

Debating Critical Theory

Engagements with Axel Honneth

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD

Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

6 Tinworth Street, London, SE11 5AL, United Kingdom

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This publication is part of the DFG-funded Cluster of Excellence (2007–2019)
“The Formation of Normative Orders” at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main.



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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Christ, Julia, editor.

Title: Debating critical theory : engagements with Axel Honneth / edited by Julia Christ, Kristina Lepold, Daniel Loick, Titus Stahl.

Description: Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. | Series: Essex studies in contemporary critical theory | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Summary: “Bringing together leading scholars in contemporary social and political philosophy, this volume takes up the central themes of Axel Honneth’s work as a starting point for debating the present and future of critical theory, as a form of socially grounded philosophy for analyzing and critiquing society today”— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020010332 (print) | LCCN 2020010333 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781786614780 (cloth) | ISBN 9781786614797 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781786614803 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Honneth, Axel, 1949- | Critical theory. | Criticism (Philosophy) | Social sciences—Philosophy.

Classification: LCC B3279.H84574 D43 2020 (print) | LCC B3279.H84574 (ebook) | DDC 142—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020010332>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020010333>

∞™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Chapter 3

Taking a Stand

Second-Order Social Pathologies or First-Order Critique

Sally Haslanger

INTRODUCTION¹

We live in an unjust world. The injustice takes many forms and is upheld in a variety of ways, many of them coercive. Resistance to injustice is not hard to explain or defend in contexts where institutions violate explicit principles that have formed the basis of the polity. In democratic countries, there are plenty of resources to critique authoritarian rulers; we can expect uprisings against violations of specified rights – due process, religious freedom, universal franchise, and so on – in societies where such rights are constitutionally protected. There is no guarantee that injustice will be recognized or corrected, but resistance has a foothold.

However, injustice is also maintained by ideology. Such injustice is harder to identify and critique. It structures our everyday lives and shapes our experience. It functions as “doxa” that is taken for granted as common sense. Political and legal theorists and judges are as subject to ideology as anyone else, and because power relations grant them status as authorities, their insights may simply reinforce the background unjust social structure.

The Critical Theory tradition is shaped by the goal of ideology critique.² A central idea is that society suffers from “social pathologies of reason.” The emancipatory goal of critique is to free us from epistemic distortions and illusions so that we are able to realize a rational form of life, both individually and collectively. In this chapter, I consider Axel Honneth’s approach to critique. After offering an interpretation of Honneth’s version of the Critical Theory model, I argue that his view rests on a set of background ideas about social change that are implausible and overly rationalistic. Moreover,

although Honneth's approach is free of some of the more worrisome elements of twentieth-century Critical Theory that he himself notes, there is an alternative that better meets the methodological commitments of critical theory. I will then sketch a conception of ideology, inspired by Althusser and Foucault, and offer an alternative model of critique.

CRITIQUE IN FRANKFURT SCHOOL CRITICAL THEORY

Traditionally, critical theory begins in a sceptical moment. The critic is positioned as a social theorist facing entrenched injustice. The task is to illuminate the injustice in ways that provide a basis for resistance. However, ideology sustains injustice by masking or distorting what's good, right, just. But it is more than this, for ideology also distorts what is taken to be possible by making the current social formations appear natural, inevitable, desirable. Even worse, because ideology is enacted in our practices, we make it true. If our practices interpret the flesh of dead cows and pigs as food, it becomes food; if the hobbled walk of women in high heels is interpreted as sexy, it becomes sexy. We want it.

Ideology fails us both morally and epistemically, and fails us morally *by* failing us epistemically. The goal of critical theory is not just to provide a true description of social reality. Truth is not enough. Critical theory has a practical and political aim: it should reveal injustice in a way that informs action. And because, as I have just suggested, the world itself can become distorted, we need a critical vantage point not just on what we believe, but on what is. As Danielle Allen puts it, "In dark times what is wrong is the world" (2001, 877). But embedded as we are in a society shaped by ideology, how do we proceed?

It would appear that we need a peephole to see through the distortions of ideology so that we recognize them as distortions. Mostly, they are modal distortions: distortions of what is possible, natural, desirable, good, known. What we see on the other side of the peephole should also be motivating so that we are prepared to act in order to reconstruct our current social reality. Of course, as is typical of sceptical scenarios, we must be prepared that what appears to be a peephole cutting through ideological distortions has a lens that is also distorting and that the appeal of what we see is a further illusion.

Critical Theory aims to address this cluster of problems: to provide a vantage point that reveals existing social pathologies and provides a basis for collective resistance. In his essay, "A Social Pathology of Reason: On the Intellectual Legacy of Critical Theory" (2009), Axel Honneth sketches what he takes to be three central commitments of critical theory. They include "the normative motif of a rational universal, the idea of a social pathology

of reason, and the concept of an emancipatory interest” (2009, 42). Very roughly, humans have an “emancipatory interest” in the full exercise of their rational capacities; this can be achieved only through engaging together in a collective project of self-actualization (an ideal referred to as “the rational universal”). Social pathologies prevent us from achieving this good. Critical Theory draws on our emancipatory interest in the rational universal to reveal and disrupt the social pathologies. Honneth argues that these core ideas “require conceptual reformulation if they are still to fulfil the function that was once intended” (2009, 42) and undertakes to do so. I am in no position to evaluate Honneth’s interpretive claims about the commitments of the Frankfurt School. However, in order to explore the possibilities of ideology critique, it is useful to begin with Honneth’s reformulation of the tradition.

Because Critical Theory aims to motivate and guide social change, it cannot rely on a set of “external” imported values: “any ‘strong,’ context-transcending form of social criticism necessarily brings the risk of paternalism or even despotism” (2009, 44). Of course, the correlative problem is that if one can only rely on the locally entrenched value horizon, then it is unclear that one will have the resources to break through the grip of ideology (2017, 2). Consequently, the goal is to find resources for critique within the unjust social order whose warrant does not depend on their acceptance in that very order.

It was considered self-evident that a theory of society could engage in critique only insofar as it was able to rediscover an element of its own critical viewpoint within social reality; for this reason, these theorists continually called for a diagnosis of society that could bring to light a degree of immanent intramundane transcendence. (Honneth 1994, 256)

“Immanent intramundane transcendence”? What exactly does this involve? Honneth suggests that the challenge is to find “a pretheoretical sphere of emancipation to which critique can refer in order to confirm its normative standpoint within social reality” (Honneth 1994, 260). As I read him, the “pretheoretical sphere of emancipation” is our peephole. It enables us to locate – in our current social reality – the basis for a warranted critique of the existing social order. This normative ground is, in principle, accessible to all of us, but is hidden or distorted by our current practices. We find it, and we are motivated by it, because it speaks to an “emancipatory interest” that is, in principle, shared by all humans and gives us a (rational) motivation to promote social change. According to Honneth, members of the Frankfurt School fill in this schema by offering different specifications of Hegel’s idea that

a successful, undistorted life together is only possible if all [members of society] orient themselves according to principles or institutions that they can understand

as rational ends for self-actualization. Any deviation from the ideal outlined here must lead to a social pathology insofar as subjects are recognizably suffering from a loss of universal, communal ends. (Honneth 2009, 24)

This ideal is something humans respond to or, perhaps more plausibly, we respond to its lack. Given this characterization of the ideal, our emancipatory interest lies, at base, in our rationality:

In the end, this idea comes down to the strong and frankly anthropological thesis that human subjects cannot be indifferent about the restriction of their rational capacities. Because their self-actualization is tied to the presupposition of cooperative rational activity, they cannot avoid suffering psychologically under its deformation. (Honneth 2009, 39)

As a result, we are capable of judging a particular social formation as defective (or unjust) because “social pathologies must always express themselves in a type of suffering that keeps alive the interest in the emancipatory power of reason” (Honneth 2009, 36). Reason sets us free.

But why do we go so wrong? It seems that the social pathologies of our current social order exploit our non-rational capacities, for example, our desire for esteem (or, in the work of other critical theorists, our desire for meaningful work, or for commodities), so it can rely on our heteronomy to recruit us into relations of domination and subordination. (“The idea that human beings have a deep-seated interest in overcoming dependencies and heteronomy has always been a hallmark of the tradition of critical social theory deriving from Marx” [Honneth 2017, 908].) Reason, however, is resilient; it gives us the capacity to transcend our immediate circumstances and to overcome heteronomy (cf. Honneth 2014a, 4). We are fundamentally motivated to live a rational life – this is not only an exercise of our cognitive capacities, but includes the realization of our full moral agency – and, importantly, we *ought* to do so. This provides an immanent, historically situated, and warranted basis for critique: morally acceptable social conditions must allow the full exercise of our rational capacities, both individually and collectively (e.g. Honneth 2009, 50). On this broad approach, the challenge of ideology critique is to locate the socially imposed irrationality that we, as rational beings, are warranted in resisting.

Recall that under conditions of ideological oppression (in contrast to repression), agents are willingly engaged in the practices that oppress them and may even identify with the practices and find value in them. (The task of explaining the wrong of repression is important, but not the focus here.) Our social conditions are pathological because they prevent agents from being fully autonomous, that is, of fully realizing their capacities for a rational life.³

This happens because their agency is not transparent: ideology masks the fact that they are engaging in self-destructive practices whose promised rewards will never be realized. On Honneth's view, the specific social pathology that we currently face concerns the economy of esteem, that is, the distribution of recognition and its lack.⁴ We continually seek what we will never obtain. However, agents are wrong about what they do and why they are doing it, not by accident, or because we are self-deceived, but because the social conditions undermine us and block such understanding. This point is sometimes made by saying that ideology blocks reflexivity: our capacity to know what we are doing and why is systematically disrupted (Zurn 2015, ch. 4; 2011). However, our autonomy cannot simply be an individual achievement because we are social beings. Ideology is pernicious because it prevents us from living together democratically, and so rationally.

How do we judge a social formation to be ideological on this account? If agents are denied the opportunity "to conceive of him or herself as an equal and, at the same time, unique member of society ... then this must be taken as an indication of the pathological development of a society" (1994, 265). Social protests serve as evidence of recognition failures and reveal that "the normative core of such notions of justice is continuously constituted by expectations connected to respect for one's own dignity, honor, or integrity" (1994, 262). The experience of disrespect by itself is not a sufficient basis for social critique; we can conclude that a system is pathological when and only when we can establish that "there is a systematic connection between specific experiences of disrespect and the structural development of society" (1994, 265; cf. Zurn 2015, ch. 4).

So, at the individual level, in undertaking critique one is protesting a kind of heteronomy: I cannot endorse the reasons that are offered to me as a basis for action for they are incompatible with my dignity, honour, or integrity. At the social level, for me to make a claim against others for greater respect or recognition is to refuse to endorse the collective terms of association that I am assumed to be party to: my engagement in the community does not meet standards that are rational for me individually and for all of us collectively.

CRITICAL THEORY AS A POLITICAL PROJECT

Does Honneth's analysis give us an adequate model for achieving social justice under conditions of ideological oppression? A hallmark of critical theory is that it aims to be emancipatory (Geuss 1981). On Honneth's account, pathologies of reason shape us to live under conditions that prevent reflexivity. Some individuals, however, become aware of this through the experience of disrespect; they resist and demand recognition and esteem that the system

denies them. The critical theorist's task is to reveal to these agents ways in which they are *structurally* denied the recognition and esteem they desire.

However, we must also reveal to those still in the grip of ideology how society is failing them so that we can coordinate to create a fully rational life together. Of course, some members of society are likely to be recalcitrant – perhaps they can't understand the critical theorist's analysis, or they are so deeply in the grip of the ideology they can't believe the alternative, or they are secure where they are and are afraid of change. What then? Presumably, Honneth's emancipatory interest must be very, very compelling; the theorist somehow has to motivate all agents to act on it, for society, and the agents who compose it, cannot be fully rational unless and until we are all reflexively coordinating our desires, habits, and expectations. Let's call this the *enlightenment model* of social change.

Here is another. Let's call it the *contestation model*. On the contestation model, it is a basic fact of life that agents have conflicting interests and there are insufficient resources to satisfy everyone's interests simultaneously. Ideology manages this problem by shaping people's interests and distorting their understanding so that they coordinate on terms that are less than fair, just, ethical, reasonable (include your favourite normative term here) because they see no other alternative, or think it is the best they can get, that is, they are "disciplined" to coordinate. As on Honneth's model, there comes a moment when this becomes intolerable and individual resistance is collectivized and becomes a movement. The movement's members are not in the grip of the ideology; they don't need to be convinced of anything by theorists (in fact, they usually understand the situation better than theorists). The goal is to gain sufficient power to force renegotiation of the terms of association so they are more fair, just, and so on. The values at issue evolve over time, across cultures, in response to material conditions, so the demands and the normative basis for critique will reflect this. Renegotiation is a political process, and there will be winners and losers. There is no utopian solution.

I believe that the contestation model is more realistic, is more in keeping with the methodological commitments of critical theory, and is more apt for addressing the broad range of ideological oppression.

More realistic: Is it really plausible that there is a universal "emancipatory interest"? Honneth characterizes this as "a self-standing epistemic interest in emancipation rooted in invariant features of a specific human practice" (2017, 909; also 1996, 39) that is needed as "an epistemological foundation for critical theory itself" (2017, 909). He ultimately discovers this in a "conceptual explanation of the essential properties of social norms" (2017, 914). But the search for an invariant feature of social life that provides a universal foundation for critique is, to my mind, neither necessary nor desirable. Different

ideologies or pathologies may structure society in ways that demand quite different forms of critique, justified in different ways. And, arguably, the desire to unify all critique, however formally, by rooting it in a shared universal interest echoes the grand narratives that Honneth sought to rework (2009).

Moreover, the history of social movements supports the idea that (a) not all social justice movements are identity-based (e.g. Mansbridge et al. 2001, 34–48); (b) that contestation rather than rational argumentation is what generates pressure against the powerful to renegotiate (Tilly and Tarrow 2015); and (c) that attempts to shape citizens so that they live together harmoniously, that is, ignoring their conflicting interests, is a threat to justice and is anti-democratic. On this last point, Danielle Allen (2001) argues that a democracy that fails to acknowledge that it is an imperfect way of managing conflicting interests causes the less powerful groups to become socially invisible. We are so concerned to affirm that democracy establishes the “common good” that we demonize who resist the results as not “really” one of us. Democracy inevitably requires sacrifices on the part of those whose interests are not fulfilled in the collective bargain, and these sacrifices are constitutive of a genuinely democratic community:

Those who ask for sacrifices without acknowledging the nature of their requests generate invisibility. Not only are particular sacrifices and sacrificers rendered invisible but so too is the basic logic of democratic decision-making: If democratic decisions are to rest on full consent, then those citizens who lose political arguments, whose interests are defeated in the public forum, must consent to their losses; democratic consent and legitimacy, in other words, depend on sacrifice. To ignore sacrifice, to avoid talking about it directly, is to turn away from a fundamental feature of democracy. (Allen 2001, 872–73)

Methodologically more sound: Where does the critical theorist stand to diagnose the social pathologies that block emancipation? Recall that the critic faces a sceptical moment; the task is to find a basis for critique that is neither external to the social order nor merely an expression of its internal values. Honneth finds it in the normative structure of human agency. This move to a “formal” basis for critique is common in the Critical Theory tradition. The suggestion is that substantive first-order critique must be either external or internal critique and so flawed; the only alternative is second-order critique grounded in the norms of rationality. But this is wrong. Critique need not be merely formal and it need not be morally neutral.

Note that Marx describes the project of critical theory as “the self-clarification ... of the struggles and wishes of the age” (1844). Note that in this passage Marx characterizes the theoretical task as a *self-clarification*: the theorist’s struggles and wishes are the struggles and wishes of the movement.

In my experience, the struggles are substantive, first order. In the same text, Marx makes this explicit:

Nothing prevents us, therefore, from lining our criticism with a criticism of politics, from taking sides in politics, i.e., from entering into real struggles and identifying ourselves with them. (Marx 1844)

Of course, this does not mean that the theorist is dogmatically committed to whatever others in the movement enjoin. But the critical theorist is a participant in the movement and is helping to articulate, motivate, and explain its demands. These demands are her demands. She is not (or need not be) neutral on the first-order struggles (cf. Celikates 2018; Jaeggi 2018). On the contestation model, the theorist's efforts are derivative from the values and demands of the movement as a whole. Moreover, the critical theorist, *qua theorist*, is not positioned as having privileged access to the defects of the social order; her task is parasitic on the insights of the social critic (who may be herself).

But, you might ask, on what basis does the theorist (or the movement) claim that *these* are the right values, when they too might be ideologically biased? The point of anti-utopian theorizing is made clear in the contestation model: the goal of a movement is not, in the first instance, to realize an encompassing vision of the fully rational life, but instead to articulate claims against the existing social order and to mobilize power behind them, so that these can be taken up for renegotiation. It is *negative*. We focus on what is not working, what we see to be damaging, and go from there. We generate proposals, but there is no utopia in mind, no promises. We only know that this is intolerable. This is more in keeping with the anti-utopian and open-ended commitments of critical theory.

Alert to many varieties of social injustice produced ideologically: Honneth suggests that social protest is grounded in identity violations. For example, he claims that humans perceive something as “morally unjust in everyday social life ... whenever, contrary to their expectations, they are denied the recognition they feel they deserve” (1994, 263). Of course it is true that people often perceive something as morally wrong or unjust if they are targets of disrespect. But this isn't the only occasion for protest or moral outrage. I am outraged by the treatment of non-human animals. It would be insulting to suggest that this moral outrage should be understood as my feeling of a lack of social recognition for my animal welfarist values. My outrage isn't about me. I am outraged by the treatment of African Americans, disabled people, violations of LGBTQ rights; I am outraged by attempts to curtail voting rights, corporate power over the government, and a million other things. I am also outraged by the *excess* of esteem I receive due to the ideologies of white supremacy, ableism, meritocracy, and capitalism. The wrong of ideological

oppression isn't all about recognition, or even about being subordinated; it is also about being positioned as dominant. My outrage is that we are hailed into social practices that undermine efforts to live together on morally acceptable terms and to fully appreciate the plurality of values.

IDEOLOGY AND SUBJECTION⁵

I've outlined several concerns about Honneth's model of social critique and social change. But is there a plausible account of social agency and social critique underlying the contestation model? My starting point for understanding ideology is Althusser. In his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971 [2014]), Althusser distinguishes *repressive state apparatuses* (RSAs) and *ideological state apparatuses* (ISAs). RSAs include the "government, administration, army, courts, prisons" that "function by violence" or, "massively and predominantly by repression." ISAs, including religion, education, the family, the legal system, the political system, trade unions, communications/media, and culture ("literature, the arts, sports, etc.") "function massively and predominantly by ideology." (RSAs and ISAs depend crucially on each other, though in modern society, the ISAs are the dominant mode of social management.)

On Althusser's view, the role of ISAs and RSAs, together, is to reproduce the productive forces within specific relations of production. Althusser highlights the educational system (or the "school-family") as the primary contemporary ISA. Learning technical "know-how" at school is not enough:

Children at school also learn the "rules" of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is "destined" for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. They also learn to "speak proper French," to "handle" the workers correctly, i.e. actually (for the future capitalists and their servants) to "order them about" properly, i.e. (ideally) to "speak to them" in the right way, etc. (235–36)

A crucial difference between an ISA and an RSA is that individuals are hailed into a subject position by an ISA, rather than violently forced into it; and it is characteristic of those "good subjects" who respond to the hailing that they take up the norms as binding on themselves. As a result, they don't need to be coercively managed, they work "all by themselves" (269)!

This interpretation of modern power is developed in Foucault: "The perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary" (Foucault

1979, 201). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault meticulously chronicles the ways in which modern power is exercised by discipline: the crafting of subjects who monitor and manage themselves, their bodies, to conform to the demands of social position. For example, as Sandra Bartky points out, women's bodies are constrained by norms specifying shape, size, motility, and appearance; "A woman's skin must be soft, supple, hairless, and smooth; ideally, it should betray no sign of wear, experience, age, or deep thought" (Bartky 69). This is not usually achieved directly by coercion. We do it to ourselves, voluntarily. "The absence of a formal institutional structure and of authorities invested with the power to carry out institutional directives creates the impression that the production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural" (Bartky 75).

Leaving aside many complexities of interpretation and details of Althusser, Foucault, and Bartky, two ideas from this tradition are relevant to a discussion of critique. First, self-knowledge and self-mastery are not politically innocent. What I know about myself is not necessarily an adequate starting point for critique or liberation. First-person experience, or even the shared experiences of a group, may only be evidence of the effects of ideology. Second, ideology is not simply a matter of beliefs, but acts on and trains our bodies, our perception, our desires, our emotions, through our engagement in practices (Haslanger forthcoming). To consistently conform to social norms, it is much easier to identify with them, than to fake it and only go through the motions.

My conception of ideology is Althusserian in the following sense (Haslanger 2017). We participate in social practices guided by a set of public meanings, scripts, norms, assumptions, and so on – a complex *cultural technē*. Practices organize us around things taken to have +/– value; let's call these (assumed or constructed) *resources*, or, alternatively, *sources* of value and disvalue. Some sources are material (such as medicine, traffic, toxic waste), and others not (such as time, knowledge, boredom). We are "hailed" into practices in a variety of ways, for example, we are hailed into speaking English by having English spoken to us; we are hailed into the role of student by being sent to school and finding ourselves responding to the teacher as an authority (nudged by threat of punishment); we are hailed into adulthood by having to pay the rent (with threat of legal coercion in the background). We then develop ways of being and thinking so that we are (more or less) fluent English speakers, fluent students, fluent rent-paying adults. Ideology is not a set of beliefs, though it may produce belief. As Althusser says, "Ideology always exists in an apparatus and its practice or practices. Its existence is material" (1971 [2014], 259).

Our social practices and the corresponding cultural *technēs* are a mixed bag. Discipline, the hailing of social subjects, is inevitable in society. Some

forms of discipline are empowering and valuable; some are efficient and practical; but others function to sustain an unjust (capitalist, racist, sexist, etc.) system. I use the term “ideology” in the pejorative sense. An ideology is a cultural technē “gone wrong” in at least two ways: it guides practices and structures that organize us in unjust or harmful ways, or it prevents us from aptly recognizing different kinds of value, and what’s of value and what’s not.

Ideology is pernicious. We – both the dominant and the subordinate – are enlisted in unjust practices; at least many of us internalize the norms and perspective on the world they demand. Again we must ask: if we are constituted as embodied social subjects through ideological practices, then where do we stand to critique them? We cannot trust our experience of meaning to be a reliable guide to justice (Scott 1991). What source of knowledge is resilient even under conditions of ideological discipline?

SOCIAL AGENCY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Practices afford spaces for deliberation; they have choice points. But the choice points occur against a backdrop of routine, habit, and skill. This is inevitable, and I would say, desirable. To live a life in which every action is reflectively considered and chosen would be hell. Full reflexivity is not really an option. But heteronomy is not as bad as it is made out to be. Our affective system has evolved “for efficient and effective collection and utilization of information to generate an expectation-based evaluative landscape that implicitly guides thought and action as the individual navigates its way through its physical and social environment” (Railton 2014, 836).

On an Althusserian view, the problem with ideology is not that we are disciplined to become social agents who act mindlessly, without reflexivity, or to only see reason to do what we are supposed to do. The problem is that the practices we are hailed into are damaging – to our sensibilities, to our bodies, to our relationships, to distant others, to the planet. It is, of course, a further problem that we are prevented from seeing this and so, not only do nothing to stop it, but actively, even enthusiastically, continue. But the epistemic problem is a secondary problem; it arises because we want change, and to bring about change we have to recognize what is wrong. Ideology makes this difficult.

Note, however, that I speak of ideological social practices being “damaging.” What normative basis for critique am I presupposing? Instead of seeking a universal and unquestionable basis, we should resist the demand for a unified ground. Such a demand assumes a foundationalist model of justification. I reject foundationalist assumptions according to which all knowledge must be grounded in experience or a “pre-theoretical” anchor (see also Quine

1953 [1980]; Antony 2018; Haslanger 2019). Both epistemic and moral foundationalism are unsupportable. This is not to deny that justification is required. But forms of justification may be diverse, holistic, context-sensitive, and path-dependent.

Ideology is not thoroughly hegemonic; subjection is, in the first instance, role and practice specific. Our lives involve participation in multiple practices that are open-ended and often in tension with each other; as a result, cultural technē̄s are not internally consistent. Moreover, discipline is not all-controlling; there is always an excess that surpasses the presumed “closure” of the dominant ideology.⁶ Some part of the excess may be material, bodily, “pre-theoretical.” But even if the body “speaks,” understanding it requires interpretation. And finally, the workings of micro-power are unstable and contested.

A standpoint begins, as Honneth suggests, in pain, struggle, alienation, and disaffection. Suffering is a sign that something is going wrong, but it is not necessarily a sign of a pathology of *reason* or a failure of *self-actualization*. The initial impulse to resist may arise from being embedded in multiple – perhaps conflicting – practices, from adjusting to new practices, or from facing circumstances or conditions that render the existing practice questionable (perhaps through the development of new technologies or climate change). Moral and cognitive estrangement is valuable here, for estrangement allows one to gain critical perspective (Kapusta forthcoming). However, a standpoint is not achieved simply by having a recalcitrant experience or “outlaw” emotion. A standpoint is a position occupied by a group, not an individual. The process of consciousness raising alters our perspective on the world in a way that what before seemed certain is called into question. The ground shifts. What we took for granted before is now in question. Oppositional consciousness and the norms it invokes are not justified by reference to a secure and universal foundation. A critical standpoint is achieved through collective reflection on and evaluation of the testimony and insights of others in spaces open to heterodox ideas and feelings, together with empirical investigation and experimentation with new tools. A paradigm shift does not mean that anything goes. Consistency and empirical adequacy remain epistemic constraints. Political uptake is necessary. And the results must be tested by living them.⁷

An adequate standpoint will illuminate injustice in the current social order. The justification of critique goes along with the epistemic credentials of the standpoint from which it arises; however, the project is holistic rather than foundational, and not merely doxastic. So the standpoint of a regressive social movement can be tested and shown to be inadequate, for example, if it fails to satisfy constitutive epistemic norms – including empirical adequacy; if it is closed to reflective review and critique; if it silences or undermines the

credibility of stakeholders; and if its social meanings and other cultural tools fail to provide a basis for meaningful coordination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Ásta, Louise Antony, Susan Brison, Robin Celikates, Stefan Gosepath, Hilkje Hänel, Daniel James, Tamara Jugov, Kristina Lepold, Mirjam Müller, Katja Stoppenbrink, Jeffrey Stout, Robin Zheng, and other participants at the workshop on Structural Injustice and Ideology at the Freie Universität, Berlin, 14 June 2019 for helpful discussion and comments. Special thanks to Kristina Lepold who has convinced me that engaging more fully with the Critical Theory tradition is deeply worthwhile and has been invaluable in helping me understand it.

NOTES

1. Some parts of §1 and §4 draw on Haslanger (2019).
2. I use the term ‘critical theory’ in lower case to refer to the project of social critique broadly (including ideology critique), and the term ‘Critical Theory’ in upper case to refer to Frankfurt School Critical Theory.
3. My primary training is in the Anglophone tradition, so the terminology I use may be somewhat distorting of Honneth’s view. In particular, Honneth doesn’t use the term ‘autonomy’ or the idea that acting autonomously involves acting from reasons that one can reflectively endorse; nor does he usually use the language of ideology or ideological oppression.
4. There are multiple forms of recognition that include objective (and material) conditions, including: “...emotional concern in an intimate social relationship such as love or friendship, rights-based recognition as a morally accountable member of society, and, finally, the social esteem of individual achievements and abilities” (Honneth 1994, 266).
5. The terms “subject,” “subjectivity,” “subjection,” and “subjectivation” (or “subjectivization”) are used in multiple ways in the literature on Althusser and Foucault. Two sets of issues are relevant (1) how ISAs/power/knowledge construct subjects and how they construct subjectivity (understood psychologically), and (2) how and to what extent the construction is subjugating, endured passively (as opposed to taken up actively), and politically suspect. I will use the term “subjection” for the construction of subjects (and only derivatively subjectivity), will assume (as should be clear) that one is active in becoming a subject, and that subjection happens in both subordinate and dominant positions. See also Lepold (2018).
6. This is a significant theme in Derrida’s work; see, for example, Balkin (1990).
7. Elizabeth Anderson has developed a pragmatist moral epistemology that relies on evidence from experiments in living. See, for example, Anderson (2014).

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