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Axel Honneth. *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*. Oxford University Press 2012. 184 pp. $31.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780195320466); $20.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780199898053)

This book is a revised version of Axel Honneth's Tanner Lectures delivered in March of 2005. The volume includes an introduction by Martin Jay and comments from Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss, and Jonathan Lear, as well as Honneth's response to their comments.

Honneth's primary concern in these lectures is to 'reactualize' Lukács' concept of reification (27, 148). Honneth believes that the concept can be reformulated in such a way that 'takes as much into account as possible of Lukács original intentions' while avoiding the errors of the original formulation (52). According to Honneth's interpretation of Lukács, reification is neither an epistemic mistake, nor a moral failing, but rather 'a form of praxis that is structurally false' (26). Reification is described as a 'detached, neutrally observing mode of behavior' that 'must form an ensemble of habits and attitudes that deviates from a more genuine or better form of human praxis' (26). This 'more genuine' praxis is 'characterized by empathetic and existential engagement' (29), and is prior to our neutral cognition of the world. Honneth refers to this antecedent moment as *recognition*, and reification, he argues, involves forgetting this antecedent recognition. But first, Honneth explores the theoretical history of the idea of the priority empathetic and existential engagement.

According to Honneth, Lukács and Heidegger share a criticism of the prevalence of subject-object dualism and the resulting 'conception of an epistemic subject who neutrally encounters the world' (30). Against such a conception, Heidegger offers 'care' as the structure of the primordial relation to the world, and this is similar to what, for Honneth, Lukács has in mind as the engaged praxis that is lost or concealed in reified social relations. This notion of existential engagement is not reducible to 'the assertion that the perspective of the participant enjoys a permanent and necessary priority over that of the mere observer' (34). Honneth claims that '"care" and "empathetic engagement" ...add an element of affective disposition' that 'is always already connected with an element of positive affirmation and emotional inclination' (35).

The priority of this positive, affective engagement with the world, over the 'neutral cognition of reality' is also found, according to Honneth, in the work of John Dewey (36). Like Heidegger and Lukács, Dewey is critical of the subject-object schema or the 'spectator model of knowledge' (37). Like Heidegger and Lukács, Dewey believes that 'a holistic form of experience, in which all elements of a given situation are qualitatively disclosed from a perspective of engaged involvement,' is prior to 'every rational understanding of the world' (36), and that the latter remains always bound to the former. Honneth believes the ideas of these three philosophers can be united in the claim that *recognition is prior to cognition*, 'that the stance of empathetic engagement in the world, arising from the experience of the world's significance and value, is prior to our acts of detached cognition' (38).

Next, Honneth appeals to developmental psychology in order to show that the 'ability to take over the perspective of the other person is itself rooted in a kind of antecedent interaction that bears the characteristic features of existential care' (41). These characteristic features are the affirmative and affective character of our engagement that is prior to our neutral observation of the world. These features have a *temporal* priority in the development of cognition, according to Honneth. While cognition has often been 'conceived as a process that occurs in the act of taking over another person's perspective' (41), he believes 'cognitivist' developmental theories fail to notice 'the emotional side

of the relationship between children and their figures of attachment' (42). The significance of this absence can be seen in recent work demonstrating 'a small child must first have emotionally identified with an attachment figure before he can accept this person's stance toward the world as a corrective authority' (42). Thus emotional identification is prior to the act of taking the other's perspective, which in turn is necessary for cognition. Honneth believes the findings of developmental psychology offer a 'first indication of the plausibility' of the priority of recognition to cognition, because 'it is through this emotional attachment to a concrete other that a world of meaningful objects is disclosed to a child as a world in which he must involve himself practically' (45). Further support is found in Stanley Cavell's notion of 'acknowledgment,' where 'acknowledgment of the other constitutes a non-epistemic prerequisite for linguistic understanding' (50), just as in developmental accounts the emotional attachment precedes taking the other's point of view.

Having argued for the priority of recognition to cognition, Honneth believes reification should be understood as 'the process by which we lose consciousness of the degree to which we owe our knowledge and cognition of other persons to an antecedent stance of empathetic engagement and recognition' (56). Reification is not reducible to a position of 'detached observation' but rather involves a form of 'reduced attentiveness' where antecedent recognition has 'slipped out of sight' (59). This might occur in practice when 'a goal becomes independent of the context in which it originated,' or, when 'a series of thought schemata…influence our practices by leading to a selective interpretation of social facts' (59).

The above remarks apply to reification as an intersubjective phenomenon; reification as a form of relationship to the world itself is, in Honneth's view, derivative of the intersubjective form. Subjective reification, however, must be understood in terms of a self-relationship rather than a relation to others. In order 'to enter into expressive contact,' a subject must regard his or her own 'feelings and desires as worthy of articulation' (71). As an affirmative relationship to the self, the 'activity of self-care is identical with…recognition' (72). And like intersubjective reification, 'the reification of one's own person merely signifies the result of our having lost sight of antecedent recognition' (74). Such reification can be seen in 'constructivist' and 'detectivist' models of self-relationship (67-74). The deficiency of both forms of relationship (which accurately describe a reified relationship), is that the subject's mental states are understood as fixed objects; while the former finds mental objects ready-made, awaiting discovery, the latter produces them as things.

Honneth concludes his lectures with a discussion of the social sources of reification, about which he disagrees with much found in Lukács account. Unlike Lukács, Honneth makes a sharp distinction between reification and depersonalization. For in depersonalized relations one is still recognized as a person, with general characteristics and, when protected by legal institutions, Honneth believes this prevents the forgetting of antecedent recognition involved in reification (80). According to Honneth, 'whenever practices of pure observation, assessment, and calculation toward the lifeworld escape the established framework of legal relations and become independent, the kind of ignorance of antecedent recognition arises that we have described as the core of all intersubjective reification' (80). This corresponds to the idea that reification can be seen in practice when a goal becomes independent of the motive for which a practice was originally adopted. As for the sort of intersubjective reification exemplified in the influence of thought schemata on our interpretation of social facts, Honneth is skeptical that a 'mere thought construct' is able by itself 'to unsettle' the antecedent recognition that precedes all thought as such (81). For this reason, he believes 'it makes

sense to assume that a correlative interplay of one-dimensional praxis and a set of ideological convictions must be at work' (81). Honneth later adds that this sort of one-dimensional praxis must 'become routine and habitual…for only this kind of habitualization has the power later to disable the antecedent stance of recognition' (157). And as for the social sources of self-reification, Honneth believes they can be found 'in social practices that are connected with the self-presentation of subjects in the broadest sense' (82).

Honneth's lectures were revised prior to publication to account for some of the criticisms from Butler, Geuss, and Lear (though Lear's comments include a postscript added after the revisions). While Honneth's revisions detract somewhat from the force of some of Judith Butler's extensive remarks, the central question raised by her and the other respondents, and addressed in Honneth's rejoinder, remains in effect. This question concerns the normative status of antecedent recognition. In what sense does the antecedent recognition forgotten in reification represent a positive ideal? Honneth clarifies that it is not 'intended to contain any norms of positive concern, nor positive benevolent feelings' (151). Antecedent recognition is *positive* only in contrast to the neutral stance of cognition. Honneth acknowledges that 'love and hate, ambivalence and coldness, can all be expressions of this elementary recognition, as long as they can be seen as modes of existential engagement' (152). But can hate, coldness, and as Judith Butler asks, even violence (104), be understood as modes of existential engagement? And if so, what does reification, as forgetting of existential engagement, ultimately explain? Honneth seems to think reification explains something about violence when he writes that when antecedent recognition is lost, others are 'treated as lifeless, thing-like objects that deserve to be murdered and abused' (156). But according to Jonathan Lear, 'the problem is not that we are not treating persons as persons, but rather that we are treating them badly as persons' (143). The basic point of these critical remarks, and many others, seems to be that if such treatment of others can coincide with *not* forgetting antecedent recognition, the significance of Honneth's concept of reification for social critique seems limited.

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