worth. Recognition in this sense implies a *positive estimation* or attitude, and not just an acknowledgement that something is the case. This concept of recognition feeds into a stronger, more controversial idea of multiculturalism than the one requiring recognition as acknowledgement, because it implies that cultural multiplicity, and the distinct cultures and identities that make up a many-cultured practice, be positively valued, endorsed and perhaps publicly supported. Acknowledgement of cultural

multiplicity is necessary but not sufficient for multiculturalism, on this model, for what is also required is affirmation of the distinct cultures involved, and of the people whose identities are tied up with those cultures. The affirmation of the identities of distinct cultural groups, be it through law or public policy, through symbolic measures or the redistribution of resources, is another way in which ‘demands for recognition’ are made in the name of multiculturalism. And it is difficult to imagine what multiculturalism would amount to today without something like such demands for recognition.

For these two reasons at least – the close conceptual connection between multiculturalism and the acknowledgement of cultural multiplicity on the one hand and the affirmation of the worth of distinct cultural groups on the other – the concept of recognition seems to be indispensable for understanding multiculturalism. It is therefore no surprise that the emergence of multiculturalism as a practice and set of ideas over the past twenty five years coincides with a resurgence of interest amongst philosophers in theories of recognition.

For convenience, we can think of the recent philosophical debate around recognition as falling into three phases. The first phase, which focused on the ‘politics of recognition’, took its terms of reference from Charles Taylor’s controversial 1992 essay of that title. The essay was originally published as the centre piece of a volume entitled *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Gutmann 1992) but multiculturalism was not central to the argument of Taylor’s essay - a circumstance that has occasioned much confusion, as we shall see. Amidst the plethora of critical responses to Taylor’s model of the politics of recognition a second phase in the debate emerged. This endorsed the importance of recognition for contemporary politics as Taylor did, but it proposed a wider, more differentiated conception of what the politics of recognition rightfully involves, one that places struggles for recognition within a broader framework of oppression and emancipation. Jürgen Habermas’s intervention took the debate a decisive step forward in this direction (Habermas 1993), but it

was Nancy Fraser who systematically took up the challenge of mapping struggles for recognition onto new social movements, progressive politics and criticisms of contemporary modes of injustice (Fraser 1997). Fraser elaborated her model in response to rival positions advanced by theorists such as Seyla Benhabib and Iris Marion Young (Benhabib 2002; Young 2000), but it was above all her exchange with Axel Honneth on ‘redistribution or recognition?’ that defined this second phase of the debate (Fraser and Honneth 2003). As in Taylor’s original model, multiculturalism plays a subordinate and ambivalent role in the unfolding of Fraser’s theory of recognition. In the third phase of the debate, the focus can be seen as switching from recognition as one object of philosophical analysis and political contestation amongst others, to recognition as a kind of organising concept for a whole paradigm of critical reflection and social-theoretic research (Ricoeur 2005; Lazzeri and Caillé 2007; Schmidt-am-Busch and Zurn 2010). The key idea being explored here, which we owe above all to Honneth’s writings (Honneth 1991, 1995a, 1995b, 2007), is that the very concept of the social is bound up with relations of mutual recognition and the struggles that must be entered into to realise them. For Honneth, mutual recognition provides a standard of ‘intact’ or ‘undamaged’ intersubjectivity in relation to which the ‘pathologies of the social’ characteristic of our times can be diagnosed (Honneth 2007). The theory of recognition thus assumes a paradigm-like status for Honneth not unlike the status the theory of value had for Marx (who considered the alienation and exploitation of labour as definitive of the capitalist epoch) or the status the theory of communicative action has for Habermas (who views the ‘usurpation and distortion’ of communicative action by strategic action - and so the colonization of the lifeworld by markets and bureaucracy - as the source of the defining conflicts of late modernity) (Habermas 1984, 1987). While Honneth is the most accomplished exponent of this ambitious conception of recognition theory, a younger generation of theorists has taken it up and is adapting it for the purposes of philosophically informed social

criticism and the renewal of critical social theory in the Frankfurt School mould (Renault 2004, 2008; Deranty 2009; Petherbridge 2009).

So while the existence and challenge of multiculturalism forces us to think more carefully about recognition and the basis on which demands for it can legitimately be made, the main theories of recognition – Taylor’s, Fraser’s and especially Honneth’s - are not addressed *first and foremost* to defenders or critics of multiculturalism as such. This is an important point to bear in mind when thinking about the relationship between multiculturalism and recognition. For the close conceptual relationship between multiculturalism and recognition has lead many theorists and commentators to interpret the main accounts of recognition as if they were, *ipso facto*, *multiculturalist* accounts – accounts that express a multiculturalist standpoint and more or less explicitly advocate for multiculturalism. This is a mistake, and much of what I have to say in this chapter is aimed at rectifying it. The widespread view that theories of recognition are direct expressions of a multicultural standpoint rests on a confusion that can be explained by the close association between recognition and multiculturalism just described. That is not to say, however, that the theories of recognition advanced by Taylor, Fraser and Honneth have nothing to do with multiculturalism, or have nothing interesting to say about it. The point is rather that we must be careful not to graft the multicultural problematic onto the theory from the start. If we resist that temptation, if we cautiously make our way into recognition theory free of pre-conceptions and wait to see show multiculturalism looks ‘from the inside’, so to speak, then much more plausible and interesting perspectives on multiculturalism come into view. To show this is the more constructive aim I have for the chapter.

I begin by looking back at Taylor’s essay on the politics of recognition and the critical reception it received. I argue that at the core of Taylor’s reflections is a claim about the multiplicity of legitimate manifestations of modern liberal ideals that has generally been

overlooked by Taylor's many critics. My purpose here is not just to help set the record straight about the nature of Taylor's argument but to retrieve an insight that remains valid today about the kind of multiculturalism a politics of recognition can legitimately support. But the retrieval of this insight is by no means the end of the matter as far as the theory of recognition is concerned. Taking my departure from two of Habermas's criticisms of the limits of Taylor's approach, I turn in the second section to analyses that place struggles for recognition in a broader framework of morally grounded struggles against oppression, with particular reference to Fraser's account. After identifying certain problematic features of Fraser's approach to recognition and multiculturalism, I turn in the final section to Honneth's theory. The argument I make about Honneth has a similar shape to the one I make about Taylor: if we carefully reconstruct the motivation behind Honneth's theory, we see that it is not - as many critics have assumed - addressed in the first instance to the problems of multiculturalism, but that it nonetheless has an indirect relevance for multiculturalism that deserves further exploration. In the case of Honneth's theory, this has to do with the focus it provides on everyday contexts of moral experience and identity-formation in addition to the legal sphere of recognition targeted by the multicultural movement.

### **Taylor on the Politics of Recognition**

Taylor's famous essay on the politics of recognition provides a framework for answering the following question: if the recognition of 'difference' is aimed at overcoming oppression, if it does possess a genuinely *emancipatory* character, what conception of freedom is operative within it, and does this conception come into conflict with the fundamental principles of liberalism? Taylor proposes that the politics of the recognition of difference is motivated by an *expressivist* understanding of freedom, tied more or less explicitly (and coherently) to a notion of *authenticity*, the historical and cultural roots of which go back to the Romantic reaction to the European Enlightenment. While expressive freedom or authenticity is hard to

reconcile with the 'procedural' model of liberalism that tends to shape the self-understanding of liberalism today, it is not, according to Taylor's proposal, incompatible with basic liberal principles or with liberalism as such. On the contrary, it points forward to an enlarged, more radically pluralist model of liberalism which can itself give content to the legitimate emancipatory goals of the politics of recognition.

It is important, to avoid some widespread misapprehensions of Taylor's position, to consider briefly the expressivist understanding of freedom and authenticity. On the expressivist view, authenticity is a capacity that all human beings have irrespective of their social or cultural location. A society can rightfully be called free, in the expressivist sense, if it recognizes and respects this capacity in everyone, and in this sense expressivism has a radically egalitarian character. On the other hand, the standards of authentic self-expression vary enormously, both at the individual and the collective level; or in terms Taylor also uses, at the level of 'we-identity' as well as 'I-identity' (Taylor 1995: 192). An expressively free people, accordingly, is one that is able to pursue its own common purposes as expressed in its own distinctive languages and cultures. It cannot be authentic, or enjoy expressive freedom, if it has an alien language or set of cultural values imposed on it. For this reason, expressivism is radically particularized as well as egalitarian. Not only is there no generalizable formula of authentic self-definition, but there can be no final, settled formulation of any one 'we-identity' (or 'I-identity'). According to the expressivist theory, self-definition is a constantly changing and unending process (Taylor 1975, 1991).

Something like this ideal of authenticity, Taylor suggests, is woven into the cultural backcloth against which a whole range of experiences of misrecognition and moral expectations of due recognition appear. Taylor then considers the scope available to liberal societies for meeting such expectations. He notes that a liberal society is defined, in the first instance, by the *equal status* enjoyed by its citizens under the law. This equality is widely

understood to be based on the 'equal dignity' of its members, which is in turn widely understood to be grounded in the equal capacity individuals have rationally to choose their own way of life. A liberal society recognizes the equal dignity of its citizens – whether based on autonomy, authenticity, or some other feature - by granting them the same basic rights: the right to life, free association, freedom of speech, religious freedom, and so forth. Everyone is entitled to these rights simply in virtue of their common dignity as human beings. With regard to their fundamental liberties, the citizens of a liberal society are entitled to equal treatment, and if they are discriminated against on account of their particularity, they in turn suffer a damaging and unjust form of misrecognition. The misrecognition results not from 'difference-blindness', as Taylor puts it (Taylor 1992: 40), but from what we could call 'sameness-blindness'. In Taylor's view, difference-blindness with regard to fundamental liberties is an essential feature of a liberal society and it circumscribes the scope available for the recognition of particularity.

Taylor takes issue not with this liberal principle, but with the version of liberalism that defines the purpose served by the liberal democratic state *exclusively* in terms of impartial or difference-blind procedures for protecting the equal dignity of individuals. The main reason he opposes it is that this is not in fact how the citizens of certain societies conceive of the common good served by their particular liberal democracy. To the extent that they are forced into conceiving it or relating to it in that way, they are subject to a kind of misrecognition. The charge Taylor puts to 'procedural liberalism', as he calls it, is that while it is justly difference-blind at the level of basic liberties, it is unduly restrictive in its construction of the *expressive possibilities* consistent with the protection of those liberties, and this makes it difference-blind in an oppressive way.

Taylor backs up the charge by considering the predicament of liberalism in Canada. He notes how the proceduralist model has alienated Quebecers who regard themselves as

belonging to a 'distinct society' within Canada with their own particular 'we-identity'. 'It is axiomatic for Quebec governments', Taylor writes, 'that the survival and flourishing of French culture in Quebec is a good' (Taylor 1992: 58). And *in the circumstances Quebec finds itself in*, this good – the good of *survivance* - can only be secured by actively promoting it in public policy. To this end, a number of language laws were introduced which enforce French-language education on the children of immigrants and prohibit commercial signs in languages other than French. Now Taylor is by no means uncritical of the measures Quebec has taken to ensure *survivance* (Taylor 1993). But he does accept that *survivance* is a legitimate goal for the Quebec government to pursue. There are inevitable costs: certain individual 'immunities and privileges', like the freedom to display commercial signs in English, have to be sacrificed for the common good. Moreover, in Taylor's view *survivance* requires more than policies that make the French language 'available for those who might choose it'; it cannot be left to individual choice. If the policies are to work, they must 'create members of the community' by 'assuring that future generations continue to identify as French speakers' (Taylor 1992: 58-59). In both these respects, the promotion of *survivance* seems incompatible with procedural liberalism: they give precedence to a collective goal over individual freedoms and they favour the group whose conception of the good they serve. Yet if the Quebecers were to follow the procedural path, they would be putting at risk the basis of their own distinctive identity, if not guaranteeing its demise. To the extent that the Rest of Canada has sought to impose procedural liberalism upon them, they have been subject to an oppressive form of difference-blindness. A liberal society can avoid this kind of outcome, Taylor suggests, if it allows for the pursuit of collective goals, while 'respecting diversity, especially when dealing with those who do not share its common goals', and by providing safeguards for the fundamental liberties.

For Taylor, then, a liberal multicultural society at once protects basic freedoms and has mechanisms in place for ensuring the survival of minority cultures. But it does not base the good of cultural survival on the notion that different cultures are of *equal worth*. The idea that different cultures deserve equal recognition on account of possessing equal value, Taylor observes, underlies a popular stance in debates over multiculturalism in education. Advocates of multicultural curricula in the humanities, for instance, sometimes argue that the traditional Western ‘canon’ has been arbitrarily enforced. It owes its privileged place in the curriculum not to its superior worth, but to the parochialism and ethnocentrism of traditional educationalists. The challenge now is to discard this parochialism, the multiculturalists argue, and to give due recognition in the curriculum of other cultures which presumably have the same worth. Now Taylor has sympathy for the ‘presumption of equal worth’ as a point of departure or ‘starting hypothesis’ for the study of another culture. But the worth of a culture cannot be determined without actually engaging with it. To assert the equal worth of cultures independently of such engagement, to lay it down as a general principle of curriculum design, defeats the purpose of the reform. On the one hand, to collapse the distinction between cultures that deserve the recognition of serious study and those that do not homogenizes them as effectively as the traditional canon did. And on the other hand, if one reasons that all cultures have the same right to inclusion because there is really no such thing as a difference in worth, it makes comparative judgments a simple matter of taking sides. This in turn betrays a certain arrogance, as it implies we have nothing to learn from comparative study.

Taylor’s critique of the well-intentioned but ultimately ‘half-baked’ relativism that can underlie multiculturalist programs of curriculum reform is tagged onto the end of his essay on recognition and stands independently of the expressivist critique of procedural liberalism that forms the core of the essay. We should bear in mind here the occasion for which the essay was written: as the inaugural lecture for Princeton University’s Centre for

Human Values, it would have been expected to include some comment on the humanities wars then raging in the United States, and to reflect on the philosophical framework most suited for an avowedly pluralist educational institution. This provides the context for his brief discussion of the idea of the ‘equal worth’ of cultures. However, this stylized account of the reasons multiculturalists and others give for studying different cultures opened up an ambiguity in his overall argument that came to dominate the critical reception of ‘The Politics of Recognition’. For Taylor’s essay now invited a reading that took it to be claiming that only those cultures that either can be ‘presumed’ to have worth on account of being long-lasting or that prove their worth through some kind of cross-cultural comparison *deserve to survive* (and so *deserve recognition* and public support aimed at securing their survival). Habermas summed up the concern such a view would naturally provoke by noting that ‘Taylor’s politics of recognition would be on shaky ground if it had to depend on the “presumption of equal value” of cultures and their contribution to world civilization’ (Habermas 1993: 141). Peter Jones has raised similar concerns about Taylor’s approach to the politics of recognition, which rests, so he argues, on the possibility of ‘our finding value in, or presuming the value of,’ other people’s cultures (Jones 2006: 35-6). While Habermas, Jones and others (Blum 1998) have mounted powerful arguments against such an approach, these arguments do not in fact address Taylor’s basic thesis: that the collective good of cultural survival is something that liberal societies can and sometimes should socially endorse depending on its compatibility with the preservation of basic liberties - which, as I have remarked, has little to do with his anti-relativist reflections on multiculturalist educational reform.

Another issue that dominated the reception of Taylor’s essay was its appeal to the notion of authenticity. This was seen as problematic both from a theoretical and practical point of view. Maeve Cooke, for example (Cooke 1997, 2009), has questioned whether judgments about authenticity, which Taylor presents as inwardly generated and as unique to

singular individuals or groups, can ever be more than sheer subjective assertions. As there is no way of critically evaluating authenticity claims, Cooke continues, the theorist is left helpless in face of conflicting interpretations of what an authentic given identity consists in. As if reflecting this fact, the best Taylor can offer is ‘uncritical affirmation of strong collective goals’ (Cooke 1997: 260), such as the Québécois goal of *survivance*. Moreover, the politics or recognition powered by the ideal of authenticity seems to leave individuals at the mercy of aggressively self-assertive groups: it seems to subordinate individual autonomy to collective authenticity. For this reason, Taylor’s model has been rejected for being fundamentally illiberal. Following Habermas and Cooke in this vein, Benhabib has argued that any ‘right to authentic self-expression’ must rest on the individual’s right to autonomy, and not, as Taylor allegedly claims, vice versa (Benhabib 2002: 53). Taylor’s problematic inversion of the moral priority of autonomy and authenticity, Benhabib continues, arises from his falsely essentialist conception of group identity. According to this objection, which crops up routinely in the literature (Emke 2000; Markell 2000; Tully 2000; McNay 2008), authenticity is a misplaced goal because it rests upon the false and ultimately oppressive idea there is something natural, pre-given or fixed in advance for a group to be authentic to. This inevitably simplifies the process of identity formation, it overlooks the discrepancies and conflicts that are bound to arise between individual and group identities, and it is governed by an invidious logic of exclusion.

There is no space here to examine the complex relations between multiculturalism, essentialism and the ethics of authentic self-expression (Mason 2007), save to remind ourselves that the expressivist account of freedom Taylor uses to analyze the politics of recognition by no means *entails* commitment to a problematically homogeneous or totalitarian notion of authenticity. As we saw at the beginning of this section, the notion of expressive freedom or authenticity that Taylor draws on is not ‘essentialist’ in the sense of

relying on some external, metaphysically given ground of identity; but then nor is it an arbitrary matter bereft of any standards of critical evaluation. As for the relation between authenticity and autonomy, it is not clear, even from within Taylor's own account, why they *must* be rival ideals or conflicting basic principles. In Taylor's view, procedural liberalism makes them *appear* incompatible by insisting on the uniform application of rights irrespective of cultural context and the historically indexed aspirations of specific groups, thus enforcing a false choice between individualism and collectivism. Tariq Modood has rightly drawn attention to the universalist thrust of *both* the principles of autonomy and authenticity, or as he puts it – departing somewhat from Taylor's own usage - 'equal dignity' and 'equal respect', both of which are 'essential to multiculturalism' in his persuasively argued conception (Modood 2007: 53).

The advantage of expressivism for Taylor is that it shows that, in cases such as Quebec, sacrifices of individual 'immunities and privileges' *may* be legitimately made for the sake of recognizing a collective good. The extent to which the Québécois have *actually* been motivated by an expressivist understanding of authenticity is, of course, another matter. Here it is important to distinguish between Taylor's use of the Quebec case to illustrate the limitations of procedural liberalism and his advocacy of a particular stance within the Quebec debate. Taylor is sympathetic to the grievance expressed by Quebeckers that procedural liberalism threatens their cultural identity by excluding the pursuit of collective goals. Given the *particular circumstances* of Quebec - a French-speaking culture bordering with an Anglophone cultural superpower - some collective action needs to be taken to ensure the continuity of its distinct identity. Proceduralism seems to prevent such measures and this generates the grievance. Taylor is sympathetic to it as a nationalist because he acknowledges the legitimacy of the aspiration to pursue common goals around a national identity. He is sympathetic to it as a liberal to the extent that the common goal pursued is consistent with the

protection of basic freedoms. But that is not to say that the form of nationalism that prevails in Quebec is as liberal as it should be, or that the form of authenticity that is sought amongst Quebecers is as expressivist as it should be. For Taylor, the backward-looking, ethnic orientation of traditional Quebec nationalism is in fact as much a danger to the continuation of Quebec as a distinct society as procedural liberalism is. By locking itself into the past, such a national identity is incapable of dealing with the challenges of the present, and in particular the challenge (and opportunity) posed by multiculturalism. To be sure, it is sometimes hard to tell when Taylor is simply describing the grievance the Quebec nationalists have with proceduralism and when he is advocating a certain response to the grievance. But to present Taylor as a spokesperson for the more reactionary wing of Quebec nationalism - or its philosophical equivalent, as a champion of discredited essentialism about individual or group identity – simply gets things wrong. In Taylor's view, contemporary Quebec provides a circumstance in which core liberal values are reconciled with the social endorsement of a particular conception of the good. It shows that a regime can pursue the collective goal of cultural survival while respecting basic liberties. To this extent it illustrates a general model that can serve as an alternative to procedural liberalism. Within the model, however, there is much room for manoeuvre.

It is this opening up of the possibilities of liberal politics that, in my view, constitutes the core and enduring insight of Taylor's essay on the politics of recognition. Taylor's argument is addressed first and foremost to those who consider there to be only one legitimate way of securing the basic individual freedoms that characterise modern liberal democracies. The doctrine that espouses this ideal is, in Taylor's mind, procedural liberalism, and the society that approximates most closely to it is the United States. The onus of Taylor's argument is to replace this picture with one in which there are many liberalisms giving expression to multiple, equally legitimate variations of the liberal ideal. Taylor wants us to

countenance not just multiplicity by way of conceptions of good or cultural identity, within a liberal framework that enables their peaceful coexistence, but multiplicity of the framework itself – a kind of second order pluralism, a pluralism of accommodating pluralism. ‘The Politics of Recognition’ can thus rightfully be read as a multiculturalist manifesto only in the specific sense that it advocates multiculturalism *about* liberalism – a ‘multi-liberalism’, so to speak. In other writings (Taylor 2004, 2007), Taylor has sketched a sociological theory of ‘multiple modernities’ to complement this position. Rather than viewing modernity as the inevitable outcome of processes of rationalisation, secularisation, or ‘enlightenment’, he proposes a model of social change undergirded by culturally contingent realizations of increasingly universalistic norms. If the theory is right, the politics of recognition would be playing itself out throughout the modern world, and certainly not just in Canada and the U.S., in ways that western modernity has potentially much to learn from.

### **Fraser on Recognition and Redistribution**

Taylor’s ‘multi-liberal’ framing of the politics of recognition nevertheless suffers from two major drawbacks. The first is that it fails to appreciate the resources that are available from within the procedural liberal paradigm for dealing with the conflicts between individual freedoms and group-based identity-claims that Taylor is concerned with in his essay. The conception of procedural liberalism with which Taylor contrasts his own position is certainly rather narrow and it bears little resemblance to the sophisticated proceduralism elaborated by theorists such as Habermas. As Habermas has pointed out, the opposition between individual rights and sensitivity to cultural differences based on the recognition of collective rights is by no means unavoidable from a proceduralist liberal point of view – indeed, properly understood, they *cannot* be intrinsically opposed (Habermas 1993: 131). This is because, according to Habermas’s theory, the responsibility to recognize and respect cultural difference in law has the same basis as the responsibility to recognize and respect individual

rights: both are grounded in the procedure of uncoerced intersubjective will-formation. The recognition of cultural difference thus needs no special justification within a properly conceived procedural liberalism. The second drawback of Taylor's 'multi-liberal' model is that it only applies to a narrow band of recognition struggles. As Habermas also pointed out, there are many contexts in which struggles for recognition occur and only a small proportion of them follow the pattern exemplified in Quebec. If the 'politics of recognition' is to be grasped in its full range, we need a more comprehensive and differentiated model than the one advanced by Taylor.

These two flaws in Taylor's model of the politics of recognition provide the point of departure for Fraser's intervention in the debate. On the one hand she is convinced by Habermas's proceduralist account of the binding moral principles of liberal democracy, which in her view has the distinct advantage of not appealing to substantive conceptions of the good or particular cultural values, as Taylor's does. The defining mark of a just, democratic society, according to Fraser, is 'parity of participation' (Fraser 2003: 36). This principle prevents the kind of subordination of individual rights to collective interests that Taylor's model allegedly countenances, and it does so without reference to any metaphysical beliefs, or psychological attachments (and so 'needs for recognition'), that individuals may happen to have. On the other hand the moral force of this principle reaches well beyond those zones of conflict Taylor had in view when describing the politics of recognition. For it extends into all those spheres of struggle triggered by the subordinate 'status' socially ascribed to members of a particular group (Fraser 2003: 30). Women, gays, blacks, and other discriminated against groups are subject to this kind of misrecognition - not just ethno-national minorities such as the Québécois. Moreover, the ground of this misrecognition is not some withdrawal of esteem towards a culture, or subjective feelings of hurt on the part of individual members of groups, but objective inequalities in status that prevent individuals

from some groups from being as autonomous - *qua* effective participants in the processes of self-rule - as members of others. Fraser maintains that this approach captures the objective *moral* basis of the struggles for recognition that characterize contemporary societies in *all* their forms.

There is much to reflect on here but the main point for my current purposes is that Fraser's strategy leaves her in an even more ambivalent position in relation to multiculturalism than Taylor. It is true that Fraser embraces the emancipatory potential of the politics of recognition. She also considers the recognition of cultural difference as in certain circumstances a requirement of justice. Both these commitments are of course congenial to the multiculturalist. But in Fraser's case they come with two important provisos. First, the politics of recognition has a progressive character only insofar as it addresses status subordination as measured against the deontic norm of parity of participation. It does not extend to the affirmation of cultural identity. At times, Fraser suggests that cultural identity (as opposed to status) is not a moral matter at all, and so is not something that progressive politics should be concerned about (Fraser 2001). On other occasions though, and more typically, she suggests that we can be more or less progressive in the stance we take towards identity – and that we ought to be 'deconstructivist' rather than 'essentialist' on the matter (Fraser 1997; 2003). Fraser's second proviso is that the politics of recognition, restricted now to issues of status subordination, must be considered as but one of at least two distinct loci of struggle against injustice. For in addition to struggles aimed at the elimination of status subordination (the proper goal of 'identity politics', in Fraser's view) there are also 'class' conflicts aimed at a just redistribution of resources. In order to keep both kinds of conflict in view, Fraser advocates a 'dual perspective' approach that takes into account maldistribution injustices arising from the capitalist economic order as well as misrecognition injustices arising from the cultural order. By adopting the economic and cultural perspectives at once,

Fraser argues, we will be able to see how maldistribution and misrecognition are intertwined in the contemporary world, how the cultural and economic orders we inhabit causally interact to bring these injustices about, and the best political strategies for remedying them.

These two provisos enable Fraser to take a critical stance in regard to what she calls ‘mainstream multiculturalism’ (Fraser 1997: 27-28; 2003: 75). Whereas Fraser detects in mainstream multiculturalism a tendency to ‘reify’ identity, to uncritically accept the value of actually existing identities and the cultural values they are based upon, her own ‘transformative’ approach would deconstruct ‘the symbolic oppositions that underlie currently institutionalised patterns of cultural value’ and thus ‘change *everyone’s* self-identity’ (Fraser 2003: 75). And whereas multiculturalism, like all forms of ‘culturalism’, tends to ‘displace’ redistributive struggles by focusing narrowly on the politics of recognition (Fraser 2000: 108), her own approach would avoid this shortcoming by attending equally to the root causes of economic (as well as cultural) disadvantage. Occasionally, Fraser has pointed to the possibility of an alternative to mainstream multiculturalism - a so-called ‘critical multiculturalism’ - that would meet these two provisos (Fraser 1997: 36; 2003: 106). But she has not herself elaborated on what such a critical multiculturalism would look like and how it would be informed by a critical politics of recognition.

We can, however, anticipate some difficulties that a critical multiculturalism understood along Fraser’s dual perspectival lines would face. Let us first briefly consider how the first proviso – that concerning identity – would be met. The first thing to note is that the deconstructive identity Fraser describes would on the face of it be a very demanding one to maintain, and surely no less demanding than the ideal of authenticity which Fraser herself criticises for the excessive burden it can place on members of culturally stigmatised groups (Fraser 2000: 112). While Fraser’s point relates directly to the cultural-symbolic conditions of identity-formation, rather than the psychological mechanisms necessary for maintaining a

healthy (or at least properly reflexive and self-critical) identity, the transformation she has in mind would clearly have to draw on psychological capacities that we all already possess. And on this point Fraser is in a bind. For while some account of the origin and development of these powers would seem to be an obvious desirable feature of a critical multiculturalism (given its goal of progressive self-transformation), Fraser does not want to mortgage her theory to questionable empirical claims and she does not want to tie her key critical norm of participative parity to any particular conception of the good (or even undamaged) life. But without some account of how we are able to develop, maintain, and indeed intensify the kind of reflexivity that the deconstructive stance requires, we are left with an apparently ungrounded hope that this is what progressive politics will make of us. Critical multiculturalism conceived along these lines would thus seem to involve an unlikely and far from stable coupling of *avant-gardist* ontology and deontic morality.

The manner in which Fraser proposes to meet the second proviso is just as problematic. Multiculturalists are routinely attacked, especially but not exclusively by leftists, for obsessing about culture, identity and recognition in the midst of appalling, and much more morally significant, economic inequalities (Barry 2001). As we have seen, Fraser shares this suspicion of mainstream multiculturalism, but rather than taking this as a reason to dismiss multiculturalist concerns, she seeks to expand the critical horizon of multiculturalism by providing it with a framework within which economic injustice and material deprivation can also be taken into account. This is the main motivation behind ‘dual perspectivism’, and it is hard to question it. What is more open to doubt is the specific means by which Fraser attempts to correct mainstream multiculturalism’s culturalist one-sidedness. The key idea, as we have seen, is to supplement the cultural perspective with an economic one. But what justifies the adoption of a distinct ‘economic’ standpoint? Here again, Fraser is in a bind. For on the one hand, it could be justified by the real existence of a distinct economic realm,

separate from culture, which perhaps can ‘causally influence’ the recognition order and the status positions of different groups within it. On the several occasions Fraser invokes the ‘autonomous’ nature of the market in capitalist society and the fact that it has a ‘logic of its own’ (Fraser 2003: 214), she seems to be endorsing this view. Certainly, she takes it as a major virtue of her theory that it can *explain* economic maldistributions, presumably on the basis of its conception of what the capitalist economy *is*. But this ambitious social-theoretical claim is more of an aspiration than an achievement: indeed, Fraser’s conception of capitalism is so minimal and formal – limited as I have said to invocations of independent system-mechanisms and tendencies to accumulation – that it is hard to see where its explanatory power could come from. As if recoiling from such grand explanatory ambitions, Fraser claims that her theory is only committed to distinct economic and cultural *perspectives* on society, without presuming there is any ontological correlate to them. This is, after all, why she calls her theory ‘perspectival’ as opposed to ‘substantive’ dualism. But that just brings us back to the question: why *these* two perspectives?

The only credible answer, and one which Fraser herself offers, is that it is *pragmatic* for those engaged in progressive politics and social criticism to adopt them. It serves the purposes of progressives such as critical multiculturalists, Fraser would say, to keep a critical perspective on both cultural and economic sources of injustice, and to engage in a common fight against misrecognition and maldistribution. Fraser’s theory provides a framework within which these struggles can be seen as complementary rather than antagonistic and this is perhaps its greatest strength. But the distinction between recognition and redistribution has problematic implications even from the point of view of its usefulness for social criticism. Recall, for example, that for Fraser the underlying moral norm breached by misrecognition and well as maldistribution is parity of participation: those with a subordinate status on account of their cultural identity suffer the same fundamental wrong as those with a lowly

class position because they both lack the resources to interact as equals. This is no doubt true. But is the full – or even the most salient - moral content of contemporary modes of social suffering captured by this norm? Is the norm of parity of participation really rich enough to encompass the gamut of moral injuries social critics have a responsibility to address? Surely the experiences of those who are subject to humiliation, disrespect, and alienation on a daily basis – say in the household or workplace – are typically only remotely informed by disappointed expectations of participatory parity, which suggests that from the point of view of sufferer at least, other normative breaches are also in play.

Experiences such as these provide the central phenomena for Honneth's theory of recognition. They are so important because, according to his theory, they can at once *reveal* the moral state of the world and *motivate* progressive social change. For Fraser, however, they are contingent responses to states of affairs whose moral measure is given independently by the norm of parity of participation. Experiences of misrecognition or the withdrawal of recognition have neither social-theoretical nor normative significance in Fraser's account; nothing of explanatory or normative weight turns on them. And for this reason, it is questionable whether we should call Fraser's theory a 'recognition theory' at all. It is not just, as Owen and Tully have pointed out, that Fraser has a 'restricted' concept of recognition that contrasts with Honneth's 'general' notion (Owen and Tully: 268). It is more that, for Fraser, recognition lacks *constitutive* significance: we don't need it to explain social change or to evaluate societies normatively. And we can see, returning to Fraser's critique of mainstream multiculturalism, that neither of Fraser's proposals for meeting the conditions of a genuinely critical multiculturalism – the deconstructive stance to identity and the adoption of a redistributive perspective on the economy - has much to do with recognition. If in the end these proposals are hard to justify on anything other than pragmatic grounds, this should not lead us to conclude that recognition theory itself has reached its limit in this area.

### **Honneth's Recognition Paradigm**

We saw in the previous section that Fraser's rethinking of recognition is motivated by the thought that the established theories of recognition – by which she means Taylor's and Honneth's – suffer from a 'culturalist' bias. By this she means that they exaggerate the moral significance of cultural identity to the extent even of 'reifying' it, and that they ignore – and more problematically encourage a 'displacement' of – struggles over the distribution of economic resources. If it turns out that these other theories are not in fact 'culturalist' in this pejorative sense, that they do not reify culture or ignore 'class' politics, then clearly the 'rethinking' Fraser proposes loses much of its rationale. So let us turn now to Honneth's theory, its alleged culturalism, and its implications for multiculturalism.

First, what is the core idea of Honneth's theory of recognition? The central task Honneth sets himself in *The Struggle for Recognition* (Honneth 1995a) is to make plausible an ambitious historical claim: that modern society emerged from, and develops in a manner shaped by, social conflicts which have a moral content in virtue of being aimed at relations of mutual recognition. It is important to bear in mind the very broad sweep of this hypothesis, and the matching sweep of the theories it opposes. Thus, at the most general level, Honneth's 'theory of recognition' contrasts with social theories that reject the explanatory purport of human intentionality, such as those that solely invoke 'laws of nature', or the law-like adaptations of a system to its environment. At the next level down, the theory contrasts with explanations of social conflict that invoke only one kind of intentionality - self-interest - as if social conflicts were always a matter of 'amoral' competition between individuals or groups over scarce resources. Bringing these two levels together, Honneth's hypothesis entails that social change admits of 'action-theoretic' explanation where the *explanans* includes not only

the interest in self-preservation and competitive advantage, but action-motivating experiences with a moral or 'normative' content.

But it is only at the next level down from here, where the structure of the moral grievances that drive the conflicts characteristic of modern society is at issue, that the hypothesis at the heart of the theory of recognition really kicks in. The theory construes the moral content of experience not in terms of matter of fact pleasure or pain, but as *social* suffering - epitomised in experiences of humiliation and disrespect - which all human beings are vulnerable to on account of their dependence on the recognition of others for the 'practical self-relations' (such as self-respect and self-esteem) minimally necessary for a good life. But this general anthropological structure takes different social forms. And in its modern form, Honneth's historical hypothesis runs, the radicalisation of the *individuating* process characteristic of modern societies involves a *differentiation* of the sources of these practical self-relations, which in turn provides the context for moral expectations of *mutual* recognition. The crucial development here is the separation of the basic social means by which the 'respect' an individual is due merely on account of being a 'person' is secured - namely, fundamental legal rights and equality under the law - and the social mechanisms by which 'esteem' is allocated to individuals in recognition of their particular achievements and contribution to society. Social conflicts could then be generated around expectations of inclusion under the legal category of the person, or more concretely, around possession of basic legal entitlements which recognise the equal dignity of persons belonging to the excluded group. Such struggles are aimed at the mutual recognition that binds equals under the law and co-authors of law. On the other hand, social conflicts could also emerge over the social status accorded to members of particular groups. What these struggles aim at is recognition in the sense of social esteem, or due recognition of the worth of particular achievements or ways of life. The 'individualization of achievement' in modern society

means that esteem has to be earned; it is not given in advance, on the basis say of the family one was born into, or as in previous times, one's 'estate' (Honneth 1995a: 125). This gives rise to cultural conflicts over what it means to make a worthwhile contribution to society, that is, over the interpretation of the 'achievement principle'. As Honneth put it: 'In modern societies, relations of social esteem are subject to a permanent struggle, in which different groups attempt, by means of symbolic force and with reference to general goals, to raise the value of the abilities associated with their way of life' (Honneth 1995a: 127).

But this leads to a problem which, on Honneth's own account, represents the most serious conceptual difficulty facing the theory of recognition, one which the pioneers of the theory (Hegel and Mead) both failed to solve (Honneth 1995a: 91). For whereas the sense in which co-possessors of basic rights and co-authors of the law mutually recognise each other is relatively clear (as persons with equal dignity), it is harder to see how relations of *mutual* recognition are involved when social esteem is based on individualised achievement. That would seem to require a situation in which everyone enjoyed social esteem (or social standing) on the basis of their individual contribution to the collective goals of the society. If the mutuality of the recognition relationship is to extend to all, it must be on account of achievements that are generally acknowledged, or contributions to goals that are shared. Given the entwinement of individuation and socialisation posited by the theory of recognition, this would simultaneously have to provide each individual with the basis of self-esteem, and bind people together in a more robust way than is possible merely on account of membership of the category of persons (that is, subjects with equal dignity). As Hegel and Mead saw, without social bonds that extend beyond the familial sphere, and which have greater binding power than those generated by the mutual recognition of persons under law, the social cohesion of highly individuated, modern societies is at risk. Social esteem through

mutual recognition could in principle provide such cohesion, thus helping to secure the integrity of the society and individual identities in one stroke.

The problem, however, is that with the individualization of achievement, agreement about the ways of life that are worthy of social esteem gradually breaks up. In a context of value-pluralism, itself the ‘inevitable consequence’ of the individualization of achievement (Honneth 1995a: 125), a crucial condition for social integration through mutual recognition seems to be lacking: namely a general consensus on what counts as ‘achievement’, a ‘valuable contribution’ to society, and so forth. Honneth’s way around this difficulty is to suggest that the potentially disintegrative effects of value-pluralism and the individualization of achievement are mitigated by a form of ‘societal integration’ in which individuals see themselves as having the *opportunity* to contribute meaningfully to society through the expression of their distinctive traits and abilities. Mutual recognition between such individuals does not require them to esteem each other’s contribution to society to the same degree - the individualization of achievement means that the degree of social esteem one receives depends on how successful one manages to be - but it does require that they all recognise each other as *potential* contributors, as having some *chance* of success. Although esteem is not given in advance to members of any particular group, no one is excluded from the means of social esteem merely on account of their membership of a group. So long as ‘every subject is free from being collectively denigrated so that one is given the chance to experience oneself to be recognised in light one’s own accomplishments and abilities, as valuable for society’, relations of mutual esteem can be said to obtain (Honneth 1995a: 130). This provides Honneth with a solution to the problem that threatened to nip the Hegel-Mead theory of recognition in the bud, namely a way of reconciling the demands of individualization (as expressed in the achievement principle) with those of social integration.

Honneth's theory of recognition thus provides a critical perspective on the exclusion of individuals from the legal protections to which they are entitled as persons (whatever their group membership or cultural background) on the one hand, and on the moral injury suffered by individuals who are not able to have their talents and abilities recognised on account of belonging to a stigmatised or denigrated group on the other. It also explains how such experiences of moral injury can give rise to conflicts with the potential for bringing about progressive social change. Struggles aimed at the proper appreciation of the 'value' of certain traits and abilities - such as those traditionally associated with women - have this role. The theory also puts us in a position to criticise arbitrary exclusions from the process of the social interpretation of worth, as well as one-sided or distorted prevailing interpretations of the achievement principle. It locates the *progressive* character of such struggles in the contribution they make to widening the 'inclusion of subjects into the circle of full members of society', and to increasing the possibilities individuals have to express all aspects of their personality without fear of denigration (Honneth 2003: 184-5).

If this is an accurate reconstruction of the central tenets of Honneth's theory of recognition, it is hard to see why it is 'culturalist' in the sense Fraser finds so objectionable. Of course, if we begin by *stipulating* a distinction between 'identity politics' aimed at cultural recognition and 'class politics' aimed at economic redistribution, then a recognition 'monism' of the kind advocated by Honneth will indeed look problematically reductive. But for Honneth it is just this initial move that puts us on the wrong foot. It should also be clear from the foregoing that the struggles for recognition that lie at the heart of the theory hardly give expression to overblown, narcissistic conceptions of self-identity bent on obliterating self-other distinctions. Something like this idea lies behind the charge that the recognition paradigm exaggerates human powers of political agency by positing an impossible notion of sovereignty (Markell 2003), though it has also been used to reach the opposite conclusion,

that Honneth's theory of recognition excludes political agency altogether (McNay 2008). Such objections would be hard to make any sense of if it were not for the role that culture and cultural identity allegedly plays in Honneth's theory. But from what we have just seen, the motivation for the struggles for recognition Honneth is concerned with arise out of experiences of disrespect for individuals or forms of life as measured against expectations of *equality* or due recognition of achievement. Nothing in Honneth's account hinges on the notion of inter-cultural recognition or recognition between cultures, and there is no place in it for recognition of cultural identity *simpliciter*. Thus, while Honneth's recognition paradigm has been seen as culturally one-sided, as naively unaware of the real motivation behind many progressive political conflicts, and as dangerously uncritical of the kind of politics motivated by the desire for recognition of one group by another, it is difficult to see what would warrant these criticisms if it were not for the hasty manner in which the problems of multiculturalism are read into the theory from the start.

Indeed, if anything it is the very *absence* of any sustained reflection on culture and the problems of multiculturalism that is striking about Honneth's writings on recognition. It is clear from the brief discussion of multiculturalism in Honneth's exchange with Fraser that Honneth considers the normative core of multiculturalism to be encompassed by the principle of equal respect (Honneth 2003: 161-170). When he writes that 'the moral grammar of the conflicts now being conducted around 'identity-political' questions in liberal-democratic states is essentially determined by the recognition principle of legal equality' (Honneth 2003, 169), he is no more than endorsing Habermas's original critique of Taylor's claim that the norm of autonomy is insufficient for grounding the politics of recognition. Whether a conflict is triggered by discrimination based on group or cultural membership, or if it is aimed at defending an endangered way of life or promoting the well-being of some group, the *moral* content of the motivation can be explicated in terms of the equal respect due to each person

under the law. In Honneth's view, only those demands for cultural recognition that are backed up by either the principle of equal respect or the merit principle have a genuine moral claim on us. For Honneth, then, it is the new semantic reach of these old principles, rather than a new principle of cultural recognition, that is really at issue in the debate about multiculturalism.

In addition to these explicit but brief remarks on cultural identity, Honneth's recognition paradigm has other resources for coming to grips with the problems of multiculturalism. Perhaps the most fundamental advantage Honneth claims for his recognition paradigm relative to other attempts at reviving critical social theory is that it does not pin itself to the objectives of particular social movements, including the multicultural movement. As he points out, the self-understanding of the new social movements, and the claims they present in the public sphere, are far from reliable indicators of the nature and scope of social suffering (Honneth 2003: 115). A better way for the critical theorist to proceed is to attend to the actual experiences of disrespect and humiliation endured by people in everyday life contexts. Such experiences of injustice at the same time reveal counterfactual expectations of what *would* amount to proper recognition. It is the disappointment of these expectations - the lack of recognition or withdrawal of it - that is experienced as a moral injury. The primary 'multicultural' problematic from a recognition-theoretic perspective, accordingly, is how the co-existence of people from many cultures provides a context in which such withdrawals of recognition and denied recognition can occur. On the basis of empirical investigation of such contexts, normative models may open up regarding how *fulfilled* expectations of recognition are mediated through experiences of cultural difference. In this way the recognition paradigm can embrace the 'everyday multiculturalism' model being explored by some contemporary sociologists (Velayutham and Wise 2009).

But the differentiation of respect and esteem recognition posited by the historical hypothesis at the core of Honneth's theory of recognition, together with the increasingly individuated basis on which achievement is recognised, suggests that one context in particular will provide the test for this kind of multicultural recognition: the sphere of work. For it is above all in work that one's worth as a social being, and our contribution to the larger life that defines us, is made concrete. It is in part for this reason that work is such a potent source of experiences of denied or withdrawn recognition, and consequently, such a vigorous source of experimentation in the struggle for recognition. Although Honneth's earlier writings are more attuned to the emancipatory potential of work-based struggles for recognition than his more recent texts, his theory never loses sight of the crucial identity-shaping function of work and its significance for maintaining healthy practical self-relations, on the one hand, and healthy social bonds on the other (Honneth 1995b; Smith 2009). Honneth follows Dewey in arguing that in the latter case, the experience of cooperation that can be engendered at work prepares the worker for the demands of democratic self-rule (Honneth 1998). It does this by *bracketing* notions of individual or group self-identity that are external to the purposes of the common work project. It may not be far-fetched to suppose that the bracketing of identity that is part of the experience of solidarity and cooperation at work provides the necessary background for multicultural democracy too.

Work provides one important context in which people suffer daily from the lack or withdrawal of recognition, from humiliation and disrespect. Neither Taylor's multi-liberal model of the politics of recognition, nor Fraser's dual perspectivism of recognition and redistribution grounded in a norm of participative parity, is conceptually well equipped to deal with these phenomena. Honneth's recognition paradigm, with its differentiated notion of recognition and its wide focus on the normative expectations we bring to all contexts of action, fares much better in this regard. On the other hand, the impact that multiculturalism

could have beyond the legal sphere has not yet been explored by Honneth or others associated with his recognition paradigm. Furthermore, these researchers are generally sceptical of Taylor's conviction about the intrinsic worth of cultures and the intrinsic good of multiplicity in the way of cultural identity. If, as I suggested in the first section of this essay, there is an enduring insight in Taylor's expressivist critique of procedural liberalism, we would then need to find a way of combining Taylor's multi-liberalism with the recognition-theoretic approach to everyday multiculturalism hinted at by Honneth. We may need such a synthesis to take our still sketchy understanding of the relation between recognition and multiculturalism further.