ARTICLE

Struggling over the Meaning of Recognition

A Matter of Identity, Justice, or Freedom?

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ABSTRACT: Struggles for recognition are at the same time struggles over what it means to recognize and be recognized. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth propose two mutually exclusive ways to understand recognition: either as a matter of justice (Fraser) or as a matter of identity (Honneth). This article argues against the limitations of both of these construals of recognition, and offers a third way of construing it: as a matter of freedom. Recognition is not reducible, empirically or normatively, to any of these, however. Moreover, it needs to be regarded both more critically and more openly since what we are dealing with is a practice and an ideal that is by its very nature deeply contestable and therefore (more than most practices and ideals) subject to unforeseeable historical and normative change. Rather than trying to fix the meaning of recognition in order to give it a determinate role in ambitious theories of justice, it would be better to proceed more sceptically, attentive both to the complexities of recognition relations and to alternative ways of conceiving them and going on with them differently from before.

KEY WORDS: *agency*, *critical theory*, *disclosure*, *freedom*, *identity*, *justice*, *public reason*, *recognition*, *voice*

> My knowledge of myself is something I find, as on a successful quest; my knowledge of others, of their separateness from me, is something that finds me. (Stanley Cavell)

A Matter of Justice or Self-Realization?

In my view, the question at the centre of the debate between Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser is not the redistribution or recognition question. The decisive question of their debate is the question of what recognition means, what it does, and for what and for whom it is done. Very early in their exchange, Nancy Fraser puts it this way: 'Is recognition really a matter of justice, or is it a matter of self-realization?' (*RR* 27).[1] This is more or less to acknowledge that we are still struggling with the social and political *meaning* of recognition – what it means to

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be 'recognized', and so what it is that we are purportedly doing when we are 'recognizing' individuals or groups or asking to be 'recognized'. Struggles for recognition also initiate struggles over the contested and shifting meaning of recognition.[2]

On the face of it, Fraser's and Honneth's views of recognition could not be more discordant. For Axel Honneth, as for Charles Taylor, recognition is a 'vital human need',[3] a deep-seated *anthropological* fact of the matter about 'the intersubjective nature of human beings' (*RR* 145). We do not just *desire* recognition, we *need* multiple kinds of recognition – respect in the political sphere, esteem in the social sphere, and care in the intimate sphere of the family. Lacking these interlocking experiences of recognition, we cannot achieve full 'self-realization': we cannot become who we want to be, cannot realize the kind of life we want for ourselves. For Honneth, the harm done by non-recognition and misrecognition is the worst form of social injustice; indeed, it is the key to unlocking social injustice as a whole (*RR* 133). Experiences of non-recognition or misrecognition violate putatively transhistorical normative expectations geared to the social confirmation or affirmation of our identity claims. Lacking such confirmation we will be unable to develop 'intact' personal identities, and so, by implication, be unable fully to function as self-realizing agents. Below the threshold of public recognition struggles, below the level of this or that contingent historical configuration, there lies a stratum of 'prepolitical suffering', claims Honneth, which can serve as an empirical reference point and a normative resource both for moral theory and for social criticism. Out of this material, Honneth fashions an all-encompassing theory of justice and critical social theory.

For Nancy Fraser, on the other hand, recognition plays an important but limited role in a theory of justice, normatively enlarging the meaning and practice of equality. That endeavour requires a shift from an 'ethical' normative framework of justice, at the centre of which is the hyper-good of self-realization, to a deontological framework at the centre of which is the moral-democratic ideal of 'participatory parity'. Rather than treating recognition as instrumental to individual self-realization, she treats it as instrumental to acquiring full status as a full partner in social interaction. Recognition, she argues, is best treated as an issue of social status, not as an anthropological constant which functions as the necessary (and apparently sufficient) condition for the formation of an 'intact' personal identity. What we should be paying attention to are patterns of cultural value that constitute some individuals and groups 'as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible'. In such cases, we can legitimately speak of 'misrecognition and status subordination' (*RR* 29). The 'remedy' for injustice in these cases will require the 'deinstitutionalization' of those patterns of cultural value which foster misrecognition and status subordination. The redress that is called for here is not the repair of the distorted subjectivities or damaged identities of social actors, but the restoration of their status as full partners in social interaction.

 Honneth and Fraser find little if anything to endorse in each other's views.

Fraser's criticisms are particularly sharp, expressing total scepticism about Honneth's project. She considers it to be overly ambitious, monistic, and foundationalist. I am largely sympathetic to some of the criticisms she makes, having made similar or complementary criticisms elsewhere.[4] However, I also have some serious concerns about Fraser's own approach. Just as it is unwise to reduce justice either to recognition or to redistribution, it is also unwise to reduce recognition struggles either to justice or to identity. Both of these either/ors are based on false antitheses. Nothing is gained by reproducing them. Moreover, since the very meaning of recognition is itself contestable, not just in theory but in practice, it may be wiser to resist defining it too strictly in relation to this or that normative ideal.

Misrecognition without a Suffering Subject

I want now to look closely at two interconnected features of Fraser's account of recognition which she believes make it normatively preferable to Honneth's: the incorporation of standards of (1) impartiality and (2) publicity. Because she treats recognition as a matter of justice within a deontological moral framework in which the right is separated from and rendered prior to the good, Fraser does not need to make any controversial or sectarian appeals to a historically or culturally specific idea of the good as Honneth's notion of self-realization must. All the work is being done by the deontological non-sectarian norm of participatory parity. Thus, she believes, her account of recognition can appeal to an impartial normative standpoint that is compatible with value pluralism and deep diversity. I do not see, however, how evading one controversial normative standpoint by taking on another *necessarily* makes her view of recognition superior to Honneth's. After all, the day has long since passed when the sharp distinction between the right and the good upon which her standard of impartiality depends can simply be taken for granted. Compelling arguments have been circulating for some time as to why such strong notions of impartiality may be part of the problem, not part of the solution to the challenges of value pluralism and deep diversity. One of those arguments makes clear that any struggle for recognition, and thereby over what it means and what it demands, 'always implicates the right and the good in complex ways that we are just beginning to understand'.[5] The thought that we can shield the right from the good, immunizing it against the challenges of pluralism and diversity, is self-defeating. And so we need to resist the still-seductive idea that there is some uncontroversial, ever-ready norm of impartiality that can serve as the single best problem-solving and conflict-resolving procedure for settling recognition claims and the 'claims of culture'. That idea too remains in the grip of normative monism, even if it is of a kind less obvious than Honneth's.

The standard of publicity to which Fraser appeals is also beset with difficulties. Although Fraser accepts that misrecognition can have the negative, disabling 'ethical-psychological effects described by Taylor and Honneth', she nonetheless

wants to insist that 'the wrongness of misrecognition does not depend on the presence of such effects' (*RR* 32). For Fraser, 'a society whose institutionalized norms impede parity of participation is morally indefensible *whether or not they distort the subjectivity of the oppressed*' (*RR* 32). But does this mean that the effects of misrecognition are morally irrelevant to judging its wrongness? Certainly it would be hard to imagine genuine cases of misrecognition, cases which typically have a significant history, in which such disabling effects were not present. And just as certainly it is hard to imagine how anyone could ever make sense of misrecognition, their own or someone else's, without the presence of such effects. The very intelligibility of the concept, and so its place in the moral language in which it plays such an important role, is inconceivable without access to the suffering misrecognition can cause. Would Fraser be prepared to endorse institutionalized norms that produced disabling 'ethical-psychological' effects so long as they were consistent with the principle of participatory parity (supposing this were a *real* possibility)? Wouldn't the presence of such effects be an indication that there is something wrong with the current institutionalization of our norms of equality? And isn't that, in part, why recognition has become part of the normative vocabulary of contemporary democracies? So what is driving Fraser to make the ethical-psychological effects of misrecognition irrelevant to judging its wrongness?

Evidently, it is an issue of objectivity. For Fraser, 'misrecognition is a matter of externally manifest and publicly verifiable impediments to some people's standing as full members of society' (*RR* 31). If we are to conceptualize 'what really *merits* the title of injustice, as opposed to what is merely *experienced* as injustice' (*RR* 205), we have to reject appeals to an independent and 'pristine' realm of subjective experiences that cannot be publicly verified. What we require is an altogether different strategy, which begins not with unmediated subjective experiences, but with decentred, depersonalized discourses of justice and social criticism. Such 'subjectless' discourses offer a far more plausible and objective empirical reference point for evaluating recognition claims than 'inarticulate suffering'. Unlike the latter, the former is not 'sheltered from public contestation', but has the distinct advantage of 'being subject to critical scrutiny in open debate' (*RR* 205).

I must confess, however, that I find the distinction between 'what really merits the title of injustice, as opposed to what is merely experienced as injustice' quite worrisome. While subjective experience is notoriously unreliable as a source of justification, it is also an irreplaceable and absolutely necessary source of *intelligibility*. The suffering in question is inescapably first-personal. Even if we set aside the point that in matters of justification the criteria of valid public justification are themselves always up for grabs, never settled, and perpetually subject to crises, it seems to me rather hard to deny that successful identification of misrecognition has to pass through *both* subjective experience *and* subjectless discourses. Just as subjectless discourses must act as a corrective or check against subjective experience, so subjective experience must act as a check or corrective against subjectless

discourses. We want to make sure that there is a reciprocal looping or feedback process between subjective experiences and subjectless discourses. Indeed, subjective experience must *permeate* subjectless discourses in order to insure that the content of those discourses is not empty, that they do not serve as one more source of alienation: the misrecognized must be able to recognize themselves in, must be able to make sense of their suffering through, those subjectless discourses of recognition. That Fraser is prepared to privilege the latter at the expense of the former reveals a certain positivist residue in her thinking, as though we could give an account of misrecognition without need of a suffering subject.[6]

There is something else that is quite worrisome about the distinction between what merits the title of injustice and what is merely experienced as injustice, and that has specifically to do with the underlying assumption that only an experience that is 'externally manifest and publicly verifiable' can count as a valid case of misrecognition. What is assumed here is that currently available claims-making vocabularies and subjectless discourses are all the vocabularies and discourses we need to *express* and *justify* recognition claims. And that assumes, as well, that misrecognition will take an already familiar public form. But if what needs to be claimed can't be made 'externally manifest and publicly verifiable' in currently available vocabularies and discourses, and if the required discourses and vocabularies can't simply be created overnight *ex nihilo*, how much trust can we actually place in standards of public verification that presuppose the adequacy of currently available discourses and vocabularies of evaluation and justification?

I am somewhat puzzled by Fraser's position here, since she has acknowledged in her previous work the need of those suffering from maligned identities to transform inherited vocabularies of identity 'in order to expand their field of action', and so turn a disabling identity into 'an enabling identity, an identity one could want to claim'.[7] How could one ever become aware of the need to do so if one did not experience first-personally the voice-erasing and agency-disabling effects of these inherited vocabularies of identity?

This is precisely why we cannot presume the justificatory adequacy of our current discourses and vocabularies, and why subjective experience must always be an ineliminable normative reference point of resistance, contestation, and transformation.

Yet another questionable assumption underlying Fraser's standard of publicity is the assumption that recognition claims are *fully explicit and determinate* claims, much like straightforward truth claims and certain kinds of moral claims. And that is just how Fraser's status model of recognition must treat them. However, because recognition claims cannot be strictly a matter of justice alone, but are also interwoven with our identities and the various goods we associate with them, they are shot through with indeterminacy. Thus, it is highly unlikely that any currently available vocabulary in which recognition claims can be stated is going to be fully adequate to what wants or needs recognition. For there to be any claiming in the first place, 'inarticulate suffering' must be made *articulate*. Therefore, there will be

cases in which what needs to be claimed cannot precede its successful articulation or expression. These are cases in which 'right is not assertible; instead something must be shown'.[8] What will determine the 'success' of any articulation is the degree to which it shows what *prior* to its articulation we were unable to see as injustice. By disclosing a morally relevant but previously unthematized or unnoticed feature of our public practices of (mis)recognition, of our institutional rules and arrangements more generally, such an articulation also illuminates why right could not be asserted prior to what needed to be shown.

Once we see that recognition claims are highly indeterminate claims, and that their inarticulacy is internal to the nature of such claims, we may become more sensitive to an aspect of that inarticulacy which we might call the experience of *aphonia*, of voicelessness or inexpressiveness. This is also one of the disabling effects of misrecognition, and it is one that speaks against, if I may put it this way, Fraser's standard of publicity. The problem here is not an unwillingness to risk public contestation and critical scrutiny; rather, it is the more immediate problem of lacking a voice, more precisely, *one's own voice*, for no other voice will do, in which to state, and so make sense of, one's suffering and misery. It is not just that we lack the right words adequately to articulate our experience of injustice; it is also that we have been rendered literally and figuratively speechless. Finding our own voice in which to voice that injustice, and to give it a name, may be the only way open to us to turn what is merely experienced as injustice into what rightly merits the title of injustice. In this way our struggle to find that voice, and to give a name to that for which we did not heretofore have a name, enlarges the horizon of moral significance, and reminds us that public reason is *not* reducible to justificatory discourse: it necessarily entails a semantically innovative problem-solving dimension (i.e. the problem of making inarticulate suffering articulate) if injustice is to be seen *as* injustice. It should also alert us to how the light of publicity can be blinding as well as illuminating. We may fail to see some morally relevant feature of an issue or conflict *because* of the light publicity sheds – which is why we need continually to adjust the lighting by disclosing what the light of publicity itself obscures. And that means that we have to incorporate a role for disclosure and articulation in the public exercise of practical reason.[9]

Turning away for a moment from my discussion of Fraser, I want to draw out an implication for Honneth's recognition theory of the semantic-political struggle to bring new articulations of injustice and identity into being. The struggle to overcome our voicelessness, to regain *our* voice once we see that it is our voice itself that is at stake, is, *pace* Honneth, a struggle that cannot be sufficiently explained, not even motivationally, as a struggle for recognition, since it is also and perhaps more fundamentally a struggle *for* or *over* one's voice. The question of one's own voice may arise in contexts of misrecognition, but it is not going to be resolved by any appropriate form of recognition through which we will be finally reassured that it is our own voice that is speaking, our own agency that is at work. Our attempts to reassure ourselves that our words and actions are indeed

our own can be only *partially* satisfied. Even under the most favourable social and political conditions, the 'satisfaction' we seek will be provisional, subject to recurring normative challenge and self-induced doubt, since we must find 'satisfaction' in the place from which the 'desire' for it first arises: under the conditions of intersubjectivity where recognition is both conferred and denied, where 'satisfaction' can easily turn into or be displaced by 'dissatisfaction'.

Honneth's theory of recognition exaggerates the degree to which we *need* recognition in order to exercise our agency, in order to speak in a voice of our own. Although I cannot go into detail here, Hegel's analysis of the 'master–slave' dialectic proves to be an embarrassment for Honneth, since the 'slave' is able to exercise a newly won agency and achieve a new self-understanding under conditions of inequality and misrecognition. He proves able, at least partially, to resolve the 'epistemological crisis' set in motion by his unsatisfied (and unsatisfiable) desire for recognition without receiving the kinds of recognition Honneth regards as necessary and sufficient conditions of successful agency and personal identity. Indeed, it was the denial of due recognition and the ensuing epistemological crisis that forced the 'slave' to reconceive and transform his basic self-understanding. The point of all this is not that misrecognition is really good for us, and so we need not worry so much about being misrecognized; the point is that recognition and misrecognition *underdetermines* our identities and our sense of ourselves as agents. Our power to shape our identity and exercise our agency does not strictly depend on receiving in advance the appropriate form of recognition. We are able to do so, over and over again, despite the denial or absence of such recognition. Furthermore, as I interpret Hegel, the experience of misrecognition does not *necessarily* entail a form of injustice. It can be the occasion of a transformative and critical encounter with another. In this case, the other we encounter challenges the recognition we claim for ourselves, not in order to maintain conditions of domination and asymmetry but in order to initiate a change in self-understanding, and change in our own relation to one another.[10]

Another implication follows from this: all the recognition in the world can neither guarantee nor serve as a substitute for our own voice. There is missing in Honneth's account of recognition the 'perfectionist' concerns thematized by Emerson, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and, more recently, by Cavell. What is missing is an awareness or sufficient appreciation of the 'internal' impediments to self-realization, those called 'conformity' and 'consistency' by Emerson, 'ressentiment' by Nietzsche, and 'das Man' by Heidegger.[11] Not all impediments to the free exercise of our agency, or to a freer, practical relation to ourselves, can be understood as 'external' impediments. We can find that we have become unintelligible to ourselves, obscure to ourselves, 'as if we are subject to demands we cannot quite formulate, leaving us unjustified, as if our lives condemn themselves'.[12] This situation is not one that can be remedied by receiving due recognition, for it is relations of recognition themselves which make urgent and ineliminable the struggle for and over our own voice.

On the other hand, I do think Honneth is right to claim that we are in need of a phenomenology of suffering. So long as it is not playing a foundationalist role, there is nothing wrong with such an undertaking, and much may be learned from it, namely, a greater sensitivity to forms of suffering for which no public language is currently adequate, and so of previously unnoticed aspects of our practices and institutions that might not otherwise merit the title of injustice. Unfortunately, Honneth doesn't provide such a phenomenology. What he provides instead is a taxonomy of suffering that he derives *ex ante* from an overambitious attempt to conceptualize the normative space within which *all* struggles against injustice must take place. However, even a modest phenomenology of suffering would have to be complemented and balanced by a Nietzschean genealogy of suffering, in light of which we could better understand the deeper motivations and the deeper complexities underlying our need for recognition.[13]

Instrumentalizing Recognition

Thus far I have only thematized the deep disagreement between Fraser and Honneth, but as it turns out their views of recognition share a few common assumptions. I want now to look at one of these. Both Honneth and Fraser have an instrumental view of recognition; that is, they both regard it as a means to an end, whether that end is an intact personal identity or full social participation. And they both regard recognition as an *explicit* or *overt* act, something over which we can dispose, something that can be mobilized by an act of state or of individual will, as though once a recognition claim is publicly justified, it is then a matter of *administering* the right kind of recognition in the right dose. Recognition is thus construed as a 'remedy' for injustice, as Fraser likes so often to put it.

I have two problems with this instrumentalist construal of recognition. And here again I want to focus on Fraser. First of all, an instrumental view of recognition *medicalizes* the issues of recognition, identity, and justice, as though we are dealing with a malady in the body politic for which the appropriate drug must be administered.[14] Second, it seeks to instrumentalize what is ultimately not instrumentalizable. Recognition is not something over which we can dispose, or which we can mete out in the appropriate amounts to the appropriate people at the appropriate time. While one can redistribute economic resources through the machinery of the state, recognition is not something that can be 'redistributed'. This is partly because it is not a thing, easily measurable and redeployable. To be sure, legal forms of recognition do institute norms of recognition in order to combat illegitimate forms of exclusion and inequality. Yet, as important as legal mechanisms are for instituting changes in practices of recognition, I think that the struggle for legal recognition is not a sufficiently complex model for understanding what is at stake in recognition struggles as a whole, and not only because legal norms of recognition are always themselves contestable.

 Whatever recognition is, if indeed it is a circumscribable practice, it seems to

figure importantly in a process of re-education, in an alteration of our cognitive orientations and normative expectations. It is a part of a larger learning process, the outcome of which, to the extent that it is a genuine *learning* process, will be both unforeseeable and unpredictable. Institutional measures are *one* way to facilitate such learning processes; but even legal forms of recognition, necessary as they may be, are not in themselves sufficient for bringing about the required symbolic and cultural change at the level of everyday practice. Moreover, as Fraser and others have pointed out, legal mechanisms for producing such change can be resisted and can be met with a severe backlash. So the question which Fraser needs to answer is just what kind of change she has in mind when she talks about the 'deinstitutionalization of patterns of cultural value'. Is this change to be achieved by 'institutional' means alone, e.g. by legal mechanisms? Are we using the right normative and conceptual language here to get at a more complex process of normative and cultural change?

These questions are particularly pertinent when considering what Fraser means by 'deconstructive recognition' and precisely what practical role it is supposed to play. Although Fraser shares with Honneth the conventional view of recognition as consisting in an explicit act of affirmation that can be expressed in various ways in various social contexts, she is also of the view that some kinds of misrecognition call for an altogether different kind of recognition, where the 'remedy' that is called for is not the affirmation of unjustly maligned group identities but the deconstruction of the very terms in which group differences are elaborated (*RR* 15). Whereas recognition as affirmation leaves everyone's identity more or less unchanged, recognition as deconstruction would 'change *everyone's* social identity' (*RR* 13, 75).

Obviously, the practice of deconstructive recognition is supposed to be the 'radical' counterpart of the 'conservative' practice of affirmative recognition, but just what it means *in practice* is anything but obvious. Deconstructing a text is one thing; deconstructing our identities something else altogether. In the first case, the operation can be done without having to put anything of one's own at stake; indeed, once the operation is started the outcome is automatic and fairly predictable. But in the second case, almost everything that matters to us is at stake, and we have no idea how to proceed or what to expect. After all, deconstructing our identities is not something we could ever get really good at, a practice we can master, for mastery in this domain would signal failure not success. It is not just that our identities resist their deconstruction, or that we are both the 'subject' and 'object' of the deconstruction; it is that the process and the outcome are not something we can actually control or foresee.

So the question naturally arises as to whether 'deconstructive recognition' can even constitute a social practice. Surely, if it is going to be a practice that we can normatively endorse, it will have to be a *democratic* practice, requiring the cooperation and consent of all concerned. But that will introduce an even higher level of indeterminacy to a process that looks highly indeterminate to begin with.

Furthermore, were 'deconstructive recognition' somehow to become a democratic practice, the 'radical' ambition of bringing about a change in 'everyone's social identity' might have to be tempered by a genuine confrontation with pluralism – that is, with the fact that some people will wish with good reasons to preserve and continue aspects of their identity, will wish to pass them on and not just let them pass away.[15]

What I have just described is rather different from Fraser's attempt to make the deconstructive type of recognition viable as a social practice. She proposes the idea of 'reformist reform' as a '*via media* between an affirmative strategy that is politically feasible but substantively flawed and a transformative one that is programmatically sound but politically unfeasible' (*RR* 79). But I do not think the idea of deconstructive recognition is 'programmatically sound' at all; to the contrary, I think its conceptualization as a possible practice is deeply flawed by Fraser's assumption that recognition is instrumentalizable, and so she misconceives how cultural change can and ought to take place.[16]

If we now note that with the notion of 'deconstructive recognition' Fraser unintentionally reconnects the question of recognition to issues of identity, the very issues from which she wanted it strictly separated (call it a return of the repressed), we can say that we have come full circle. We see that recognition as we currently understand it is as much a matter of equality as it is of identity, as much a matter of justice as of agency. However, we are still unsure what to make of recognition; neither what it means to us nor what normative and political role(s) we would like it, or need it, to play in social life.

Discourses and Counter-Discourses of Recognition

For some time we have been working with an essentially therapeutic discourse of recognition that distinguishes between good and bad kinds of recognition, and conceives of the good kind as unequivocally good, the sure remedy for the harm done by the bad. More or less simultaneously a much more sceptical counter-discourse of recognition has emerged for which recognition is implicated in a complex process of social construction that has to be continually and relentlessly deconstructed. Admirably, if unsuccessfully, Nancy Fraser has tried to combine both of these discourses, in order to get beyond their respective limitations.

But perhaps what we are dealing with are practices and expectations that are actually heterogeneous, far more indeterminate, and far less stable, than recognition theorists like Axel Honneth generally believe, united more by contingent historical circumstances than by an underlying and unchanging anthropological-normative core. If this impression is correct, then we need a more pluralistic and contextualist account of recognition not a monistic account, no matter how complex and internally differentiated it may be. Honneth's account of recognition is skewed by an orientation to a formal theory of the good at the centre of which is

a very disputable and flawed ideal of self-realization that moulds the practice of recognition for its own purposes.

I think that James Tully takes an important step in the right direction when he recasts the struggle for recognition not as a struggle for the recognition of one's legitimate identity claims but as a struggle *over the norms of recognition*. By shifting the focus to the norms of recognition themselves, Tully connects the struggle over intersubjective norms of recognition to the struggle over how we wish to be governed. Thus, recognition becomes a matter of *freedom* and not just a matter of justice or identity, and misrecognition an unjustifiable curtailment of our freedom to govern ourselves. Since the struggle over the norms of recognition is at the same time a struggle over what it means to recognize and be recognized, there can be no final or perfect state of recognition in whose projected normative light we should understand the shortcomings or imperfections of our current practices or forms of recognition. As Tully points out, like all moral and political norms, norms of recognition have a normative and normalizing function, both of which can provoke resistance and contestation. No matter how well meant or intentioned, no matter how mutual or reciprocal are norms of recognition, the effects in practice will always be contestable and questionable. Indeed, we may need to be just as worried about the coercive force of mutual and reciprocal norms of recognition.[17]

It might be time to ask just what it is we expect from recognition, for it may be that we have normativized and normalized recognition to such an extent that we have overburdened it with too many social and political demands. It might be time to think not only about what recognition does for us, but also what it can't do; what we can get from recognition and what we can't get. It might be time to think about the limits of recognition. I think we can safely say that full and complete recognition is a chimera. All recognition, even the very good kind, is *partial*, both incomplete and one-sided. Because we don't fully know what we are doing when we are doing it, and because our motivations and our actions can never be fully transparent to us or fully foreseeable by us, the possibility of misrecognition is built into each and every act of recognition. This possibility is made actual in the practices by which we interpret and apply our current norms of recognition, for better and for worse.

I am not only suggesting that we may be overworking recognition theoretically and practically, but also that we may have partly misconstrued the good it represents, and is supposed to effect. There may be good reason to question our *craving* for recognition, to question the desire it is supposed to satisfy. Our desire for recognition may turn out to be a desire for which 'we can't get no satisfaction', not even from equals, and the reasons for that may be worth understanding better than we currently do. It seems to me that this kind of questioning marks a new direction in the discourses on and of recognition.[18]

Perhaps we need to imagine different practices of recognition, practices which do not neatly divide between affirmative and deconstructive practices. Perhaps we

need to work towards practices of recognition that do not already have form or place in our social life, expressive practices which are nonetheless continuous with self-criticism, engaging the misrecognized and misrecognizers in ways we can't yet describe. I can't say much more about this now – I wish I could. While I agree that critical theory requires a normative foothold in empirical reality, it requires even more the power to disclose alternative possibilities, possibilities not already available to us.[19]

Notes

1. *RR* refers to Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003) *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. London: Verso.
2. Here I am trying to supplement Tully's reformulation of the struggle for recognition as a struggle over the norms of recognition. Even when actors challenge a norm of (typically legal) recognition because they experience it as unbearable, they are not only challenging the specific harm that the particular norm facilitates, they are also implicitly attempting to redefine what recognition is or should be. I am indebted to Tully for helping me with my own (ongoing) struggle over the meaning of recognition.
3. Charles Taylor (1994) 'The Politics of Recognition', in Amy Gutman (ed.) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, p. 25. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
4. Nikolas Kompridis (2004) 'From Reason to Self-Realization? On the "Ethical Turn" in Critical Theory', *Critical Horizons* 5(1); repr. in John Rundell, Danielle Petherbridge, Jan Bryant, John Hewitt and Jeremy Smith (eds) (2004) *Contemporary Perspectives in Critical and Social Philosophy*. Brill: Leiden.
5. James Tully (2006) 'The Practice of Law-making and the Problem of Difference: One View of the Field', in Omid Payrow Shabani (ed.) *Multiculturalism and the Law: A Critical Debate*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
6. For complementary criticisms of Fraser and an illuminating view of misrecognition and suffering from an Adornian perspective, see Jay Bernstein (2005) 'Suffering Injustice: Misrecognition as Moral Injury in Critical Theory', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Special Issue on 'Rethinking Critical Theory', 13(3): 303–25.
7. See Nancy Fraser (1991) 'From Irony to Prophecy to Politics: A Response to Richard Rorty', *Michigan Quarterly Review* 30(2): 259–66.
8. Stanley Cavell (1990) 'The Conversation of Justice', in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, p. 112. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
9. On the 'world-disclosing' role of reason, see Nikolas Kompridis (2006) *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
10. I make this point in greater detail (n. 4), pp. 346–9.
11. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1990) 'Self-Reliance', *Essays: First and Second Series*. New York: Vintage. Friedrich Nietzsche (1969) *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage. Martin Heidegger (1962) *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, part I, ch. 4. New York: Harper & Row. For elaboration of this point, see part II of Kompridis (n. 9) and (forthcoming) 'Intersubjectivity, Recognition, and Critique'. Now this is another reason why I think Fraser is wrong to dismiss outright approaches which focus on the self, on identity, and on so-called experiences of 'prepolitical' suffering. The dichotomy between self and

society has surely outworn its welcome. It is an effect of a metaphysical picture that is based on questionable and prejudicial distinctions between inner and outer, subjective and objective, private and public. For one line of critique of this picture, the writings of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Taylor, and Cavell are exemplary.

12. Cavell (n. 8), pp. xxxi–xxxii.
13. Wendy Brown (1995) 'Wounded Attachments', in *States of Injury*, pp. 52–76. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
14. This medicalizing tendency is especially pronounced in Honneth. See Kompridis (n. 4) for criticism of this tendency.
15. Nikolas Kompridis (2005) 'Normativizing Hybridity/Neutralizing Culture', *Political Theory* 33(3): 318–43. On the issues raised in this article, see Seyla Benhabib (2006) 'The Claims of Culture Properly Interpreted: Response to Nikolas Kompridis', *Political Theory* 34(3): 383–8, and my reply (2006) 'The Unsettled and Unsettling Claims of Culture: Reply to Seyla Benhabib', *Political Theory* 34(3): 389–96.
16. I should add that I find the application of the idea of 'nonreformist reform' to redistribution far more promising.
17. Tully (n. 5).
18. In addition to the work of James Tully, here I am thinking of the work of Wendy Brown (n. 13) and Patchen Markell (2003) *Bound by Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. See also James Tully (2006) 'On Reconciling Struggles over Recognition: Toward a New Approach', in Avigail Eisenberg (ed.) *Equality and Diversity: New Perspectives* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, pp. 15–33 (2004a) 'Exclusion and Assimilation: Two Forms of Domination', in Melissa Williams and Stephen Macedo (eds) *Domination and Exclusion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 191–229 (2004b) 'Recognition and Dialogue: The Emergence of a New Field', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 7(3): 84–106. In this vein of counter-discourses of recognition, see also Andrew Schaap (2004) 'Political Reconciliation through a Struggle for Recognition?', *Social and Legal Studies* 13(4): 523–40.
19. For a systematic statement of this alternative conception of critical theory see Kompridis (n. 9).