

REIFICATION AS A NORMATIVE CONDITION OF RECOGNITION

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The aim of this paper is to situate the notion of reification as a neutral foundation for the three spheres of recognition. Reification, as a negative concept, allows the possibility of recognition to take place in Axel Honneth's three spheres of recognition; namely, love, law, and esteem. My argument is that the givenness of these positive aspects of recognition is made possible by the existence of necessary reifications to which pathologies allow a certain form of intersubjective realisations. This form brings about the possibility of an "otherwise" situation. Drawing from the intersubjective theory of recognition in Georg Hegel's and Martin Heidegger's instrumentalist hermeneutics (i.e., Vorhandenheit) of authenticity, I aim to pursue the necessary qualification to which reification is to be considered as a neutral ground for normativity to germinate. My contention is that the neutral state of reification is made possible when it is seen as a productive discourse situation in which recognition becomes possible.

INTRODUCTION

Axel Honneth's normative ethics brings about a different reading of the conditions of recognition in the perspective of an individual interacting with the social environment. Honneth's approach is different in the sense that he looks for values already existing in a societal structure in order to uphold or question these values. In this approach, metaphysical and transcendental values are no longer seen as a productive category for ethics, as these sources of values do not provide a materialistic framing of the social conditions in which values are established. These sources do not provide a concrete assertion as to how they are maintained and upheld in society. Rather than propose a system of ethics that relies on transcendental or idealistic claims, Honneth's normative ethics proposes to look at existing normative values that are embedded in social practices as a basis for the critical understanding of ethics. The focus of Honneth's work is to look at the bases of universal norms practiced in social realities that are based on materialistic principles. In his project, the gloss of his theory is based on a salvage effort to take bits and pieces of Western philosophical paradigms and sociology so as to fasten together a critical theory that is able to engage immanent social structures. This engagement with

the tradition of theory crosses over to various theories, to name a few, the universalistic conception of ethics in Immanuel Kant (2002, 56),¹ the intersubjectivist recognition in Georg Hegel (2002, 89) and the philosophical anthropology in George H. Mead (1972, 183). Like Jurgen Habermas, Joel Anderson (2011, 47) notes that Honneth shares the perspective of valuing institutions that protect undistorted forms of intersubjectivity grounded on universalistic principles. The difference, however, between Habermas and Honneth, is that the former (1996, 9) opts to look at communicative forms of rationality as a normative basis for ethics; the latter (1995, 75-76) opts for an intersubjectivist foundation of normativity in the framework of philosophical anthropology as a form of struggle to which recognition becomes possible.

Honneth's emphasis on the struggle for recognition is founded on two fundamental conditions: first, there is an already existing positive normative structures that govern our values and expectations in society; second, that in the midst of these positive normative structures, there are also prevailing negative conditions that distort our values and expectations. The struggle for recognition occurs as a product of these opposing social conditions that tear and develop these two aforementioned conditions. What is realised amidst this struggle is that the positive normative structures are immanent, inasmuch as distortions in the structure provide a form of misrecognition of individuals that seek to legitimise their integration to society. The productive aspect of this agonistic struggle for recognition is that the normative values that social institutions present are not only shaped by instrumental rationality, but also by the individual's dissent. In his reading of Hegel's *Jena lectures*, Honneth (1995, 18-19) draws upon the dialectical nature of negation as a way in which individuals either transformed the universalised system of legal claims or are integrated into society. This negative dialectical relation can be observed from an individual's initial condition as a child and his gradual integration to society, up until the point when he struggles to achieve solidarity in the form of esteem. For Honneth, this negativity is necessary since it allows a basic sense of understanding autonomy as a given condition of individual subjective experience. Autonomy in this sense, is useful in the process of legal universalisation insofar as it allows an immanent revision of norms, while at the same time, autonomously providing authentic intersubjective assent to societal norms.

The struggle for recognition is Honneth's (1995, 23) reconstruction of Hegel's intersubjectivity and Mead's philosophical anthropology as a basis for the notion of normativity. Honneth's goal is to present a universal foundation of normativity established under intersubjective situations found in the relationship between the individual and society. The resulting situation that the individual is born into is governed by already existing structures of relations. As the individual is gradually introduced into these structures, he begins to learn that social norms are implicit in the recognition of individuals as part of such existing social structures. As a particular subject, however, the individual gradually realises that there are instances in this existing social norms that may contradict his self-understanding wherein he finds himself oppressed or humiliated. Such condition brings about the realisation of a transition that occurs in a person towards a "whole" person; the movement that this brings into the social order is not a movement from without, but a movement from *within* the existing structures of recognition. For Honneth (1995, 58), the movement that is implied here is an *agonistic* struggle because the intention

of the individual is not merely to preserve one's own interest, but to have one's own interest acknowledged as a legal universality. In this struggle, the intersubjective social relations are laid bare and we seek to follow the law because it is the institution that exists to protect us. Honneth contrasts this social dimension of Hegel's intersubjectivity with Thomas Hobbes's (1996) egotistic and self-interested subject. If the subject is simply self-interested for his survival needs, why does the subject even bother to integrate himself into society?

In Honneth's (1995, 169) reading of Hegel and Mead, the fundamental condition of recognition is realised in the family, society, and the subject's participation in society as a form of self-realisation. Honneth derives the negative aspect of recognition through Hegel, while in Mead, Honneth draws the positive conditions. By combining both perspectives, Honneth (1995, 18 and 81) is able to espouse quasitranscendental positive normative values while at the same time explaining these structures in their immanent conditions. The three spheres of recognition, namely, love, rights, and esteem, are founded on universal conditions that have their own positive expectations and negative realisation. In love, the introduction of the child's social environment is through the realisation of individuation that she/he has from her/his parent with the expectation of care as a precondition that made her/his existence possible in the first place. The child in this sense gradually learns that one is a separate entity from the parent (specifically, the mother); the mother, who has to deal with the "labour" of raising the child has to gradually introduce the child's individuation by forming a sense of "inner negativity." This "inner negativity" is not simply a practical form of allowing the parent to go about her daily affairs in life, it also helps the child prepare itself from a broader social environment. The process of individuation is important insofar as it prepares the child to recognise not only his/her autonomy, but also the autonomy of others. As a starting point, this gives rise to a sense of "self" or the "I," which inevitably realises the existence of other "I's" that are as distinct as the mother's own "I."

The second sphere happens when the child is able to realise the intersubjective dimension of his/her social relations as he/she gradually imagines himself/herself in the position of other "I's." In this situation, the "I" sees itself in the second-person perspective of the "me" as constituted not only by her/his self-image, but also by the image the subject imagined in relation to social realities. The second sphere allows the child to integrate himself/herself in society by imagining the position of the other and taking that perspective as an intersubjective exercise of recognising the autonomy of others. In recognising the individuality of others, the subject is now aware that autonomy is important. In this sense there is a reciprocal understanding of morality as a form of responsibility. Under the structure of law, this responsibility becomes safeguarded not because of its importance in preserving oneself,² but in keeping oneself as a part of society. In this stage the recognition of the existential condition of others in social reality is structured under the first sphere's expectation of care. The subject in this case begins to recognise his/her reciprocal duty to intuit the individuality of others so as to integrate himself/herself in society. Without this perspective, the subject will be shunned or cast out of society through legal means, since society itself is the manifestation of how individuals are recognised to possess their own rights (Honneth 1995, 76 and 110).

On the third sphere, social integration is shown as an immanent structure in which the subject undergoes the agonistic process of being recognised not only as an individual,

but as an individual in society. In this sphere, the subject (see Honneth 1995, 113) asserts himself/herself as a mature part of society when his/her own concrete worth and value in society are recognised and respected. At this stage, the productive force of the subject as it is aligned towards social norms is recognised. A taxpayer, for example, exercises his/her mature relations to society by paying whatever is due to the prevailing social or governmental norms. In this exercise of mature relations, the tax payer, by virtue of his/her recognition of the law and his/her contributions to society, has the right to be recognised since his/her actions already presupposes that he/she recognises the individuality of others in society. By recognising the productive contributions of the subject to society as a whole, the subject gains a sense of esteem for himself/herself and, at the same time, society produces a sense of unity and solidarity to those who do the same. In this context, the problem of misrecognition is seen when the recognition of individuals who participate properly in social norms and conventions were denied of the recognition that they ought to have as mature members of society. For example, again, a taxpayer who pays his/her dues, is denied this sense of esteem when his/her concrete traits and qualities are disrespected. In this situation, one can imagine the following examples: a politician privileged in the court of law for crimes that were committed against the subject; the subject denied of normative practices in society because of cultural or personal differences (e.g., same-sex marriage); or the employee who does not receive rightful recognition because of his/her sex, race, or religion. In these situations, the third sphere provides an agonistic solution towards recognition by changing the social structure in its own terms, towards adjusted norms that modify those already established. No longer will the actions of the subject in his/her struggle for recognition be considered as a crime, since the already existing structures of society allow certain adjustments for the immanent condition of its subjects.

My main argument in this paper is that in the midst of these spheres of recognition, there is an implicit form of reification that occurs in the process that makes recognition possible. I argue that reification is a fundamental attitude of recognition since it brings both positive and negative aspects of intersubjectivity. To this extent, I also argue that such positive and negative aspects of intersubjectivity balance the nature of reification, to the extent that one can call it as a neutral ground for recognition. For this matter, I am going to present a reading of Honneth's Tanner lecture on reification since it moves the possibility of recognition towards the position of understanding subjectivities through their manifestations or struggles for recognition.

Reification is the instrumental reduction of humans as ends or the valuation of instrumental objects as over and above the value of subjects. With this, I am structuring my arguments in three points. First, in line with Honneth's (2008, 22) reading of Georg Lukacs's (1972, 83-110) notion of reification, reification is subject to a category **mistake² of** becoming either a morally objectionable act or a distorted form of praxis. Reification is necessary for the process of recognition since it allows both the positive and negative aspects of the three spheres to take place. My second argument positions reification on a neutral ground when both the negative and positive aspects of the three spheres are established in agonistic conflict. It is in this scenario that intersubjectivity takes place, to which normativity, despite its immanent conditions, allows intentions to be laid bare through reification. My third and final argument is that from the position of care, the idea

of reification is as constant as recognition. Again, drawing from the Tanner lectures, I cite Honneth's allusion to Martin Heidegger's (1996, 69-88) hermeneutic project as a proper contextualisation of reification since it provides us with a neutral framework of understanding reification not in its categorically aligned state.

NECESSITY OF REIFICATION IN THE PROCESS OF RECOGNITION

There is a quasi-epistemic reification that emerges as a consequence of self-negation that occurs in the three spheres of recognition. My argument is that this form of reification, despite its supposedly neutral state, gives rise to the possibility of struggle or dialectic. This struggle is essential for the realisation of normative grounds for care, rights, and esteem; for without this struggle there would be no productive engagement of the given situation to which subjects were able to realise their given roles. This engagement occurs in the positive and negative sides of normativity where, on the one hand, positive values are made concrete through the initial engagement of the individual in the social world of the family through care. On the other hand, the negative side of normativity occurs in the engagement of the child to the social world under the recognition of autonomy of individuals that would be in conflict as the child experiences separation—a separation of identities from his/her parent. The problematic that Honneth (2008, 23) sees in Lukacs understanding of reification in the context of capitalism—as an acquisition of the habit of looking at the immediate surrounding world as mere things and objects—is a key point that I want to develop in this argument. I want to excise the idea of capitalism in the context of looking at the immediate world as things and object, precisely because the act of reification does not begin only in capitalism or in the social sphere, but rather as a basic biological tendency of organisms to rely on the immediate world to advance their existence. Mothers are, for example, biologically wired by their instinctive need to treat their offspring with some sense of care not because they immediately see the value of their children as potential subjects, but as a mere way to get pleasure from the hormone oxytocin.

I am not of course advocating the idea of reification in the context of using fully-developed subjectivities. Like Honneth, I agree with the idea that reification is not something that can be simply understood in the category of positivity and negativity. Rather, I want to emphasise Honneth's (2008, 22) argument that reification is multi-faceted and multi-layered to the extent that its occurrence is neutral before any epistemic category is realised in its function. Moreover, the value of reification is relative to the position of the cognisant subject who is already self-aware of his/her subjectivity; we see it as a positive or negative instrument only insofar as it seems to reduce autonomy to a particular end or goal. My contention is that in the given social structures that we encounter, it cannot be denied that there are proximate ends or goals that we expect or are expected for us to achieve. Reification then, as a multi-faceted and multi-layered occurrence is somewhat necessary to the comportment of individuals to their social realities. Reification can be understood as a pre-epistemic condition to which social conditions occur, its values are only clearly established when there is a conscious apprehension of its conditions as an end for something.

In the sphere of care, reification is seen as a two-fold way of establishing intersubjective relations with the parent and the child. The child in this context objectifies

the parent as an extension of his or her body, as an object of sustenance; the labour of the parent becomes apparent to the consciousness of the parent, giving rise to the recognition of reification. In the negative sense, reification serves the purpose of establishing the need to integrate the child to society by giving individuation the character of autonomy. As the subject enters the sphere of rights, the analogue in the care of the parent of the child is further realised when the subject understands autonomy as he/she sees reification as a negative appropriation of the other as an end to individual purposes. Likewise, in the sphere of esteem, the need to satisfy the social ends of the norm somewhat objectifies the actions of individuals in the social world. To this extent, the negative relationship that we come to realise in the process of reification, allows the agonistic structure of recognition to take place. The value of reification as a negative epistemic condition of the subject comes up only in relation to the category mistake of looking at reification as a negative condition. In the same line as Lukacs reduces reification to the objectification of reality under the ideology of capitalism, the usual mistake found in the ethics that espouses the irreducible nature of others as subjects is made apparent when the irreducible character of subjects is taken as an absolute. This category mistake conflates the problem because it eliminates the possible normative grounding of ethics to concrete social praxis. In other words, we cannot imagine subjects in a concrete social situation inasmuch as the subject is taken as an absolute infinity much like our understanding of an ontotheological mythology of an absolute being. This criticism is apparent in Honneth's (1995, 109) reading of the "postmodern" ethics of Emmanuel Levinas (1979) and the valorisation of "individual particularities" of Jacques Derrida (2001). In Levinas (see Honneth 1995, 119) the experience of the absolute other as an infinity is seen as an "intramundane representative of a principle of infinity," the presence of the other is paradoxical insofar as the other is there and yet its intentions are completely uncomprehensible to the subject. Though Levinas makes us aware of the intersubjective condition of recognising others as an autonomy of its own, Levinas does not clearly establish any normative grounds where we can take actions to resolve instances of misrecognition. What occurs then is simply a *gelassenheit* or a state to which the other appears *as it is*, this incomplete ethical situation is further supplemented by Derrida's (see Honneth 1995, 116) adoption of *friendship* as a normative basis for social relations.

The conflating issue of ambiguity in this context is that in a social relation, the problem of recognition only takes place when reification is clearly manifested either on the part of the subject or on the part of the social institution that dispenses recognition to its subjects. The manifestations of subjects cannot be clearly given without resorting to the apparatus of social norms to which ends are clearly defined. If we were to take an aspect of recognition, its goals are proximate in as much as the objectification of subjects are clearly defined (e.g., in paying taxes we are ends to the goals of the state), and regardless of the struggle that comes along with reification, we are given the neutral spaces of contextualising the intentions of the parties involved in the struggle for recognition.

REIFICATION AS NEUTRAL GROUND IN AN AGONISTIC CONFLICT

In my second point, I argue that in the context of normative ethics, the neutrality of reification occurs only when the ideal situations for recognition are met. This ideal situation

is seen when the agonistic aspect of recognition has been acknowledged by its participants, giving rise to an intersubjective understanding of particularities. In this condition, the perspectives of both parties are met with the neutralising ground of always already existing norms that allow them to situate their claims for normativity. Likewise, it is in the context of neutrality that we are able to understand the condition of misrecognition as a struggle between subjects or struggle between a subject and his/her social reality. Through Levinas and Derrida, we realise that it is difficult to belabour ourselves with the task of determining the absolute end of the subjects insofar as they are utterly indeterminate due to their autonomy. The problem with this is that although Levinas and Derrida are able to emphasise the value of autonomy, their notion of ethics prevents a productive discourse in a context-bound understanding of recognition as a struggle. We cannot deal with absolutes insofar as they are not within the realm of our experience of the social world. I am not suggesting that we abandon Levinas and Derrida's project for this deficiency, but rather I am proposing to draw some aspects of their theory to a more fundamental framework of reification.

In Derrida's "Violence and metaphysics" (2001, 162), we come to a realisation that ontological violence is a necessity for epistemically finding a ground for intersubjectivity. In sum, Derrida argues that the valorisation of ethics over ontology is self-defeating; in the case of Levinas, it denies the productive encounter to which the subject and the Other are able to recognise one another. There should be a sense of a necessary ontological violence in the form of recognition to which the intentions of the subject and the Other is made apparent as a form of *economy*. The exchange is intended not to delimit the possibilities of the subjects involved in a conflict, but rather to facilitate a disclosure of their subjective contexts in a common normative ground. In other words, reification as a form of necessary ontological violence is characterised by the neutral condition to which subjectivities are able to expose intentions in a normative ground. Reification, in this sense, is not bound to the overly moralised sense of looking at reality as an absolute end to a subject's will; rather, it is a productive manifestation of intentions in a specific situation.

Honneth (2008, 59), in a very rare gesture, presents a mundane example of this problem in his Tanner lecture. He gives us the situation of reification in the context of friendship and an objective social situation involving a tennis player playing against her best friend in a championship match. The context of the situation is that the tennis player took up the sport because of her friendship with the opponent with whom she is currently going to compete. What Honneth achieves in this example is that he is able to paint a picture of reification in a context, and asserts that the forgetfulness of the situation is bound by contextual frames to which recognition takes place. The dilemma that the tennis player faces is of course obvious; on one hand, the exercise of autonomy insists that she wins the match to gain recognition; on the other hand, the tennis player's relationship with her opponent also insists that she gives way for her friend since winning might put their friendship at stake. What is lacking in this imaginary social situation is that Honneth fails to situate the intentions of both parties in this agonistic relations. Although we are able to frame the context of reification as an end either to the desire of the tennis player to win the match or preserve the friendship that led her to this situation, Honneth does not present any normative conditions to which this friendship is established in the first place.⁴ There are instances when we allow reification to take place without raising the red flag of

misrecognition. We may in some instances allow for example a friend to win a tennis match because our objectification is in line with our autonomy; in this sense, the norm of care is still exercised. My point of contention in this argument is that reification is to be understood in the limited context of social realities and not as a whole. In this regard, I will continue my argument to my third point, to which authenticity, in the context of Heidegger's hermeneutic, is able to situate reification as a necessary comportment to specific social contexts.

AUTHENTICITY SITUATES REIFICATION AS NECESSARY IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Third, I argue from the Tanner lectures that Honneth's idea of reification situates itself in Heidegger's phenomenology of authenticity. For Heidegger, the subject faces the issue of instrumentality not only on itself, but also in its treatment of others. I argue that in the context of authenticity, the state instrumentality (*Vorhandenheit*) is necessary in the comportment towards social realities. As such, reification, in the form of instrumentality, is a necessary social condition which gives rise to agonistic possibilities of recognition. This somehow runs parallel into Derrida's idea of economy and violence, to which I make an analogy between necessary violence and necessary reification. In Heidegger, the being of the subject is understood in the given condition of the life world. We exist in social realities that have always already been there prior to our existence, and our everyday comportment to this environment requires us to treat reality as a means to an end. For Heidegger (1996, 339), our existence in this social realities has comported us to the point wherein its everyday characteristics have been taken in the form of habit. The same observation is made true in the capitalistic tendency of society in the observations of Lukacs notion of reification (see Honneth 2008, 23), to the extent that it has become a "second nature" for us to look at reality as a means towards an end. Heidegger's rumination on this problem of reification is important, because the everyday conception of our social reality is inevitably geared towards this teleological tendency. Reification, as a comportment to reality, is not taken as a negative situation that completely obliterates autonomy and possibility. In between the context of being free and being dominated, the category mistake of the consequences of reification is able to take its neutral aspect. If we are able to observe in Heidegger the idea of authenticity as the rooted nature of our movement or projection towards self-disclosure, we are able to take note that it is also a category mistake to distinguish this condition as contradictory poles of existence. The being of Dasein is not always going to be primarily engaged in the world with authentic resolve towards the actualisation of its completion. In reality what makes this completion possible are the moments in which its inauthenticity creates the agony that questions its rootedness in its own historicity.

Reification belongs neither to the categories of authenticity nor of its inauthenticity. Where it belongs depends on the context of the individual who recognises, becomes its object. For example, grades in an academic setting may seem to be a reification of a student's performance in the perspective of the student, but in the perspective of a teacher it is an authentic representation of his intentional observation of that student's performance. In this regard, reification becomes a *trans-active* disclosure of intentions to which recognition is established as a struggle. Like the ontological necessity of violence

in establishing identities in Levinas and Derrida's ethics, we find this *trans-action* as a productive way of neutralising asymmetries in intersubjective relations. It is in this context that we are to understand that the instrumental nature of reification makes the whole idea of social interaction possible in the exercise of autonomy. Moreover, this normative process of reification not only allows the possibility of recognition to take place, it also allows us to engage in the contextuality of subjective intentions on already existing normative structures that makes this communication of intention possible. In this regard we realise not only the value of autonomy in individual subjects and their need to have such autonomy recognised, we are also able to move beyond the ambiguous context of infinity or absolute responsibilities by limiting the extent of reification to its intended context.

CONCLUSION

Following the case of reification as a neutral and normative ground for recognition, we find a very fertile ground for the possibility of using Honneth's theory of recognition to understand the intention of subjects through their manifestations of reification as their struggle for recognition. My objective in this essay is to bring back the possibility of understanding cultural products of subjects as a manifestation of their intentions through reification. Perhaps in the same line as Adorno, my understanding of reification can allow a critique of culture as it is shaped by subjects and social institutions. I diverge from Adorno's perspective only in the context of its pessimistic undertones of his critique of capitalism. I maintain that the social institutions are, in their own right, shaped by the subjects that they also influence. For this matter, Honneth's theory of recognition serves as a powerful tool that can help us understand the dynamics of how social institutions shape and become shaped by the very subjects that it contains.

NOTES

1. "In the tradition going back to Kant, 'morality' is understood, to repeat, as the universalist attitude in which one respects all subjects equally as 'ends in themselves' or as autonomous persons; 'ethical life,' on the other hand, refers to the settled *ethos* of a particular lifeworld, and normative judgments are to be made about this *ethos* only to the extent to which it is more or less able to approach the demands of universal moral principles." C.f. Honneth 1995, 172.

2. By "category mistake," Honneth implies the epistemic distinction between objectification and non-objectification that has distinguished reified and nonreified forms of recognition. In the same manner as Lukács (1972), Honneth asserts that reification is subject to ambiguous and multilayered tendency that cannot be simply defined categorically as reification or nonreification. Similar to Gilbert Ryle's (2009, 8-12) usage of the "category mistake," the distinction between reification and nonreification is difficult to establish in as much as the concept of "mind" and "body" could never be clearly distinguished categorically.

3. This is in reference to Honneth's contrast between the political theories of Niccolo Machiavelli (1988) and Hobbes (1996). For Honneth (1995, 9-10), there is no need for the context of law to simply protect the survival of subjects under a form of social contract

since it denies the autonomy of the human agency by using the authoritarian power as a basis for instrumentalising social practices. Furthermore, the condition of nature as a state of war no longer explains why crime is even made possible since the desire of self-preservation is no longer deemed necessary under a single authoritarian figure.

4. Honneth (2008, 155) admits in the latter part of the lectures that his presentation of this example has been one-sided, opting the perspective of the tennis player as the only perspective given in such example.

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