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***Recognition and Life.
A Study on Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition and John
Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism***

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Chapter One. Preliminary Remarks on the Contemporary Debate on Recognition: An Introduction to Work Organization

I.1. The Ascending and Descending Parabola of Recognition

From the second half of the 20th century, the category of recognition has been coming across a history of theoretical rediscovery and increasing problematization within critical social theory. Recognition, besides its explanatory and descriptive significance for issues concerning practical philosophy and social ontology, has become unquestionably one of the key categories of critical theory and social philosophy, due to its theoretical potentiality in interpreting social movements and critically approaching contemporary social contexts. Indeed, through the category of recognition it has been feasible for contemporary critical theorists to emphasize the social conditions of human freedom and self-realization, thus acquiring a critical perspective on those social contexts that systematically impede social members to freely and fully develop their personal identities. In this process of recovery of recognition as a critical category of the social world, Axel Honneth, since the publication of *The Struggle for Recognition* (1992), has been representing the reference theorist. Indeed, his theory of recognition, with its conceptual framework, still stands for the more systematic attempt to outline a paradigm of recognition for a critical theory of the social world. However, it is a fact that the category of recognition, after its renaissance period and its systematic actualization through Honneth's theory, has been questioned severely in its effective critical capacity both by contemporary social phenomena and social philosophers.

Given this state of the art position within the contemporary debate, the main challenge to maintain the idea of a critical theory of recognition is to deal with the criticisms so far moved to the contemporary paradigm of recognition, as highly represented by Axel Honneth's account. A strategy for attempting to address these criticisms is to identify within Honneth's conceptual framework the theoretical shortcoming that structurally debilitate the efficacy of a critical category of recognition, then find an alternative theoretical approach that can be of help to overcome it.

In the present chapter, we will thus briefly reconstruct the recent recovery of the category of recognition until the turning point of Axel Honneth's critical theory. Secondly, we

will refer to the two fundamental criticisms that have been raised against the Honnethian paradigm, to expose then the structural shortcoming within Honneth's framework that we think is responsible for its critical weakness. Once the core problem of the Honnethian paradigm of recognition has been stated, we will propose the path of inquiry that we aim to undertake in the following chapters, by presenting John Dewey's philosophical perspective as a useful point of departure for addressing the criticisms that a critical theory of recognition is compelled to face. We will thus propose to go with Honneth, then beyond Honneth, through John Dewey.

I. 1. 1. The Contemporary Emergence of the Paradigm of Recognition and its Theoretical Aim

The start of the ascending parabola of the recognition category in contemporary philosophy coincided with the renovated philosophical interest for Hegel's philosophy. Mainly thanks to the recovery and the connection of the juvenile writings of the German philosopher with his mature philosophical thought, from the second half of the 20th century, contemporary philosophers have found in Hegel's philosophy a theoretical need that resembled their philosophical urgencies. That is, the need for the recovery of practical philosophy, for a renovated philosophical reflection about the practical subject and its link to the social world. As Hegel attempted to overcome the modern depiction of the human subject, portrayed by Machiavelli and Hobbes in its sole instrumental rationality, naturally competitive attitude and abstract juridical form of social relationship, so, within contemporary philosophy, emerged an opposition against the dominant positivistic and liberal paradigm of the human being. Under the technological impetus of late-capitalistic societies and the shifted focus within the philosophical debate on issues related to juridical rights after the Second World War,¹ the human subject was unilaterally portrayed in its mere instrumental cognition, capacity for utilitarian calculus, and as a bearer of individual rights.² The philosophical retrieval of Hegel's philosophy by Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas, and the reconstruction of his juvenile writings – as *System der Sittlichkeit, Jenaer Realphilosophie (1803-1804)*, *Jenaer*

¹ For a historical reconstruction of the preeminent interests of contemporary social, moral, and political philosophy after the Second World War, see Honneth, 2007a and Jaeggi, 2014 (Introduction). They both underline the theoretical abandonment of issues related to the pathologies of social life, namely, of the critical analysis concerning the quality of social relations that allows the human subject to reach a *good* life within social contexts.

² See Vito Santoro, 2007, Ludwig Siep, 2007, Axel Honneth, 1995, Ch. 1 and 2, for an analysis of Hegel's theoretical relation to the Doctrine of natural law and the significance for a contemporary retrieval of Hegel's practical philosophy. For an overview of the *Positivismusstreit* of the 1960s, see Adorno, ed., 1976; Honneth, 1991, Ch. 7.

Realphilosophie (1805-1806) – by Ludwig Siep, Andreas Wildt and Axel Honneth,³ to name a few, was motivated by an interest for the key category through which Hegel sought to broaden the philosophical conception of practical subjectivity and its social intercourses, that one of *Anerkennung*. Indeed, any account of human practical subjectivity directly or indirectly entails a conception of social relations, and thus an ontology of the social world. As the modern theory of natural law and the Hobbesian paradigm of the social contract paradigmatically show,⁴ to conceive human rationality solely in instrumental terms, namely, as seeking to satisfy its egoistic interests, implicitly or explicitly implies an atomistic understanding of human subjectivity, which relates to other subjects as a self-sufficient individuality that pursues its objectives and needs within the social arena. Since such theories depict human rationality as the instrumental and utilitarian cognitive capacity to attain individualistic needs, social relations end up being conceived as secondary elements to human individuality, and as naturally tending to forms of social oppositions between subjects, who compete with each other to affirm different objectives and acquire dominant social statuses. Within this theoretical framework, a specific ontology of the social world follows: social institutions, and especially the State, appear as exterior instruments to reach a social order or a social balance among social members, both restricting and assuring their agentive power through rights, so to make the reproduction of human societies feasible.

In opposition to such theories, through an expansion of Fichte's intuition in *Foundation of Natural Right*, Hegel represents recognition as a grounding principle through which he outlines a new philosophical project. Indeed, to rehabilitate through the concept of "recognition" the relevance of practical philosophy, whose purpose since Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* has been to inquire on *human praxis*, i.e., practical subjectivity in its volitional and motivational dimension, means to shed light on the social conditions that, first from a descriptive point of view, allow the human being's practical rationality and form of life to develop. Hegel's employment of the concept of recognition is meant to add a new perspective to understand the human being-in-the-world, the dimensions of social relationships, the ontology of the social world, and the theory of its historical reproduction. The main idea that Hegel seeks to outline through the category of recognition is that human subjectivity, in order to develop specific structures of rationality, such as self-consciousness, intentionality and a

³ See Siep, 1979; Wildt, 1982; Honneth, 1995.

⁴ See Petrucciari, 2003, Ch. 4.

normative space of reason, as well as to pursue its objectives and stand as a social member within the social world, needs specific social preconditions, namely, to be in social relations of reciprocal mediation with other social subjects, which becomes progressively more refined and normatively significant. Indeed, in the section “Self-consciousness” of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,⁵ Hegel intuits that the emergence of self-consciousness, i.e., the capacity of the individual to self-refer and concretely act as an autonomous rationality with intentional and reflexive contents, cannot be explained as a mere *datum*. Instead, the capacities of the human form of life are due to the social mediation with other rational subjects, who, through a process of differentiation and projection in others, reciprocally acknowledge as autonomous rational beings. The concept of recognition thus refers to those intersubjective exchanges wherein the human subject “knows himself in the other” (*Das Andere sich ebenso in seinem Anderem weiss*),⁶ acquiring a sense of itself as a practical rational subject, i.e., a person, through the confirmation of other subjects.

Having emphasized the functional role that recognition plays, first, in the emergence of the structures of practical rationality, Hegel focuses on the significant consequences that the intersubjective structure of human subjects has for the institution of the human form of sociality.⁷ Indeed, human social life’s distinctive trait lies in the reflexive and normative character assumed by animals’ natural sociality.⁸ According to Hegel, the pre-reflexive mutual dependence which already subsists among animal organisms for developing a “feeling” of individuality and reproducing the species’ continuity through sexual relations, acquires for human beings a reflexive and normative character, abandoning its natural instability and intermitting form. The reflexive trait acquired by the intersubjective mediation between rational subjects entails the constitution of social relations, which, since they are grounded on the reciprocal attribution of personhood-status, rationally justified, obtain normative contents and publicly stabilized forms. Indeed, the mutual acknowledgment of personhood-status implies the institution among subjects of social practices regulated by reciprocal duties and expectations,

⁵ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, [1807] 1977.

⁶ Hegel, *Jeaner Realphilosophie 1805-1806*, 1969, p. 201.

⁷ For an overview on the significance that recognition has, according to Hegel, for the development of the capacities of the human form of life, see Laitinen, Ikäheimo & Särkelä, 2015; Ikäheimo, 2009, 2013, 2018; Testa, 2008, 2009, 2012.

⁸ See Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, [1830] 2010, *The Animal Organism*, § 350-376.

which allow various levels of coordinated and cooperative agency to develop until a shared horizon of values, customs, and institutions becomes stable.⁹

The contemporary rediscovery of the Hegelian concept of recognition is thus motivated by its theoretical potential in opening up a new horizon on human subjectivity and social intercourses, unveiling the intersubjective premises for the human capacity to self-conceive and act as a practical subject within the social world. From now on, human practical rationality is conceived in its social constitution and performativity, as dependent upon social mechanisms of mutual decentralization among subjects. Moreover, it is grasped in its communicative capacity and finality: practical rationality is not reduced to the capacity to instrumentally control external conditions in order to ensure individual material needs and attain some social status in competition with other subjects. Instead, it is as well the capacity to institute forms of mediation and communication with others, to engage in forms of coordinated and cooperative activity. Such a process of recognitive mediation, to which contemporary commenters refer in terms of “individualization through socialization,”¹⁰ in its descriptive significance, seeks to grasp the intersubjective mechanisms that sustain both the development of practical subjectivity, this latter’s integration within social relations, the institution of social practices and institutions, and the symbolic reproduction of human societies as well. Indeed, within such a theoretical framework, the ontology of the social world, in its emergence and reproduction, acquires a sharp distinctive quality, in opposition to the one that is developed by a unilateral atomistic and instrumental account of rational subjectivity. The institution of social relations, practices socially performed, and social institutions that regulate subjects’ social intercourses is no more deemed as a process *exterior* to the natural relationships among subjects, as the result of a second-order rational calculus, whose equilibrium is intrinsically fragile and reproduced under the threat of legal authority and physical force. Instead, intersubjectivity, as the genetic and performative precondition of personhood, represents the natural attitude for which the human being can spontaneously institute forms of coordinated social agency, that are subsequently stabilized into collective social practices and public social institutions. It follows also that the stability and the reproduction of the social world occur not only from a material point of view but from a symbolic one as well. In fact, the symbolic reproduction of instituted social worlds

⁹ See in Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia* and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* ([1821] 1991), the sections dedicated to the “Objective Spirit” (*Objektiver Geist*), which analyze the passage from subjective spirit to the constitution of an objective and institutional social space.

¹⁰ See, for example, Honneth, 1995; Petherbridge, 2013; Testa & Ruggiu, 2016.

– in their framework of collective values, ends, practices and institutions – occurs through those communicative and normative ties that the recognitive attitude of human beings make feasible. The significant multi-level implications of the category of recognition well warrant the pivotal importance it acquires for various scientific branches, to such a degree that the contemporary philosophical debate, with the expression “recognitive turn,” refers to the widespread introduction and analysis of the mechanisms of intersubjectivity and recognition in neuroscience, cognitive science, social ontology, and psychology.¹¹

But besides the descriptive significance of recognition in Hegel’s philosophy, as accounting for types of social agency overlooked by mainstream social and political theories, its normative and critical dimension has been the main object of interest for critical social theory and contemporary social philosophy. With a particular focus on Hegel’s Jena writings, contemporary commenters have brought to the fore the relevance that recognition has for human beings for the attainment of their individual well-being, and thus for the realization of their freedom *within* and *through* the social context. In this respect, recognition seems to imply different levels of normativity as related to its descriptive or ethical significance. The descriptive dimension of recognition implies a weak sense of normativity because it does not refer to intersubjective relations among subjects with a strong moral sense. Rather, it accounts for those relations of mutual confirmation among subjects as intentional rational subjects, that are necessary for partaking in a common space of reason and shared social actions, normatively regulated through a series of reciprocal expectations and duties. On the contrary, to emphasize the strong normative dimension of recognition means to refer to the moral significance that the relations of confirmation between human beings acquire once they are identified as the conditions for the full-fledged and free realization of subjectivity, and for the transformation of human societies into living ethical contexts.¹² Contemporary philosophers, such as Ludwig

¹¹ See, for example, Gallese’s, Rizzolatti’s, and Sinigaglia’s notorious researches on mirror neurons and embodied simulation. The discovery of systems of neurons in the premotor cortex, which are devoted to simulating others’ observed actions, has demonstrated the existence in apes and human beings of neural mechanisms apt for “taking the perspective of the other.” These intersubjective neural mechanisms have thus been interpreted as the basis, respectively, for the processes of “understanding others” (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2006) and empathy (Gallese, 2001). The recognitive turn has stimulated extensive analyses in cognitive science and social ontology as well, in regards to the recognitive premises for the capacity of understanding others’ intentions or sharing collective intentions and actions (Tomasello, ed., 2005; Gallese & Metzinger, 2003). In psychoanalysis, Donald Winnicott (Winnicott, 1965, 1971) and Jessica Benjamin (Benjamin, 1988) have criticized the main-stream Freudian approach to psychoanalysis, since it overlooks the recognitive role that parents have for the positive ego-formation of children.

¹² For an analysis of the ethical meaning of recognition in Hegel’s philosophy, as related to the concepts of freedom, self-realization and ethical life, see Honneth, 1995, 2001 and 2014; Pippin, 2000; Ikäheimo, 2013.

Siep, Andreas Wildt, Axel Honneth, and Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Bush,¹³ have thus attempted, first, to retrace the strong normative core of Hegel's concept of recognition, and secondly, to re-actualize its theoretical potentiality to explain moral forms of social conflict and stand for a critical category for social contexts.

They reconstruct Hegel's strong normative analysis of recognition, first, by underlining how Hegel pursued the isolation of the fundamental practical dimensions of the human subject while connecting the possibility for the subject to perform them freely to different types of cognitive relations. The strong normativity and moral shade that recognition acquires from this perspective are due to the acknowledgment of its constitutive role for the human subject's freedom and self-realization, thus becoming an intersubjective mediation that is morally characterized by attitudes of reciprocal care and solidarity. Despite the metaphysical presuppositions that frame Hegel's inquiry on recognition,¹⁴ which led him to emphasize the constitutive role of recognition for the emergence of universalistic forms of consciousness, the innovative aspect of Hegel's analysis remains the idea of the social source of individual freedom and self-realization. Hegel aimed at offering a theoretical framework wherein the relation between the subject and the social world is not deemed in terms of an externally imposed limitation, but, on the contrary, as a space of liberation for the subject. A similar perspective is conceivable once the intersubjective attitude of human subjects to "know themselves in the other" assumes the moral meaning of mirroring themselves *in* and receiving *from* the other subject a positive confirmation of the practical dimensions which belong to human persons, who need a reaction of involvement from the social world in order to find a social space to freely self-express and develop. Moreover, the character of reciprocity (*Gegenseitigkeit*),¹⁵ which Hegel identifies as a fundamental condition for the ethical character of cognitive relations, is of great importance to understand his theory of social freedom and ethical life. Indeed, the cognitive process must not occur unilaterally, but rather must spring from the subjects' mutual acknowledgment as persons. Reciprocity is the main precondition for human subjects to consciously grasp their reciprocal resemblance and interdependence, finding in these similarity and closeness the cognitive and practical reality (*Wirklichkeit*) of their free

¹³ See Schmidt am Bush, 2011.

¹⁴ For an interpretation of the theoretical consequences that Hegel's metaphysical presuppositions have for his category of recognition, see Honneth, 1995, Ch. 3, and Siep, 2007.

¹⁵ See Honneth, 1995, pp. 36-38. For a contemporary explanation of the reciprocity issue in normative recognition, see also Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007.

subjectivity. The essential reciprocity of recognitive relations represents the crucial element to account for the possible constitution of ethical social contexts,¹⁶ namely, social spaces that emerge through the subjects' reciprocal decision to limit and decentralize their abstract infinite freedom in order to find in others' freedom the real accomplishment of their own free individuality, through a mechanism of *identification with* and *individualization through* others. Indeed, the ethicality of human societies¹⁷ relies upon the social subjects' attainment of shared or participative forms of consciousness and identity, objectified through institutions and moral customs (*mores*) wherein the various contents of human subjectivity can find social expression becoming part of social life. As Robert Pippin clearly explains, Hegel's category of recognition programmatically stands for the key-category by which he demonstrates how the social is a context of liberation.

[The social] can all look like a compromise with the existence of others, but it looks so only under the false assumption that there could be anything like an individually free will apart from that social challenge and social response. Rather, the latter is the original condition of free agency itself, a social relation without which my relation to my own deeds could not be conceived as free, and so a form of dependence in which independence is achieved, not compromised.¹⁸

The second element of Hegel's analysis of recognition that contemporary philosophers have emphasized as constitutively related to its normative meaning is the category of "social struggle." Indeed, his great intuition has been to connect the conflicting aspect of the social world also with the subjects' need for social recognition in order to attain their freedom and self-realization, avoiding a unilateral interpretation of social antagonism as occurring merely under the pressure of egoistic interests and for the sake of social power. The disparate presence of the category of a struggle for recognition within the Jena writings and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, although differently interpreted by commenters,¹⁹ underlines Hegel's idea of the constitutive dependence of social subjects' freedom on social recognition, thus representing a motivational trigger to enterprise social moments of conflict and struggle as this dependence gets overlooked or denied. Thanks to Hegel, the conflictual aspect of the social world gets

¹⁶ See Hegel, *Jenaer Realphilosophie 1805-1806*, 1969.

¹⁷ See Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, [1821] 1991.

¹⁸ Pippin, 2000, p. 158.

¹⁹ See, for example, Honneth's interpretation of the place and meaning of Hegel's category of struggle in *The Struggle for Recognition*, (Ch. 3), and the different arguments that Alexander Kojève (*Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 1969), and Judith Butler (*The Psychic Life of Power*, 1997) have provided regarding the meaning and role of the *Phenomenology's* "struggle for life and death" and "master/slave dialectic."

considerably broadened as regards its motivational source. Indeed, “by the time Hegel took up the model of social struggle that Machiavelli and Hobbes had each independently implemented, the theoretical context was entirely changed”²⁰ and Hegel “could once again portray the construction of the social world as an ethical learning process leading, via various stages of struggle, to even more demanding relationships of reciprocal recognition.”²¹

Hegel’s normative paradigm of recognition has represented a promising inquiry path for contemporary critical theory and social philosophy, standing for the middle term to unify and revolutionize the existing paradigms of three different theoretical levels. First, the level of subjects’ identity-development starts to be conceived as dependent upon relations of recognition, with a progressive degree of normativity and moral sense. Second, the moral meaning acquired by social relations of recognition serves to outline an ontology of the social world as not merely relied upon functional cognitive relations, but as well on ethical social bonds that enable the realization of subjects’ freedom within the social context. Finally, the historical development of human societies can be grasped both in its ethical and agonistic meaning, as mediated by struggles for social recognition. What’s more, the category of recognition has disclosed a rich normative vocabulary related to concepts such as self-realization, social freedom, flourishing life, personal identity, allowing the social branches devoted to the critical analysis of the social world, namely Critical Theory and social philosophy²², to revisit their critical frameworks through conceptual tools apt to negatively grasp various pathologies of the social world. Indeed, its normative vocabulary paves the way for a broad critical perspective on the social world, which can potentially detect the several ways in which the social world can obstruct human subjects’ or social groups’ chances for freedom and self-realization.

²⁰ Honneth, 1995, p. 11.

²¹ Honneth, 1995, p. 62.

²² With Critical Theory we refer mainly to the Frankfurt School that, from the foundation of the Institute of Social Research (1923), has sought to outline a program for a critical theory of the social world, as opposed to traditional theories. Frankfurt Critical theorists aim to follow and expand Marx’s aim of providing a theory of the social world that is not reduced to a descriptive analysis of social phenomena. Instead, a critical theory of the social world seeks to unveil the essential relations that sustain practices of domination and exploitation within capitalist societies, thus finding a normative core immanent to social contexts for arousing successful processes of social transformation. For an introduction to Critical Theory’s fundamentals, see Horkheimer, 2002; Deranty, 2009, Ch. 2; Renault, 2018. With the expression “social philosophy” we refer to the broader category of philosophic studies, not strictly connected to Marx’s heredity, that seeks to analyze the pathological distortions that occur in the relation between the subject and the social world. For an introduction to this quite new terminology, see Honneth, 2007a; Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017; Saar, 2019.

Therefore, it hardly surprises the considerable interest that the Hegelian concept of recognition arouses for critical social theory, due to its vast critical capacity. Nevertheless, the actualization of the Hegelian concept of recognition and the implementation of its critical potential have progressively occurred, reaching their highest point in Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, and then undergoing important criticisms that a critical theory of recognition must necessarily consider.

I. 1. 2. The Turning Point of Honneth's Theory of Recognition

Within this progressive process of actualization of the recognition paradigm for critical social theory, Jürgen Habermas, representative of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, is one of the first contributors. From his essay "Labour and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena Philosophy of Mind" and the inaugural address at the Institute for Social Research,²³ Habermas started to outline the general trajectories of his future project for a critical theory of the social world, devoted, firstly, to provide a philosophical anthropology, which encompasses the various dimensions of practical human activity.

Habermas' theoretical interest in demanding a renewed analysis of human *praxis* was sustained by the urgency to re-introduce within the framework of Critical Theory and sociology the issue of the subject-subject relation. Indeed, the diffusion of Positivism in sociology, which focused on the sole technical and scientific dimension of human rationality,²⁴ but above all the pessimistic turn of Critical Theory's First Generation,²⁵ sharply called for a paradigm renovation. Indeed, Horkheimer and Adorno²⁶ had grounded their critical analysis of capitalist societies on a historical reconstruction of the pervasive mechanism of domination of nature perpetrated by instrumental forms of rationality. Following Marx's anthropological analysis, which focuses on the relation between the human being and the natural world,²⁷ they analyzed human action in its sole inter-objective dimension, and then conceived capitalist and totalitarian societies as the final results emerging from the exploitative logic of technical cognition, extended from nature to overall human relationships and institutional contexts. From the end of the Second World War, Horkheimer and Adorno's philosophy of history and systemic theories

²³ See Habermas, 1973; 1971a.

²⁴ The label *Positivismusstreit* refers to the philosophical and sociological debate of the 1960s that Adorno and Habermas held against Popper and his disciples. See Adorno, ed., 1976.

²⁵ See Honneth, 1993, Ch. 7; Deranty, 2009, Ch. 2 and 3; Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. 1.

²⁶ For an overview on their common critical ground, see especially Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002.

²⁷ See Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1975-2004, vol. 3.

of the social world reached pessimistic conclusions as regards the possibility for social emancipation. Indeed, their philosophy of history presupposed an increasing pervasiveness of the logic of domination within human societies, with the institution of systemic social structures apt to ensure the complete manipulation of class consciousness. Due to this pessimistic approach, their system-theoretic interpretation of contemporary late-capitalist societies theoretically foreclosed the possibility for social emancipation from domination and instrumental structures of human rationality. Critical Theory, thus, severely questioned its original aim to sustain pre-theoretical criticism by finding theoretical frameworks to pursue effective social transformations.

Therefore, dealing with the theoretical problems of the first generation of Critical Theory and the dangers of the atomistic and instrumental conceptions of the human being brought forth by Positivism and the Technocracy thesis,²⁸ Habermas elaborated a philosophical anthropology to providing a multi-dimensional account of human practical rationality. Besides the human pre-theoretical interest for technical cognition, devoted to the domination of nature for the strictly material reproduction of human societies, Habermas was concerned with stressing the human pre-theoretical interest for cultural action, which aims at establishing a communicative agreement upon the rules and norms to follow collectively within human societies. Habermas' strategy thus consisted in rebalancing the contemporary theoretical framework with the re-introduction of the analysis of the subject-subject relation. To reach this goal, he recovered the Hegelian paradigm of "the dialectic of moral life,"²⁹ as well as G. H. Mead's social psychology, in order to argue a threefold thesis. First, human societies run through a process both of material reproduction, in which the physical survival of the social world is ensured through technical cognition, and of symbolic reproduction, wherein the moral framework collectively followed in human societies is confirmed or transformed through a process of communicative agreement among social members. Second, the social members' capacity to reach a common agreement

²⁸ See Honneth, 1993, Ch. 7 and 8, wherein Habermas' relation to both currents is clearly explained. Indeed, Honneth reconstructs Habermas' overall project as clearly related (*quasi* a reaction) to the philosophical problems of the time. On the one hand, he struggled against Horkheimer and Adorno's critical social theories, as relied upon a unidimensional account of human action and subjectivity, which focuses on the single relation between human beings and the natural context, thus excluding any reference to the subject-subject relationship in its descriptive and normative function. On the other hand, he engaged into a discussion with Karl Popper (*The Positivist Dispute*, 1964), and subsequently with the exponents of the technocracy thesis (*Technology and Science as Ideology*, 1970) to highlight the co-existence of scientific and instrumental forms of practical rationality and a communicative form of human activity. This latter aims at reaching a shared communicative consensus with other subjects and represents the fundamental premise for the subjects' freedom and self-realization.

²⁹ Habermas, 1971a, p. 54.

as regards norms, values, ends, and interests to collectively pursue, relies on mechanisms of reciprocal recognition. Indeed, according to Habermas, only when subjects reciprocally acknowledge each other as rational moral subjects, namely as legitimate partakers in the social process of rational constructions of social norms and ends, it is possible to entertain communicative debate free from social domination and grounded on rational consensus. In this recognitive dimension, it is feasible for human subjects to reach their individual identity formation by integrating their moral perspective within the social world. An ego “adapts itself to its external conditions through learning processes, is initiated into the communication system of a social lifeworld by means of self-formation processes, and constructs an identity in the conflict between instinctual aims and social constraints.”³⁰

The third thesis sketched by Habermas in the second chapter of *Knowledge and Human Interests*, is that the social impediments to an undistorted process of communicative agreement stir up moments of social struggle among social groups. Recovering Hegel’s concept of a “struggle for recognition,” Habermas abandoned Marx’s unilateral materialistic interpretation of social conflicts by identifying in intersubjective and inter-group struggles a moral core. In addition to struggles that reclaim equal material conditions and a different work organization to ensure social members’ physical and spiritual self-development, Habermas emphasized the social conflicts that arise from subjects’ normative expectations in conducting communicative social interactions wherein the different moral perspectives of social groups receive social relevance, influencing the transformative process of social contexts and leading to the free development of social members’ identities. Such struggles, therefore, occur whenever undistorted processes of recognition among subjects as moral social members are hindered by forms of social domination and normative-free productive relations. Through the Hegelian paradigm, Habermas stressed the existence, within modern subjects, of normative expectations towards other social members and the social context, grounded on the recognitive premises for identity formation and the ontological reliance of modern societies upon mechanisms of legitimization and moral acceptance by the social members.

Although Habermas did not follow this sketched theory of the social subsequently, rather preferring a functionalist account,³¹ he placed recognition in its strong normative

³⁰ Habermas, 1971a, p. 43.

³¹ Here, we are referring especially to the reconstruction of Habermas’ social theory that Honneth provides in *The Critique of Power* (1993 [1985]), pp. 268-277 and Ch. 8. Indeed, Honneth identifies two different models of social theory in Habermas’ production. On the one hand, he argues that Habermas outlined a theory of the social world

meaning of intersubjective mediation necessary for the free constitution of human subject's identity, as the key-category for grasping the pre-theoretical criticism of social contexts and critically approaching the social world. His actualization of the Hegelian paradigm of recognition consists in sketching a critical theory of the social world related to the category of recognition, due to the human beings' intrinsic need for social acknowledgment to develop their

as strictly related to an anthropology of human rationality that is considered in its normative intersubjective premises. Firstly, Habermas identified the different types of pre-theoretical interests that belong to human subjects. Secondly, he grounded the human subject's possibility to perform such types of action, undertake a free development of personal identity, and attain the positive reproduction of human societies upon intersubjective relations of reciprocal normative recognition. Finally, he provided an action-theoretic interpretation of human social action, which is grasped in its reflective, voluntary, and conflictual nature. Indeed, the symbolic reproduction of human societies is conceived as dependent on moments of social struggle, which aim at reintroducing undistorted forms of communication for reaching a rational social agreement and power-free social contexts. Honneth, thus, stresses how Habermas, within this theoretical framework, located the source of pre-theoretical criticism within human subjects' denied expectations for recognition and depicted the social struggle as a fundamental socio-ontological process for the moral renovation of human societies. Honneth also underlines the specific interpretation of the role of critical theory that follows from such premises, as the theoretical activity that partakes in the analysis of the emancipatory potential of social members' oppressed morality. Nevertheless, Honneth argues that, subsequently, in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), Habermas has provided a strictly functionalist theory of the social world. "Habermas' theory leaves behind the framework in which it had originally been grounded as an anthropology of knowledge. The investigation of the basic structures of intersubjectivity is directed exclusively to an analysis of rules of speech so that the bodily and physical dimension of social action no longer comes into view" (Honneth, 1993, p. 281). Honneth's main critique of Habermas' mature theory refers to his theoretical shifts from the intersubjective conditions of human subjectivity and capacity for action to the intersubjective premises of universal pragmatics. With "universal pragmatics," Habermas conceives the transcendental and universal validity-conditions of human speech in its different logical domains (instrumental rationality, communicative rationality, and expressive rationality) and social spheres of application (the system and the life-world). Universal pragmatics' "specific goal consists in demonstrating that in the process of speech oriented to understanding interacting subjects raise reciprocal validity claims and necessarily assume the obligation of redeeming them in discourse. [...] Habermas attempts to show that universal standards of rationality enter into the exercise of communicative action. These standards of rationality possess conclusive validity regardless of the accompanying consciousness of the participating subjects" (Honneth, 1993, pp. 281-282). Habermas' linguistic turn entails various problems for his social theory and critical theory. The essential ones consist, first, of the different location of the criticism-source, with a shift from the pre-theoretical moral reactions of individuals due to distorted forms of social communication, to the transcendental validity-conditions of human speech. The second problem lies in the dualistic understanding of the spheres of the social world, as following completely different validity-conditions. According to Habermas, the system, i.e., the sphere of production and bureaucratic administration, is governed by instrumental rationality's validity-condition, the truthfulness of communicative statements. On the contrary, the life-world, namely the normative sphere of social norms, values, and societal ends, depends on communicative rationality, which aims at consensual rightness. Besides the problematic idea of an utterly normative-free sphere of action, the essential problem consists, according to Honneth, in the consequent narrowness of the concept of social pathology. Through this theoretical framework, social pathologies are restricted to the colonization of the system over the life-world, namely, to the structural expansion of instrumental rationality at the expense of communicative rationality. Thus, the previous idea of a struggle among social groups for the public recognition of their moral perspectives is seriously undermined, as well as the analysis of the social conditions for the development of subjects' free individuality, and Habermas' following critical theory overlooks the inter-groups' relations of domination completely. "Whereas purposive-rational domains of action seem to be separated out from all processes of the integration of the life-world, the social life-world is represented as freed from all forms of the exercise of power. Power, as a means for the coordination of social action, is considered only at the level of system integration, so all presystemic processes of the constitution and reproduction of domination must fall out of view" (Honneth, 1993, pp. 300-301).

subjective identities and institute cultural-social frameworks resulting from a power-free communicative agreement among social members. Moreover, the very critical cogency of recognition lies in its negative counterpart, namely misrecognition, much more essential for disclosing an immanent critical analysis of human societies.³² Accordingly, human societies become objects of criticism as their existing juridical, cultural, and moral frameworks prevent social groups from being recognized as legitimate participants to the symbolic renovation of human societies. Therefore, the recognition paradigm allows Habermas to approach the social world from a critical perspective focused on relational social systems that, dis-acknowledging subjects as rational and moral partakers in discursive contexts, obstructs the free identity-constitution and development of social members.

The progressive affirmation of recognition, or, in its negative counterpart, of misrecognition, as a critical category for social contexts has been subsequently enforced and sustained by post-modern societies' multiculturalism and social movements for cultural recognition, rather than by strictly theoretical considerations.

Contemporary society differs sharply from "traditional" society. [...] First, it [traditional society] was sharply bounded; because intercultural contacts were restricted to the margins, there was no significant cultural hybridization, not any great difficulty in establishing where one culture ended and another began. [Second,] the society was ethically monistic; all of its members operated within the terms of a single, shared horizon of evaluation, which was all-pervasive and uniformly diffused [...]. [Third,] the cultural order was exempt from contestation; in the absence of any alternative evaluation horizon, there was no perspective from which to criticize the institutionalized-pattern of cultural value, nor any perspective that supported contestation. [Fourth,] the resulting hierarchy was socially legitimate; however much individuals may have chafed under it, they lacked any principled basis for challenging its authority. None of these conditions holds for contemporary society. First, the cultural order of this society is not sharply bounded. No longer restricted to the margins, transcultural flows pervade the central "interior" spaces of social interaction. Thanks to mass migrations, diasporas, globalized mass culture, and transnational public spheres, it is impossible to say with certainty exactly where one culture ends and another begins; all, rather, are internally hybridized. [Second,] the cultural order of contemporary society is ethically pluralistic. Not all members share a common, uniformly diffused evaluative horizon. On the contrary, different subcultures or "community of values" subscribe to different, and at times, incompatible, horizon of value. [Third,] value patterns and evaluative horizons are intensely contested. The combination of transcultural hybridization, institutional differentiation, and ethical pluralism ensures the availability of alternative perspectives that can be used to criticize the dominant values. Nowhere exempt from cultural contestation, contemporary societies are veritable cauldrons of cultural struggles. [...] They participate actively in a dynamic regime of ongoing struggles for recognition.³³

³² See Thompson & Yar, eds., 2011. In this collective publication, the main topic of interest is precisely the analysis of the politics of misrecognition, as the complementary category of recognition.

³³ Fraser & Honneth, 2003, pp. 55-57.

The category of recognition was well suited to theoretically grasp multicultural social movements and the normative requests of subcultural identities, such as gender, religious, national, and cultural identities. Therefore, it showed up in its pivotal role for the sustenance and development of groups' identities and social requests.³⁴

However, once the critical importance of the category of recognition strongly emerged within the contemporary debate of critical social theory, the very possibility of outlining a recognition theory to refer to for the criticism of social contexts depended on a serious attempt to deal with a threefold set of theoretical clarifications, strictly interrelated.

(i) An analytic explanation of the mechanism of recognition as constitutive for the human subject's free identity-formation. What kind of subjective acquisition does social recognition entail to make it so fundamental for the full-fledged identity-constitution of human subjects? To what extent does the lack of social recognition provoke moments of social struggle that are not reduceable to strictly material motivations but are, instead, related to a strong moral significance?

(ii) An attempt to operate a distinction as systemic as possible between the different dimensions of practical human identity that require social recognition, which subsequently leads to two different questions. First, are there different species of social recognition, and conversely of misrecognition, and if so, how can we distinguish their constitutive meaning? Second, is it possible to identify a specific social sphere wherein each of these forms of recognition emerges while temporarily allowing its reproduction as an ethical context?

(iii) An explanation of how a paradigm of subjective identity's constitution based on recognition can be transposed into a critical principle for critical social theory, with an exposition of the role and function of critical social theory.

Axel Honneth is the theorist who has attempted to address these issues simultaneously, becoming one of the most important representatives of the third generation of Critical Theory and the main interlocutor of the subsequent debate on recognition. Indeed, *Kampf um Anerkennung* (1992) is the *Habilitationsschrift* wherein Honneth has laid the theoretical foundations for addressing the three compelling theoretical issues that a theory of recognition must address in order to stand for a systematic critical perspective on human social contexts.

³⁴ See, for instance, Charles Taylor, 1994. The Canadian philosopher, clearly influenced by the specific social, cultural, and political status of his country of origin, has been one of the main philosophers who focused on cultural identities' recognition.

The structural and conceptual organization of *The Struggle for Recognition*, inaugurating the mature phase of his philosophical thinking, has represented, and still is, the reference framework of Honneth's further writings. If not for a few exceptions, his subsequent philosophical production has been destined to develop in more detail some of its aspects.

In this enterprise, Honneth's main interlocutor is, of course, Hegel. His attempt to outline a recognition theory apt to stand for a systematic critical theory of recognition occurs through the actualization and conceptual enhancement of the Hegelian paradigm. What is interesting about Honneth's strategy, thus, is that it responds to the three theoretical issues just exposed, which surfaced within the contemporary debate thanks to the retrieval of Hegel's philosophy, via Hegel itself.

(i) By retrieving and reconstructing Hegel's category of recognition in the Jena writings, wherein the Stuttgart philosopher defines recognition in terms of "knowing oneself in the other,"³⁵ Honneth conceives the strong normative meaning of recognition in its making feasible for the human subject to develop a positive practical self-image. Thus, recognition is conceived as the reciprocal relation of positive confirmation between subjects as regards their subjective practical dimensions. With "subjectivation" (*Individualisierung*), Honneth refers to the process wherein the human being becomes an individualized subject, with an autonomous practical identity, by self-identifying in a positive manner (*Selbsterfahrung*) with the dimensions of its practical subjectivity. Indeed, Honneth underlines that the encouraging and supportive affirmation of others is the necessary condition by which the subject can acquire a positive self-understanding and self-perception, and consequently autonomously self-realize through its desires, needs, capacities, and plans for life within the social context.

To the question "What kind of subjective acquisition does social recognition entail to make it so fundamental for the full-fledged identity constitution of the human subject?", Honneth answers by connecting recognition with a triad of interrelated concepts: *Positive Selbsterfahrung–Individualisierung als ungestörten Selbstbeziehung – Selbstverwirklichung*.³⁶

The role that recognition plays for the subject's attainment of psychological integrity, which is necessary for its free realization in the social context, on the one hand, adequately justifies the emergence of moral social conflicts. On the other hand, it allows the critical theorist

³⁵ Hegel, *Jeaner Realphilosophie 1805-1806*, 1969, p. 201. Cf. the German expression "Das Andere sich ebenso in seinem Anderem wissen."

³⁶ See Honneth, 1995, pp. 68-69, pp. 92-94 [German edition, 1992, pp. 110-111, pp. 148-150].

to analyze from a conceptual and theoretical point of view the pre-theoretical sufferance that fuels, or potentially can fuel, existing social conflicts for public recognition. These latter arise from the suffering reactions of social groups that systematically undergo experiences of oppression and domination, which, with regularly symbolic or practical acts of disrespect and contempt, prevent the development of their personal integrity. Social struggles for recognition, thus, in their motives and ends, seek to transform societies for instituting or reconstructing ethical relations of recognition wherein subjects can attain their self-realization.

(ii) As regards the possibility to distinguish different forms of social recognition, Honneth re-actualizes with some contemporary psychological, sociological, and cultural studies, the Hegelian theory of the levels (*Ebenen*) of recognition that are needed for the human subject's integral identity-constitution. The levels of recognition are thus intended as the ontogenetic stages for the subject's self-identification with its different practical capacities, which are revealed from the subject's progressive integration within the spheres of the social world, as well as the co-existing and reciprocally interrelated conditions for the subject's attainment and realization of its free personal identity. Honneth thus identifies three different forms of recognition: love, respect, and social esteem or solidarity. These recognition-species share the same moral logic of "knowing oneself in the other," but differ qualitatively according, first, to the specific subjective practical dimension they are apt to confirm, namely, being a concrete individual, an abstract person, and a biographical social member. The second way in which they differ qualitatively is related to the specific positive self-experience that they allow the subject to reach and to the social sphere wherein they occur, i.e., the sphere of intimate relationships, the juridical and political sphere, and the cultural and work sphere.

The combination of these two elements lets Honneth derive two further considerations. The first one refers to the mistaken one-dimensional account of recognition provided by other approaches to recognition (for instance Kant's, Habermas'),³⁷ wherein the affective component of recognitive relations and the multilayered dimensions of subjective identity is mostly overlooked, with specific consequences regarding the interpretation of the role and function of theory. Honneth's contribution in highlighting the affectional and the concrete core of recognition surfaces in a variety of elements. For instance, his multi-dimensional account of recognition (and misrecognition) includes forms of recognition strictly mediated by emotional

³⁷ See Honneth, 1990, 1995, 2007e.

attachment, and he generally understands recognitive relations in terms of an active confirmation, mediated by care, rather than as mere passive toleration or acceptance of other subjects. Indeed, apart from the juridical and political equality, his theory of personhood accounts as well for the subject's need to receive social sustainment for its concreteness, namely, its ways of life and personal needs. And finally, Honneth considers subjects' experiences of misrecognition mainly in their emotional, pre-theoretical, and conflictual moral dimension.

The second consideration he draws deals with issues of social ontology and social theory. Indeed, Honneth deduces from his paradigm of recognition both an expressivist theory of social institutions, and a theory of the moral progress of modern societies. By recovering Hegel, Honneth conceives recognition as the fundamental intersubjective relation through which human subjects mutually realize their freedom while giving rise to social institutions not merely apt to coordinate social behavior, but that, rather, represent ethical contexts wherein a common symbolic framework for the free realization of all social members is assured. Accordingly, love, respect, and social esteem are the formal relations of recognition whose surplus of normativity provides to create, through progressive stages of social struggle, ethical social context with increasing conditions for freedom and self-realization. Social institutions, therefore, for being ethical contexts and having social legitimacy, constitutively depend upon existing requests for social recognition, since they are called to express, enhance, and stabilize their moral contents through normatively regulated social practices.

Moreover, Honneth outlines a theory of the moral progress of modern societies, which closely follows from the previously mentioned ontological intersection between recognition and social institutions. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, and especially in *Freedom's Right* (2011), Honneth interprets the history of modern societies in terms of a cumulating moral progress wherein social institutions and social practices progressively embody the developing moral contents that arise from the series of social conflicts aiming at even more universalized and individualized recognitive relations. Thus, the history of modern and contemporary societies is interpreted in terms of a progressive path toward social freedom, wherein the moral stages emerged from previous social struggles for recognition stand for the ethical symbolic frameworks from which subsequent and more ethical recognitive relationships can be disclosed.³⁸

³⁸ See Honneth, 1995, Part 3; 2014, Part 2 and 3.

(iii) From the two previous theoretical standpoints, Honneth carves out a normative principle, which gathers the universal forms of social recognition that are essential for a full-fledged identity-constitution of the social members within the social context. Indeed, with the principle of the “good life,” Honneth aims at providing the relations of recognition that universally allow human subjects to attain their self-realization *within* and *through* the social contexts. He thus aims at outlining a critical theory that relies upon a paradigm of recognition, which, on the one hand, provides a principle universally applicable to any human society, because it accounts for the social conditions that, formally, i.e., without expressing particular cognitive contents, are essential for the self-realization of human personalities within modern societies. On the other hand, he attempts to unify the differentiated forms of recognition that make it feasible for human subjects to have a good or successful life.

In light of these considerations, Honneth outlines an account of social critique that, through the immanent and context-transcending criterion of the “good life,” must participate in the process of linguistic and conceptual articulation of the “hidden morality” of oppressed social groups, thus cooperating in formulating new requests and struggles for social recognition. Therefore, social critique stands for the theoretical level wherein the pre-theoretical moral contents that emerge from experiences of misrecognition can receive a structural shape and lead to the transformation of historical societies.

I. 2. The “Dark Side” of Recognition: The Blind Spots in Honneth’s Theory of Recognition and the Desiderata for a Critical Theory of Recognition

Through the previous general reconstruction of the contemporary emergence of the paradigm of recognition and this schematic summary of Honneth’s critical theory of recognition, we have tried to show two fundamental points to continue programmatically our analysis on recognition. The first one concerns the theoretical exigencies that have led contemporary practical philosophy, critical theory, and social philosophy to recover the category of recognition. The second one refers to the prominent relevance that Honneth’s theory of recognition has had, and still does, for the contemporary attempt to develop the normative and critical potential of cognitive relations, due to his willingness to outline a systematic critical theory of recognition.

Nevertheless, the recognition paradigm, after this renaissance period of which Honneth's theory represents the most explicative reference, is going through a descending parabola, due to the several criticisms aroused within the contemporary debate. The existing critical literature on recognition is extremely vast but what interests the present analysis here are the criticisms that represent the point breaks of the contemporary recognition paradigm, thus seriously questioning its critical capacity. For these reasons, two programmatic demarcations are needed.

First, by considering Honneth's mature paradigm, developed from *The Struggle for Recognition*, as the more systematic reference point for a critical theory of recognition, we intend to focus both on the criticisms that have been moved by commenters directly to Honneth, and on some "negative" accounts of recognition³⁹ that have aroused indirectly problematic issues for the Honnethian framework on recognition.

Second, it is relevant to distinguish between two different degrees of criticisms that have questioned the critical potential of the recognition paradigm. On one level, it is possible to locate those criticisms that highlight the categorical weakness of the Honnethian paradigm as regards its critical capacity of distinguishing among inadequate and adequate normative relations of recognition, apt to assure the domination-free self-realization of human subjects. On a more structural level, there are those competing views of the subject and the social world that, while acknowledging the role of recognition for the human being's process of subjectivation, understand the process of recognition structurally as a relation of subjection of the individual to the other subject and the social world.

The common aim of these two levels of critique consists in the progressive highlighting of the "dark side" of recognition,⁴⁰ namely, of its ambiguous or ambivalent nature, as a relation that can assure freedom, but also domination and power. By overlooking the "dark side of recognition," Honneth's theory of recognition ends up being "naïve" and, more incisively, devoid of conceptual tools for distinguishing clearly recognitive relations which normatively concur in sustaining the subjects' freedom from those relationships of recognition which maintain the subjects in a state of social domination or subjection to the social world. Instead, the distinctive element among the two levels of criticism concerns their more or less structural pervasiveness. As regards the first level of criticism, the compelling issue addresses the

³⁹ The label "negative account of recognition" we use here is taken from Jaeggi and Celikates' chapter on recognition in *Sozialphilosophie. Eine Einführung* (2017).

⁴⁰ For the label "dark side of recognition," see Carnevali, 2017.

employment of relations of recognition as instrumental tools for maintaining relations of social domination and oppression at the expense of oppressed social groups. Instead, the second level of criticism does not merely point out the possibility that recognitive relations can turn into relations of domination, but it conceives recognition as a relation of power from an ontological point of view, through which the subject is passively pervaded and constituted by the social context. Therefore, the two levels of criticism set two different challenges to a critical theory of recognition such as Honneth's.

The first challenge is the urgency to clarify the *ontological conditions* of positive or normative recognition. Accordingly, a contemporary critical theory of recognition is required to better define the further conditions that an affirmative relationship of recognition must satisfy to be genuinely ethical and, thus, devoted to the concrete realization of the subject's identity contents. This clarification is needed to distinguish ethical recognition from ambiguous and ideological forms of recognition, which do confirm the worth of subjective contents but without standing as the recognitive contexts suitable to successfully bring about the objective realization and real satisfaction of such contents.

Conversely, the second challenge compels recognition theory to clarify the *ontological status* of ethical recognition in light of the considerations of a competing theory of the social world. Despite being extreme or radical, this competing theory points out the unavoidable determining and structuring role that recognition, even if ethically aiming at the realization of subjective contents and non-ideological, plays within the human being's subjectivation and self-identification process. Therefore, the point at issue consists of reflecting not on the ontological conditions that recognition must satisfy to be non-ideological and suitable to fully realize the subjective contents asking for public acknowledgment. Instead, it concerns the *ontological status* that ethical recognition, since it always unavoidably implies somehow a supra-subjective determination of human contents and capacity for action, should have and maintain to not entail a socially strong over-structuring and over-channelling of the identity contents of human subjectivity. To clarify the ontological status of recognition, therefore, is necessary for two main reasons. On the one hand, it makes evident the specific *status* that an adequate or ethical relationship of recognition, as opposed to ideological and ambiguous recognition, should maintain to *remain* ethical after its occurrence and embeddedness in the social context. On the other hand, it helps discriminate and detect relationships of recognition that are not *per se* manifestly or ideologically oppressive and unjust. But instead, it detects those

recognitive relationships that develop a pathological status, that of being powerfully determining, alienating, and lifeless, as they entail a socially strong limitation of subjective contents and determination of the individual's possibility for creative and deviating capacity for action. Accordingly, the ontological status of recognition is to be intended in terms of the meta-condition that ethical recognition should maintain to remain ethical given its determining character, rather than turning into a relationship that is lifeless, normalizing, and standardizing of the creativity of human action.

I. 2. 1. Recognition as Domination

By starting from the lower degree of criticism, we want to refer to, first, those critiques that account for the *ambiguity* of recognition, namely, for the existence of relations of recognition instrumentally devoted to maintaining and reproducing situations of social domination and oppression. Therefore, we can conceive as “ambiguous” those social relations wherein the positive attribution of value to social subjects ideologically or instrumentally aims at maintaining these latter within asymmetrical relations of domination. Thus, in such cases, the moral quality of the recognitive relation, through which the subject receives from the social context a positive confirmation of itself, manifests as a second-order content, which hides the first-order aim to reproduce the illegitimate, asymmetrical domination of some social groups upon others, hindering their free self-realization. Nancy Fraser (2003), Patchen Markell (2003), David Owen and Bert van den Brink (2007), Barbara Carnevali (2008), Danielle Petherbridge (2013), and Lois McNay (2008a and 2008b) have all sought to highlight that “relations of power can themselves take ‘recognitive’ forms that foster certain practical relation-to-self,”⁴¹ and that in Honneth's conceptual framework there is a “conflation of the normative with the descriptive” meaning of recognition which leads to “a simplification of social and political relations.”⁴² By relying upon several philosophical traditions, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Hannah Arendt and Pierre Bourdieu, they conclusively show this blind spot in Honneth's theory in a variety of perspectives, meanings, and shades. For instance, Patchen Markell stresses that, from a descriptive analysis of human societies, social recognition can blur social injustices. He shows how recognition can stand for a tool in the hand of social or institutional dominant groups for further oppressing other social members by exploiting their intrinsic need for symbolic

⁴¹ Van den Brink & Owen, 2007, p. 20.

⁴² McNay, 2008b, p. 128.

recognition, while fixing asymmetrical relations of social dependence and implementing among oppressed social groups attitudes of mutual exclusion. Barbara Carnevali, by recovering the impressively actual and severe human anthropology of Rousseau, additionally highlights the social competition arising from the subjects' need for recognition and the compromises that subjects are willing to accept in order to be integrated within their social context. Nancy Fraser and Lois McNay, respectively referring to Marxist and Bourdieu's insights, underline the objective and material structures of social injustice and domination, which, while pervading social members in their bodies and structuring their practical space, are silenced through existing symbolic recognitive practices which functionally integrate them into unjust social structures. Whereas Danielle Petherbridge, in her reconstruction of the critical theory of Axel Honneth, makes evident how Honneth:

posits normativity in what he regards as the certainty of recognition. In this sense, intersubjective relations and identity-formation are conceptualized only within the normative terms of recognition, rather than as co-constituted by a variety of modality of intersubjectivity and forms of interaction, including power and strategic action.⁴³

Despite the different conceptual tools and the variety of strategies or arguments employed, all these authors agree that Honneth, in his mature theory of recognition, prioritizes a strictly strong normative understanding of recognition, which overlooks from a descriptive point of view those normatively weak recognitive relations that sustain the reproduction of societies in their unjust and oppressive structures. His missing consideration of this dimension of recognition strongly resizes and weakens the critical capacity and sensitivity of his conceptualization of ethical recognition, as sustaining and partaking in the free self-realization of human subjects. Indeed, his criterion of the "good life" does not offer stringent conceptual tools for distinguishing among these two levels of social confirmation, affirmation, and conferral of social value to social members.

In a more radical way, Danielle Petherbridge argues that any attempt to demarcate among the descriptive and the normative level of recognitive relations or, put differently, to provide an undamaged notion of intersubjectivity, stands in the way of social critique because it fails to provide a theory of intersubjectivity that "recognizes, firstly, the contingency and fragility of human interaction, and, secondly, the ways in which intersubjective 'recognition' is

⁴³ Petherbridge, 2013, p. 121.

always imbricated in networks of power.”⁴⁴ Although the acknowledgment of the intrinsic instability and fragility of intersubjective relations is a key issue for social critique and, more prominently, for a critical theory of recognition such as Honneth’s, which downplays the *situational* dynamic of recognitive relationships by giving attention to the sole historical development of recognitive contents, it can be questioned whether Petherbridge’s conclusion necessarily follows. That is to say, is the intrinsic fragility and instability of relations of recognition among subjects a sufficient reason to deny that normative relationships of recognition are possible, and to identify their structure? Or, on the contrary, is the main challenge for a theory of recognition to provide an account of normative recognition which structurally relies upon a more clarified set of ontological conditions so to demarcate more effectively ethically adequate and inadequate forms of social recognition?

In conclusion, on this first degree of criticism, the main critical issue regards the conflation within Honneth’s theory of the normative with the descriptive level of social recognition. Indeed, the previously cited philosophers reveal his naïve assumption that all forms of recognition are ethically grounded, without considering the distinction among their weak and strong normativity, and thus the reliance of social injustice, oppression, and domination upon symbolic relations of recognition. Under the pressure of these challenging criticisms, two possible options are available for a critical theory of recognition. On the one hand, as Petherbridge suggests, the Honnethian attempt to provide a normative model of undamaged forms of recognitive relations should be abandoned due to the actual fragile status of intersubjective relations, for they can easily be integrated and framed within relations of domination and oppression, thus becoming conditions for functionally sustaining social injustices. We may call Petherbridge’s solution an “hermeneutics of suspicion,” that approaches intersubjective relations in their co-extensiveness with domination. Or, as proposed by Patchen Markell, the category of recognition, due to its reliance on the intrinsic need of social subjects to be integrated within existing human societies, also the unjust ones, should be substituted with the critical category of “acknowledgment” of the intrinsic vulnerability and indeterminateness of practical human activity.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Petherbridge, 2013, p. 78.

⁴⁵ See Markell, 2003, pp. 177-189. Nancy Fraser (2003) also suggests adding a second normative principle to the one of recognition for obviating to the ambiguity of recognition. She identifies in redistribution, or participatory parity, the second normative criterion that, as ontologically and critically distinguished from recognition, refers to the objective and material equality that is to be assured to all social subjects in addition to the positive self-relation following from recognition.

On the other hand, a different theoretical strategy seems feasible in order not to abandon Honneth's critical project and, at the same time, strengthen his critical sensitivity. Indeed, the intrinsic possibility that social positive attributions of worth can turn into ambiguous relations of domination, does not necessarily jeopardize any attempt to provide an undamaged or positive idea of normative recognition, wherein subjects can freely self-realize due to the social mediations with other subjects. Honneth's main contribution has been to grasp from a theoretical and empirically point of view the causal and constitutive connection between manifest social contexts of misrecognition and the inability of human subjects to develop an integral practical identity through the mediation of the social context and its members. The intrinsic nexus among the affirmative mediation of others and the positive self-identification of human subjects with their practical dimensions (being an emotional and bodily individual with personal needs, a person with moral and decisional capacities, and a biographical social member) conceptually allows him to give reason for the social sufferance related to experiences of manifest cases of social misrecognition, such as physic and psychological violence, juridical inequality, social exclusion, and cultural hatred. And this critically essential insight cannot for sure be abandoned.

Thus, considering the descriptive fragility and instability of recognitive relationships, the main challenge for the contemporary paradigm of recognition, of which Honneth's theory stands as the main reference point, is whether its foundational conceptual framework may be strengthened in order to face the descriptive *ambiguity* of recognitive relationships. Does the dynamic, slippery, and exploitable character of recognitive relations compel the necessary withdrawal, from a theoretical point of view, of an ethically normative paradigm of recognition? Or, conversely, is it possible to maintain Honneth's generic insight regarding the constitutive bond between the positive development of subjects' practical-identity and the affirmative response of other subjects, while identifying the conceptual core of his mature theory wherein the *hiatus* between normatively strong and weak relations of recognition gets structurally blurred? Is it possible to pinpoint in the theoretical framework used by Honneth from *The Struggle For Recognition* the structural shortcoming that, given his overlooking of the ambiguous side of recognition, prevents the possibility of distinguishing among adequate and inadequate relations of recognition, i.e., among recognitive relationships aiming at sustaining the subject's free self-realization and those devoted to hindering or obstructing it? Therefore, once considered the ambiguity of recognition, but still with the willingness to maintain the

general insight of Honneth's theory of recognition as regards the social conditions of subjective freedom and self-development, the core issue becomes how we can strengthen his general insight so to overcome its blind spot for social critique. The first desideratum for a critical theory of recognition is, thus, to attempt at understanding which structural aspect in Honneth's theory precludes the possibility to clarify the *ontological conditions* that recognition, as an affirmative relationship of worth, should satisfy to be truly ethical and non-ideological. Then, the next issue is to consider how and through which structural and conceptual tools could it be possible to avoid Honneth's shortcoming while maintaining his general idea to provide an ethical concept of recognition, according to which the free self-realization of the human subject can occur within the affirmative mediation of others.

Therefore, this first level of criticism compels the clarification of the ontological conditions of ethical recognition with but beyond Honneth so as to rehabilitate and strengthen the critical sensitivity and capacity of a critical theory of recognition.

I. 2. 2. Recognition as Constitutive Power

As previously mentioned, there is a second degree of criticism of the recognition paradigm that structurally questions its critical capacity. Indeed, on this critical level, we can find those theories of subjectivity and social theories which do not merely point out the ambiguous ontology of recognition, but rather argue for its intrinsic *ambivalence*. Such theories share with Honneth's paradigm the idea that the human being needs a web of affirmative and value-conferring social relationships in order to develop a personal identity and become a legitimate social member that partakes in shared juridical, social, and cultural frameworks. Nevertheless, they interpret the process of subjectivation through social recognition as a process of *subjection* of the individual to the social world. Recognition is conceived as a relationship through which the human being develops into a subject with a personal identity, being thus a relationship *productive* of a new status. But the status to be a socially recognized subject is directly associated with the ontological condition of being determined heteronormatively by a pre-existing social world and being objectified in one's practical identity through a restricted horizon of agentive possibility.

As Robin Celikates and Rahel Jaeggi concisely summarize in a chapter dedicated to the "negative theories of recognition,"⁴⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and

⁴⁶ See Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017, Ch. 5.

Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) outline two theoretical paths wherein the relational status of human subjectivity is presented through an ambivalent ontology. Here, the recognitive status of the human being stands for the very condition for the development of subjective identity and, thus, for the subject's factual dependency upon others, which implies its voluntary attitude to subjugate to and internalize the evaluative standards of existing social worlds, while becoming statically and objectively identifiable by others through personal and social categorizations existing without its permission. To use a paradigmatic definition of Sartre, the subject "is free but in condition,"⁴⁷ since "the Other's existence brings a factual limit to my freedom. This is because of the fact that by means of upsurge of the Other there appear certain determinations which I aim without having chosen them."⁴⁸

Indeed, Sartre emphasizes both the factual *datum* and ontological necessity of the subject's being-in relation with others, and the heteronormative and reifying meaning of social recognition as regards the creative and dynamic constitution of personal identity. According to Sartre, freedom is a relational category, namely, a condition which cannot be severed, from an ontological and conceptual point of view, from its opposite category of "determinacy," since "being free" implies always the liberation from some determinate status, position, or situation. From this conceptual analysis, Sartre concludes that for the subject to be in recognitive relations with other subjects means to be "objectified" or "reified" because, from a status of indeterminacy (the *for-it-self*), the subject gets involved in a process of determination through objective identities and pre-given social roles and statuses (the *in-itself*). Accordingly, the "look" of the other implies the identification with and the attribution of statuses, qualities, and capacities to the subject.

Here I am – Jew, or Aryan, handsome or ugly, one-armed, etc. All this I am for the Other with no hope of apprehending this meaning which I have outside and, still more important, with no hope of changing it. If my race or my physical appearance were only an image in the Other or the Other's opinion of me, we should soon have done with it; but we have seen that we are dealing with objective characteristics which define me in my being-for-others. [...] Thus something of myself – according to this new dimension – exists in the manner of the given; at least for me, since this being which I am is suffered, it is without being existed. I learn of it and suffered in and through the relations which I enter into with others, in and through their conduct with regards to me. I encounter this being at the origin of a thousand prohibitions and a thousand resistances which I bump up against at each instant.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Sartre, 2003, p. 519.

⁴⁸ Sartre, 2003, p. 523.

⁴⁹ Sartre, 2003, p. 524.

At the same time, for Sartre, subjective freedom takes place within the process of being determined by the social world by finding in this determinacy new horizons of possibility, for “to be free is not to choose the historic world in which one arises – which would have no meaning – but to choose oneself in the world whatever this may be.”⁵⁰ Also in Sartre’s analysis, to be recognized by others is the factual condition for the constitution and public conferring of specific subjective identities. But the recognitive process is conceived as an ontological restriction and impediment to subjective creativity, whose overcoming stands for the very realization of human freedom. Although recognition allows the subject to consciously self-identify through the public attribution of specific individual qualities, social statuses, and cultural identities, it also involves the restriction of the subject’s potentiality for indeterminate creativity, and the reifying attitude to treat subjectivity with the ontological, static, and entirely descriptive status of objects. Only within such interplay between determinacy and transcending freedom, recognition and dissolution of recognitive ties, does human subjectivity exist. Recognition, thus, *is* a condition for freedom, but in a completely different sense from Honneth’s: it is not the final aim, the equivalent of freedom. Rather, it is the submissive and reifying condition wherein human freedom can develop in terms of liberating resistance.

In Chapters I, II, and III of the *Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler also outlines a theory of subjectivation structurally akin to Sartre’s, that has had, and continues to have, a profound impact on contemporary philosophy of gender and ethical paradigms of recognition. By using several philosophical and psychoanalytic traditions, from Nietzsche to Freud and Althusser, but relying especially upon Foucault’s theory of power, she argues that “‘subjection’ signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject.”⁵¹ Her main thesis, thus, consists in conceiving the constitution of human subjectivity in relational terms. We become subjects (namely, self-returning linguistic sites for intelligibility and agency)⁵² only within the encounter and the recognitive mediation with others and the social world. Nevertheless, she points out that our constitutive dependence as subjects upon the recognition of others implies our voluntary subjection (not to be intended only in reflective

⁵⁰ Sartre, 2003, p. 521.

⁵¹ Butler, 1997, p. 2.

⁵² Butler, 1997, p. 11.

terms) to existing binary categories and evaluative standards of our pre-existing social contexts. Butler's conception of the subject's voluntary subjugation to the social world through recognitive relations cannot be understood with the traditional accounts of power as domination. Here, the human subject is not "dominated" by social groups or institutions which, legitimately or illegitimately, manifestly or ideologically, possess the power to determine the behavior of other social members forcefully. As she clearly specifies in the *Introduction*, she retrieves Foucault's notion of "constitutive power," which, as distinguished from domination, contributed to critically enrich the traditional notion of power.⁵³

Indeed, Foucault attempts to conceptualize the ontological power that social contexts generally, productively, pervasively exercise on human subjects. For here, power is not something owned by identifiable individuals or groups but, as famously described by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), "must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization."⁵⁴ Thus, power is *general* because it is the result of the totality of the asymmetrical force-relations existing within a social sphere or a social context. These force-relations, wherein the human subject "occurs," are not *per se* something stable but in ceaseless dynamic. The human subject "occurs" within a pre-existing social context that stands asymmetrically before it as an anonymous set of forces, which shape the individual into an individualized subject, conceptually and pragmatically integrated into the social world due to the internalization of social determinations (orders of discourse, systems of knowledge, social categories, set of bodily behaviors etc.). Thus, in Foucault's framework, the process of subjectivation, of becoming individualized human subjects, occurs through the recognitive mediations among social contexts and individuals. Recognition stands for the social relation wherein individuals get integrated into given social contexts and identified descriptively and normatively as individual subjects through the internalization and performative enactment of social determinations.

Within such a theoretical framework, recognition's intrinsic ambiguity lies in its constitutive role towards the human subject. That is to say, if recognition stands for the *constitutive force* through which individuals turn into identified subjects, by being determined

⁵³ For analyses of Foucault's notion of power, see Honneth, 1993, Ch. 5 and 6. For convincing re-actualizations of Foucault's notion of constitutive power for contemporary critical theory, see Saar, 2010 and 2019; Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. 2 and 5; Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017, Ch. 7.

⁵⁴ Foucault, 1978, p. 92.

by existing social forces, this means that it makes the individuals a *product* or *effect* of social power. The individual becomes a product of power relations because they shape it, through cognitive mediations, into a socially determined subject. But it becomes a product of power also in the sense that it turns out into a source of power, since power does not impede the subject to act, as domination does, but, on the contrary, determines the subject while enabling it to perform and re-elaborate its social determinations.⁵⁵ In Foucault, “power is understood as enabling and productive, not coercive nor prohibitory; it does not stand opposed to freedom but in fact may be the very condition of the possibility for freedom, autonomy and individuality.”⁵⁶ Power is not ‘repressive’ but ‘productive’; it has the capacity to produce the subject, which receives simultaneously the power of doing something else accordingly, as not a bare reproduction but an active performance of the new potentialities of power relations. “A power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them to submit, or destroying them.”⁵⁷ Therefore, recognition, as the relational mediation through which power constitutes subjects, namely, as the positive, empowering conferral to subjects of enabling capacities, qualities, rights and statuses, is the condition for both the subjects’ subjection and standardization to the social world, and its freedom and power to act. In other words, in this account, as well as in Sartre’s one, recognition is an ambivalent category wherein subjection and freedom are co-constitutive categories and ontological conditions. We can be free once we are determined and empowered by the social set of forces; we submit to the social world only if we can internalize and thus differently reproduce or alter its social set of forces. Thus, recognition is not opposed to constitutive power but occurs interdependently with it. Another of Foucault’s fundamental contribution to the category of power lies in the notion of “standardization” or “normalization.” In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), with norms, Foucault refers to the techniques of power that do not have “repressive functions but rather productive ones. Their purpose is to routinize the modes of behaviour of the social opponent through constant disciplining and, through that, to allow them to solidify. Foucault calls every kind of such a conduct fixed by compulsion a ‘normalized’ conduct”⁵⁸. Norms are, thus, fixed or habitualized modes of conduct, which, as mainly mechanically performed, do not imply subjects’ reflexive justification to be effective.

⁵⁵ Foucault, 1980, 1982.

⁵⁶ Petherbridge, 2013, p. 190.

⁵⁷ Foucault, 1978, p. 136.

⁵⁸ Honneth, 1993, p. 166.

According to Foucault, the mainly pre-reflexive dimension of norms, plus their recognitive and disciplining functioning, explain and sustain the subjects' attitude to follow the standardized social behaviors, thus normalizing their ways of life. Moreover, Foucault highlights how the disciplining and normalizing process of norms occurs, first of all, on the bodily level. The first dimension wherein power starts to shape the human being in an individualized subject is the body, in its motor and reproductive processes. The process of subjectivation, occurring through productive power and its recognitive mediation, starts, at first, from the pre-reflexive body dimension, which is not to be conceived as irrational or un-reflexive, but rather, as a level which precedes the propositional and self-conscious level of reflexivity.

The contribution of Foucault's theory of power, which gathers both a sketched theory of subjectivation and a systemic account of the social world, can be summarized in two interrelated aspects. The first one concerns the integration of the notion of constitutive power to the one of domination. Through such a categorical enlargement, Foucault refers to the ontologically asymmetrical relation between existing social contexts and individuals that accounts for the ontological power that the social world has regarding the constitution of human beings into socially integrated social subjects. According to the notion of constitutive power, the human subject is always the product and the effect of existing social forces, being determined and empowered from the outset by their standardizing forms of conduct. The notion of subjective freedom still relies upon recognitive relations, but these can no longer be distinguished from power ontologically and, thus, associated with an ethically pure finality. The ambivalent nature of recognition lies in its double-sided status as the condition of possibility both for becoming subjects through the embodied internalization of the existing set of forces and for the empowered capacity for action that these latter provide to human subjects. Thus, to be recognized from the social context means to be free in determining social contexts, to be asymmetrically subjugated to a more powerful, constitutive force, which allows subjects to explore and develop standardizing modes of conduct. Finally, Foucault's second contribution has been to highlight the bodily and pre-reflexive dimension of constitutive power and recognitive processes, which gives reason to the pervasive and silent functioning of power relations and forcefully highlights the bodily, pre-propositional, behavioural working of recognitive relations.

For such reasons, Judith Butler has retrieved Foucault's theory of power, while integrating it with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, in order to analyze more precisely

the psychic mechanism through which power, as distinguished by domination as external imposition, can penetrate into human subjects to the point of making them “attached” and voluntarily devoted to their subordination. This devotion and voluntary subjection to social reality’s pre-given and fixed frameworks can be explained, according to Butler, once we rely upon a notion of enabling power and on a theory of the human subject’s stubborn attachment to recognition. By starting from the notion of “stubborn attachment,” Butler claims that:

No subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent (even if the passion is negative in the psychoanalytic sense). Although the dependency of the child is not political subordination in any usual sense, the formation of primary passion in dependency renders the child vulnerable to subordination and exploitation [...]. Moreover, this situation of primary dependency conditions the political formation and regulation of subjects and becomes the means of their subjection. If there is no formation of the subject without a passionate attachment to those by whom she or he is subordinated, then subordination proves central to the becoming of the subject. As the condition to becoming a subject, subordination implies being in a mandatory submission. [...] “I would rather exist in subordination than not exist” is one of the formulations of this predicament.⁵⁹

The core idea of Butler’s analysis of the psychic life of power is that the primary vulnerability of the human being makes them dependent upon the recognition of other subjects, and thus constitutively leads them to self-subjugate *to* and be subjected *by* the social world. The individual’s subjection to the social context, namely the adoption and self-standardization to its frameworks in order to be recognized and integrated within it, is thus the condition for the human being to *be* and *persist* as a subject who can act. Through Foucault’s theory, Butler points out how power, mediated by the need and the conferring of recognition, leads subjects to the paradoxical status of being simultaneously products and effects of subjection.

A power exerted on a subject, subjection is nevertheless power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject’s becoming. [...] If in acting the subject retains the conditions of its emergence, this does not imply that all of its agency remains tethered to those conditions and that those conditions remain the same in every operation of agency. [...] The act of appropriation may involve an alteration of power such that the power assumed or appropriated works against the power that made the assumption possible. Where conditions of subordination make possible the assumption of power, the power assumed remains tied to those conditions, but in an ambivalent way; in fact, the power assumed may at once retain and resist that subordination. This conclusion is not to be thought of as (a) a resistance that is really a recuperation of power or (b) a recuperation that is really a resistance. It is both at once, and this

⁵⁹ Butler, 1997, p. 7.

ambivalence forms the bind of agency. [...] Power acts on the subject: an acting that is an enacting.⁶⁰

Therefore, it seems clear that Butler's aim is to further analyze the Foucauldian concept of constitutive power by developing more explicitly a theory of subjection (intended as both subjectivation and subjugation) as ontologically relying upon recognition. It is precisely the subject's dependence upon recognition that accounts for its ontological vulnerability and aptness to be determined by social standards, arbitrary categorizations, and asymmetrical relations of force. Nevertheless, the counterintuitive aspect of social recognition is that the power acted on the subject through its mediation turns into the enacting power that the latter can have towards its social environment. In Butler's case as well, constitutive power and, if we want to provide a label of this account on recognition, *constitutive recognition*, are the conditions of possibility for the subjects' subjugation and freedom "in context," in "power-structures."⁶¹

Sartre, Foucault, and Butler's theories provide different analyses, more or less structured, of the relational or recognitive status of human subjectivity. By setting aside the different conceptual framework they refer to, for instance, Sartre's retrieval of Descartes' notion of absolute freedom, Foucault's reliance upon French Structuralism, and Butler's use of psychoanalytic tradition, what should have emerged is their common attempt to outline an ambivalent ontology of recognitive relations among subjects and the social world. Differently from the previous level of criticisms, here, these analyses of recognition aim at debilitating this latter from a structural, thus more invasive, point of view. Whereas in the first case the blind spot in Honneth's theory of recognition regards his overlooking of the descriptive dimension of recognitive relations, thus pointing out the critical insensitivity of his theoretical framework in distinguishing between adequate and ideological forms of recognition, in this second case the possibility to conceive recognition as a normative and truly critical or emancipatory

⁶⁰ Butler, 1997, pp. 11-14.

⁶¹ We must specify how Butler in her following writings, such as in the essay she presented for the Adorno Lectures, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life?" (2012), mitigates the radicality of her analysis on recognition by offering, first, a descriptive analysis of the intrinsic vulnerability and interdependence of the living human body upon the external world, and then outlining a normative perspective wherein recognition is to be thought as the acknowledgment of human vulnerability as to render it equal, bearable, liveable, and just. Therefore, according to this new perspective, the issue is no more to negate the normativity and critical sensitivity of recognition as such structurally. Instead, it is to consider the mainstream paradigm of recognition as insufficient in providing the ethical meaning of social relationships. Since they do not account for the intrinsic vulnerability, dependence, and power relationships that characterize human life, they are incapable of offering a consequent ethical description of recognition as devoted to maintaining such a vulnerability liveable and just.

category for the social contexts is excluded from a structural point of view. The impossibility for recognition to stand for a critical category of the social context is due to the ontological or factual dependence of the human being, for its development as a social subject, upon social recognition, which constitutively leads the subject to internalize and be determined from the outset by the existing social, cultural, and juridical framework. The ontologically relational development of human subjects into pre-given social contexts, which exert their power upon individuals asymmetrically, implies that recognitive relations are always both constitutive and enabling. In fact, they enable the intelligible and practical development of individuals through a positive confirmation that, nevertheless, always occurs by conferring qualities and capacities yet existing or specifically structured by the social context, without them having been chosen or continuously ratified by the individual, involved in a dynamic development resistant to objective and reified categories. On the one hand, these structures and categorizations set up delimited horizons of agentive, emotional, desiring, and conceptual possibilities, predetermining the subject's absolute creativity and freedom. On the other hand, such delimited horizons of possibilities are not to be conceived socio-ontologically as fully rigid or closed. Rather, they are elastic, thus allowing the subject to be enabled with agentive power to explore the intrinsic potentialities of power relations.

As we have seen, recognition is conceived simultaneously as delimiting and enabling the practical agency and identity of human subjects, as something necessary but to be overcome in its limitations, and therefore, as maintaining a bright and a "dark side" together. What these theories argue for is the *radical* exclusion of a positive or ethical recognitive relation among subjects and, consequently, the denial of any possibility to conceive recognition as a critical category to criticize the social world since this latter, as a matter of principle, is *always* itself an object of critique, *always* coexisting with power and subjugation.

It is not difficult to see how, on this second level of criticism, there are gathered philosophical traditions which look at intersubjective and social relations, and more importantly for our reflections, recognition, through the lens of a theory of the social world which essentially compete with the one developing from Hegel to Honneth. Indeed, although the social world and intersubjective relations are conceived as an ontologically necessary and factual aspect of the human being, the quality of such a dependence is negatively presented. The social world and recognitive relationships are the *loci* of the determination and objectivation of subjective identities, from which subjects can acquire an agentive power to overcome and be freed from

social ties and predeterminations partly. Instead, for an ethical paradigm of the social and recognition, they stand for the final *loci* wherein the mere abstract potentialities of human freedom can acquire an effective and living form. Thus, in both cases, the social world and cognitive relations represent a primary condition of possibility for human freedom, but in sharply different manners. In the first case, they are the factual conditions for subjectivation that are to be deconstructed by the subject for attaining power for action within but beyond social ties. In the second case, they are factual and ethical conditions for the subject's process of subjectivation and self-realization, since its being-in-society is not merely a factual *datum*, but on the contrary, the space wherein subjectivity can find concreteness for its freedom. The idea of "social freedom" can be declined in a twofold manner: human freedom is social because it is factually always "in context"; or because it is effective and concrete thanks to and through the social context and its relational structure.

This kind of opposition among theories of subjectivation, social ontologies, and social theories cannot but raise some suspects, due to their respective radicality and unilaterality. The "negative" accounts of social freedom and recognition, stressing legitimately the power asymmetry *de facto* existing among social contexts and individuals, end up considering recognition as always implying a standardizing and objectifying effect on human subjects ontologically. Instead, the "positive" ones, by considering the social world and recognition as the legitimate *loci* wherein subjects can attain freedom in light of the disrupting effects on psychic integrity and practical realization of individuals caused by the denial or lack of recognition, tend to overlook the asymmetrical power that social contexts exert *through* and *on* intersubjective relationships among social subjects with reifying and standardizing effects. Accordingly, it seems that both positions, in their radical and unilateral understandings of the relationship between individuals and the social world, hinder a balanced critical approach to human societies and blur their critical sensitivity by exaggeration or by default.

Indeed, on the side of the "negative" approaches, any capacity to distinguish between the inevitable and the problematic degrees of social asymmetry and constitutive recognition gets blurred. The relational status of human subjectivity is uniformly considered problematic. As Robin Celikates and Rahel Jaeggi concisely argue for, this philosophical approach:

seems to be locked in a paradoxical and aporetic description of the inevitable social character of our existence. It makes difficult, indeed, to demarcate social relations of reification, alienation and domination from those cognitive relations which, instead, are constitutive of the process of subjectivation. [...] The issue regarding how we can become free in front of constrictive norms

and their normalizing social pressures, is to be conceived as related to the possibility for subjects to appropriate and transform social determinations, rather than as an alternative among determinacy and indeterminacy.⁶²

This position leads social critique to be indifferently critical towards the inevitable existence of social subjects within organized social contexts, which determine the content of subjectivity partly, and those recognitive relationships which tend to reify and strictly delimitate the polyvalent and developing agency of social subjects, raising social and subjective feelings of alienation.⁶³ By referring to Rahel Jaeggi's analysis, "alienation" stands for "a relation of relationlessness,"⁶⁴ as indicating that psychological and practical state wherein social subjects, despite being recognized through social determinations and involved within practical contexts, experience a personal status of inertia, passivity, absence of control, lack of understanding, stagnation, and lifeless relation towards the social context. The constitutive aspect of recognition among subjects implies the inevitable affirmation of the subject's practical dimensions not abstractly but through the intelligible structures of social contexts. Nevertheless, the constitutive side of recognition becomes problematic and relevant for criticism once its elastic, polyvalent, dynamic, and living status is obstructed due to the lifelessness and rigidity of the personal and social categories that stand for its horizon of intelligibility. If they impede human subjects from dynamically developing their identities in and through the qualitative transformation of social contexts' categories, meanings, determinations, desires, and interests, they reduce human subjectivity to the status of an inert object to manipulate.

Conversely, on the side of the "positive" accounts of recognition, as highly represented by Honneth's theory, the asymmetrical power of social contexts and the possible risks and degenerations of the constitutive role of recognition receive insufficient attention.⁶⁵ The notion of power to which Honneth's theory refers is one of *domination* mainly, which, thus, considers

⁶² Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017, p. 74. (Translation mine).

⁶³ See for instance Martin Saar (2019). Here he outlines for social critique the normative criterion of "polyvalence" of social practices and subjective activity.

⁶⁴ Jaeggi, 2014, p. 25. Herein, Jaeggi successfully recovers the critical category of "alienation," first through a reconstruction of its philosophical history and subsequently by actualizing it in relation to contemporary neo-capitalist society. Such an attempt of actualization has led Jaeggi to operate a process of formalization of the concept of alienation. She formalizes this category by severing it from an essentialist understanding which connect the subjective feeling of alienation to the loss of an original ontological content. To give reason to contemporary post-metaphysical positions, especially as regards human identity, she proposes to connect the status and feeling of alienation, with their sets of moral and normative meaning, to the formal idea of a relational status of the human being with itself, the external world and the social world, thus understanding as pathological all those forms of subjective relations to the world wherein the transformative and creative potential of the human being is blocked or obstructed.

⁶⁵ See Allen, 2010; Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. 5.

the social cases where some social groups exert constrictive power upon other social members through social, political, cultural, and juridical frameworks that manifestly misrecognize other subjects' capacity to act freely and positively self-conceive. In the previous paragraph (I. 2. 1), we have referred to those criticisms which highlight Honneth's lack of consideration for normatively weak recognitive relations that instrumentally affirm or confirm the value of subjects' practical dimensions to maintain the dominant and oppressive status of some existing social groups. Moreover, we have seen that this missing consideration has prevented Honneth from providing more cogently and critically the *ontological conditions* that render recognitive relations "adequate" or "ethical," distinguishing them from ideological and dominating ones. Finally, we have quickly mentioned the idea that to specify further the ontological conditions of recognitive relations would mean to identify the theoretical aspect of Honneth's theory that structurally impedes the possibility of this specification process.

But here, with the notions of constitutive power it should be clear that we are referring to a different dimension of power, which accounts for the factual asymmetrical power that the social context exerts on individuals through recognitive relations, always mediated by its *pre-given* or *new instituted* categories, meanings, qualities, and capacities. Honneth, in *The Struggle for Recognition*, does not consider the issue sufficiently. This impedes his account from being critically sensitive not merely towards instrumental or ideological relations of recognition between social subjects, but also towards *alienating, standardizing, reifying, and lifeless*⁶⁶ relationships of recognition. These relationships of recognition are not *per se* manifestly or ideologically unjust, repressive or constrictive. Instead, the issue at stake is that, after being instituted and unavoidably implying a partly supra-subjective determination of subjective contents, they assume a rigid ontological stance that prevents subjects from instituting a *living, transformative, and creative* transaction towards themselves, their social determinations, and their social contexts.

Given the constitutive dimension of recognition, it is necessary for a normative recognition paradigm, such as the one of Honneth, to maintain the very possibility of a conception of successful recognitive relations that can still be distinguished by reifying, standardizing, and lifeless ones. Such a possibility seems feasible just for the fact that we can pre-theoretically and theoretically refer to a web of social relationships as "wrong" with a

⁶⁶ With "reifying," we are referring here to those recognitive relations which do not dynamically develop in their contents and agentive dimensions in relation to the subjects' dynamic, thus becoming constitutive relationships wherein individuals appear as fixed, determined objects, rather than as creative subjects.

variety of qualitative determinations and statuses, such as “lifeless,” “static,” “alienating,” “objectifying,” and so on. The issue in question, thus, compels an ethical paradigm of recognition to reflect not upon the ontological conditions that a relationship of recognition should satisfy in order to be devoted to the objective realization of the subjects’ contents, in contrast with ideological confirmations. Rather, it should investigate the *ontological status* that a non-ideological and ethical relationship of recognition, once instituted, should have and maintain to remain ethical, without implying the degenerations possibly following from the determining and empowering role it unavoidably has within the subject’s process of self-identification in the social world. Therefore, with ontological status, we mean the *kind* of relationship that ethical recognition, once being instituted in an adequate and non-ideological manner, should be in order to remain ethical and be in contrast with its problematic degenerations following from its inevitable constitutive character. That is, from the fact that it is a *social* relation, i.e., always occurring within an existing social context and with the mediation of supra-subjective and habitual common reference frameworks of categories, meanings, statuses, norms, social behaviors, desires, and ends. What do labels such as “objectifying,” “static,” “standardizing,” and “alienating” suggest if not a matter of *ontological status*, which should pertain, as a sort of meta-condition, to a non-ideological and genuine relationship of recognition to remain ethical? Has recognition something to do with “life,” “dynamics,” and “transformation”? It should be both constitutive and flourishing for the human beings’ own potentialities, and it should confirm and affirm from a public and social point the valuable potentialities, qualities, and requests of human subjects, making them public and socially intelligible. But how should we intend this “constitutive” or “productive” capacity of recognition so as to conceive as “pathological” or “wrong” any solidification of its dynamic? This is an ontological question that refers to the *ontological status* of ethical recognition, rather than to the ontological conditions for domination-free recognitive relations.

The second level of criticism for a recognition paradigm makes evident, despite its problematic radicality previously pointed out, the insufficient attention that Honneth, in his theoretical framework, has paid not only to the *ontological conditions* but also the general *ontological status* of ethical recognition. Indeed, he has not only failed to specify the ontological conditions which make a relation of recognition “normative” and “ethical” as allowing the subject to reach its self-realization discarded from situations of domination and oppression. Moreover, he has not specified the *ontological status* that ethical recognition, as partly

constitutive of subjective practical identities through the mediation of existing social categories and structured horizons of agentive, emotional, behavioural, and meaningful potentialities, must have in order to not becoming a lifeless and objectifying relationship.

I. 3. Honneth's "Truncated Project" and the Recovery of John Dewey: A Proposal

In the two previous paragraphs, we have attempted, first, to summarize the theoretical reasons which led contemporary practical philosophy to reconstruct the Hegelian category of recognition, thus allowing critical social theory to progressively outline a critical project built upon this notion. Second, we have posited Axel Honneth's account, mainly relying upon the theoretical framework of *The Struggle for Recognition*, as momentarily the more systematic paradigm of recognition and the higher attempt to provide a critical theory of recognition. The acknowledgment of Honneth's theory as the turning point of the contemporary critical paradigm of recognition is due to his attempt to clarify the constitutive mechanism of recognition for human subject's self-realization. Accordingly, recognition manifests as the relationship wherein subjects positively confirm and affirm their subjective practical dimensions, thus reciprocally allowing each other to develop the positive practical self-relation that is necessary for freely self-realizing within existing societies. Then, we have briefly enumerated the theoretical bases of Honneth's account, namely, his systematic identification of three different *species* of recognition (love, respect, and social esteem) and understanding of recognition's moral meaning. Consequently, the central role he attributes to social suffering as the emotional basis to undertake moral struggles for social recognition. And finally, his formulation of the criterion of the "good life" to criticize social contexts that structurally implement forms of social misrecognition, which harm the psychological integrity of social members through continuous experiences of disrespect and contempt.

Third, we have presented the two levels of criticism, emerging within critical theory and social philosophy's debate, that the contemporary critical theory of recognition, mainly relying on Honneth's paradigm, is compelled to address in order to maintain as feasible to use recognition as a critical category of human societies. What such criticisms have pointed out is the insufficient attention Honneth paid respectively to the role that recognition plays in sustaining and silencing situations of social dominations, at the expenses of oppressed groups,

and to its inevitable constitutive dimension in partly determining and structuring the subject's practical identity, in its emotions, capacities, ends, and qualities through pre-existing and regulating social categories and practices. We have seen how these two levels of criticism affect an ethical or normative paradigm of recognition more or less structurally, stressing the urgency to provide further conceptual tools to distinguish among adequate and inadequate relations of recognition. Against the background of such criticisms, the theoretical framework Honneth outlined from *The Struggle for Recognition* appears necessary but not sufficient to maintain recognition as a critical category of the social contexts.

Having made such considerations, in an attempt to contribute to this debate on recognition, the main objective of our reflections will be the following. To inquire, in light of the criticisms previously exposed, on how it could be possible to strengthen the theoretical framework of a critical theory of recognition, as highly based on Honneth's mature paradigm of recognition, in order to maintain the project to provide a normative category of recognition for criticizing human societies. This aim implies three theoretical steps.

The first step, that we attempted to undertake partly in this chapter, is to clarify from the criticisms raised to Honneth's theory what sort of theoretical questions it is unable to address. We conceptualize the first compelling issue his theory is incapable of dealing with in terms of the *ontological conditions* of normative recognition, related to the urgency to find conceptual tools to distinguish more clearly among adequate and ideological relationships of recognition, due to his assumptions that any occurrence of social relations of affirmation and confirmation towards social members' practical identities is already a case of ethical recognition, apt to allow their free self-realization in the social context. This problem, thus, calls for an enlargement of his normative grammar of recognition. Indeed, its normative framework seems to be capable of critically detecting cases of personal injury, which manifestly obstruct the possibility for human subjects to develop a positive practical self-relation. Notwithstanding, it turns out to be lacking sensitive conceptual tools for criticizing ideological relations of recognition among social members, namely, normatively weak cognitive relations, which acknowledge positive values to social members while maintaining them within relations of domination and oppression. The second compelling issue Honneth's theory is struggling to address is the one we have defined as the *ontological status* of normative recognition, and refers to the problem of the constitutive dimension of recognition and the necessity to discriminate among the inevitable social determination of recognition and the pathological cases wherein it turns into a standardizing,

alienating, and lifeless relation. Honneth's overlooking of this ontological dimension of social recognition, which in its pathological regressions relies upon a notion of power different to that one of domination, implies the lack within his conceptual framework of theoretical elements apt to specify the ontological status of normative recognition, namely, the *kind* of constitutive relation that it is or should be in contrast to its pathological forms.

To face these problems and keep the idea of a normative concept of recognition for criticizing human societies, we aim to inquire whether it is possible to enrich Honneth's theoretical framework, as standing for the current reference framework of the contemporary critical theory of recognition, for clarifying the *ontological conditions* and the *ontological status* of normative recognition. This would make feasible, for a critical theory of recognition, to distinguish among adequate and inadequate recognitive relations, namely, among normatively strong and normatively weak relationships of recognition, i.e., ideological and lifeless.

The second step, thus, will endeavor to identify within Honneth's framework, with a particular focus on *The Struggle for Recognition* and other following writings which develop its theoretical and methodological strategy, the *theoretical reason* for which the possibility for a clarification of the *ontological conditions* and *ontological status* of normative recognition is structurally impeded.

The final step, once this problematic theoretical reason is understood, will be to enlarge the reference framework of contemporary recognition through a philosophical perspective which can be of help in overcoming the structural shortcoming of Honneth's paradigm and, thus, in clarifying the two issues mentioned. As previously said, we want to try to go beyond Honneth, through a philosophical perspective that can strengthen the normative grammar and critical task of a contemporary critical theory of recognition. The philosophical perspective we think can give a stimulus to the progressive development of the contemporary paradigm of recognition by being flanked with Honneth's theory, is that of the American pragmatist John Dewey.

I. 3. 1. The Unidimensional Analysis of the Subject-Subject Relation: The Subject-Object Relation, Its Critical Potential and Honneth's Truncated Project

The first and the second part of this work will be devoted respectively to a reconstruction of Honneth's theory of recognition and the identification of its structural element which

prevents the possibility of clarifying the ontological conditions and ontological status of normative recognition.

In Chapter Two and Chapter Three, we will thus outline the theoretical structure of Honneth's mature project for a critical theory of recognition, by focusing mainly on *The Critique of Power* (1985), *The Struggle for Recognition* (1992), his exchange with Nancy Fraser *Redistribution or Recognition* (2003), and the articles of the 2000s, *Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy*, *The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: on The Location of Critical Theory Today*, *Moral Consciousness and Class Domination: Some Problems in the Analysis of Hidden Morality*, and *Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of Critique in the Frankfurt School*. In the extensive production of Honneth,⁶⁷ these writing can be considered exemplificative of both the theoretical exigencies and the main conceptual bases on which he has built his human anthropology of recognition and account of critical theory. By analysing in more detailed the exigencies that led Honneth to undertake a similar project against the background of the previous generations of Frankfurt Critical Theory, we aim to delineate the theoretical core of his paradigm of normative

⁶⁷ We will primarily focus on these writings since, herein, we can find the theoretical backbone that sustains Honneth's entire philosophical production, even his most important following work, *Freedom's Right* (2011). On the one hand, this theoretical backbone provides a clear description of how Honneth conceives the constitutive mechanism of recognition for the human subject's self-realization. On the other hand, it unveils the problem we think structurally affects his category of ethical recognition's critical capacity: the lack of analysis of the constitutive practical interaction that the human being undertakes with the external environment. In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth maintains *The Struggle for Recognition's* theoretical backbone in its main conceptual elements and structural problem, focusing on the objective embodiment of the social conditions of human subjects' self-realization within three main institutions of the modern world, i.e., personal relationships, the market, and the public sphere. Honneth shifts the interest from the intersubjective relationships of recognition among social members to the normative principles that govern the genesis, the reproduction, and development of the social institutions of social life, conceiving the critique of the social world in terms of an analysis of the possible "distortions" of social life from the rational principles embedded within the social world. In *Freedom's Right*, therefore, with respect to the first mature systematic work on recognition, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth undertakes an institutional analysis of the social world, wherein the recognitive conditions of the subject's freedom are analyzed through the historical and normative reconstruction of the main social institutions of the modern world, whose ethical principles govern their progressive and teleological evolution towards increasingly ethical contexts of freedom. Hence, Honneth keeps maintaining his understanding of the constitutive mechanism of recognition and the teleological interpretation of human societies' moral progress, reconsidering the former on the level of social institutions and grounding the latter on a historical reconstruction of the modern world. Therefore, the final result is that the problematic aspects already present in *The Struggle for Recognition* are not solved, but, on the contrary, maintained and implemented. Firstly, his institutional shift maintains the lack of a broader anthropological analysis of the human being, and consequently, of recognition. Secondly, it implies his less attention to the hidden sufferance and emancipatory reactions occurring at the social world's intra-group and inter-group level. Thirdly, it entails his furthering assumption of a teleological and cumulative path for social freedom and ethical life, overlooking the "imbrications of power," as Danielle Petherbridge calls them, that can accompany relationships of recognition. Therefore, for our reflections, we want to focus directly on "the origin of everything," namely, the first mature works of Honneth, identifying the theoretical reason that we think has weakened all the Honnethian program for a critical theory of recognition.

recognition as relying upon the conceptual triad previously mentioned: positive affirmation – individualization as undistorted self-relation – self-realization. Consequently, we will expose his account for a critical social theory, namely, his conception of the specific function and analytic criterion of social critique, respectively, the discovery of the hidden morality of misrecognized social groups, and the “good-life” criterion.

In Chapter Four and Chapter Five, we will seek to identify the *theoretical reason* for which his account of recognition, with its conceptual framework and consequent normative grammar of recognition, cannot deal appropriately with the two levels of criticism previously exposed, and thus offer conceptual tools to point out less formally the ontological conditions and status of normative recognition. We want to argue that this reason lies in Honneth’s unilateral analysis of the subject-subject relation as regards the process of individualization and free self-realization of human subjects. The structural shortcoming of Honneth’s framework consists of his consideration of the development of subjects’ practical identity as primarily dependent upon the positive affirmation and confirmation of other social members. He does not frame social recognition alongside other interactions through which the contents of subjective practical identities develop and are related to, and on which recognition is functionally dependent. Instead, he understands recognition as the unique relation of subjectivity, whose affirming and confirming quality is sufficient for subjects to gain a “positive self-experience” and, thus, undertaking unimpeded the processes of “social self-realization.” By considering the development of subjective identities only in relation to social recognition, Honneth ends up assuming by default a *private* and *psychologist* conception of practical identity’s contents, as interiorly present, pre-reflexively or reflexively, in human subjectivity, something they possess and just attend to receive a kind of social confirmation to be realized, fulfilled, and developed. Honneth’s subjectivist or psychologist understanding of subjective contents, which individuals dynamically develop or own through the historical development of human societies, is evident from his abstract and formal definition of recognition in terms of affirmation (*Bestätigung*), participation (*Anteilnahme*), improvement (*Steigerung*). Such a description, nevertheless, has a high degree of formality. It is formal because it reduces recognition to a matter of amorphous affirmation. Honneth assumes that the mere sustainment received from the social context is a sufficient condition for allowing subjects to realize their contents effectively and objectively. Therefore, Honneth, focusing only on intersubjectivity concerning the development of subjective practical identities, and consequently relying upon a psychologist idea of their

contents, ends up taking for granted the immediate continuity among the abstract, evaluating, social affirmation of subjective features, which is necessary for the subject to positively self-identify with itself, and the *effective, objective, and dynamic* realization and fulfilment by subjects of their personal contents. Notwithstanding, such a theoretical structure has proved to be inadequate, namely, necessary but not sufficient for approaching social contexts critically. Whereas it permits the criticism of social situations wherein subjects undergo manifest cases of social misrecognition through experiences of radical contempt and disrespect, thus being impeded in developing a positive self-relation to act within societies, it is insufficient for critically approaching the inadequate forms of social recognition. It is insufficient, on the one hand, to critically identify those recognitive relations wherein the development for the subjects of a positive self-relation is instrumentally supported for silently hindering the effective and objective realization of their personal contents and social requests, and thus, their real self-realization. On the other hand, it is inadequate to detect those recognitive relations which become lifeless, tending to standardize, strictly determine, and curb the dynamic process of development of subjective identity's contents.

The theoretical reason that we think hinders the Honnethian framework to be able to overcome the formality of his recognition paradigm, thus offering a more explicit analysis of the ontological conditions and ontological status of normative recognition, is his unilateral analysis of the subject-subject relations. Indeed, his formal anthropology of the human being unilaterally considers the reliance of human subjectivity upon recognitive relations without contemplating another central pole of subjective activity, on which recognition should be considered as functionally dependent: the subject-object relation.⁶⁸ Without a reflection on the qualitative relationship of the human being with its external environment, both natural and social, and an analysis of its interdependence and influence with recognition, a further clarification of the *constitutive mechanism* of normative recognition is compromised. In fact, how can we consider a relation of recognition as ethical or normatively “effective,” i.e., as

⁶⁸ The critique to Honneth as regards his unilateral analysis of subject-subject relation has been already pointed out by Jean-Philippe Deranty, Nancy Fraser, and Danielle Petherbridge, but in different ways. We will see in the following chapters how Deranty (2005, 2009, 2015a) and Fraser (2003) especially stress the “missing materiality” within Honneth’s mature theory of recognition, namely, the absence of a Marxist analysis of the subject’s interactions with materiality, work, and nature, and the consequent role they should play within recognitive relations. Petherbridge (2013) emphasizes especially Honneth’s missing consideration of the relations among subjects and social institutions. Our analysis aims at stressing more forcefully the absence in Honneth’s mature theory of recognition of an anthropological project conceiving ethical recognition as functionally dependent upon the general co-constitutive relation existing between the human subject and the external environment.

aiming at the realization of the subject's contents, if we cannot refer it to a conception of human activity within the external world that can give us some directives concerning their mutual constitution and qualitative exchange? Moreover, how can we define the *ontological status* of normative recognition if we do not refer to a broader ontological analysis of human activity within and through the external world?

Apart from such an analysis, recognition appears “overhead,” eradicated from its reference to an objective world wherein the qualities, capacities, ends, and aims of subjects arise, can be realized, and develop according to the specific ontological relation that the human being has with the external world. As long as we rely upon a formal human anthropology that focuses on the sole intersubjective conditions of practical human identity, without also inquiring about the type of relational exchange with the external environment that characterizes human activity and constitutively defines its contents, normative recognition cannot but be described abstractly in its conditions and be lacking a clear definition of the type of relation that actually is for the human being and human societies. It remains abstractly described in terms of “positive affirmation” because the sole analysis of the subject-subject relation does not lead to the consideration of the co-constitutive relation between the human being and the experienced external world. Accordingly, the human being is considered for its self-realization as dependent merely on the emotional, linguistic, or practical confirmation from the social world of its subjective contents, which are overlooked in their strictly objective mediation and development. Consequently, the subjects' contents remain, for both theoretical and pre-theoretical critique, something “private” and “undefined.” This means that they are prevented from being considered in their objective conditions for fulfilment and enhancement, and, thus, are extremely vulnerable to social manipulation and sterile objectification.

Afterwards, once the theoretical reason for which Honneth's mature framework fails to provide a stringent description of normative recognition in its ontological conditions and ontological status has been identified, we will attempt to overcome its shortcoming by referring to a philosophical anthropology wherein the category of recognition is framed within a broader analysis of human activity within the external world. We will start such an operation, firstly, by considering in Chapter Six that within Honneth's production there is a work, *Soziales Handeln und menschliche Natur* (1980), which, although less considered in the philosophical debate and not further developed and officially integrated by Honneth in its reference framework on recognition, contains somehow a theoretical openness to the philosophical anthropology we are

looking for. Indeed, we will emphasize how Honneth here, with Hans Joas, undertakes an analysis of the constitutive exchange that the human being has with the external world. Honneth and Joas theoretically approach the human being, first, in its more immediate dimension, namely, its being a *part of nature*, which develops a specific agentive quality within the external environment wherein it lives. Within this framework, recognition still plays a central role in representing a condition of possibility for subjectivity. Nevertheless, it is no more abstractly conceived as independent or “eradicating” from the distinctive occurrence of human activity *from* nature and *within* the objective world, natural and social. Instead, it is now presented in its genetic and performative role of mediation in the distinctive exchange that the human being has with the external world. We will see how therein Honneth and Joas conceive human activity in terms of a *humanization of nature*, as the subject’s capacity to grasp its sensuous and bodily experience within the world meaningfully and transform the external world intelligently and creatively. Recognition, as the genetic and performative condition for this agentive structure of the human being, assumes thus a normative role, as the necessary social mediation through which the human qualitative exchange with the external world can be performed and developed in its dynamism.

This work’s primary reference to the natural, sensuous, bodily, and practical aspect of human activity seems to sketch a theoretical framework different than the leading one of *The Struggle for Recognition*. Albeit not explicitly stated and subsequently integrated by Honneth in his mature theory, in a similar theoretical framework, the constitutive role of recognition for the human subject’s self-realization is enriched. Consequently, the ontological conditions and ontological status of normative recognition would be more clarified because this should aim at implementing the agentive quality of human beings within nature, in its specific ontological conditions. In addition to the fact that Honneth himself has neither yet expressly pointed out the advantages of such an approach to recognition nor attempted to integrate it with his reference account, the conceptual ground of *Social Action and Human Nature* does not stand for a systematic theory wherein a deepened naturalistic analysis of human activity, social life, and recognition are gathered together. Therefore, the third part of this work will be dedicated to a pragmatist approach that fundamentally contributes to the outline of a systematic naturalistic anthropology wherein recognition is functionally framed, disclosing an enriched normative grammar on recognition and critical approach to human societies. In conclusion, we will emphasize the theoretical and critical significance of this approach for a contemporary

theory of recognition for further defining the ontological conditions and ontological status of ethical recognition.

I. 3. 2. Recovering John Dewey: The Place of the Human Being in Life as a Clarification of the Constitutive Mechanism, Ontological Conditions, and Ontological Status of Recognition

In the third part of this work, we seek to refer to the theoretical perspective of John Dewey, a philosopher who we think has offered an extremely rich philosophical anthropology that he named *Naturalistic Humanism*, which stands for the theoretical background of a series of lectures in social and political philosophy he gave at the University of Peking. The current growing interest in the *Lectures in China, 1919-1920*, i.e., the English translation by R. W. Clopton and T. Ou of the Chinese transcription of the lectures, and the contemporary rediscovery of Dewey's original preparatory notes represent an important turning point for the current philosophical debate. On the one hand, for the philosophical rehabilitation of Dewey's social and political thinking, and, on the other, for its contributions to a paradigm of social philosophy and the critical analysis of social contexts. Indeed, in the *Lectures*,⁶⁹ Dewey conceives the moral progress of human societies as depending upon oppressed social groups' struggles for *public recognition of interests*. This striking similarity with Honneth's theory, namely, the combination of recognition with an agonistic understanding of moral progress, is leading with good reasons to a series of studies aimed at inquiring into such a theoretical bond. By following recent inquiries that are attempting to underline Dewey's specific approach to social philosophy, regarding its role and methodology,⁷⁰ and reconstructing his categorial framework, which includes the concept of "interest," "democracy," and "experience,"⁷¹ we aim to deepen especially the productive relation that can be instantiated between Honneth's theory of recognition and Dewey's use of this concept.

It is fundamental to underline that Dewey has not outlined a systematic theory of recognition like Honneth's, probably because at the end of the 19th century and in the first part

⁶⁹ From now on, with "*Lectures in China*", we refer to both the English translation by Clopton and Ou of the Chinese transcription and Dewey's original notes.

⁷⁰ The contemporary debate that is inquiring about the relation between pragmatism and Critical Theory is extremely vast, but we will refer later to the fundamental contributions of Roberto Frega, Roberto Gronda, Emmanuel Renault, Federica Gregoratto, Arvi Särkelä, Italo Testa, and Rahel Jaeggi.

⁷¹ Great analyses have been conducted by Rosa Calcaterra, Robert Bernstein, Robert Westbrook, Emmanuel Renault, and Matteo Santarelli.

of the 20th century, the renewal of a paradigm of recognition in Western Philosophy had not started yet, and, thus, the urgency to focus analytically on such a concept was not already felt. Moreover, the frequency of the concept itself in his philosophical production is limited. Nevertheless, Dewey explicitly used it in his programmatic manifest for a pragmatist social philosophy and, more importantly, he framed it within a very specific philosophical framework that merits reconstruction.

We are thus interested in the anthropological theory, with its conceptual framework, wherein Dewey places such a concept and through which it assumes a specific declination that we think could be of help for overcoming the unilaterality of Honneth's theory of recognition. Therefore, in Chapter Seven and Eight, we will start from the analysis of the *Lectures in China*, highlighting the underneath naturalistic anthropology that sustains the entire text and confers to recognition a specific role and place. Then, in Chapter Nine, Ten, and Eleven, we will attempt to unveil the critical potentialities of Dewey's use of the category of recognition by reconstructing the naturalistic philosophical anthropology and theory of the social world he systematically develops and deepens in some of his later works, such as *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Theory of Valuation* (1939). This reconstructive work is devoted to showing that a critical theory of recognition, to address the criticisms of the contemporary debate and strengthen its normative grammar and critical capacity, can go with Honneth, beyond Honneth, through Dewey. We will attempt to demonstrate this argument in three steps. In the first place, we will show how Dewey bases the possibility to undertake a critique of social contexts on a metaphysical reflection on life and consequent descriptive and normative analysis of how the subject, as a *living being*, *can* and *should* interact and act with the external world. The striking originality of his critical thinking lies in his attempt to replace the human subject within the broader context of life, as standing for an individual that is part of life while belonging to a specific degree or level of existence, which entails a particular capacity to act. The human being, like other organic entities, is a sensuous body endowed with needs and lacks, which can be satisfied, ensuring its self-survival and well-being, only by means of a constitutive interaction with the external environment, through the sensuous perception of the outer world's qualities of which it is deficient and the consequent transformation of these qualities by a process of consummation and enjoyment. The human subject, hence, is not an entity severed from nature. Rather, Dewey

stresses the necessity to re-conceive it in its continuity with the rest of nature, for it lives only in virtue of a living and constitutive interaction, both sensuous and transformative, with the outer objective world's qualities and values. Nonetheless, the human being differs from the rest of nature and other animal organisms, hence belonging to a higher level of life, since it has intelligence, i.e., the cognitive capacities of signification and knowledge. Dewey considers these cognitive capacities in their main practical function. On the one hand, they allow the subject to consider the external qualities of which it is deficient *significantly*, grasping the *specific* conditioning objective factors that regulate their occurrence and stabilization. On the other hand, they permit the individual to intelligently identify an organization of behavior devoted to operating specific transformations of the outer world, both natural and social, in order to enhance its demanded qualities. Hence, thanks to intelligence, the human being can potentially turn its immediate experience, i.e., its organic living and constitutive interaction with the outer world, into a *qualitatively* different interaction: the one of *enhancement of life*, which entails both the *reshaping of existence* and the *reconstruction of its own living experience*.

Thanks to its cognitive capacities, the human being can “reshape existence” since it can unveil the intelligibility running through existence and the external environment, disclosing the interactions underlying outer objects and situations, regulating their transformation and change, and expanding their own qualities. Moreover, it can reconstruct its immediate experience, i.e., the sensuous and transformative constitutive interaction that it has with the outer world for its self-survival and well-being. Indeed, the human being can intelligently *value* its feelings of liking and disliking and the outer qualities to which they refer, with which it identifies as standing for something valuable for it and, hence, as revealing something of itself. This process of cognitive valuation consists of considering these demanded qualities as mediated in their occurrence, stabilization, and enhancement by specific objective conditions. Thanks to these evaluative processes, the individual can channel its need and accomplish its demanded quality through an “interest,” or an end-in-view, which represent a future potential object or situation wherein, through a specific chain of means, namely, transformations of the external world, both natural and social, its contingent needed quality can be enhanced, expanded, and secured in its occurrence, its needs can be significantly and not-contingently fulfilled, and its immediate living unity with the outer world can be transformed into an ontological and practical interpenetration without tensions and harmonious.

Furthermore, Dewey deeply describes and justifies the human beings' capacity for action within the world, i.e., the enhancement of life as "reshaping of existence" and "reconstruction of experience," in its two ontological conditions: *intelligent transformation* and *dynamism*. In light of his metaphysics of life, he can first point out the *specificity*, the *plurality*, and the *uniform possibility of transformation* of the qualities demanded by the subject. Second, he can account for the *intrinsic situational projectivity* and *deviational potential* from previous experiences of the subject's needs, demanded qualities, and interests or ends-in-view. Finally, he can stress the possibility of *evaluating* the *adequateness* of the human being's activity of enhancement of its own life through the public and objective verification of the *humanizing potential* and *vitality* of its ends-in-view.

In the second place, we will reconstruct how, according to Dewey, the human being can genetically and performatively realize its capacity for action with the external environment thanks only to the recognitive mediation of other subjects, which is conceived in terms of the *participation or engagement in the other subject's experience*. Dewey highlights that the processes of knowledge, signification, and transformation of the outer world underlying the possibility of the subject to reconstruct its experience are not processes that, in their functional meaning, the individual can accomplish by itself, since they are eminently social processes. Recognitive relationships, thus, are conceived in terms of other subjects' participation and engagement in the experience of the individual cooperating for reconstructing it. That is, for defining – through their perspective, knowledge, meanings – and realizing – through their practical effort – the end-in-view, the object or situation reachable through a specific chain of means, wherein the need of the individual can be satisfied stably, its demanded quality can be expanded and enhanced, and its ontological and practical unity with the external world can become a tensionless and harmonious interpenetration or fusion.

In the third place, we will argue that his metaphysics of existence, his descriptive and normative theory of human action within the external world, and the consideration of its recognitive structure represent the theoretical framework by which Dewey defines his program for social criticism. Accordingly, social philosophy should criticize and outline social transformation programs whenever social members are prevented from realizing their specific constitutive interaction with the external environment due to inadequate contexts of recognition. In the *Lectures in China*, Dewey refers to two main inadequate contexts of

recognition, the ideological and the standardizing or lifeless one. With the first category, he refers to those recognitive contexts which are pathological since they do positively integrate social members in the social context but without standing for the emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations suitable to *enhance* their life, thus maintaining subjects in a situation of oppression and unveiling the parasitic hegemony of the social world by a specific group. Instead, with the second category, Dewey refers to those recognitive contexts that *rigidly* determine and hypostatize the contents of social members, interpreting and realizing them with categories, meanings, knowledge, customs, statuses, social practices, and institutions, which empower the subjects' capacity to act but delimiting and restricting its emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities, hence leading to a reification, standardization, and normalization of their personal contents. According to Dewey, these recognitive contexts prevent human subjects from performing and realizing their constitutive interaction with the external world according to the intrinsic dynamism that ontologically belongs to it as a *living* interaction, which always entails a more or less potential for deviation from previous experiences.

We will conclude that, within Dewey's *Naturalistic Humanism*, we do not find a systematic consideration of recognition as constitutive of the human subject's personal integrity, which, as Honneth pointed out, is an essential part of a good life. Instead, he has an alternative approach to recognition. An additional meaning of the constitutive role of ethical recognition for human subjectivity's self-realization emerges, and a contemporary critical theory should integrate it with the one that it currently considers. In fact, this alternative constitutive meaning allows the critical theorist to disclose a normative grammar of recognition capable of enriching the one derived from Honneth's paradigm of recognition, with the possibility to detect and criticize the inadequate or weakly ethical relationships of recognition. A contemporary critical theory of recognition, integrating Honneth's anthropological framework and paradigm of recognition with Dewey's naturalistic anthropology and understanding of recognition, is enabled, in the first instance, to conceive recognition as being constitutive for the human subject's self-realization not only since it represents that affirmative relationship, mediated by care and participation, that allows subjects to develop a normative disposition towards its personal contents. But, furthermore, since it allows the subject to realize its constitutive interaction with the outer world, the one of *enhancement of life*. In the second instance, through Dewey's framework, a critical theory of

recognition would be able to additionally define the *ontological conditions* that recognition must meet in order to be ethical according to the ontological conditions of human action itself. Ethical would be those relationships of recognition which allow the subject to *objectively enhance its life* by cooperating in the reconstruction of its needy experience, in the social institution of emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations functional for the significant fulfillment of the subject's needs, for the expansion and stabilization of its demanded qualities, and for the realization of its tensionless and harmonious ontological and practical interpenetration with the outer world. Instead, the *ontological status* of recognition, namely, the *kind* of relationship that recognition should be in order to allow the subject to not be strictly and rigidly determined by the social context, would be better defined and explained in terms of a *living transaction*. It should be a relationship that defines and stabilizes the contents of the subject, without entailing the subject's standardization and normalization to the socially defined categories, meanings, norms, standards, social practices, and institutions, and the reification of its contents. Instead, it should encourage and allow the subject to *keep living*. That is, to engage in the new and qualitatively unique interactions with the outer world, which open up new transformations and change, new emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities, new possibilities of deviation from the symbolic and practical framework of the social world, and hence the projection of its needs, demanded values, and personal contents.

Lastly, through the analysis of Dewey's program in social philosophy, we will stress that his social criticism can be inspiring and useful for a contemporary critical theory of recognition also from a methodological point of view. Indeed, his account of social philosophy represents a form of "weak normativism," which emphasizes the *situationalism* and *verificationism* that the normative principles and theories for social transformation should always maintain. His weak normativism could allow a critical theory of recognition to overcome the internal tension of Honneth's "strong normativism." Honneth, in the attempt to provide a richer and more structured criterion for social critique, ends up considering the species of recognition, which are fundamental historical normative principles of modern societies, in terms of normative principles to be employed universally, without considering the necessity to test and revise their emancipatory potential in structurally different social situations. Instead, Dewey argues that critical social analysis should orient its critical outlook by means of a universal and formal criterion but should use it as a "map and a compass" to determine a social situation, first, as "problematic." It is the duty of *specific* social theories

to more precisely define the normative principles that, in a particular social situation, can be emancipatory and provide programs for social transformation, which should always be considered as “hypotheses.” That is, more specific normative principles, such as the different species of recognition, and the theories for social transformation should be experimentally tested and verified in their adequacy, in light of their consequences and the further experiences of social members. Accordingly, they should be revised, enriched, or dropped in light of new and different social situations, as being always historically determined, and hence, possibly not suitable to ensure the moral progress within different social situations.

Our reflections will conclude with Chapter Twelve, wherein we will sum up our conclusive remarks. To be reconsidered in its effective critical capacity and emancipatory potential within human societies, a contemporary critical theory of recognition is compelled to revise its current critical paradigm of recognition, mostly relying upon Honneth’s account. We think that John Dewey’s Naturalistic Humanism and program for social philosophy should be acknowledged in their theoretical and critical contributions and integrated into the theoretical framework of a contemporary critical theory of recognition, as being able to strengthen its critical capacity in light of a consideration of the interdependence between recognition and life.

***PART 1. THE CONTEMPORARY PARADIGM OF
RECOGNITION AND THE ROLE OF AXEL
HONNETH'S MATURE THEORY OF RECOGNITION***

Chapter Two. The Need for a “Praxis Philosophy”: The Theoretical Genesis of Axel Honneth’s Mature Theory of Recognition

The theory of recognition that Honneth elaborated in his *Habilitationsschrift*, then published in 1992 as *The Struggle for Recognition*, represents the *pars construens* of his previous critical dialogue, in *The Critique of Power* (1985), with the main theorists of the earlier generations of the Frankfurt School, specifically Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas. Although Honneth has not dedicated any of its nine chapters to the analysis of his theoretical reviewing of and distancing from their social theories, it is essential to place his mature theory of recognition in the correct philosophical context of origin. Indeed, if “separated from this rich genealogy [...], the theses presented in *The Struggle for Recognition* might appear vague or insufficiently developed.”⁷² In fact, *The Struggle for Recognition* is to be interpreted in terms of a programmatic *reaction* to the critical *impasse* of Horkheimer and Adorno’s social theories through the development of Habermas’ truncated analysis on the everyday sphere, normatively regulated, of the intersubjective relationships among social members. Why can recognition stand for a critical category of the social? How is it to be understood in its intrinsic normative mechanism? How is it possible to systematically grasp its extensive critical potential within the different spheres of the social world? And how should critical theory be interpreted accordingly in its role and task? Honneth has defined all these inquiring questions, which represent the backbone issues of *The Struggle for Recognition*, in relation to the theoretical problems and limitations he previously singled out in the accounts of social critique of the Frankfurt School’s previous generations.

In the preface to *The Critique of Power*, Honneth explains the main aim of the work as follows:

I examine the approaches developed by Adorno, Foucault, and Habermas in order to criticize the conception of contemporary societies as relations of domination. The purpose of such a comparison is to work out in the represented positions *the conceptions of action* that lie at the basis of social integration and thus, too, at the basis of the exercise of power. [...] The form that a ‘critique of power’ should assume today follows implicitly from a critical analysis of the difficulties encountered, at different levels of reflection, within both of these approaches. To that

⁷² Deranty, 2009, p. 2.

extent it provides [...] reflective stages in which the conceptual premises of a critical social theory are gradually clarified.⁷³

In *The Critique of Power*, Honneth is interested, on the one hand, in analyzing the philosophical anthropologies to which the previous critical theorists referred in order to outline a theory of human action through which providing an analysis of the mechanisms of social domination and an account of social critique. On the other hand, he aims at understanding such accounts as progressive stages in the analysis of social domination, as parts of a “learning process” wherein the theoretical shortcomings of the previous stages had been overcome partially by the following ones, and through which Honneth clarifies to himself the fundamental directives of his future critical program. In fact, the origins of Honneth’s mature theory of recognition can be retrieved in the theoretical need he points out in *The Critique of Power* for “a praxis philosophy,” namely, for a philosophical-anthropological analysis suitable to address as systematically as possible the many *facettes* of social domination, to revalue the capacity of the human subject for critical and transformative activity, and to redefine the role and function of critical social theory.

According to Honneth, previous critical theorists, having failed to provide a differentiated enough philosophical anthropology, overlooked the differentiated normativity intrinsic to the intersubjective relationships among subjects. By ignoring or not investigating in depth the normativity that springs from the intersubjective relations among social subjects, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas ended up outlining system-theoretic accounts of the social world, with three main theoretical shortcomings. First, they prevent an essential dimension of social domination from being considered autonomously or sufficiently. Second, they severely downplay the capacity of social subjects for critical activity, and, finally, critical social theory loses its defining function to sustain oppressed social groups’ social struggles.

In the first two chapters of *The Critique of Power*, Honneth undertakes a reconstructive and critical analysis of Horkheimer and Adorno’s social theories, focusing, among other writings, on the four-handed work in which their theoretical points of convergence are presented, namely the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).⁷⁴ Indeed, in this collection of essays,

⁷³ Honneth, 1993, pp. xi-xii (Italics mine).

⁷⁴ The main topics contained in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* follow the inquiry path Horkheimer already disclosed in the essays *Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era* (1936), *Traditional and Critical Theory* (1937), and *Art and Mass Culture* (1941). Adorno then furthered the critique of

Horkheimer and Adorno attempt to reconstruct the development from pre-modern to modern societies in terms of a history of the progressive and totalizing affirmation of instrumental reason. With “instrumental reason” they refer to the scientific paradigm of rationality that prevailed during the Enlightenment, namely, that form of abstracting and generalized thinking by which the human being began to be able to dominate nature for self-preservation, but at the expense of an increasing abandoning of the constitutive relation between subjectivity and objectivity. In fact, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, the aim of the human being to dominate nature for overcoming its constitutive dependence and vulnerability to it progressively implemented a form of thinking that relates to the natural world only through a categorizing, generalizing, exploitative, and quality-blind attitude.

Enlightenment is totalitarian. [...] For Enlightenment, only what can be encompassed by unity has the status of an existence or an event; its ideal is the system from which everything and anything follows. [...] Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities. [...] The single distinction between man’s own existence and reality swallows all up others. Without regard for differences, the world is made subject to man.⁷⁵

Through instrumental reason, indeed, both subjectivity and objectivity “are nullified” since the subject’s extensive incorporation and subjection of the external world for the sake of control entails the total suppression of both the autonomy of nature and the awareness that the human being has about the living bond existing between the richness of its personal identity and the qualitative uniqueness and multiplicity of outer objects. From the false promises of the Enlightenment, concerning the possibility for the human being to overcome its self-incurred immaturity through scientific reason, to the affirmation of Capitalism, with its scientific division of labour and its system of mechanized and waged work, to the consolidation of the modern State’s bureaucratic and administrative rationality, the logic of violence, control, and suppression becomes the only relational structure of all interactions of the human being, with nature, itself, and other subjects. Horkheimer and Adorno, thus, attempt to show how the dominating logic of instrumental reason has been progressively *extended* to all layers of human

instrumental rationality and mass culture in *Minima Moralia* (1951), *Negative Dialectics* (1966), and *Aesthetic Theory* (1970). For an introduction to Horkheimer and Adorno’s philosophical background in writing the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see Galli, 1966.

⁷⁵ Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 4-5.

relationality, and systematically *secured* through industrialism, state apparatus, and mass culture, in the face of which the subject is but a passive victim, as being completely exposed to their attitudes of control and standardizing activity. “Not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationships of individuals to themselves, have themselves been bewitched [...]”⁷⁶ The individual psyche, repressed in its natural impulses and socialized through the system of rationalizing social forces,

shrinks to the nodal points of conventional reactions and the modes of operation objectively expected from them. [...] The countless agencies of mass production and its culture impress standardizing behaviour on the individual, as the only natural, decent, and rational one. Individuals define themselves not only as things, statistical elements, successes or failures. Their criterion is self-preservation, successful or unsuccessful adaptation to the objectivity of their function or schemata assigned to it. Everything which is different, from the idea to criminality, is expose to the force of the collective, which keeps watch from the classroom to the trade union. Yet, even the threatening collective is merely a part of the deceptive surface, beneath which are concealed the powers which manipulate the collective as an agent of violence.⁷⁷

From this passage it is clear how the system of instrumental reason distorts both the human being’s self-conception and self-relation as a unique and qualitative individuality, for it abandons its enriching and projective relation to objectivity to become a mere standardized function of the system, and human social relationships. By entirely transposing the logic of exploitation and suppression of external and internal nature to the subject-subject relations, the two authors attempt to explain social domination as the respective inter-humane attitude to materially dominate the other, to exploit its bodily existence for profit and security, regardless of its unique and irreplaceable qualities. Famously, Horkheimer and Adorno reinterpret the story of the Sirens in the *Odyssey* as an indirect depiction of such a nexus between repression of nature through work and social domination. Accordingly, to escape the perilous lure of the Sirens, which metaphorically recall the subject to its original aesthetic unity with nature, Odysseus relies on a rational system of division of labor. Such a strategy of control, on the one hand, leads Odysseus to a form of self-suppression, and, on the other hand, implies the institution of a class of dominated workers that deal with nature and materiality for Odysseus’ own sake. Indeed, Odysseus decides to plug the ears of his comrades and orders them to row while he avails himself of the right to enjoy the pleasure of the Sirens’ lure but bound to the

⁷⁶ Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, p. 21.

⁷⁷ Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 21-22.

ship's mast. Thus, retrieving Hegel's master-slave dialectics, Horkheimer and Adorno conceive the logic of social domination as the suppression of the slave's free and autonomous unity with nature. The latter is indeed reduced to blind corporeity and, as a working tool, his/her function is exploiting nature for the other's survival. Instead, the master is the one who delegates to others the violent and material manipulation of nature while ensuring his/her control on instrumental theory and the access to the archaic pleasure deriving from the original unity with nature, but without indulging in any real abandonment and retrieval of it.

Horkheimer and Adorno's final consideration is entirely pessimistic. The reconstruction of the increasing degeneration of human societies into closed systems of domination leaves no openings for a renewal of the human species. Rather, human history is conclusively conceived of as embedding a 'dialectical' movement, for its logic of suppression of nature, which is progressively transposed to all aspects of human relations (with objects, the inner self, and other subjects), leads to the very opposite outcome: human societies and human beings succumb "more deeply to that compulsion."⁷⁸ Individuals' atomization, war, racism, antisemitism, totalitarian societies, industrialized and standardizing mass art, and bureaucratization, are all simultaneous products and elements of the progressive totalization of instrumental reason, which, by attempting to repress all natural dimensions, leads to the opposite result of unleashing nature in its more blind and de-humanizing form.

Faced with the argumentative structure of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that we have tried here to summarize, Honneth, in *The Critique of Power*, provides a critical perspective on the fundamental purpose of this work, the anthropology and theory of ego formation it accounts for, the type of social theory it develops, the theoretical tools to analyze social domination it provides and the effective possibility for social criticism and transformation that derives from it.

Indeed, he points out how the pessimistic attitude of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is undeniably radical, providing a philosophy of history that interprets human historical process as a systemically progressive course of domination, assured by structures of control and manipulation destined to totally shape human individuality.

The progress of civilization is exposed as the concealed process of human regression. Socio-cultural evolution, which on the testimony of a cumulative growth in productive forces gives the

⁷⁸ Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, p. 9.

impression of continuous progress, turns out to be the extended act of regression in the history of the species.⁷⁹

The radicality of such an interpretation of human history and the focus on a single source of its regressive matrix, namely, the pathological relation of the human being with the natural world, according to Honneth, unveil Horkheimer and Adorno's unilateral anthropology and theory of ego-formation. Indeed, there are few passages in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* wherein the negative judgment on instrumental thinking and abstract individuality is shown as related to a positive anthropology and theory of identity formation. Such an anthropology, following Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *Theses on Feuerbach*, grounds the criticism of existing societies upon a conception of an *undistorted practice* of the subject with and within the objective world, i.e., with the natural and the social world.

Indeed, Marx's initial critique of Capitalism unmasks its base-mechanisms of private property and wage labour as de-humanizing for they imply the loss for the human being of its 'humane' practical relation with the external world, itself, and other subjects. Marx conceives of human activity in terms of 'praxis' since its primary ontological and epistemological dimension consists of its sensuous and transformative exchange with the external world through labour.⁸⁰ The exploitative and estranging logic to which human praxis is subjected within

⁷⁹ Honneth, 1993, p. 37.

⁸⁰ Here, it is essential to stress that Marx's anthropology, despite having been developed with the background of Hegel's idealism and Feuerbach's materialism, outlines a distinguishing category of human activity. As Emmanuel Renault points out, "following Hegel, Marx tried to think of men as defined mainly by their concrete activities, activities that are always conditioned by external and internal constraints, but are also able to transform their conditions, either through work or through revolutionarily activity. The notion of 'practice' denotes precisely the human activity conceived of in its subjective and objective conditionings as well as in its subjective and objective transformative potentials. [...] It is surely not contingent that Marx's version of the idea of the primacy of the practical is articulated with reference to 'Praxis', rather than to 'praktische Vernunft', 'das Praktische', 'die Tätigkeiten', 'die Handlung', or 'die Tat'. Indeed, in German Idealism and in Young Hegelianism, the German term 'Praxis' was already in use, but it was in another context and with another function. It was not in the context of discussion about the primacy of the practical, but about the relations between theory and practical applications. Its function was not to enunciate an ontological or epistemological principle but to think of the status of applied science or the political application of philosophical theories of natural rights. [...] Marx speaks of 'Praxis' in the *Theses on Feuerbach* in order to contrast an idealist conception of practice as 'subjective activity' (*subjective Tätigkeit*) or as actualisation of the freedom of the spirit or practical reason, with a materialist conception of practice as 'objective' and 'actual' (*wirklich*), that is, as always conditioned by circumstances.[...] Hence, the task of the 'new materialism' Marx wants to promote is to think of the primacy of the practical with reference to practice conceived of not only as a 'subjective activity' but also as an activity conditioned subjectively (as 'sensuous human activity') and objectively (as conditioned by circumstances). [...] It means that new materialism thinks of practice in its 'worldiness'. [...] It means that this new materialism criticizes the idealist conception of practice with an argument that is typical of old materialism: human activities are always conditioned by 'circumstances'. But conversely, against the old version of materialism, Marx stresses that the circumstances can also be changed by human practices, and it is only such a potential of human practices that enables one to understand the possibility and significance of 'revolutionary', or 'practical-critical' activity." (Renault, 2018, pp. 21-23).

Capitalism, as depriving the human being of its own activity, of the object of its labor and of its sympathetic attitude towards other subjects, well warrants for Marx the radical criticism of bourgeois societies and the imperative of social struggle to give rise to a communist society. What is important to underline is that in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx considers the disrupting effects of Capitalism upon practical human activity in its outer and inner dimension as well.⁸¹ Marx's reference to the subject's self-constitution and self-relation, thus, relies upon a sketched theory of subjectivity, according to which to become a subject means self-constituting as an individual human being through the particular and self-conscious appropriation of the human species' sensuous, creative, and transformative activity of the natural world's qualities.⁸² According to Marx, the "humane" relation to the external world and, therefore, the subject's positive self-development as an individual human being, do not depend upon the mere "having," "owing," or "consuming" of external objects. Instead, it depends on self-consciously pursuing the ontological unity which bounds, respectively, subjectivity to objectivity's qualities, circumstances, and properties that are suitable to be enjoyed, seen, touched, and perceived in their variety, and objectivity to subjectivity, as suitable to be unveiled, transformed, and enriched by the human being.

Similarly, Horkheimer and Adorno outline a philosophical anthropology according to which the primary agentive dimension of the human being is its relationship with the natural world, which is 'undistorted' when it is lived as a sensuous, aesthetically rational, artistic, and transformative relationship. Consequently, they relate the constitution and positive development of the subject's identity to the relations with natural objectivity.

But even as an autonomously objectified subject it is only what the objective world is for it. The inner depth of the subject consists in nothing other than the delicacy and richness of the outer perceptual world. If this intermeshing is broken, the self petrifies. It is confined, positivistically, to registering the given without itself giving, it shrinks to a point, and if, idealistically, it projects the world out of the bottomless origin or its own self, it exhausts itself in monotonous repetition.

⁸¹ See Marx, 1975, 3.

⁸² Marx, 1975, 3, p. 296. It is fundamental to underline how in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), Marx still relies upon the idea of a historical subject, i.e., the human species-being (*Gattungswesen*). Although he follows Feuerbach in his critique of Hegel's absolute idealism, reclaiming the urgency to revaluing from a philosophical point of view the uniqueness of human individuality, Marx maintains the philosophical perspective of the human species' natural community as the real subject of human history (see, Feuerbach's *Toward a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy* [1839], and Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* [1843]). Despite Marx's maintenance of a group and species' perspective, both on a descriptive and critical level, it is possible to find in both *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *Notes on James Mill* (1844), the presence of a sketched theory of the process of identity constitution of subjects as *individual* members of the human species through the projective and transformative relation with the external world.

[...] Only mediation, in which the insignificant sense datum raises thought to the fuller productivity of which it is capable, and in which, conversely, thought gives itself up without reservation to the overwhelming impression – only mediation can overcome the isolation which ails the whole of nature.⁸³

According to Honneth, Horkheimer and Adorno's human anthropology and theory of ego-formation⁸⁴ are unilateral and, thus, problematic, both from a descriptive and critical point of view. Firstly, Honneth stresses how through such a theoretical framework the mechanism of social domination, i.e., of the oppression exerted by some social group upon other social groups, lacks an autonomous analysis that, independently from the logic of the domination of nature, focuses on its non-derivate origin and on forms of social oppressions other than the mere material, bodily, and labour exploitation.

Such a theory sees in the identity logic of instrumental reason the subsumption of the particular under the universal – the original model of domination, of which every other form of domination is merely derivative. [...] This pointed formulation blatantly reveals the implicit presupposition that creates in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* an argumentative bridge between the philosophical-historical construction and a theory of social domination. The knitting together of these component concepts represents an attempt to form the concept of social domination in correspondence with the concept of the domination of nature. Only with the silent presupposition of this analogy is it meaningful to conceive of the techniques of social domination as products of an intra-social utilization of the means of domination acquired by working upon nature.⁸⁵

Secondly, by following such a unilateral analysis, the emergence and the successful development of the ego formation are understood as dependent merely on the free constitutive relation with external objects, to be conceived non-dualistically, as determined by and determining subjectivity. Horkheimer and Adorno, hence, entirely overlook the constitutive role that intersubjective relations play for the formation and the positive development of subjectivity.

⁸³ Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 155-156.

⁸⁴ We should underline how Horkheimer and Adorno's lexicon for what concerns the topic of identity formation is strictly related to psychoanalysis and its theory of the ego-development through the antagonistic pressure of the Id's impulses and the Superego's moral norms introjected from the social context. Horkheimer and Adorno reject Freud's ultimate idea that civilization or community life and the human original impulsive nature are two opposite and conflicting poles, for they do not perceive human naturalness in terms of an anti-social or blind condition, thus in strict opposition to social life. What's wrong is not social life per se, but the form of social life to which the model of instrumental reason has led. The positive ego-formation, thus, is not dependent upon the 'repression' or 'sublimation' of naturalness, but rather on the recovery of such a naturalness through a different form of rationality (negative or aesthetic thought for Adorno).

⁸⁵ Honneth, 1993, pp. 42-53.

Adorno and Horkheimer interpret the development of the individual ego as a process that is played out solely between the individual conscious subject and his or her natural environment. [...] The formation of human capacity for identity is conceived as the primarily individual process of formation of a subject in relation to natural reality. The human ego, according to these few indications, emerges as the intra-psychic product of a process in which the perceiving subject learns to distinguish between the outer sense impressions and inner experiential states. [...] Adorno and Horkheimer sketch the outlines of an autonomous ego identity within the context of the same theory of perception in which they also explain the origin of ego identity. They want to show that the formation of identity leads to an ego free of compulsion and identical with itself to the extent that the subject allows outer sense impressions and its inner experiential states to communicate equally and freely with one another. [...] The autonomous ego is thus only the correlate of a nature recognized in its own individuality.⁸⁶

What impresses Honneth is how this aesthetic conception of ego identity provides an analysis of individual identity's constitution as entirely "independent of social recognition by other subjects."⁸⁷ The lack of any consideration for the intersubjective premises of human identity, both for what concerns the formation of the subjective ego and the free development of the subject's personal identity, prevents Horkheimer and Adorno to outline a reliable theory of subjectivity, which accounts for the *different types of interaction* from which subjectivity emerges with its human capacities, and from which the normative conditions for the development of an undistorted personal identity can be identified in their multiplicity.

Finally, according to Honneth, a pessimistic philosophy of history combined with a unilateral account of human action and a strictly inter-objective theory of ego formation takes Adorno and Horkheimer to a no less problematic theory of the social. Indeed, they end up outlining a system-theoretic account of the social world. The idea of a progressive implementation and totalization of instrumental rationality at the social and societal level lead them to conceive of contemporary societies as closed systems of self-reinforcing supra-subjective forces. Such a system of social forces includes the capitalist division of labor (progressively defined on a global and corporative level), the capillary institution of bureaucratic and administrative organization (to the disrupting peak of totalitarian states), and the construction of a mass industry wherein expressive art, in its different forms, turns into a set of techniques of control and standardization of social members. On the theoretical level, Horkheimer and Adorno's judgment on the systematic and manipulative power that these social

⁸⁶ Honneth, 1993, pp. 43-45.

⁸⁷ Honneth, 1993, p. 45.

forces exert on individuals is sustained by their missing consideration of the social dimension of human activity and subjective identity, and consequently, of the normative expectations that the individual addresses to other subjects. They do not consider the social relations upon which the symbolic legitimization of the social world and the development of an autonomous personal identity depend, losing, thus, the opportunity to look at a fundamental source of social and individual normativity. Since the capacity of the human being to partake in processes of constitution and legitimization of shared cultural frameworks, and its possibility to freely self-develop within intersubjective relations, are entirely overlooked, Horkheimer and Adorno “cannot but comprehend the socially oppressed subject as a passive and intentionless victim of the same techniques of domination that are aimed at nature. It seems as if the procedures of control shape individuals without running into attempts at social resistance and cultural opposition.”⁸⁸

The final result of all these theoretical problems is that the role that critical social theory has for the enhancement of oppressed social groups’ critical activity is seriously downplayed. In the famous essay *Traditional and Critical Theory* (1937), Horkheimer distinguished critical theory from traditional ones as the theoretical activity that no longer aims at describing existing reality through generalizing and static concepts. Indeed, traditional theories, relying upon a dualistic conception of the subject’s theoretical activity and objective reality, relate to the natural and the social world as something given, existing naturally, which theory is devoted to describing in their intrinsic mechanisms for the mere sake of control. From such ontological and epistemological premises, it follows, firstly, that the function of theory is traditionally conceived of as the mere subsumption of the particularity and contingency of natural and social reality into even more generalizing and abstract categorizations. Secondly, that traditional theory indirectly justifies existing social settings, while dis-acknowledging the resistance or irreducibility of worldly events to the identity logic of generalization. The direct effects of such a form of theory, which lacks any conscious process of self-critique, are its self-denial as critical thinking and its consequent account of subjects’ pre-theoretical thought as alien to ‘praxis’, i.e., to the transformation of objective conditions and revolutionary activity.

According to Horkheimer, in opposition to traditional theory, a theory that pursues to recover its intrinsic critical attitude to the objective world should derive its concepts from existing reality (as traditional theories do), but in order to re-discuss them with changing reality.

⁸⁸ Honneth, 1993, p. 55.

For critical theory, the social world is to be unveiled as the result of both objective and social conditionings and, thus, as involved in a process of change wherein subjects and objects co-constitute each other. Critical theory therefore is designed to reinstate the practical significance of pre-theoretical thinking within the social world, namely its capacity to transform, criticize, and resist existing reality. Accordingly, it should conceive itself as the theoretical activity that sustains pre-theoretical activity through generalizing theories apt to effectively transform the social world for practically overcoming fixed social structures. And as an ally of existing emancipatory interests, it aims at updating its theoretical framework with the ongoing changes of practical critical activity.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, Horkheimer's account of critical theory seems to Honneth to be contradicted by the theoretical framework he provided with Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The combination of a negativistic philosophy of history with a system-theoretic account of the social world and a unilateral analysis of human action and ego development prevents their critical theory from referring to the critical normativity of oppressed individuals, relying upon their capacity for social action.

Honneth's critical review in the first part of *The Critique of Power* of the conceptual framework of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*⁹⁰ allows him to clarify the first point of departure for the maintenance of a critical theory of the social that aims at unveiling the various mechanisms of social domination and helping pre-theoretical social criticism to transform unjust and oppressive social contexts. It is a matter of recovering on the level of theory also "the existence of an intermediary sphere of the everyday communicative praxis of social groups"⁹¹ wherein "a social space for the creative achievements of interacting groups"⁹² can still be recovered. In other words, critical social theory must revise its philosophical anthropology to properly account not merely for the human subject's practical activity with objectivity, but for the human capacity for social action as well.

⁸⁹ "If, however, the theoretician and his specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the oppressed class, so that his presentation of societal contradictions is not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change, then his real function emerges." (Horkheimer, 2002, p. 215).

⁹⁰ After the analysis of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Honneth focuses on Adorno's personal social theory, considering it as a further investigation on the critical categories already defined together with Horkheimer, namely the reifying mechanism of instrumental thinking, the negativistic analysis of historical development, the critique of mass culture, and the identification of art and aesthetic thinking as the primary dimension for social critique.

⁹¹ Honneth, 1993, p. 55.

⁹² Honneth, 1993, pp. 55-56.

According to Honneth, Jürgen Habermas is the Frankfurt theorist who undertook such an anthropological path of inquiry but without fully exploring its theoretical potentialities. In the three chapters dedicated to Habermas' critical theory, Honneth focuses on the latter's insight on the human being's capacity for social action and the intersubjective premises of human identity, while maintaining a strong critical approach towards him. Indeed, the German philosopher is presented as the one who has disclosed an intersubjective account of human subjectivity and a communicative theory of the social world in Frankfurt Critical Theory but to finally opt for a functionalist theory of the social in which, moreover, the in-depth analysis of the intersubjective conditions of human subjectivity is set aside. What interests us here is to underline which undeveloped insight Honneth sees in Habermas' reflections before *The Theory of Communicative Action*, and how his mature theory of recognition is devoted to turning this insight into the core for a critical theory of the social.

As we mentioned in Chapter One, in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), Habermas outlined his program for a critical theory of the social world by advocating the review of philosophical anthropology. Indeed, only through the distinction of the different practical interests and cognitive attitudes of the human being is it feasible, according to him, to develop an account of social domination and clarify the role of critical theory. Making such an attempt, Habermas distinguishes among the human interest to practically master its external environment from the one to engage in the constitution of social forms of action. For social action Habermas means the human being's capacity to partake with other subjects in the constitution, through communicative agreement, of a shared framework of values and ends to pursue through practices collectively performed, and whose legitimacy depends on making possible the autonomous development of the identities of the subjects. Therefore, from a general point of view, he acknowledges how any social practice, from scientific knowledge to the evaluating and prescribing system of moral, cultural, and political values observed within every social context, depends, both in its genesis and performative conditions, upon communicative processes wherein subjects normatively agree upon the validity of its constitutive elements (scientific theories, moral standards of evaluation, and social and political strategies). From a local point of view, the one of critical theory, "along with material reproduction realized through instrumental activity, Habermas' social theory also takes up the communicative dimension of normative integration—symbolic reproduction."⁹³ Namely, he re-acknowledges

⁹³ Honneth, 1993, p. 242.

how human societies further their existence “physically,” through productive processes, and “symbolically,” through the communicative agreement and maintenance of the system of values, aims, and ends that the practices collectively followed embody and that shape the “practical self-understanding of social groups.”⁹⁴ Therefore, Honneth stresses how Habermas “maintains that individuals united within societies are capable of maintaining their lives only when beyond the reproduction of their material existence, they also continuously contribute to a renewal of their social lifeworld.”⁹⁵

Socialized individuals are only sustained through group identity [...]. They can only secure their existence through processes of adaptation to their natural environment, and through readaptation to the system of social labor in so far as they mediate their metabolism with nature by means of an extremely precarious equilibrium of the individuals among themselves. [...] Only in this balance, through communication with others, is the identity of each ego established.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, Honneth argues that Habermas subsequently furthered his communicative theory of the social world with two competing strategies, leading respectively to two different accounts of the social world, of social domination and of the role of critical theory. The one Habermas has finally adopted in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, and which Honneth considers as problematic, consists of giving his theory a “linguistic direction.”⁹⁷ Herein, Habermas identifies both the descriptive basis to explain the phylogenetic evolution of human societies in terms of a process of rationalization and the normative source for social criticism in the transcendental validity-norms of human language. With “universal pragmatics,” Habermas refers to the theory which gathers the validity conditions upon which the three different forms of human rationality depend. Accordingly, instrumental or strategic rationality depends on the *truth* of the interpretation of a given situation and the appropriate means to achieve a certain end in it. Instead, communicative rationality relies upon the normative *rightness* of the justification for which certain values and norms are to be undertaken socially and collectively. Finally, aesthetic-expressive rationality refers to the validity-condition of *authenticity* of the personal contents expressed within a public situation. Habermas then transposes the analytic distinction among the different forms of human rationality into an ontological distinction within contemporary society of two different spheres of the social world.

⁹⁴ Honneth, 1993, p. 251.

⁹⁵ Honneth, 1993, pp. 220-221.

⁹⁶ Habermas, 1976, p. 222.

⁹⁷ Honneth, 1993, p. 268.

Indeed, he understands as “universal components in social evolution” both the *system* and the *life-world*. The system includes those forms of strategic action free from ethical constraints, i.e., the productive system and the bureaucratic administrative system. Instead, the life-world is the communicative sphere, i.e., the family and the public, wherein, through communicative agreement, the socially shared symbolic framework by which individuals are integrated within society is reproduced in its progressive contents and developed in relation to the a-normative changing demands of the productive and administrative sub-systems.⁹⁸

Given such symmetrical coexistence and integration of these spheres of action, Habermas outlines a systemic account of the social world, as determined in its evolution by the rationalizing processes that occur in both its two ontological spheres, in the form of the increasing implementation of instrumental and communicative forms of rationality.

According to Honneth, the main problem of this theoretical framework is that “Habermas is no longer able to introduce the concept of power from an action-theoretic perspective; he now can introduce it only from a system-theoretic perspective.”⁹⁹ That is to say that Habermas, through this declination of communicative theory, can address the issue of social power and domination only in the systemic terms of a *colonization* of the system over the life-world, i.e., in terms of the societal totalization of teleological rationality at the expenses of communicative rationality, which is therefore assumed in a very unreliable way as free in themselves from processes of power and domination. Indeed, “the image of communicatively integrated spheres of action suggests the independence of the lifeworld from practices of domination and processes of power.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Honneth stresses, Habermas’ framework is unable to focus on the forms of social domination and power that occur on the level of social groups with competing moral perspectives.¹⁰¹ The reproduction of human societies’ symbolic framework is understood as occurring upon undistorted and a-conflictual processes of communicative agreement, without unveiling the intra-groups relations of oppression obstructing such reproductive processes. Moreover, from the social world’s linguistic and systemic account offered by Habermas in *Theory of Communicative Action*, the role of critical

⁹⁸ “The social is not absorbed as such by organized action systems; rather, it is split up into spheres of action constituted as the lifeworld and spheres neutralized against the lifeworld. The former are communicatively structured, the latter formally organized. They do not stand in any hierarchical relationship between levels of interaction and organization; rather, they stand opposite one another as socially and systemically integrated spheres of action.” (Habermas, 1984, p. 309)

⁹⁹ Honneth, 1993, p. 288.

¹⁰⁰ Honneth, 1993, p. 299.

¹⁰¹ Honneth, 1993, p. 299.

theory is no longer to undertake an immanent-transcending analysis of social groups' struggles to transform objective structures of domination. Instead, critical theory relies upon the transcendental analysis of the validity-norms of language while focusing on the societal events occurring at the level of systems of action.

Habermas' alternative strategy to develop his communicative theory of the social world served as inspiration for Honneth, at least for the identification of his future path of inquiry for a critical theory of recognition. Indeed, the anthropological framework of *Knowledge and Human Interests* allows Habermas to alternatively sketch an action-theoretic account of both the social world, of human cultural action, and of the development of subjective identity, which can compete with the one of Horkheimer and Adorno. In fact, in the appendix to *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Honneth emphasizes Habermas' reference to the Hegelian notion of the "dialectic of moral life."¹⁰² Accordingly, here Habermas bases the ontological reproduction of the cultural social world (its class-divisions and moral structures), as well as the ethical regulation of its productive processes, on the *common consensus* following from the uncoerced communicative agreement among social subjects, that recognize each other as equal partakers in the process of "will-formation." The normative criterion to reach such a communicative agreement does not consist of the transcendental norms of language, but rather of the suitability of existing cultural and moral frameworks in standing for normative horizons through which subjects can develop a free practical self-relation, pursuing their interests and needs within existing societies.

The human species secures its existence in systems of social labor and self-assertion through violence, through tradition-bound social life in ordinary-language communication, and with the aid of ego identities that at every level of individuation reconsolidate the consciousness of the individual in relation to the norms of the group. Accordingly the interests constitutive of knowledge are linked to the functions of an ego that adapts itself to its external conditions, through learning processes, is initiated into the communication system of a social life by means of self-formation processes, and constructs an identity in the conflict between instinctual aims and social constraints.¹⁰³

According to Honneth, the constitutive dependence of the subject's self-formation on the existing symbolic frameworks is the first fundamental intuition of Habermas. The second one is providing an intersubjective account of subjective identity's free development as well,

¹⁰² See Habermas, 1971a, appendix.

¹⁰³ Habermas, 1971a, p. 313.

in contrast with the aesthetic theory of Horkheimer and Adorno for which “an ego free of compulsion and identical with itself is to the extent that the subject allows the outer sense impressions and its inner experiential states to communicate freely and equally with one another.”¹⁰⁴ The core insight of this intersubjective account is that the autonomous and free development of the identity of the subject relies upon the normative framework by which other subjects perceive it and, thus, by which it practically understands itself. As the normative perspective by which other subjects relate to the individual subject impedes the latter to integrally self-relate to its practical life, the subject’s reaction is to disagree with the existing moral and cultural framework and to undertake social struggles if they are excluded from the possibility to engage in forms of communicative disagreement freed from coercion and power. Therefore, Habermas’ third fundamental intuition, according to Honneth, is the retrieval of the Hegelian category of social struggle, which, being presented as a form of “socially distorted communication lets the entire process of the formation and institutionalization of social norms appear in new light.”¹⁰⁵

Whereas in the first version we encountered, this process [the formation and institutionalization of social norms] was abstractly conceived as a moral advance in learning that the human species realized as a whole, the same process is now conceived as a process of will-formation that takes place between two social groups in the form of a struggle over the basis of validity of moral norms.¹⁰⁶

With this insight that Habermas has not subsequently followed, Honneth deems it feasible to return the moral advancement and reproduction of human societies to social subjects and, furthermore, to not conceive the intersubjective processes of social integration and communicative agreement as belonging to a communicative ideal free from power and domination. On the contrary, social domination can be precisely understood, first, in its occurrence at the agentive level of inter-group relations rather than only at the systemic-level of supra-subjective social forces. Second, social domination’s constitutive mechanism can be conceived of as the distortion provoked by dominant groups of those forms of intersubjective communication upon which depends the constitution of a symbolic framework through which human subjectivity can develop a positive relation to itself, its desires, and needs by acquiring

¹⁰⁴ Honneth, 1993, p. 44.

¹⁰⁵ Honneth, 1993, p. 271.

¹⁰⁶ Honneth, 1993, p. 271.

the normative perspective of other subjects. Finally, due to the constitutive dependence of subject's positive self-relation upon recognitive contexts, social domination implies the arousal in subjects of moral reactions and normative requests towards the social context. In this new light on the social world and the premises for the autonomous constitution of human identity, critical theory is called "to expand our knowledge about the particular forms of class domination at the moment and, hence, to again set in motion the suspended process of will-formation that could be freed from the socially rooted barriers and limitations of communication."¹⁰⁷

In conclusion, in *The Critique of Power*, Honneth advocates for the review of an anthropological analysis to recover the investigation of the communicative dimension of the human being's activity. Through the category of social action, he deems it feasible to re-acknowledge and to account for the existence and the persistence of normative relationships among social members, even in contemporary social contexts, where supra-subjective measures of social control have increased. The normativity of social action derives indeed, on the one hand, from the relational mechanisms that lie under the institution and performativity of social practices, i.e., from the processes of acceptance and agreement among social members concerning the moral values and ends pursued collectively within the social space. On the other hand, it stems from the moral criterion orienting the agreement or disagreement upon existing symbolic social frameworks, namely, their capacity to regulate relational contexts through which human subjects can positively self-relate and autonomously self-realize. Hence, according to Honneth, critical social theory should redefine, in the first instance, the analysis of human action and then the theory of the 'ego' development, as relying additionally upon specific intersubjective preconditions.

From a descriptive point of view, such a redefinition is needed to provide a reliable portrait of both the different dimensions of human activity and the interactional conditions for the successful self-constitution of subjects as free individuals. Whereas from a critical point of view, this redefinition would allow Honneth to overcome the impasse of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* critical prospect. Indeed, it permits him to recover an action-theoretic account of human subjectivity within the social world. The human being is not defined unilaterally by its exchange with objectivity, and its personal autonomy does not develop only through its aesthetic projection in experiential objects. Additionally, it can perform and instantiate forms of social or cultural actions, thus, developing the capacity for normative and critical activity.

¹⁰⁷ Honneth, 1993, p. 277.

The human subject follows social practices that are instantiated upon reciprocal expectations and duties, but to which, at the same time, it has agreed or consented. Thus, the social world cannot be entirely conceived as a system to which the subject is wholly passive and intentionless, i.e., as a system of contents and practices that the subject inertly internalizes. On the contrary, it is co-constituted by human subjects, thus being suitable to be an object of critique and to be fought the more existing cultural and social frameworks impede social members from freely self-realizing since they regulate misrecognizing relational contexts that prevent individuals from positively self-perceiving from the normative perspective of other subjects. Therefore, the normative source to agree with or to criticize and struggle against the social world lies in the relational preconditions for the autonomous development of subjective identities. It is this conceptual passage, therefore, that the category of recognition, i.e., the intersubjective relation of reciprocal affirmation among subjects through which the free self-constitution of human identity can occur, begins to emerge as the primary normative and critical category of the social world.

Moreover, this broader theoretical framework discloses to Honneth a different approach to the issue of social domination regarding both its constitutive mechanism and its various forms. Accordingly, social domination is not regarded as the mere transposition of the modern exploitative logic of nature on the level of social relationships, and it does not consist only of bodily and material exploitation. Instead, Honneth seeks to conceive it in terms of a “*distortion*” or “institutional destruction of the conditions of reciprocal recognition”¹⁰⁸ through which the autonomous self-constitution of subjects can be attained through their participation in the “[social] process of will-formation.”¹⁰⁹ In such a perspective, a fundamental future element of Honneth’s theory of recognition emerges, namely, the understanding of the mechanism of social domination as occurring on the level of the relation that the subject has with itself, thus, with the aims, desires, and capacities that constitute its identity and need, for being freely expressed, to be publicly integrated within existing cultural and social frameworks.

Finally, by reconsidering the social dimension of human activity and personal identity development, social critique is needed to immanently recover the expressed or unexpressed normative requests of dominated subjects concerning the transformation of existing social

¹⁰⁸ Honneth, 1993, p. 271.

¹⁰⁹ Honneth, 1993, p. 265.

structures of values, norms, and aims, “as an object of specific scientific research.”¹¹⁰ Namely, it must refer to “the cultural activities and the interpretative accomplishments of the oppressed groups in a social system”¹¹¹. With “interpretative accomplishments” Honneth means the moral and normative reactions that dominated groups develop in the face of oppressive social contexts and that stands for the moral interpretative framework they want to be integrated through social struggles into the collective social framework. In such a program of recovering an action-theoretic and normative conception of human subjectivity through the analysis of the constitutive dependence of free subjective identity upon recognition, critical social theory can return to its original function. That is to say, to immanently sustain the counter-morality of oppressed social groups, to be integrated within existing societies through forms of moral struggles for recognition.

Therefore, the final result of Honneth’s critical and reconstructive enterprise in *The Critique of Power* is the declared necessity of a “praxis philosophy,” in at least three senses. First, praxis philosophy is needed, which inquires on the *various* forms of human activity, and, therefore, also on the everyday dimension of intersubjective relations normatively regulated, by which the symbolic reproduction of cultural social framework can be attained through social consensus, and upon which the successful identity formation of human subjects can be reached. Second, with praxis philosophy, Honneth refers to the theory that provides an action-theoretic account of human subjectivity. This is conceived indeed as able to normatively and critically ‘act’ and ‘re-act’ in a conflictual manner, in opposition to a conception of the subject as a passive victim, suitable to be manipulated and penetrated entirely by the systemic social forces. Third, in relation to the two previous points, critical theory is needed to re-think itself as critical praxis, thus recovering its transformative role in practically sustaining and developing through its scientific and theoretical level the conflictual morality of oppressed social groups.

Once having illustrated the program of *The Critique of Power*, it is possible to present Honneth’s mature theory of recognition as pursuing a part of such a program. Indeed, in *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth does focus on an anthropological reflection, by dismissing purely reconstructive analysis for a personal contribution, but with a re-dimensioned spectrum of inquiry. Faced with the unilateral analysis of human action and theory of ego development provided by Horkheimer and Adorno, and seeing in Habermas the path to inquire on the

¹¹⁰ Honneth, 1993, p. 30.

¹¹¹ Honneth, 1993, p. 55.

intersubjective conditions for the free development of subjective identity and the reproduction of human societies, Honneth then pursues an outline of a systematic theory of the forms of recognition that are necessary for the self-realization of human subjects within modern societies. In the attempt to rebalance the attention and critical significance of the interpersonal relations among human subjects within the framework of critical theory, Honneth concentrates strictly on the ethically constitutive role of recognition for the development of free personal identity.

Honneth's mature program for a critical theory lies, thus, in the idea according to which it is feasible to outline a formal anthropology that systematically gathers the different forms of social recognition in the absence of which the human subject cannot freely self-realize, being impeded to undertake its needs, juridical and political requests, plans for life, and socially valuable personal capacities. The theoretical legitimacy of this formal anthropology does not rely upon socially exterior, transcendental, or idealistic arguments, but rather upon the social sufferance and the moral evaluations that immanently occur within existing societies, often in a conflicting outcome, as the subjects' normative expectations of recognition towards the social world and the relational exchanges with other social members are betrayed and jeopardized. Therefore, Honneth outlines his theory of recognition by referring to the subjective normative expectations of recognition that stem from the social members' reciprocally constitutive interdependence, while discerning their distinguishing qualities. Such different qualities are made relative to the intersection among three elements: the practical dimension of human identity to be recognized, the relational context wherein it occurs, and the prevailing psychological activity through which such normative expectations of recognition are mediated. Hence, Honneth's theory of recognition appears as the systematizing attempt to grasp the normative logic that is intrinsic to modern social contexts, determining their symbolic reproduction and moral evolution. From a general point of view, the ontological and theoretical source of this normativity is generally the human subject's constitutive need for social recognition, whereas its expressive and phenomenological grammar is specified by the forms that recognition assumes within modern societies.

Such a systematizing attempt, thus, has a fundamental usefulness. It stands for the theoretical level wherein the pre-theoretical normative contents that negatively stem from social members' experiences of disrespect and rupture of constitutive social bounds acquire a coherent and interpretative expression of their negativity. Through this interpretative framework, the

negative and suffering experiences that subjects undergo in their relational exchange with other social members can be interpreted as regards both their motivational social source, their qualitative and emotional shade, and the social sphere of their occurrence. In a nutshell, the contingent, disordering, and individualistic sufferance of scattered social members can be transformed into collective social experiences, whose negativity is made coherent on their practical, emotional, and propositional level, turning into positively expressed social and political requests towards existing social contexts.

In the following section, we will take a closer look at the theoretical backbone of Honneth's critical theory of recognition, wherein the constitutive mechanism of recognition is described by the triadic set of the concepts previously mentioned – positive affirmation, undistorted or integral self-relation, and self-realization. What will emerge is that the anthropology upon which his mature critical theory relies focuses *strictly* on intersubjective interactions as the primary precondition for the human being self-realization. He thus severs any anthropological analysis of the inter-objective interactions that define the capacity for action of the human being, which, as we will see, has entailed more than a few problems for his critical theory of recognition.

Chapter Three. The Mature Theory of Recognition of Axel Honneth and Its Critical Significance

III. 1. The Recognitive Turn of *The Struggle for Recognition*

As we were saying, in *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth aims to provide a critical theory of recognition by following and deepening the insight already present in *The Critique of Power*, according to which the subject learns to relate to itself by internalizing the normative perspective through which other subjects perceive it and interact with it. He is not interested in the mere process of social integration of human subjects, for which individual action is always an expression of a plexus of social actions since the subject internalizes the socially shared horizon of social, cultural, and political categories. Rather, he wants to inquire about that social relation that allows the subject to pursue a free and full-fledged process of identification and individualization within the social context. By identifying in “recognition” such a relational category, his mature critical program is dedicated to presenting “recognition” as a legitimate critical category of human societies and the agentive category of the “struggle for recognition” as an alternative communicative form by which the reproduction and the moral progress of human societies historically and empirically occur. The structure of the book is thus organized so to that:

an intersubjectivist conception of the person emerges, in which the possibility of an undistorted relation to oneself proves to be dependent on three forms of recognition: love, right and esteem. [...] As the results of this investigation show, there are – corresponding to three forms of recognition – three forms of experiences of disrespect, each of which can generate motives that contribute, in turn to the emergence of social conflicts. As a consequence of this second step of the investigation, the idea of a critical theory of recognition begins to take shape, according to which processes of societal change are to be explained with reference to the normative claims that are structurally inherent in relations of mutual recognition.¹¹²

¹¹² Honneth, 1995, pp. 1-2. See the German edition, 1992, p. 8. “Auf diese Weise entsteht ein intersubjektivitätstheoretisches Personenkonzept, innerhalb dessen sich die Möglichkeit einer ungestörten Selbstbeziehung als abhängig von drei Formen der Anerkennung (Liebe, Recht, Wertschätzung) erweist. [...] [Diese] drei Formen der Anerkennung entsprechen, wie das Ergebnis einer derartigen Überprüfung zeigt, drei Typen der Mißachtung, deren Erfahrung jeweils als Handlungsmotiv in die Entstehung sozialer Konflikte einfließen kann. Als eine Konsequenz dieses zweiten Untersuchungsschrittes zeichnet sich damit die Idee einer kritischen Gesellschaftstheorie ab, in der Prozesse der gesellschaftlichen Wandels mit Bezugnahme auf die

Therefore, the possibility to provide a critical theory of recognition relies upon three theoretical steps:

(i) The identification of the mechanism for which recognition is the essential relation for the subject's successful self-realization. Honneth identifies the mechanism for which recognition is constitutive of the subject's self-realization in the fact that it allows the subject to develop an undistorted practical self-relation and self-conception, as a necessary precondition to pursuing one's personal identity freely.

(ii) The differentiation of three forms of recognition and the corresponding distinction among three forms of personal disrespect. These latter are to be conceived in terms of the negative normative grammar that lies under the occurrence of social struggles, which aim at the transformation of human societies' moral framework in order to set the social conditions for the subjects' undamaged self-relation.

iv) The outlining of a universal and formal criterion by which social philosophers can critically approach all human societies according to an immanent and transcending method, which refers to the expressed or hidden morality of oppressed social groups for helping in furthering the moral progress of human societies.

III. 1. 1. The Mechanism and the Three Forms of Recognition: Honneth Reviewing Hegel

To begin with the first step, Honneth attempts to identify the mechanism which lies under recognitive relations as being constitutive for the subject's self-realization. His core argument is that recognition is the reciprocal relation by which subjects mutually acknowledge affirmatively and positively as practical subjectivities or persons, allowing each other to develop that positive or undistorted (*ungestört*) relationship with themselves that represents the personal condition to achieve freely their self-realization.

In *The Struggle for Recognition*, the primary reference for Honneth to analyze the mechanism of recognition is Hegel, who was the first to develop in his juvenile writings both a relational account of the human subject and a moral conception of the social struggle. Indeed, at the beginning of the 19th century, it "had gradually matured within Hegel's thought the conviction that, for the foundation of a philosophical science of society, it would first be

normativen Ansprüche erklärt werden sollen, die in der Beziehung der wechselseitigen Anerkennung strukturell angelegt sind."

necessary to break the grip that atomistic misconceptions had on the whole tradition of modern natural law.”¹¹³ Indeed, both the empirical and the formal approaches of modern natural law “remain trapped within the basic concepts of an atomism that presupposes, as something like a natural basis for human socialization, the existence of subjects who are isolated from each other.”¹¹⁴ By reconstructing Hegel’s thought from the *Natural Law* (1802) to the main writings of his Jena Period, the *System of Ethical Life* and the *Realphilosophie*,¹¹⁵ Honneth retraces the conceptual progress that brought Hegel to overcome such an atomistic and egoistic understanding of the human being’s natural behaviour. Indeed, these theories were giving serious problems both in offering an explanation of the stability of human societies, due to the necessity for those theories to conceive the institution of ethical relations as a secondary and external addition to the natural predisposition of the human being for egoism, and consequently, in providing a framework wherein sociality and the human being’s positive self-realization did not exclude each other. The main challenge Hegel had to deal with was to find a category within which the ontological and conceptual primacy of social life could be explained over atomistic individualization, while making thinkable and feasible a holistic conception of sociality and individuality, according to which “a process can arise involving both a growth of community ties and, at the same time, an increase in individual freedom.”¹¹⁶

Hegel found in Fichte’s notion of *recognition* the right category to accomplish such an aim. Indeed, Fichte, in the essay *The Foundations of Natural Law* (1796), carved out at the

¹¹³ Honneth, 1995, p. 11.

¹¹⁴ Honneth, 1995, p. 12. Here, Honneth refers to and explains the distinction Hegel draws between the “empirical” and the “formal” approaches to the natural law in *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*. With the former category Hegel means the modern anthropologies that conceive of the nature of the human being as an *ensemble* of isolated and atomistic behaviours: “they always conceive of the purportedly ‘natural’ form of human behavior exclusively as the isolated acts of solitary individuals, to which forms of community-formation must then be added as a further thought, as if externally” (Honneth, 1995, p. 12). With the second category, he refers to the Kantian and Fichtean transcendental conceptions of human rationality, which, as opposed to human empirical behaviour and its individualistic and egoistic inclinations, stands for the only source of ethical behaviour. “Here, too, human nature is understood as an aggregate of egocentric (or, as Hegel puts it, ‘unethical’) drives, which subjects must first learn to suppress before they can attain ethical attitudes, that is, attitudes conducive to community” (Honneth, 1995, p. 12).

¹¹⁵ In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth focuses only on Hegel’s Jena writings, for he considers his juvenile philosophy as the only phase where Hegel manifestly posits the concept of recognition at the basis of a conception of the human subject, before programmatically considering the process of Spirit as the main subject of his philosophical analysis. Honneth then changes his opinion concerning Hegel’s mature thought, for in *Suffering from Indeterminacy* (2000) he interprets Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* as still relying upon the category of recognition and its three modern forms, and, moreover, as a useful depiction of the normative structure of modern societies.

¹¹⁶ Honneth, 1995, p. 16.

basis of the social institution of juridical freedom a relation of reciprocal recognition among subjects, namely a “reciprocal effect” between subjects wherein both exhort the other to act freely. For Hegel, Fichte’s intuition suggested, first, that the very freedom of each subject is dependent on recognition, namely, on the reciprocal affirmation, and consequent mutual self-limitation, among subjects of the capacity to be free. Secondly, that the institutions of social life, as the system of juridical right, are not to be understood as the results stemming from the egoistic rational calculus of individuals regarding the perilous of a war against all, nor from the suppression of the human being’s empirical egoism, as the formal accounts of natural laws argued for. Instead, the institution of ethical relations, both as regards their genesis and societal maintenance, is to be related to the intrinsic social conditions of human freedom, for the latter is no more a natural condition nor a rational imperative intrinsic to the subject in its loneliness. In fact, freedom is now conceived as a *status* that the subject consciously acquires relationally, by being recognized from the other subject as free and by recognizing in the freedom of the other the completion of its own freedom. The institutionalized forms of the ethical relations that are the constitutive basis for free practical subjectivity cease to represent limitations externally given to the subject and legitimized for a mere rationalistic calculus. Quite the contrary, they are the stabilizing expressions of the intersubjective basis of human freedom.

What Honneth finds interesting is how Hegel attempts to broaden the Fichtean insight on recognition. Indeed, he confers to Fichte’s conception of the relation of recognition an intrinsic processuality, both according to an extensive and intensive logic, occurring through conflict. In the *System of Ethical Life* (1802) and the *Realphilosophie* (1805-1806), although with different strategies, Hegel first places recognition at the basis of different dimensions of practical subjectivity, thus distinguishing different social spheres constituting human freedom.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, he conceives intersubjective recognition in terms of a process of

¹¹⁷ Honneth underlines how Hegel, in the *System of Ethical Life* and the *Realphilosophie*, attempts to broaden and dynamize the Fichtean insight on recognition with two different conceptual backgrounds, which, although pursuing the same aim, significantly change the theoretical setting for a paradigm of recognition. Indeed, in the *System of Ethical Life*, Honneth underlines how Hegel frames the Fichtean notion of recognition into an ontology of Aristotelian derivation by considering the human being, likewise the rest of nature, as an entity that teleologically tends to the full expression of its natural potentialities. For what concerns the human being, the potentiality to actualize is its natural sociality, i.e., the forms of intersubjective recognition wherein the individual is naturally embedded, and by which it attains a confirmation of its subjective identity. From the level of a ‘natural ethical life’, the course of human society is understood as a process towards an ‘absolute ethical life’, where to the naturally given ethical relation of recognition among subjects is given a self-conscious and stabilized status, which allows the subject to reach a more deep self-individualization through the transformation of given cultural costumes (see Honneth, 1995, pp. 18-28). Nevertheless, Honneth regards the *Realphilosophie* as the fundamental writing where Hegel traces the structure for an intersubjective theory of practical human subjectivity. Herein, he

stages or levels of recognition through which the individual subject ontogenetically undertakes an even more differentiated self-individualization, with a corresponding growth of forms of common consciousness and socialization. Especially in the *Realphilosophie*, Hegel clearly outlines a theory of subjectivity based on three different forms of recognition. In addition to distinguishing between three different dimensions of practical subjectivity and three forms of recognition, he identifies the morally constitutive meaning of recognition in the fact that the human subject, in order to achieve a full conscious knowledge of the types of practical capacities that it has, and thus to consciously self-comprehend as a person, depends on the affirmative answer of the other subject.¹¹⁸

Accordingly, in the section *Subjektiver Geist*, Hegel identifies “love” as the primary form of recognition, for it is the physical and spiritual relation wherein subjects find a

does not only undertake a clearer distinction of different forms of recognition, related to the ‘object’ or subjective dimension to recognize. Additionally, he gives an explanation of the intrinsic mechanism of recognition, then providing an ethical account of social struggle in sharp opposition to the one of Hobbes. Indeed, in the *Realphilosophie* “the place occupied by Aristotelian natural teleology, which still had a complete hold on the *System of Ethical Life*, gradually comes to be taken by a philosophical theory of consciousness,” (Honneth, 1995, p. 27) thus, discarding the developmental process of recognition from the teleology intrinsic to natural life. The constitution of ethical relation of recognition is now reconsidered independently from the teleological logic of nature, as related to the own process of “spirit” or “consciousness.” Such a theoretical shift, according to Honneth, allows Hegel to directly relate from a conceptual point of view the necessity of recognition and its different forms to the need of the individual to develop the different dimensions of its practical subjectivity, rather than to the teleology of nature. Thus, both the distinction among various forms of recognition via a theory of subjectivity and the intrinsic mechanism for which recognition is fundamental for the freedom of the human subject emerge more forcefully. Indeed, recognition is now conceived as necessary for the subject for it allows the latter to “know itself in the other.” Suddenly, the moral grammar of the struggle for recognition is clarified: “The turn to philosophy of consciousness now allows him unambiguously to locate the motives for initiating a conflict in the interior of the human spirit, which is supposed to be constructed in such a way that for its complete realization it presupposes knowledge of its recognition by others, which can only be acquired through conflict” (Honneth, 1995, p. 28). According to Honneth, Hegel weakens though the theoretical advantages of a philosophy of consciousness with the strong metaphysical presuppositions of his category of Spirit, therefore maintaining the recognitive process of the subject still dependent upon something, in this case, the constitution of a universal consciousness, the “spirit of people,” as ontologically and conceptually primary to the individual subject. Indeed, although the recognitive processuality of human societies is now referred directly to the constitution of the human subject, rather than to the teleological ontology of nature, the human subject is metaphysically conceived as a manifestation of a universal and ethical consciousness, which intrinsically defines the development of practical subjectivity through recognition as the process by which subjects come to conceive “themselves as a totality.”

¹¹⁸ See Hegel, *Realphilosophie* (1805-1806). The work is structured in three parts, “Spirit According to its Concept,” “Actual Spirit,” and “Constitution.” Firstly, Hegel analyses the cognitive and practical process through which the subject reaches a consciousness of its being a free will (*Freier Wille*), namely, a natural being whose sensuous impulses (*Begierde*, as distinguished from *Trieb*) can be cognitively mediated and practically satisfied constructively through work. The human being, thus, starts to self-conceive as a voluntary and practical subjectivity that objectifies its will in the object of labour. Progressively, Hegel analyses the process by which the subject, from the self-confirmation it obtains through objects (*Dinge*), reaches a full self-comprehension as a voluntary and practical subjectivity only through the encounter with another subject, namely, through the movement of recognition.

confirmation of their immediate subjective dimension, that of being a natural individual with needs.

Hegel conceives of love as a relationship of mutual recognition, in which natural individuality is first confirmed. Here, this definition admittedly acquires, even more clearly than before, the particular sense (based on the theory of subjectivity) according to which the volitional subject is able to experience itself for the first time as a needy, desiring subject only after having had the experience of being loved.¹¹⁹

Indeed, love, as the physical and spiritual relation occurring through the sexes, appears as the first relation of mutual confirmation wherein subjects, as particular and sensuous individuals, “know themselves in the other.” Namely, the subject consciously learns to self-conceive and experience itself as a natural subject once “it can become intersubjectively shared knowledge on the part of both” and once it experiences and knows the other correspondingly, for “if I do not recognize my partner to interaction as a certain type of person [...] I thereby deny him precisely the characteristics and capacities with regard to which I want to feel myself affirmed by him.”¹²⁰

From Honneth’s explanation of the Hegelian first sphere of recognition, it is already clear that he finds out what he was searching for from *The Critique of Power*. Namely, he finds out an intersubjective theory of subjectivity (or “ego-formation”) that does not merely conceive of the relationship with others as secondary, and necessary only to materially self-reproduce or exist, as in Horkheimer and Adorno’s materialistic understanding. Instead, the Hegelian understanding of recognition as “knowing-oneself-in-the-other” allows Honneth to provide a conception of recognition as primary for subjectivity, and moreover, as working on the

¹¹⁹ Honneth, 1995, p. 37.

¹²⁰ Honneth, 1995, pp. 37-38. Hegel, in the *Realphilosophie*, conceives of the reciprocity of recognition as a fundamental condition for the real development of the subject’s identity. “Die Bewegung des Schlusses ist dadurch gesetzt, dass jedes an sich ist, was das Andere ist. Das Eine, das Allgemeine, ist die Einzelheit, das wissende Selbst; ebenso ist das Einzelne das Allgemeine, denn es ist das [Sich-] Aufsichbeziehen. Aber es hat für sie zu werden oder diese Dieselbigkeit ein Wissen derselben” (Hegel, 1969, p. 200). Hegel deems that the real autonomy of the individual springs from the acknowledged interdependence of both upon each other. Indeed, the subject’s true self-experience as bodily subjectivity depends either on the confirmation conferred by the other and on its own acknowledgment of the other’s bodily subjectivity. The expression of their particular personality is truly possible once the two subjects reach a conscious knowledge of their resemblance and unity, from which the particularity of both can develop as an expression of themselves and the other as well. For this reason, Siep (Siep, 1979) interprets the Hegelian conception of recognition as a movement (*Bewegung*) in terms of a syllogism wherein from the premises of singularity (to be an individual subject), and universality (to be an individual subject as the other) follows the conclusion of particularity (to be a particular subject with the other). For an analysis of the issue of reciprocity in recognition, both in Hegel and in the current debate, see also Ikäheimo, 2002, 2013, 2014; Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007.

intrapersonal dimension of subjectivity, for the subject can consciously experience the spheres of its practical activity only through the positive confirmation of other subjects.

Proceeding with the intersubjective stages or levels for the development of the subject's personal identity, Hegel identifies the institution of right as the second form of recognition, while considering the struggle as the cognitive and moral mediation for the subject to attain recognition. The creation of the family-context through sexual relations and procreation leads, according to Hegel, to the institution of more complex intersubjective relations due to the simultaneous coexistence of different family units, which, resembling the Hobbesian "state of nature," attempt economically to take possession of a piece of land. Like Hobbes, Honneth stresses, Hegel makes the rise of a collective form of life coincide with the formation of "social relations of competition,"¹²¹ for all subjects simultaneously and arbitrarily attempt to take possession of a piece of land leading to conditions of inequality or exclusion among family units. Nevertheless, Honneth points out how, for Hegel, first, the immediate relations of competition among subjects directly imply from a socio-ontological point of view the existence of an implicit acknowledgment among subjects as bearers of equal claims. Secondly, Hegel substitutes the conceptual category of "a war against all" and the idea of an egoistic rational calculus lying under the collective decision to institute a juridical community, with a moral theory of both social struggle and legal institutions. Indeed, "in the text, this takes the form of an account in which conflicts over the unilateral seizure of possessions are interpreted not as 'struggles for self-assertion' but as 'struggles for recognition'."¹²² The subject excluded from the act of possession, which belongs equally to all subjects, undergoes an experience of mis-acknowledgment from the social context as regards its being a subject with requests that are equal to all other subjects. For, the subject undertakes an act of aggression towards the other, which is intra-personally motivated by the need to be considered and confirmed by others as being a person with the same legitimate demands, rather than for the mere reason of physical survival or satisfaction of material needs.¹²³ As in the case of love, in the sphere of civil society the subject constitutively needs to know itself as being affirmed by the other in order to gain a self-conscious experience of itself. In the love case, the subjective dimension to be confirmed

¹²¹ Honneth, 1995, p. 41.

¹²² Honneth, 1995, p. 43.

¹²³ "The reason why the socially ignored individuals attempt, in response, to damage the others' possessions is not because they want to satisfy their passions, but rather in order to make the others take notice of them" (Honneth, 1995, p. 44).

is the “individual in his particular nature of his [or her] urges,”¹²⁴ while in the case of rights the subject expects to be recognized as an “abstract” person equal to all others, namely as a bearer of universal legitimate claims shared by all subjects. With the sphere of civil society, Honneth observes how Hegel keeps providing a conception of human interactions as possessing a normative logic due to the need for the subject to receive an affirmation from the other for experiencing consciously its subjectivity as intersubjectively known. Moreover, he adds that the denial of such a normative structure of human interactions entails the arousal within the offended subject of “a certain normative irritation.”¹²⁵

In the face of the social contempt towards the normative request of the subject to self-experience from an intersubjective point of view, the subject develops an oppositive and aggressive reaction against the offending subject, which leads to a second aggressive reaction of the attacked subject against the offended subject (called by Hegel “the struggle for life and death”). The intrinsic meaning and societal results of these two phases of struggle are considered by Hegel in sharp opposition to Hobbes. Indeed, Honneth observes how in Hegel the aggressive opposition of the excluded subject is not dependent upon the egoistic attitude to affirm its “absolute” freedom against the ones of others, and conversely, the reaction of the subject that undergoes the aggression is not mere fear to see its possibilities for survival and life being jeopardized. Instead, the offended subject makes of the aggression the cognitive and practical mediation to take to the attention of the other its contrasting moral understanding of the meaning of existing intersubjective interactions, the one wherein all personalities can develop. In the same manner, for the attacked subject, the experience of the social struggle stands for a fundamental cognitive moment, wherein, first, it suddenly considers how its self-experience as a person before the struggle was merely contingent and arbitrary in the absence of the other subject’s confirmation. Secondly, it morally perceives its behavior as an action with social consequences rather than as a mere private or personal matter. Social struggle represents for Hegel an essential social and intra-personal moment of moral reflection, for both subjects develop intersubjectively and personally a consolidated consciousness of their reciprocal interdependence.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Honneth, 1995, p. 39.

¹²⁵ Honneth, 1995, p. 44.

¹²⁶ “This life-and-death struggle, into which the insulted subject drags the other by means of a death-threat, acquires a special position within Hegel’s reconstruction. It marks the experiential stage within the individual formative process, in which subjects finally learn to understand themselves as persons endowed with ‘rights’. [...] Through the reciprocal perception of their mortality, the subjects in the struggle discover that they have already recognized

In Honneth's interpretation of Hegel, from this second sphere of recognition, subjects gain consciousness of their effective participation not merely into a family unit with particular individuals, but also in a broader social sphere wherein each subject expects to be equally recognized as a legitimate bearer of universal requests through juridical rights. With the mutual recognition among individuals to legitimately pursue equal requests through the status of legal persons with rights, the process of individualisation of subjects through a decentralizing movement continues. Indeed, as they reciprocally include each other in their perspective as external to familiar ties, subjects learn to self-experience as equal juridical persons (*Rechtsfähige Personen*). The appropriation by the human being of this second dimension of its practical subjectivity through an intersubjective movement allows it, at the same time, to overcome its sole individual will through the action-theoretic institution of a universal will and an institutional society, which therefore occur not as "something alien or superordinate to subjects."¹²⁷ Rather, "Hegel conceives of the 'spiritual actuality' of society, the 'universal will', as an all-embracing medium capable of reproducing itself only through the intersubjective practice of mutual recognition."¹²⁸ Therefore, from a socio-ontological point of view, Honneth discovers through Hegel how intersubjective recognition, with its conflictual movement, can describe and normatively justify the reliance of the spiritual and juridical reproduction of human societies on the communicative relations between the social members. Since the natural and immediate forms of community can develop into a stabilized juridical and institutional framework only if they rely upon a movement of reciprocal recognition among subjects, as knowing themselves in the other, so such a framework depends for its legitimization and reproduction upon the existing communicative or conflictual relations of recognition between subjects.

each other insofar as their fundamental rights are concerned and have thereby already implicitly created the social basis for an intersubjectively binding legal relationship" (Honneth, 1995, pp. 47-48). In this passage, Honneth distinguishes his interpretation of Hegel's idea of the struggle for life and death from the one of Kojève (1969) and Wildt (1982). According to Wildt, Hegel uses this category only metaphorically to refer to those existential moments where subjects realize the threat to be excluded from juridical relations. Kojève, following a similar suggestion, argues that the interruption of the struggle among subjects relies upon the subjects' understanding of their reciprocal existential vulnerability. For Honneth, instead, the motivation under the suppression of the conflict is not related to the sudden comprehension of subjects as regards their shared existential vulnerability. On the contrary, precisely through the common decision to risk their lives, the two subjects gain consciousness that they are both aiming at the same end, namely, to bring on a legitimate and institutionalized level the normative expectations that the entrance into community life directly entails in subjects. That is, to see their equal freedom confirmed in the other.

¹²⁷ Honneth, 1995, p. 49.

¹²⁸ Honneth, 1995, p. 49.

Finally, in the section *Wirklicher Geist*, Hegel continues his analysis of the intersubjective premises for the development of subjectivity, identifying another moment of social struggle. Concerning this section, Honneth agrees with Hegel's theoretical dissatisfaction in considering the moment of "abstract right" and the new-born institution of a juridical universal will as sufficient conditions for the constitution of ethical relations among subjects. Indeed, these, although necessary conditions, remain trapped in an extreme formality and indefiniteness because "at the point of intersection associated with 'being abstractly recognized', in which the individual formative processes of all members of society eventually converge, it is open, to a certain extent, in which respect and to what degree legal persons have to recognize each other reciprocally."¹²⁹ Therefore, according to Hegel, a further moment of social opposition follows, by which the two legal persons, acknowledging each other in the mediation of the "contract," attempt to overcome the abstractness of right to reach a recognition of "the particularity of one's 'own will'."¹³⁰

At this specific point of the reconstruction, Honneth considers this second moment of struggle as a missed opportunity for Hegel, since he loses the possibility to relate it to a third sphere of personhood and, thus, to a last form of intersubjective communication by which the subject can know to be confirmed in its self-experience. Indeed, because of his metaphysical presuppositions, Hegel ends up incorporating the ontogenetic process of human subjectivity through intersubjective recognition into the teleological process of realization of Spirit, namely, the universal and collective will. Honneth emphasizes how the argumentative focus for Hegel is the final institution of a universal will wherein the particularities of individuals are overcome through an increasing process of decentralization. Instead of developing a third form of recognition among individuals to address the unsatisfaction felt by the subject to be anonymously considered by other social members as an abstract person, without any reference to its particularity for the social context, Hegel considers this conflictual moment as a tool to strengthen the subjective feeling to belong to an institutional and universal context, a State.

Notwithstanding, the theoretical potentiality intrinsic to the *Realphilosophie*, due to its theory of subjectivity and its understanding of struggle as the mediation for even more ethical

¹²⁹ Honneth, 1995, p. 50.

¹³⁰ Honneth, 1995, p. 53. According to Hegel, the first aggressive act is the breach of the contract, and the second one is the crime committed by the subject following from the incurring of juridical penalty, because, in front of juridical constriction, the subject is affected by a feeling of personal injury.

forms of communication, should disclose, according to Honneth, a different but feasible conclusion regarding the struggle arising from the formality of law:

Since the law represents a relation of mutual recognition through which every person, as bearer of the same claims, experiences equal respect, it precisely cannot serve as a medium for the respect of every individual's particular life-history. Instead, this (to a certain extent) individualized form of recognition presupposes, in addition to cognitive achievement, an element of emotional concern, which makes it possible to experience the life of the other as a risky attempt at individual self-realization. [...] Respect for the 'will' of the individual person, as it is demanded by the criminal deed, can only be realized completely in a relationship of recognition that, unlike the one based on law, is supported by feelings of social concern.¹³¹

Thus, Honneth glimpses in Hegel the conceptual possibility for a third dimension of practical subjectivity and a last form of intersubjective recognition, upon which depend, both descriptively and normatively, the creation and the reproduction of an ethical framework of collective values, aims, and customs. That is to say, only by passing from abstract equality to the significance that the particularity of social members' capacities, qualities, interests, and desires own for the social context it would be possible, on the one hand, for the subject to find more concrete self-realization through its increasing decentralization with the social world. Indeed, it would attain the knowledge to be recognized as a particular social member that cooperates for the good of the social community. On the other hand, *via* this affirmative mediation among subjects as biographical members of society, it would be really feasible to legitimately constitute a shared cultural, moral, and symbolic framework to be pursued collectively, wherein all subjects can reach their self-realization within and through social relationships. As in the case of juridical structure, the symbolic or cultural structure of human societies can be grasped as relying both in its emergence and its normative process of legitimization on the existence of recognitive relations of "esteem" or "solidarity" among subjects, where the emotional cooperation with the other tempers the abstract cognitive element of juridical relation.

In conclusion, Hegel offers Honneth the opportunity to think of an anthropology grounded on recognition by which reconstructing the development of the social world as an *ethical learning process* devoted to the extension of the forms of intersubjective communication

¹³¹ Honneth, 1995, pp. 56-57.

that are implicit in the occurrence of any natural community.¹³² Through this extensive logic, recognition is conceived as an extensive movement occurring not merely positively or naturally, but rather through moments of social struggle which demand the ethical institution of more differentiated forms of recognition, already implicit in the occurrence of natural communities, by which other dimensions of individuality can be publicly acknowledged.

But what Honneth thinks is needed to really outline an anthropological framework by which providing a theory of the social world as an ethical learning process is the explication in Hegel's processual paradigm of recognition of an intensive logic as well. Indeed, every social sphere determined by a specific form of recognitive relation is to be deemed as undergoing a process of internal development due to the progressive enrichment of the substantial contents that define the practical dimensions of human subjectivity, which expects to be recognized. The moment of struggle and opposition, once again, mediates the intensive development of the forms of recognition's substantial meaning:

The structure of any of these relationships of mutual recognition is always the same for Hegel: to the degree that a subject knows itself to be recognized by another subject with regard to certain of its abilities and qualities and is thereby reconciled with the other, a subject always also comes to know its own its distinctive identity and thereby comes to be opposed once again to the other as something particular.¹³³

By the conjugation in recognition of a twofold ontological movement of extension and intension, it opens up to Honneth the chance to revisit the negativistic system-theoretic accounts of the social world and the objectivistic theory of subjectivity provided by Adorno and Horkheimer. Indeed, from Hegel, Honneth derives the theoretical framework suitable to recover an action-theoretic account of subjectivity, through which conceptually and empirically unveiling the human subject's normative, critical, and conflictual activity against unjust and oppressing societies. In fact, the Hegelian paradigm of recognition allows Honneth, first, to think of an anthropology according to which various forms of intersubjective communication, rather than inter-objective relations, are considered primary conditions for the subject's self-realization. Second, the Hegelian strategy to explain the constitutive dependence among

¹³² "Within the framework of an ethically established relationship of mutual recognition, subjects are always learning something more about their particular identity, and since, in each case, it is a new dimension of their selves that they see confirmed thereby, they must once again leave, by means of conflict, the stage of ethical life they have reached, in order to achieve the recognition of a more demanding form of their individuality" (Honneth, 1995, p. 17).

¹³³ Honneth, 1995, pp. 16-17.

subjects is, for Honneth, essential, for it permits him to ground an account of the social world as constitutively relying upon the social members' *moral* expectations and upon the occurrence of social struggles arising from the subjects' feeling of personal injury. In fact, Hegel considers recognition as that intersubjective movement of affirmation by which subjects can gain a successful self-experience as practical subjectivities, thus acquiring a self-perception intersubjectively confirmed and known. From such a conceptual strategy, it follows that in the absence of the normative social interactions on which the development of the individual's self-experience depends, the subject is willing to undertake a struggle against the social context, springing from an internal feeling of personal injury. With this intersubjective theory of the human being, thereby, it is feasible to rethink the social context, in its juridical and symbolic framework, as grounded both in its emergence, reproduction, and transformation upon the successful relations of recognition among subjects. As a consequence, the idea of Horkheimer and Adorno for which human societies can develop into closed systems of oppression and social domination, where subjects are reduced to powerless victims, appears fallacious. Finally, their negativistic philosophy of history can be substituted with one that, on the contrary, accounts for the intrinsic development of human societies as ethical social contexts, wherein different forms of recognition gradually distinguish from each other while undertaking a process of internal moral development.

The challenge for Honneth is thus to re-actualize the Hegelian paradigm of recognition in a post-metaphysical and empirically grounded critical theory of recognition. The ultimate goal of this re-actualizing operation is to offer a critical criterion by which, through a systematized framework of the intersubjective conditions for the subject's self-realization, different forms of social dominations can be denounced. From Honneth's perspective, through such a normative criterion social critique can re-pristiniate its original function of immanently disclosing different types of social dominations as relations of misrecognition, injuring the psychological integrity of social members and their chance for social freedom, while helping the frustrated moral reactions of oppressed groups turn into struggles for the moral progress of human society.

III. 1. 2. Love, Respect, and Social Esteem: The Preconditions for the Personal Integrity of Human Subjects and the Intrinsic Morality of Social Struggle

To really offer a systematic and post-metaphysical paradigm of recognition by which criticizing contemporary human societies and theoretically developing the morality of oppressed social groups into social conflicts, Honneth's strategy is to reappropriate the Hegelian framework through non-metaphysical premises and a series of empirical and interdisciplinary studies. The fact that Hegel incorporates his communicative account of the human subject into the teleological process of self-realization of a universal Spirit or Reason prevents him from conceiving of "this formative process - which he described in terms of a movement of recognition mediated by the experience of struggle - as an inner-worldly process occurring under contingent conditions of human socialization."¹³⁴

The first point of departure to reappropriate the Hegelian paradigm is thus to rephrase the mechanism of recognition so that its extensive and intensive movement can be attributed to the needs of historical subjects, rather than to the teleological process of a universal rational subject. Therefore, to conceive of intersubjective relationships of recognition as "empirical events within the social world" means for Honneth to outline "an empirical social psychology." Such an empirical social psychology must be suitable to account, first, for "the existence of various forms of reciprocal recognition," through which subjects by seeing "themselves confirmed by the other as independent can [...] mutually reach an understanding of themselves as autonomously acting, individuated selves," and "which are to be distinguished according to the level of autonomy they make possible for an agent."¹³⁵ Second, it must be made reasonably and empirically evident that "these forms of reciprocal recognition can be mapped onto corresponding experiences of social disrespect; and, finally, [that] there is historical or sociological evidence for the claim that such forms of disrespect have actually served as a source of motivation for social confrontations."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Honneth, 1995, p. 67.

¹³⁵ Honneth, 1995, pp. 68-69. See the German edition, 1992, pp. 110-111: "[...] Wenn beide Individuen sich jeweils durch ihr Gegenüber in ihrer Selbsttätigkeit *bestätigt* sehen, können sie komplementär zu einem *Verständnis* ihrer selbst als *einem autonom handelnden und individuierten Ich* gelangen" (Italics mine).

¹³⁶ Honneth, 1995, p. 70. See the German edition, 1992, pp. 112-113: "Zunächst ist dann der Frage nachzugeben [...] ob sich den jeweiligen Formen der reziproken Anerkennung entsprechende Erfahrungen der sozialen Mißachtung zuordnen lassen; und ob sich schließlich historisch-soziologische Belege dafür finden lassen, dass solche Formen der sozialen Mißachtung tatsächlich die Motivationsquelle von gesellschaftlichen Auseinandersetzungen waren".

In this regard, Honneth finds in the social psychology developed by George Herbert Mead in *Mind, Self and Society* an inspiring point of departure. Indeed, he makes it feasible to rethink the Hegelian paradigm of recognition into a post-metaphysical framework, which, first, rephrases the constitutive mechanism of recognition in empirical and psychological terms. That is, recognition is presented as the condition of possibility for the subject to develop a positive practical self-relation, since the subject objectively self-perceives by internalizing the normative perspective of other social members. Secondly, Mead's framework permits Honneth to relate the extensive and intensive movement of recognition explicitly to the internal normative perspective of human subjects. Indeed, now it is the subjects' creative psychic force to compel the progressive development of existing societies' normative framework according to the imaginative anticipation of recognitive contexts allowing an increment of the possibilities of personal autonomy and individualization for human subjects.

Concerning Mead's description of the constitutive mechanism of recognition for the self-realization of subjectivity, Honneth reconstructs, first, his epistemic argument, then turns to its moral and practical one. In fact, Mead's analysis of recognition is due, in the first instance, to his attempt to explain the process of emergence of the psychic, namely, of the process through which the subject "becomes conscious of the subjective character" of its "world of psychological experiences."¹³⁷ Given the influence of the rising tradition of American pragmatism, especially considering the encounter with Dewey at the Chicago University, Mead relates the emergence of human epistemic self-consciousness, i.e., of the conscious experience of one's psychological contents, to the occurrence of a specific type of practical interaction, the one that takes place with other subjects. Indeed, the interaction between human beings is marked by their intersubjective capacity to assume the perspective of the other. The human subject, that is, can internalize the agentive reactions of the other subjects with which it interacts, thereby objectifying itself as a "me," as a particular individual, by interiorly reproducing in itself their possible reactions in front of its personal action. The fact that the human being is able to anticipate the reactions of other subjects means, for Mead, that it internally reacts to its own imaginative action as its partner would do, therefore, assuming an external self-perception and acquiring an objective image of itself as a particular individual embedded within social interactions.

¹³⁷ Honneth, 1995, p. 72.

This intersubjective constitution of self-consciousness, for which the subject self-consciously relates to itself by internalizing the perspective of the others, is justified and mediated originally, according to Mead, by the institution among subjects of shared gestural and symbolic meanings.

Mead's explanation takes its point of departure from the observation that one possesses knowledge of the intersubjective meaning of one's actions only if one is capable of generating the same reaction in oneself that one's behavioural expressions stimulated in the other: I can become aware of what my gesture signifies for the other only by producing the other's reply in myself. [...] The development of the consciousness of oneself is connected to the development of consciousness of meaning in the sense that, in the individual experiential process, the latter prepares the way for the former: the ability to call up in oneself the meaning that one's action has for others also opens up the possibility for one to view oneself as a social object of the actions of one's partner to interaction. In perceiving my own vocal gesture and reacting to myself as my counterpart does, I take on a decentred perspective, from which I can form an image of myself and thereby come to a consciousness of my identity.¹³⁸

Thereby, Honneth stresses, first, how the process described by Mead, wherein subjects reciprocally internalize the perspective of the other, stands for a form of reciprocal recognition. Indeed, to use meanings shared communally implies that the subject confers to and receives by the other subject the acknowledged status of an epistemic subject, which partakes in a social context of communication governed by reciprocal meaningful expectations. Secondly, Honneth emphasizes how, already at this epistemic level of intersubjective constitution, Mead identifies two different psychic constitutive elements of subjectivity. With the "me," he refers to the objectified self that is perceived interiorly as reproducing the meaningful reactions of other subjects, or in other terms, the individual identity springing from the perspective and expectations of its partner in linguistic communication.¹³⁹ Instead, with the "I," Mead attempts to name the creative and energetic psychic impulse that, in front of problems emerging in the course of meaningful interactions with other subjects, compels the given framework of meanings and linguistic expectations to develop. "Mead thus distinguishes the 'me' which, since it only reflects the other's image of me, only preserves my momentary activity as something already past – from the 'I', which represents the unregimented source of all my

¹³⁸ Honneth, 1995, pp. 73-74.

¹³⁹ See Mead, 1964, p. 139: "Certainly the fact that the human animal can stimulate himself as he stimulates others and can respond to his stimulations as he responds to the stimulations of others, places in his conduct the form of a social object out of which may arise a 'me' to which can be referred so called subjective experiences."

current actions.”¹⁴⁰ Hence, Honneth already sees in Mead the possibility to consider the identity of the subject as emerging in the tension between the reproduction of the normative expectations of the social context and the identifying creative impulse in transforming it. Or, to put it differently, the development of the human subject’s identity as an epistemic social subject does rely upon the recognitive process intrinsic to the internalization of the framework of socially shared meanings. Nevertheless, this recognitive process is marked by an intrinsic movement due to the inner psychic creativity of the subject, which leads it to further and adjust the meaningful development of its social world.

The so far mentioned theoretical changes that Mead introduces and Honneth deems as significant regarding the understanding of the intersubjective mechanism by which the subject’s identity emerges are, thus, two. The first one is that Mead rephrases the Hegelian mechanism of recognition as constitutive for the subject’s identity in psychological terms. From the non-empirical description of “knowing oneself in the other,” Mead, through an analysis of the phenomenological mechanism of language, redefines it in terms of objectively perceiving oneself as a particular individual by internalizing the normative perspective of the other. Therefore, “a subject can only acquire a consciousness of itself to the extent to which it learns to perceive its own action from the symbolically represented second-person perspective.”¹⁴¹ The second one is Mead’s explicit identification within the subject of a creative and psychic energy.

Then, Honneth observes how Mead, from the epistemic level, locates the recognitive mechanism to the basis of the practical level of subjectivity as well.¹⁴² Indeed, he shifts the analysis to the process by which the subject acquires a “practical-relation-to-self.” Namely, he is interested in understanding the recognitive mechanism for which the subject objectively self-relates as a person that acts, rather than merely understands, by internalizing the rules of action and the moral behavioral standards of its social context. By empirically analyzing the educational process of children, Mead observes how they learn to perceive themselves as practical agents by regulating their behavior according to the norms and values for action intrinsic to the increasingly broader social spheres where they get integrated, from family to

¹⁴⁰ Honneth, 1995, p. 74.

¹⁴¹ Honneth, 1995, p. 75.

¹⁴² For a further analysis of the closeness between Hegel’s and Mead’s approach to recognition, see Renault, 2013.

school, social associations, and political sphere.¹⁴³ Therefore, the psychology of education allows Mead to find an evident justification for how human subjects acquire an objective image of themselves as practical subjects through the progressive internalization of the normative perspective by which other subjects perceive and interact with it, namely by developing intra-psychically an image of themselves according to the rights and duties by which the external world recognizes it as a social member.

With the extension of social reaction to include normative action-contexts, the ‘me’ is transformed from a cognitive into a practical self-image of one’s own person. By putting itself in the normative point of view of its interaction partner, the other subject takes over the partner’s moral values and applies them to its practical relation to itself.¹⁴⁴

Therefore, Honneth underlines how, again, intersubjective recognition is considered by Mead as the constitutive interaction for the subject’s practical identity development, because it allows the subject to develop an intra-psychic relation to its personal dimensions. But there are two other elements that Honneth finds essential within Mead’s analysis of the dependence of subject’s practical identity on social recognition. In the first place, Mead intuitively understands how the practical self-relation that the subject acquires through recognition is not merely a cognitive acquisition. Instead, it implies the *normative* evaluation that the subject makes of itself. Namely, the subject develops a *positive* practical self-relation, which permits it to autonomously and freely partake in its social environment:

It is no coincidence that Mead speaks at this point of the ‘dignity’ one is granted as soon as one is recognized, through the granting of rights, as a member of the community. For, implicit in the term is the systematic assertion that the experience of recognition corresponds to a mode of practical relation-to-self in which one can be sure of the social value of one’s identity. The general concept that Mead selects for designating this consciousness of one’s own worth is that of ‘self-respect’.¹⁴⁵

Thus, Mead’s framework makes explicit how the intra-psychic acquisition that cognitive relations entail for the individual is its evaluative self-perception as a practical

¹⁴³ According to Mead, the child lives such phases of social integration either with a more passive attitude, under the influence of the social punishments or rewards that follow whether shared rules are respected or not, or with the more active internalizing process of “play” and “game.” In the latter case, the child imaginatively and performatively adopts the behavioural norms of an even more “generalized other,” starting to develop a progressively complex self-conception as a member of the social community, which confers and demands a set of legitimate requests and normative expectations.

¹⁴⁴ Honneth, 1995, p. 77.

¹⁴⁵ Honneth, 1995, p. 79.

subject with *worth*. Furthermore, Mead names such a conscious experience of personal worthiness into a psychic self-relation with a normative meaning: self-respect. More strongly than Hegel, Mead's psychological analysis of the form of normative self-relation deriving from social recognition unveils to Honneth the possibility to respectively relate the three forms of recognition delineated through the reconstruction of the Jena writings to the subject's development of three different forms of *positive* psychic self-relations. Mead does not mention love as a relation of recognition but mostly focuses on the developmental intra-psychic effects that juridical relations and the cooperative system of division of labor have for the human subject. The former conditions the development in subjects of self-relations of dignity or self-respect due to their being participants in the social context. Instead, the latter mitigates the abstractness of juridical relations by giving relevance to the personal contribution that the specific social member can bring to the social context through "socially useful work."¹⁴⁶ Unlike Hegel, Mead fails to understand the sphere of intimate relationships as a context of recognition but rightly understands how "one develops abilities and traits and can convince oneself of their unique value for the surrounding social world, on the basis of the recognizing reactions of one's partners to interaction."¹⁴⁷ Accordingly, Honneth suggests how it can be conceptually relevant to distinguish among different evaluative self-relations that the subject intra-psychically gains through the existence of different forms of recognition.

In the second place, Mead maintains the idea of a creative psychic energy within the practical subject, which implies that the subject is always prompt to engage in conflicting social moments in order to express the creative moral and evaluative instances that the "I" develops in historical situations. Hence, Mead's argument links the intensive dynamic of the forms of recognition, namely the substantial meaning they dynamically acquire from a historical point of view, to the increasing moral and evaluative expectations of social subjects' inner creative spontaneity. Indeed, this latter propels to the transformation of existing relations of recognition in order to ensure social conditions wherein subjects' practical identities can attain greater spaces for juridical autonomy and social individualization and thus better forms of normative relations to themselves.

For Mead, this inner friction between the 'I' and the 'me' represents the outline of the conflict that is supposed to be able to explain moral development of both individuals and society. As the

¹⁴⁶ Honneth, 1995, p. 88.

¹⁴⁷ Honneth, 1995, p. 87.

representative of the community, the 'me' embodies the conventional norms that one must constantly try to expand, in order to give social expression to the impulsiveness and creativity of one's 'I'. Mead thus introduces into the practical relation-to-self a tension between the internalized collective will and the claims of individuation, a tension that has to lead to a moral conflict between the subject and the subject's social environment.¹⁴⁸

This is a crucial point for Honneth since Mead connects the historical development of the forms of recognition to the tension intrinsic to the subject in morally transforming existing juridical and cooperative relationships to develop a greater practical relation to itself. That is to say that the human being, via social struggles, attempts to gain a deeper normative experience of its own worth as a juridical member and a biographical individual, so that the chances for its autonomous self-realization through the social context can actually increase. It also follows that Mead deduces from his empirical social psychology a theory of the social world for which the reproduction and historical progress of the latter is grounded upon the conflicting instances for recognition of social subjects. What's more, he clearly conceives such an action-theoretic account of the social world's development in terms of an increasing moral progress, wherein the ever-growing universalization and individualization of juridical relations and solidarity ties open up the path for deeper forms of positive self-relation, therefore, of the personal preconditions for an autonomous and free self-realization.

By merging the theoretical approaches of Hegel and Mead, Honneth collects three fundamental theoretical suggestions, reciprocally interrelated:

- a) the possibility for the subject to develop a normative practical self-relation, namely a positive relation to itself, constitutively relies upon the recognitive attitude of other subjects, which is to be thought in terms of a positive affirmation and confirmation. Indeed, the subject objectively experiences or perceives itself by internalizing the normative perspective of its social partners.
- b) the tripartite paradigm of recognition carved out from Hegel's and Mead's suggestions, for which love, respect, and social esteem (or solidarity) are to be considered as the three recognitive forms of the ontogenetic process of the subject's free identity, can be empirically justified. Accordingly, these three forms of recognition can be post-metaphysically related to three different types of normative self-relation of the human being, which are to be regarded as the personal conditions necessary for the subject to reach the psychic or personal integrity that is needed for its autonomous and free realization in the social context. Moreover, "central here will be evidence for the claim that the various forms of reciprocal recognition can, in fact, be

¹⁴⁸ Honneth, 1995, p. 82.

mapped onto different levels of the practical relation-to-self” and that it is possible thereby to “find a systematic consideration of those forms of disrespect that, as negative equivalents of the corresponding relations of recognition, could enable social actors to realize that they are being denied recognition.”¹⁴⁹ Indeed, according to Honneth, it is possible to outline, correspondingly to the different forms of recognition, three forms of misrecognition, which stand for the experiences of disrespect that jeopardize the psychic and identity’s integrity of the human subject, therefore arousing in subjects aggressive and conflictual reactions towards the social context, with moral meaning. “The specific vulnerability of humans resulting from the internal interdependence of individualization and recognition”¹⁵⁰ implies that any social attitude that disconfirms the worth of one person’s practical dimension is unjust and needed to be criticized. But “not simply because it harms subjects or restricts their freedom to act, but because it injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively.”¹⁵¹

c) The societal institution and development of human societies can be theoretically and ontologically grounded upon the intersubjective relations between subjects and social groups. Moreover, such a development can be interpreted in terms of a moral progress, wherein the different stages of historical social conflicts cumulatively lead to the creation of social recognitive contexts wherein grow the chances for the social members’ personal autonomy and individualization. That is, such a historical process of struggles for recognition has been ensuring an increasing possibility to normatively experience oneself as an equal partaker to the institutional world and a biographic individual with cooperative capacities:

The reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition. [...] Admittedly, this general premise has explanatory power only when it includes a dynamic element. The aforementioned imperative, which is anchored in the social life-process, provides the normative pressure that compels individuals to remove constraints on the meaning of mutual recognition, since it is only by doing so that they are able to express socially the continually expanding claims of their subjectivity.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Honneth, 1995, p. 93. See the German edition, 1992, p. 150: “Im Mittelpunkt wird dabei der Nachweis stehen, dass sich den unterschiedlichen Formen der reziproken Anerkennung tatsächlich verschiedenen Stufen der praktischen Selbstbeziehungen der Menschen in der Weise zuordnen lassen. [...] findet sich eine systematisierte Berücksichtigung derjenigen Formen von Mißachtung, die als ein negatives Äquivalent der entsprechenden Anerkennungsverhältnisse den gesellschaftlichen Akteuren die Tatsache vorenthalten Anerkennung sozial erfahrbar machen können.”

¹⁵⁰ Honneth, 1995, p. 131.

¹⁵¹ Honneth, 1995, p. 131.

¹⁵² Honneth, 1995, pp. 92-93. See the German edition, 1992, pp. 148-149: “Die Reproduktion des gesellschaftlichen Lebens vollzieht sich unter dem Imperativ einer reziproken Anerkennung. [...] Eine

In such a theoretical framework, social critique reviews its role. It provides, through interdisciplinary studies, a formal and systematic anthropology collecting the forms of recognition and their corresponding types of practical self-relations. It thereby employs such an anthropology as a set of normative principles by which it criticizes existing social relationships as sustaining social experiences of misrecognition and supporting the historical subjects' critical and conflicting activity towards the social world.

Following such suggestions, in *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth finally provides the formal anthropology that he has then maintained as the cornerstone of his subsequent writings.¹⁵³ With it, Honneth distinguishes, with the help of empirical justifications, three forms of social recognition – love, right, and social esteem – according to the intersection between the subjective practical dimension to recognize, the normative practical-relation-to-self they help in constituting, the social sphere of integration they descriptively and normatively regulate, and the prevailing psychological quality that mediates them.

The first form of recognition he starts to analyze is love (*Liebe*) as it stands for the primary constitutive intersubjective relation within the ontogenetic process of human individuals. With love relationships, Honneth refers to all the primary relationships, such as parent-child relationships, friendship, and erotic relationships, wherein few concrete individuals establish emotional ties through which they positively experience with the other's emotional confirmation their being concrete individuals with affective and physical needs. Such a positive confirmation of the worth of one's personal neediness allows the subject to reach a

erklärungsrelevante These ergibt sich aus dieser allgemeinen Prämisse freilich erst dadurch, dass in sie ein Element der Dynamik einbezogen wird: jener im sozialen Lebensprozeß verankerte Imperativ wirkt als ein normativer Zwang, der die Individuen zur schrittweisen Entschränkung des Gehaltes der wechselseitigen Anerkennung nötig, weil sie nur dadurch den stets nachwachsenden Ansprüchen ihrer Subjektivität gesellschaftlich Ausdruck zu verleihen vermögen."

¹⁵³ See Honneth and Fraser's exchange in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (2003) and *Freedom's Right* (2011). In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth maintains *The Struggle for Recognition's* theoretical backbone in its main conceptual elements, focusing on the objective embodiment of the social conditions of human subjects' self-realization within three main institutions of the modern world, i.e., personal relationships, the market, and the public sphere. Honneth shifts the interest from the intersubjective relationships of recognition among social members to the normative principles that govern the genesis, the reproduction, and development of the social institutions of social life, conceiving the critique of the social world in terms of an analysis of the possible "distortions" of social life from the rational principles embedded within the social world. In *Freedom's Right*, therefore, with respect to *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth undertakes an institutional analysis of the social world, wherein the cognitive conditions of the subject's freedom are analyzed through the historical and normative reconstruction of the main social institutions of the modern world, whose ethical principles govern their progressive and teleological evolution towards increasingly ethical contexts of freedom. Hence, Honneth keeps maintaining his understanding of the constitutive mechanism of recognition and the teleological interpretation of human societies' moral progress, reconsidering the former on the level of social institutions and grounding the latter on a historical reconstruction of the modern world.

normative objective image of this personal dimension, namely, to develop a specifically normative intra-psychic relation-to-self: self-confidence.

Subjects mutually confirm each other with regard to the concrete nature of their needs [*konkrete Bedürfnisnatur bestätigen*] and thereby recognize each other as needy creatures [*bedürftige Wesen anerkennen*]. In the reciprocal experience [*Erfahrung*] of loving care, both subjects know themselves to be united in their neediness, in their dependence on each other [*in ihrer Bedürftigkeit von jeweils anderen abhängig sind*]. Since, moreover, needs and emotions can, to a certain extent, only gain 'confirmation' [*Bestätigung*] by being directly satisfied or reciprocated, recognition itself must possess the character of affective approval [*Affektive Stimmung*] or encouragement [*Ermütigung*].¹⁵⁴

And:

Moreover, because this relationship of recognition prepares the ground for a type of relation-to-self in which subjects mutually acquire basic confidence in themselves, it is both conceptually and genetically prior to every other form of reciprocal recognition. This fundamental level of emotional confidence - not only in the experience of needs and feelings, but also in their expression - which the intersubjective experience of love helps to bring about, constitutes the psychological precondition for the development of all further attitudes of self-respect.¹⁵⁵

Honneth justifies with the objective results of contemporary psychoanalysis this theoretical understanding of love relationships as constitutive for the human subject to gain a positive relation to its personal emotions and needs, which can be psychically named self-confidence, as the personal precondition for the subject to relate freely and realize its concrete needy individuality. The studies of Donald Winnicott and Jessica Benjamin¹⁵⁶ have empirically demonstrated how the manifestation of care, affective presence, and support of the mother to

¹⁵⁴ Honneth, 1995, p. 95. See the German edition, 1992, p. 153: "[...]Die Subjekt wechselseitig in ihrer konkreten Bedürfnisnatur bestätigen und damit als bedürftige Wesen anerkennen: in der reziproken Erfahrung liebevoller Zuwendung wissen beide Subjekt sich darin einig, dass sie in ihren Bedürftigkeit von jeweils anderen abhängig sind. Weil Bedürfnisse und Affekte zudem in gewisser Weise überhaupt nur dadurch «Bestätigung» erhalten können, dass sie direkt befriedigt oder erwidert werden, muss die Anerkennung hier selber den Charakter affektiver Zustimmung und Ermütigung besitzen."

¹⁵⁵ Honneth, 1995, p. 107.

¹⁵⁶ See Winnicott, 1965 and 1971; Benjamin, 1998. Winnicott and Benjamin, Honneth underlines, take a critical detachment from the orthodox psychoanalytical conception of children's development, according to which the child's intersubjective relationships can be assimilated to the subject's libidinal attraction for external objects. Instead, Winnicott and Benjamin attempted to evaluate the specific role that intersubjective relations play for the personal constitution of the child and the pathologies of personality that follow from the lack of both a material and emotional confirmation of parents. Moreover, they elaborate 'the theory of object-relations'. They unveil in the individuation-process of the child a fundamental, intermediate phase of emotional attachment to external objects, for the child learns to detach himself/herself from the mother while acquiring an understanding of her/his ego's independence and demarcation from external subjects and objects, thanks to the aggressive manipulation of objects of play.

her child is essential for this latter's ego-development and acquisition of physical and emotional self-independence. Indeed, from a condition of total "symbiosis" between the mother and the child in the first months of life, wherein the child lives in a condition of "primary narcissism" or omnipotence, without distinguishing himself/herself from the mother and the external world, the two must develop a love relationship wherein both identify themselves in the other as autonomous and independent bodies and persons, but still will the confidence to find confirmation, care, and support from the other. Therefore, the symbiosis circle where mother and child immediately find themselves is to be interrupted for a balance between reciprocal autonomy and dependence, by which the child can develop a personal feeling of individuality and trust in his/her personal expressiveness' worthiness.¹⁵⁷ This is so because the child can undertake a process of positive individuation only whether the affective confirmation of her/his mother with regard to the worth of her/his concrete neediness, emotions, and expressions leads to the acquisition of a positive relations to herself/himself, so to deal positively and autonomously with her/his bodily neediness, emotional sensitivity, and personal expression. The same logic of balance between self-confidence (or autonomy) and dependence upon others, Honneth deems, can be transposed to all other primary relationships, such as friendship or erotic love, although assuming different configurations.¹⁵⁸

As Danielle Petherbridge underlines, in Honneth's framework love does not merely represent the first form of recognition in the ontogenetic development of the human being, but most importantly "a theory of love or primary affectivity [is] posited as the precursor, both conceptually and genetically, to all other forms of recognition."¹⁵⁹ From a genetic point of view,

¹⁵⁷ According to Winnicott, the developmental stages in the mother-child relation can be divided into "absolute dependence," "relative dependence," and "towards independence." Accordingly, from a complete state of emotional and corporeal unity with the mother, the development of the baby's ego, after the first months of life, starts with the progressive physical demarcation undertaken by the mother and the transitional mediation with the objects of play. For Benjamin, such a process is related to the Hegelian notion of a struggle for recognition, wherein the mother struggles for the baby's acquisition of the capacity "to be alone," although with ongoing attention for the child. In contrast, the baby manifests aggressive reactions towards the mother to deny the mother's autonomy and recover the initial symbiosis due to the perception of his/her dependence on the mother. Nevertheless, through this aggressive stage, and the maintenance of the mother's attitude of bodily and emotional care despite these destructive behaviours, the child experiences the boundaries of its own body, of the mother's bodily individuality, and the material existence of external objects as well. Thus, the baby can start to develop, thanks to the mother's attitude of care, both a feeling of his/her individual practical self and the knowledge of his/her affective, emotional, and corporeal expressions' worthiness.

¹⁵⁸ In *The Struggle for Recognition*, there is not a thorough analysis of the specific conditions that distinguish the different forms of primary relationships, such as physical and erotic fusion or non-erotic attitudes of care. More detailed distinctions, also with a reconstruction of the historical conditions that lead to the constitution of the normative logic of modern primary relationships, can be found in *Freedom's Right* (Honneth, 2014), part III, Ch. 6.

¹⁵⁹ Petherbridge, 2013, p. 158.

love is the recognitive relationship through which the subject reaches the fundamental personal precondition, the trust in the value of its own concrete individuality, that is necessary for all the subsequent processes of socialization. From a conceptual point of view, love embeds paradigmatically the underlying mechanism of recognition. The latter consists, according to Honneth, to the rupture of the original symbiosis among subjects for the institution of a reciprocal relation of dependence that, nevertheless, allows the subject to reach a positive relation to its own individuality through the ongoing confirmation of the other subject, which assumes the mark of affectivity, i.e., an emotional and active attitude of participation. Hence, the process of individuation cannot but occur, according to Honneth, on the ridge wherein intersubjective dependence and personal independence imply and merge with each other.¹⁶⁰

According to Honneth, the form of disrespect that corresponds to the negative counterpart of love is physical and psychological violence (*Vergewaltigung*), for personal experiences such as torture and rape are injuries that bring the complete disintegration (*Verletzung, Einsturz*) of one person's physical and psychic integrity (*körperliche und psychische Integrität*).¹⁶¹ Honneth interprets such a threat not merely in materialistic terms since the subject's impossibility to autonomously dispose of its own body carries a psychic incapacity

¹⁶⁰ Danielle Petherbridge considers this point in Honneth's argument both confusing and problematic. On the one hand, she stresses how Honneth relates such a mechanism of recognition to an original state of complete fusion with the other subject. Therefore, it remains unclear whether the child's ego development starts in the condition of total symbiosis, subjectively undifferentiated, or of intersubjective recognition, wherein two conscious subjects relate to each other. On the other hand, Petherbridge, following the suggestions of a series of feminist critical studies, contests that Honneth did not consider that the relationships between child and mother are neither reciprocal relations of recognition nor symmetrical relations (see Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. IX). She sharply underlines how Honneth's notion of love fails to unveil the asymmetrical relations of power that subsist between the mother and the child, therefore offering an unrealistic and naïve overview on the underlying mechanisms of recognitive relations. Indeed, she stresses that the reciprocity of recognition does not fit within the primary relationship between mother and child, wherein the acknowledgment of the other's neediness is undertaken unilaterally by the mother, creating a situation of unilateral dependence of the child upon the mother. Therefore, in such relationships, without presupposing in the mother any aggressive, disregarding, or disconfirming attitude toward the baby, it is necessary to underline how the mother owns an asymmetrical power with respect to the baby, which is to be conceived in terms of the power to determine the baby's behaviour productively. In a nutshell, the missing mutuality of mother-child relations implies the existence of an asymmetrical relation among the two subjects and, consequently, the effectively unilateral dependence of the latter upon the former, which opens up space within recognitive relations of some subject's power to determine the other.

¹⁶¹ See Young, 2007; Allen, 2010, 2011; Piroballi, 2012. These are the theorists who suggested to Honneth the necessity to add to *The Struggle for Recognition*'s framework all the psychological forms of violence, mostly present in the cases of domestic violence towards women, such as economic dependence, blackmail, stalking, and relational standards based on stereotypical categories, which can destroy the integral self-relation of a person. Moreover, they contest how Honneth in *The Struggle for Recognition* does not consider the love-sphere as having an ethical development, considering only the spheres of respect and social esteem as crossed by a moral progress carried forward by the developing normative expectations, mediated by social struggles, of social members. Honneth has then added such critical suggestion to his paradigm of recognition, see Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Honneth, 2014.

both to develop the feeling of self-confidence, necessary to live in one's own body, emotions and thoughts, and to positively self-identify with other dimensions of human personality. "Thus, the kind of recognition that this type of disrespect deprives one of is the taken-for granted respect for the autonomous control of one's own body, which itself could only be acquired at all through experiencing emotional support as part of the socialization process."¹⁶²

The second form of recognition that Honneth analyzes is respect (*Achtung*), mediated by the conferral of juridical rights. Through the latter subjects mutually confirm each other, from a cognitive point of view, as abstract persons, capable of making "reasonable, autonomous decisions regarding moral questions,"¹⁶³ thus both acquiring the normative relation-to-self of self-respect, as being subjects with the rational and moral capacities to partake in moral decisions within the social context. Whereas love is a form of emotional "sympathy" and affective participation in the concrete neediness of an irreplaceable individual, thereby not being suitable to be cognitively controlled or mechanically aroused, respect is the acknowledging relation by which subjects positively confirm each other as persons as such, regardless of their distinguishing concreteness. Following Hegel's post-conventional understanding of juridical relations,¹⁶⁴ Honneth interprets them according to the universalistic meaning they assumed within modern societies, namely, once the sphere of right had obtained societal independence from the hierarchy of social values following from the social division of labour. Indeed, in pre-modern societies, the distribution of rights and duties was unequally determined with respect to the degree of social estimation received by one's own task in the relations of social cooperation. But with the development of industrialism and international communication, the rupture of conventional ethics carried the progressive autonomy of the sphere of right. Indeed, historical subjects started to distinguish between their status of rational

¹⁶² Honneth, 1995, p. 133. See the German edition, 1992, pp. 214: "Die physische Mißhandlung eines Subjekts stellt einen Typ von Mißachtung dar, der das durch Liebe erlernte Vertrauen in die Fähigkeit der autonomen Koordinierung des eigenen Körpers nachhaltig verletzt; daher ist die Folge ja auch, gepaart mit einer Art von sozialer Scham, ein Verlust an Selbst- und Weltvertrauen, der bis in die leiblichen Schichten des praktischen Umgangs mit anderen Subjekten hineinreicht."

¹⁶³ Honneth, 1995, p. 114. See the German edition, 1992, p. 184: "[Die Subjekte] die Fähigkeit unterstellt werden können, in individueller Autonomie über moralische Fragen vernünftig zu entscheiden."

¹⁶⁴ Here, Honneth emphasizes that Hegel, unlike Mead, has grasped the normativity proper of juridical relationships of modern society, namely, as tied to universalistic premises. Mead has conventionally understood juridical relation as a form of recognition. Indeed, what interests Mead is that subjects, through the conferral of conventional rights, can know themselves as acknowledged participants to social life. Instead, Hegel links modern juridical relations to the normative request of subjects to gain a juridical status *equal* to others, grounded upon the fact that human societies in their legitimacy depend, both genetically and reproductively, on all social members' acceptance and consensus.

persons, equal to all others in their capacity to be morally imputable social members and partakers in the legitimization of the social world, and their condition of biographic individuals embedded within cooperative relationships.

From this point on, the legal system can be understood as the expression of the universalizable interests of all members of society, so that, according to the demand internal to it, exceptions and privileges are no longer admissible. Since, in this connection, a willingness to adhere to legal norms can only be expected of partners to interaction if they have, in principle, been able to agree to the norms as free and equal beings, a new and highly demanding form of reciprocity enters the relationship of recognition based on rights.¹⁶⁵

Honneth's identification of respect as the counterbalancing cognitive relation that is discarded from any consideration of the human being's concrete individuality and the qualitative evaluation of its personal capacities from a contributory point of view does but recover the Kantian insight on formally "treat[ing] any person as an end in itself." Therefore, there is a universal quality of being a person, which is to be conferred equally to all human beings and to be respected in its dignity: to be an individual with rationality and capacity for moral decision. As such, the intrinsically moral potentiality of the sphere of right, which makes this latter, according to Honneth, a cognitive context destined to undergoing a historical increase of its moral meaning through the growing normative expectations of subjects mediated by struggles for recognition, lies in the variable ways to understand, first, the parameters to confer such a quality. That is, the interpretation of the prerequisites to be *considered* legal persons, i.e., rational persons with the moral capacity to participate in rational will-formation, has changed and still does, in the course of history, with respect to multiple factors such as race, gender, social class, age, and nationality. The extensive movement¹⁶⁶ of respect, therefore, has been tied to the growing, increasing, and cumulative requests for juridical universalization of the social groups and categories excluded from socially accepted definitions of "person." The second interpretative variable regarding the status of legal person concerns the *conditions to*

¹⁶⁵ Honneth, 1995, p. 109-110. See the German edition, 1992, p. 177: "Das Rechtssystem muss von nun an als Ausdruck der verallgemeinerbaren Interessen aller Gesellschaftsmitglieder verstanden werden können, so dass es seinem Anspruch nach keinen Ausnahmen und Privilegierungen mehr zulassen darf. Weil damit eine Bereitschaft zur Befolgung rechtlicher Normen von den Interaktionspartnern nur noch dann erwartet werden kann, wenn sie ihnen im Prinzip als freie und gleiche Wesen haben zustimmen können, wandert in das Anerkennungsverhältnis des Rechts eine neue, höchst anspruchsvolle Form der Reziprozität ein."

¹⁶⁶ Here, we refer to the progressive movement of inclusion in legal relationships of excluded subjects, namely to the universalization of juridical rights. Historically, many social struggles for recognition were devoted to the universal conferral to all social members of existing "civil rights guaranteeing liberty, political rights guaranteeing participation and social rights guaranteeing basic welfare" (Honneth, 1995, p. 115).

publicly stand for a rational person with the moral capacity to partake equally in the institution of agreements regarding social norms. “The cumulative expansion of individual rights-claims [...] can be understood as a process in which the scope of the general features of a morally responsible person has gradually increased, because, [...] ever-new prerequisites for participation in rational will formation have to be taken into consideration.”¹⁶⁷ Following the historical tripartition of rights pointed out by the jurist Robert Alexy and the sociologist Thomas H. Marshall,¹⁶⁸ Honneth reconnects the contemporary juridical division between civil rights, political rights, and social rights as resulting from the historically emerging moral requests of social subjects. They progressively learn, through empirical experiences, the cumulative conditions that are needed to perform this practical human dimension while clarifying its constitutive meaning. Therefore, negative rights for individual freedom, positive rights to participate in social and political life, and juridical protections for the transformation of formal equality into concrete and material social justice are to be all considered products of the intrinsic dynamic of the historical subjects’ moral potentiality.

The psychic counterpart in receiving public respect through the conferral of those juridical rights that make feasible the participation in the legitimization of social life is, for Honneth, the positive relation-to-self “as a morally responsible person.”¹⁶⁹ Self-respect (*Selbstachtung*), therefore, is the normative experience that the subject has of itself, which follows from seeing its autonomy confirmed cognitively by the social world in its entirety, and represents the personal precondition to express its moral responsibility in social life freely and legitimately.

Finally, Honneth considers the psychic result that follows in the subject from the structurally social denigration of its juridical expectations and requests, which can occur both with the exclusion from the existing framework of legal rights and the denial of the conditions that should be legally ensured for the participation in social life as a legitimate moral person. These forms of disrespect, namely denial (*Entrechtung*) and exclusion from rights (*Ausschließung*) “typically [bring] with [them] a loss of self-respect, of the ability to relate to

¹⁶⁷ Honneth, 1995, p. 114-115.

¹⁶⁸ Robert Alexy wrote in 1986 *Theorie der Grundrechte*, and Thomas H. Marshall published in 1963 *Sociology at the Crossroads*.

¹⁶⁹ Honneth, 1995, p. 118. See the German edition, 1992, pp. 191-192: “Die positive Selbstbeziehung [...] sich auf sich selber als eine moralisch zurechnungsfähige Person zu beziehen.”

oneself as a legally equal interaction partner with all fellow humans.”¹⁷⁰ Namely, the subject is prevented from developing a self-experience or self-perception of its status of “full-fledged partner to interaction,”¹⁷¹ with the consequent arousal of the negative and crippling feeling of social humiliation.

Social esteem (*Soziale Wertschätzung*) is the last form of recognition that constitutively lets the human subject gain a positive-relation-to-self, thus completing the ensemble of personal preconditions for the individual to develop the psychic and personal integrity necessary to undertake its full-fledged individualization and self-realization within the social world. Indeed, Honneth defines social esteem as that intersubjective confirmation regarding the valuable significance that the biographic capacities, qualities, interests, and values of the social member have for the social context, as a cooperative context of common finalities, and which occurs under the psychological attitude of “care” (*affektive Anteilnahme*) or “felt concern” (*aktive Sorge*).¹⁷² Both Hegel and Mead suggested that human subjects, once integrated within juridical relationships, still need to overcome the anonymity of rights for being positively integrated with social ties in their own social individuality. Mead narrows this social relationship of value conferral only to the work dimension, thus to the material contribution provided by an individual to the social world. While Honneth, through Hegel’s mature concept of “ethical life,”¹⁷³ refers to the general framework of values that, standing for the generalization of all social members’ interests, aims, and needs, represents the share system of evaluation with which all social subjects can identify their own individuality within the entire society. By taking from Mead the idea of the subject’s biographic worth, and from Hegel the broader account of ethical relationships as not confined to work relations, rather standing for the symbolic framework by which a human society conceives itself, Honneth seeks to outline the modern conditions for social esteem.

Honneth, firstly, underlines how the concept of social esteem, as such, is a product of modernity, while in traditional societies, it was the category of “honour” to design a relationship of estimation or valuation. Traditional or conventional societies used to derive the framework of values designed to collectively regulate social life from metaphysical or religious beliefs,

¹⁷⁰ Honneth, 1995, p. 134. See the German edition, 1992, p. 216: “Insofern geht mit der Erfahrung der Entrechtung typischerweise auch ein Verlust an Selbstachtung, der Fähigkeit also, sich aus sich selbst als gleichberechtigter Interaktionspartner aller Mitmenschen zu beziehen, einher.”

¹⁷¹ Honneth, 1995, p. 133. “[der] Status eines vollwertigen, moralisch gleichberechtigten Interaktionspartners.”

¹⁷² Honneth, 1995, p. 129.

¹⁷³ See Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, [1821] 1991.

which, therefore, rigidly defined a set of substantial values, independent from mundane justifications. Furthermore, the societal organization was *corporatively* structured. Namely, it relied upon the distribution of social members into societal statuses, hierarchically arranged according to the degree of contribution that their lifestyles could provide with respect to the societal values absolutely observed. From such a societal structure, three constitutive properties defined the relationships of social estimation, namely the attribution of social honour. First, the moral standards for social evaluation were conservatively rigid and mechanically reproduced. Second, any social member was not evaluated in its independent qualities, capacities, and interests. Instead, it was considered as an expression of its social status and the lifestyle accorded to it. Accordingly, in the mechanism of societal evaluation, the social individual was subject to two distinctive processes, one internal and one external to the group. On the one hand, it was subjected to the intra-group evaluation. That is to say, as an expression of its societal cast, the individual was considered in the light of its behavioural accordance with the intra-group system of values, i.e., the moral code integral to the specific way of life assigned to the social status in question. Moreover, the subject of the group received a certain normative self-image correspondently to the degree of estimation that the existing social hierarchy had conferred to the group in question.

The shift from traditional (or conventional) societies to modern (or post-conventional) societies represented a radical rupture of such a system of relationships of social estimation, according to Honneth. In fact, the historical theorization of juridical universalism, due to the new theory of the social world as discarded from religious or metaphysical justification, progressively jeopardized the myth of “social givenness,” while returning to social subjects and their common agreement the ultimate power to accept the existing social setting in its legitimacy. The sudden learning by the social counterparts of the mundane preconditions of the social world’s structure led correspondingly to question the given symbolic framework of societal values as well, for this latter had been unveiled in its social and historical origin too as the result of asymmetrical relationships of symbolic power among social statuses. Furthermore, the technological and communicative development of modernity marked a fundamental change for social subjects. Indeed, to use the words of Marx, the advent of capitalism meant for the subject the opportunity to detach itself from the social status accorded to it by birth. Namely, it gains the chance for both socially self-individualizing independently from corporativism, and for being estimated for its own individual capacities, qualities, and ways of self-realization.

Only from this particular historical juncture does Honneth deem it feasible to properly speak of “social esteem,” for the human subject was really able to receive a social confirmation of the worthiness of its biographic individuality. What’s more, through such an intersubjective affirmation, mediated by emotional and active manifestations of solidarity, the social subject was suitable to instantiate a further positive relation to itself, self-esteem, or feeling of self-worth. This latter, thus, stands for the normative attitude that the subject acquires about itself as being endowed with qualities having worth for existing societal ends, aims, and values. And finally, it represents the normative personal prerequisite that is needed by the subject to freely and autonomously undertake its own lifestyle and self-realization, namely, to pursue its ends, interests, values, and capacities in the social context.

From such an overview of social esteem, Honneth draws two conclusive remarks. The first one, as in the case of “respect,” concerns the moral potential intrinsic to the human subject’s normative need to receive the positive estimation of its social context. Indeed, the societal symbolic frameworks of values, on which social members’ evaluation depends, historically undertake a pluralistic dynamic, occurring through cumulative struggles for recognition to ensure to all social members the chance to equally compete, with their biographic individuality, for the acquisition of societal worth. Such a pluralistic dynamic, compelled by social conflicts, has been occurring in the historical development of human societies with respect to both the governing societal values and the specific definition they acquire in social contexts. “For this reason, the worth accorded to various forms of self-realization and even the manner in which the relevant traits and abilities are defined fundamentally depend on the dominant interpretations of societal goals in each historical case.”¹⁷⁴ As in the case of the increasing moral enhancement of the sphere of rights, wherein an even more universalization and incrementation of the subjects’ capacity for autonomous morality and rationality are gradually ensured, so in the societal sphere of social esteem, there is the institution of even more pluralized systems of moral standards and values, which fosters the possibility for subjects to increasingly self-individualize as biographical social members positively embedded in the societal cooperative system. “Every subject is free from being collectively denigrated, so that

¹⁷⁴ Honneth, 1995, p. 126. See the German edition, 1992, p. 205: “Daher bemißt sich der Wert, der den verschiedenen Formen der Selbstverwirklichung zuerkannt wird, aber auch bereits die Art, wie die entsprechenden Eigenschaften und Fähigkeiten definiert werden, grundsätzlich an den Interpretationen, die historisch jeweils von den gesellschaftlichen Zielsetzungen vorherrschen.”

one is given a chance to experience oneself to be recognized, in light of one's own accomplishments and abilities, as valuable for society."¹⁷⁵

Finally, in light of such considerations, the subjects' occurrence into experiences of social contempt in the cultural sphere, where subjects do not relate reciprocally as persons as such, but as biographical members qualitatively belonging to a context of values, implies the loss of self-esteem. Namely, because of experiences of social insult (*Beleidigung*) and denigration (*Entwürdigung*), subjects are unable to "regard themselves as beings whose traits and abilities are esteemed"¹⁷⁶ and, therefore, to pursue independently the form of self-realization they identify with.

Now it is possible to understand in what sense Honneth, from *The Struggle for Recognition* onwards, has outlined a systematic framework suitable to offer a tripartite account of the human subject's personal integrity and, respectively, of the forms of intersubjective recognition that constitutively represent the social conditions for its attainment. Indeed, he has enucleated the three forms of positive relation-to-self – self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem – that are needed by the subject to undertake a full-fledged process of self-individualization and autonomous self-realization in the social context. Then, he has related the subject's progressive acquisition of such normative and moral relations to self to three different kinds of social affirmations – love, respect, and social esteem. This conceptual framework, wherein recognition has been related to the interrelation between positive active confirmation (*aktive Bestätigung*) – positive self-experience (*Positive Selbst-Erfahrung*) – self-realization (*Selbstverwirklichung*), has been not considered by Honneth in purely descriptive terms. For sure, it has allowed Honneth to recover an intersubjective account of human subjectivity, which had been overlooked entirely or was missing systematicity in precedent social theories. But, furthermore, it has disclosed to him the chance to understand social recognition, in light of the moral understanding, the conflictual movement, and the progressive dynamics he has conferred to it, in terms of the socio-ontological basis of human societies' symbolic reproduction and moral development.

Indeed, the fact that the subject's psychic and personal integrity constitutively depends upon the recognition of other subjects, considered in terms of affective, active, and supportive acknowledgment, forcefully implies that the denial of the normative interactions that the subject

¹⁷⁵ Honneth, 1995, p. 130. See the German edition, 1992, p. 210: "[...] jedes Subjekt ohne kollektive Abstufungen die Chance erhält, sich in seinen eigenen Leistungen und Fähigkeiten als wertvoll für die Gesellschaft zu erfahren."

¹⁷⁶ Honneth, 1995, p. 134.

expects to receive from its social context to instantiate a positive self-image, jeopardizing the possibility of the latter to develop a positive self-experience, triggers the arousal of moral sufferance and negative emotions of disrespect. In fact, the loss by the subject of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem corresponds to the emergence of feelings of social shame, such as being hurt or degraded or outraged, which stand, according to Honneth, for the psychological experiences leading the subject to cognitively undertaking an analysis of current recognitive relations. “For the negative emotional reactions accompanying the experience of disrespect could represent precisely the affective motivational basis in which the struggled-for recognition is anchored.”¹⁷⁷ By recovering Dewey’s pragmatist theory of emotions,¹⁷⁸ Honneth underlines how subjective emotions should be dismissed in their traditional meaning of expressions of inner feelings by revaluing their role for action. An action-theoretic account of human emotions aims, therefore, to emphasize how feelings “appear in either positive or negative dependence on actions.”¹⁷⁹ For, the emergence of personal feelings of social shame or anger are to be always related in their origin to the denial of the norms which guide social interactions, and in their outcome to the arousal of conflictual reactions aiming at changing the current situation. Indeed, such moral feelings, in the strict circuit of emotions and actions, are practically situated in the disruption of implicit ethical norms of human interactions, namely the forms of recognition upon which practical human subjectivity is based, and correspondingly bring the subject to undertake an effort in changing the current negative situation.

Honneth, thus, describes the phenomenology of the social conflict as a process occurring by three distinctive phases. The human subject cognitively analyzes its negative moral emotions by referring them to the denigration carried out by the social context concerning its conditions for positive self-relation. Then, the generalizable mechanism of recognition and its three forms allows the subject to wonder whether its personal experience of misrecognition is being shared with other subjects and, if it does so, to find out a common semantic to turn their personal experience into a common experiential framework, based on shared moral expectations of recognition. Finally, once it has constituted a collective identity relying upon the development of a semantic experiential bridge among all offended subjects, the subjects’ new subcultural

¹⁷⁷ Honneth, 1995, p. 135. See the German edition, 1992, p. 219: “Denn die negative Gefühlsreaktionen, die die Erfahrung von Mißachtung psychisch begleiten, können genau die affektive Antriebsbasis darstellen, in denen Kampf um Anerkennung motivational verankert ist.”

¹⁷⁸ See Dewey, 1894; Dewey, 1895.

¹⁷⁹ Honneth, 1995, p. 136.

interpretative horizon enables them to engage in social conflicts aiming at setting up the ideal normative social context wherein their collective identity can receive social acceptance.

In opposition to any utilitarian account of social struggle, Honneth argues that struggles for recognition must conceptually be interpreted in moral terms since their primary motivation is not material survival or power competition. Instead, their grounding semantic framework refers to “the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition. These expectations are internally linked to conditions for the formation of personal identity in that they indicate the social patterns of recognition that allow subjects to know themselves to be both autonomous and individuated beings within their socio-cultural environment.”¹⁸⁰ Hence, the intrinsic meaning of the historical struggles for recognition has been, and still is, the moral progress of human societies as such, which, with the ethical learning process embedded in social conflicts, develop into increasing normative contexts of intersubjective interactions, wherein the chances for human subjects’ individualization and autonomy progressively grow.

Posing the task in this way makes it necessary to conceive of the model of conflict discussed so far no longer solely as an explanatory framework for the emergence of social struggles, but also as an interpretive framework for a process of moral formation. Even just the reference back to the logic of the expansion of recognition relationships allows for the systematic classification of what would otherwise remain an uncomprehended occurrence. Every unique, historical struggle or conflict only reveals its position within the development of society once its role in the establishment of moral progress, in terms of recognition, has been grasped.¹⁸¹

The reinstatement of an intersubjective anthropology of human subjects’ identity, by means of the psychologization of Hegel’s recognitive paradigm with Mead’s approach, enables Honneth to overcome the aforementioned limits of previous critical theories. Indeed, firstly, it allows him to recover the social subjects’ capacity both for pre-theoretical critical activity against the social context and for the socio-ontological power to legitimize the social world’s symbolic (juridical, cultural, and institutional) reproduction.

Secondly, such an anthropological framework paves the way for Honneth to outline an account of social domination or social injustice in recognitive terms, thus pinpointing the autonomous mechanism that domination acquires within the subject-subject relations. Namely,

¹⁸⁰ Honneth, 1995, p. 163.

¹⁸¹ Honneth, 1995, p. 168. For a further elaboration by Honneth of the teleological progress of human societies towards increasingly free and ethical social contexts, see *Freedom’s Right*. Herein, Honneth provides a reconstruction of the normative principles embedded within the main institutions of the modern world (personal relationships, the market, and the public sphere) and a historical overview of the historical moral changes that occurred within these social spheres.

the mechanism of social domination lies in the denial of human subjects' moral expectations to receive the social confirmation that is needed to develop normative attitudes towards oneself, standing for the personal preconditions to pursue an autonomous and realized life. Therefore, Honneth provides a conceptual understanding of social domination or injustice that seeks to overcome the mere equivalence between the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of human subjects. Social domination is rooted in the relation that the individual has with itself, in the normative horizon by which it is induced to perceive its life, its activity, its social partners, and the social world as well.¹⁸² Moreover, according to such an anthropology, symbolic social frameworks can differently harm practical human subjectivity, with all the disrespectful experiences related to physical and psychological violence, constriction and exploitation, or to juridical exclusion, and finally, to social and cultural denigration or contempt.

Thirdly, critical theory is now called to help in liberating the progressive moral potentiality intrinsic to the three normative principles of human identity and social life by immanently referring to the morality that stems from existing situations of misrecognition.

III. 2. A Strong Normative Approach for Social Critique: The Normative Criterion of the “Good Life” and the Liberation of Hidden Morality

According to Honneth, critical theory must extract by means of the aforementioned human anthropology three normative principles, which stand for the formal conditions for a full-fledged intersubjective communication and for the empirically normative references that have historically sustained subjects in pursuing progressive social struggles for recognition.

By employing the normative criterion of the “good life,” which gathers the three formal intersubjective conditions for social subjects' integral self-individualization within the social world, critical theory can recover its original role of an ally of social struggles. For, from the ideal and formal perspective of a realized normative communication among subjects, wherein successful processes of individualization through socialization are ensured, social critique

¹⁸² From *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth attempts to present the social struggles for economic and material equality or redistribution as derivative from recognitive requests, namely, their materialistic meaning is to be conceived as normatively dependent upon the primary dimension of moral recognition. See, specifically, Fraser & Honneth, 2003, wherein Fraser contests Honneth's monistic approach to recognition, advocating the theoretical necessity to maintain a normative dualism, which distinguishes, both conceptually and empirically, the requests for social recognition from those for equal redistribution, based upon a more strong normative issue on equal material status, rather than stronger individualization.

should critically approach the social world while turning the morality expressed via social sufferance into juridical, social, cultural, and political requests for social recognition, to be affirmed through the learning process of social struggle.

It follows that Honneth attempts to develop and employ *immanently* the normative criterion of the “good life” or “ethical life” in order to avoid social critique from having both the paternalistic risk of “invention”-based critical approaches and the conservatory attitude of some “interpretation-reconstruction”-based critical approaches.¹⁸³ Indeed, the normative criterion of the “good life,” which contains “everything that is intersubjectively presupposed today in order for subjects to know that the conditions for their self-realization are safeguarded,”¹⁸⁴ is neither the arbitrary product of a theorist’s mental experiment and

¹⁸³ See Honneth, 2009. In “Reconstructive Social Criticism With a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of ‘Critique’ in the Frankfurt School”, Honneth recovers, while enriching, the distinction that Michael Walzer draws in *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987) among three types of critical approach, according to “how the procedure is procured with which the assertion of the underlying norms or principles [of critique] is attained” (Honneth, 2009, p. 46). The “revelation”-based approach makes the normativity of its critical criterion to rely upon the possibility to cognitively or religiously grasp a “closed realm” of binding principles, standing for the standards by which any human society is to be criticized and conformed to. The manifest risk of such an approach, understandably, is that the social theorist experiences human societies in light of a utopian revelation, without any consideration of the existing social conditions. The “invention”-based (or “construction”-based, as Honneth renames it) approach advocates for singling out a set of principles by means of a transcendental method or a mental experiment that takes its distance from the social world and, thus, maintains a paternalistic and arbitrary attitude to social reality. Finally, the “interpretation”-based approach (or “reconstruction”-based, as Honneth renames it) seeks, instead, to immanently criticize human societies by hermeneutically singling out the normative or rational principles embodied within existing societies, which implicitly or explicitly lay under and govern the ensemble of their social practices and symbolic frameworks. In this category, nevertheless, it is possible to operate, according to Honneth, a further distinction among immanent-conservative social theories and immanent-transforming social theory (see also Jaeggi, 2018). In the first case, the norms embodied in the social context are substantially conceived, and any social situation that slips from these rational norms must be returned to the given observed logic. Instead, the immanent-transformative approach compels, through the Hegelian and Left-Hegelian idea of an embodied historical reason, the substantial transformation of social reality’s normative principles, and, at least in Honneth’s case, such a historical development is to be directly related to the growing moral expectations of social individuals in interacting with the social context. Finally, Honneth adds to Walzer’s schema a fourth critical approach, although not considered in *The Struggle for Recognition* and in *Freedom’s Right*, this latter standing for the last main writing of Honneth wherein he develops an interpretation of modern societies’ history according to a set of normative, rational, and objectified principles. The fourth option Honneth refers to is the “genealogy”-based approach, which, following Nietzsche and Foucault’s methodology, attempts to “criticize a social order by demonstrating historically the extent to which its defining ideas and norms already serve to legitimate a disciplinary and repressive practice” (Honneth, 2009, p. 48), thus undertaking a historical reconstruction of the social mechanism for which certain normative principles became dominant within modern societies due to tacit mechanisms of power. Nevertheless, Nietzsche and Foucault refuse to offer an alternative positive normative criterion. Indeed, “in this sense, genealogy is in a certain sense a parasitical critical procedure, since it lives by presupposing a normative justification that it does not itself try to give” (Honneth, 2009, p. 48). In this essay, therefore, Honneth proposes to merge the interpretative and the genealogical approaches, hence, advocating for two different hermeneutical levels for social critique. That is to say that the interpretive-transformative phases of critical theoretical activity are always to be accompanied by a genealogical proviso, which questions whether social critique’s immanently designed normative principles may risk overthrowing their emancipatory meaning as being in the long run “alternated into practice that stabilize domination” within the succession of historical changes.

¹⁸⁴ Honneth, 1995, p. 172.

transcendental reasoning nor the bare identification of a normatively substantial ideal extracted from a specific social context. Instead, it stands for the criterion that the theorist, on the one hand, immanently derives from an empirically regulated human anthropology and an interpretation of the social struggles for recognition that have followed over the course of history according to a logic of progressive morality. On the other hand, it is a guiding criterion that, in approaching existing social contexts, relies upon a negativistic method, for it is dependent concerning its substantial contents upon the suffering experiences of existing social subjects. Moreover, through this criterion, the theorist, relating to existing symbolic and cultural frameworks through the normative lens of the social experiences of sufferance, is willing to help in transforming the given moral contents of human societies, rather than to repristinate the status quo. To a mere conservative or particularistic attitude of social critique, Honneth thus contraposes a transcending one, for the normative criterion of critique, and correspondingly, the normative principles of human societies are to be grasped on the level of theory as entirely “formal,” as its material contents and substantial meanings historically develop according to social subjects’ progressive moral requests.

A formal conception of ethical life encompasses the qualitative conditions for self-realization that, insofar as they form general prerequisites for the personal integrity of subjects, can be abstracted from the plurality of all particular forms of life. But since, for their part, such conditions are open to possibilities for normative progress, a formal conception of this sort does not escape all historical change but rather, quite the opposite, is tied to the unique initial situation presented by its period of origin.¹⁸⁵

Using the category of “formality” to refer to the criterion of a full-fledged cognitive intersubjectivity, Honneth explicitly retrieves the Kantian ideal of a principle whose universal application is feasible only if expressed independently from any substantial and empirical reality. Nonetheless, in opposition to Kant, Honneth attempts to enrich the unidimensional framework of this latter, which justifies only the moral imperative to respect the universal autonomy belonging to human rationality, thus limiting the legitimacy of philosophical analysis to account for a concept of “justice” without any reference to the “good” of the human being. On the contrary, Honneth’s criterion, which gathers “love,” “respect,” and “solidarity,” aims to account for the social conditions for the human being’s good life or self-realization, without,

¹⁸⁵ Honneth, 1995, p. 175.

nonetheless, referring to any empirical definition that such concepts receive in the particular forms of life.¹⁸⁶

Our approach departs from the Kantian tradition in that it is concerned not solely with the moral autonomy of human beings but also with the conditions for their self-realization in general. [...] But in contrast to those movements that distance themselves from Kant, this concept of the good should not be conceived as the expression of substantive values that constitute the ethos of a concrete tradition-based community. Rather, it has to do with the structural elements of ethical life, which, from the general point of view of the communicative enabling of self-realization, can be normatively extracted from the plurality of all particular forms of life.¹⁸⁷

We have outlined in its general structure Honneth's method to immanently extract the criterion of the "good life" in order to provide critical theory with a normative perspective for critically approaching human societies in light of the paradigm of recognition, negatively referring to oppressed social groups' morality of sufferance. Nevertheless, two further considerations are still needed.

In the first place, in the essay *Moral Consciousness and Class Domination: Some Problems in the Analysis of Hidden Morality*, Honneth provides a fundamental clarification concerning the specific task of critical theory, in its role of an ally to oppressed social groups. In the face of Horkheimer and Adorno's negative philosophy of history and missing analysis of the intersubjective conditions of ego-development, which underplayed the conceptual possibility for an emancipatory interest into contemporary capitalist societies, Honneth counterposes the different approach that his intersubjective paradigm of recognition offers. First, he clarifies how such an intersubjective account of human subjects allows social critique to recover, both conceptually and empirically, the moral expectations that social members have

¹⁸⁶ The debate upon whether it would be feasible or significant for social philosophy to refrain from any consideration of what is good for the human being, rather focusing on mere issues of universal justice, is extremely wide and complex to be addressed here. For an analysis of the main elements of such a debate and an argument in favour of critical theory and social philosophy's engagement in ethical issues, see, for instance, Jaeggi, 2018, Introduction, "Against Ethical Abstinence." Here, Jaeggi exposes the two main contemporary arguments in support of social philosophy's "ethical abstinence," namely, Rawls' theory of justice and Habermas' procedural ethics of discourse. She summarizes how both authors deem philosophy to be legitimate only in inquiring in the universalizable conditions of equal justice, and in the communicative premises that are fundamental for historical subjects to reach a common agreement as equal members on ethical issues. What Jaeggi contests about such approaches is that they overlook the constitutive dependence of the principles of justice upon ethical premises on human being's good and self-realization. For instance, the juridical condemnation of physical violence for educational purpose, that now is a universal premise for personal autonomy, has been the result of a historical learning process, occurring from a certain form of life, regarding the necessity for children to reach a good life within a societal context free from the threat of physical harm.

¹⁸⁷ Honneth, 1995, p. 172.

towards each other, as not merely related to material motivations, no longer effective in front of the material compensatory strategies of capitalist societies. Second, he emphasizes how social critique must deal with the empirically effective morality springing from historical misrecognized subjects with different premises to those of Habermas' account of procedural discourse ethics. Indeed, in line with a formal discourse ethics that outlines the standards for a power-free agreement on moral norms, Habermas provides a solution for which the empirical subjects that bring about socially emancipatory moral principles are those who are able to demonstrate the ethical meaning of their moral consciousness on the public communicative level. According to Honneth, such an approach leads to employing critical categories that are not able to detect the counter-morality of oppressed social members empirically, for it unilaterally adopts the communicative standard of the emancipatory moral experience belonging to the hegemonic political classes. Indeed, with such a communicative and linguistic account of oppressed subjects' emancipatory morality, social critique "must implicitly ignore all those potentialities for moral action which have not reached the level of elaborated value judgments, but which are nonetheless persistently embodied in culturally coded acts of collective protest, or even in mere silent "moral disapproval."¹⁸⁸ From a sociological point of view, with a special focus on the analysis of Barrington Moore in *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, Honneth clarifies how the morality of lower social strata within capitalist societies mainly does not develop into a coherent system of moral principles to be presented in the communicative space. Hence, the specific task that social critique should fulfil due to its role as an ally with social moral conflicts is, in the first instance, to use conceptual categories – in Honneth's case, the series of moral feelings related to social sufferance – apt to disclose those pre-communicative and pre-linguistic experiences of disrespect. Therefore, the critical theorist is required to seek the "hidden" emancipatory morality, which, even if normatively oriented according to the cognitive premises of freedom, remains a "consciousness of injustice," rather than a systematically communicative counter-morality. Nonetheless, "the basic cause of this is not the cognitive inferiority of lower strata, but class-specific differences in the pressure exerted upon them by normative problems. [...] The conditions I would like to put forward as the cause for the differing construction of the moral consciousness of socially suppressed groups are therefore social-structural in character."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Honneth, 2007d, p. 83.

¹⁸⁹ Honneth, 2007d, p. 84.

Consistently, the first strategy to be adopted is, for Honneth, a review of the common elements shared on this phenomenological level of emancipatory morality. Namely, “consciousness of injustice”, as pre-communicatively and pre-linguistically occurring, is mostly *fragmented*, i.e., spread into silent expressions of moral disapproval under the *façade* of the subject’s successful social integration or hidden by culturally coded acts of protests. It is *incoherent*, for the object or the reference of the injustice felt by the subject is not systematically grasped and related to a coherent value- and goal- system. Finally, it is *un-universalized*, for subjects tend to consider their negative feelings arising from social interactions as merely individual or private issues.

The second strategy that social critique must employ consists of the analysis of the social expedients devoted to systematizing the desymbolization and the progressive isolation of vulnerable social members structurally. Such expedients, which withhold the subjects’ chance to appropriate both of semantic and symbolic means and of the spatial and cultural conditions to develop a collective moral identity, run human societies in all their levels, i.e., the institutional, cultural, and private ones. And they can be identified, in the first place, in all the strategies of institutional isolation, namely, the dissolution, through administrative, political, economic, and working systems, of community ties, spaces for cultural, political, and moral learning processes. Second of all, they stand for all the means devoted to debilitating the subjects’ capacity for coherent normative communication, such as the dismantling or weakening of educational systems, the establishment of a series of communicative taboos, and the development of a closed hegemony of social media. Therefore, it is relevant to underline how social critique, according to Honneth, is now compelled to deal with the broader phenomenological occurrence of critical morality, mainly mediated via negative, pre-linguistical, and pre-communicative experiences of social sufferance. This means that its essential function is helping in liberating and semantically expressing the hidden moral potential of excluded social strata.

A critical analysis of society must see as its task today the identification of moral conflicts connected to the social class structure which are hidden behind late capitalism’s façade of integration. [...] The concept of the consciousness of injustice is intended to serve this purpose. With it, Critical Theory of society can be kept open to the socially repressed moral conflicts in which suppressed classes make us aware of the structural restrictions placed on their claims to just treatment – that is, to as yet unrealized potentialities of historical progress.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Honneth, 2007d, p. 90-95.

The conclusive consideration we want to draw concerns the presence of an unresolved tension within Honneth's strategy to ground the normativity for social critique. We have seen how he advocates for an immanent-transcending account of social criticism, which, therefore, attempts to derive from an empirically grounded human anthropology and overview of the moral grammar of historical social struggles the normative criterion for social critique to criticize existing human societies. Honneth strongly emphasizes both the immanence-based strategy through which such a criterion is to be derived in order to avoid any arbitrary and paternalistic outcome, and the formality that the criterion of the good life necessarily must maintain. Indeed, it gathers the intersubjective conditions for the subject to self-realize but without substantially referring to any particular form of life, because they are "only general patterns of behaviour [...] [that] can be distilled, as structural elements, from the concrete totality of all particular forms of life."¹⁹¹ As further clarified in *Pathologies of The Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy*, the proviso of formality plays a significant role for Honneth, for he aims at providing a criterion universally applicable to all human societies to detect the pathologies of the social. In this text, by using the naturalistic term "pathology" metaphorically,¹⁹² Honneth argues that human societies, although not ontologically bound to natural organisms, are to be normatively conceived as pathological as the processes of social development "can be viewed as misdevelopments (*Fehlentwicklungen*) or disorders" for they prevent "the members of a society from living a 'good life'."¹⁹³ Nevertheless, he stresses, such an evaluative approach to social processes cannot but be based, first, upon descriptive premises, which gathers by means of a "weak anthropology" the social premises for an integral subjective identity, and, secondly, upon a "standard of normality," i.e., a positive normative framework for cognitively and emotionally approaching existing contexts of interaction. Such a standard of normality, as the critical reconstruction of the history of previous social philosophies

¹⁹¹ Honneth, 1995, p. 175.

¹⁹² For an analysis of two possible philosophical approaches to social pathologies, see Laitinen & Särkelä, 2017. Here, they distinguish between a normative and a naturalistic approach to social pathologies. In the first case, the term "pathology" is employed metaphorically to indicate the departure of human societies from the norms embedded within human societies. In the second approach, the term stands for an "analogy" or for a multilayer phenomenon occurring within the different levels of life. Honneth's strategy, for what concerns *The Struggle for Recognition* and "Social Pathologies: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy," is identified with the first approach.

¹⁹³ Honneth, 2007a, p. 4.

suggests to Honneth, should be *non-essentialist*, bounded to an anthropological category of *intersubjectivity*, and thus *formal* and *universally applicable* to any human society. Indeed, the process from modern philosophy to contemporary sociology has increasingly shown, according to Honneth, the necessity of a philosophical analysis devoted to analyzing human societies from the perspective of the interrelation of social subjects with their social contexts, without unidimensional accounts of the practical dimensions of subjectivity, according to ethical judgments such as “good” or “bad” but devoid of a substantial definition of such ethical concepts. From no longer acceptable monological or essentialist definitions of human nature, such as Rousseau’s and Marx’s,¹⁹⁴ Honneth claims the necessity to find a formal normative criterion, universally applicable – the one of ethical life – by which the “culturally independent conditions that allow a society’s members to experience undistorted self-realization” can be identified.¹⁹⁵ That is to say, for Honneth, the criterion of “social normality,” concerns the forms of ethical relations that are needed for the subject to develop a “normal,” i.e., non-pathological, relation to itself in any social contexts. The requirements of formality and universality (or context-transcendent) for his criterion of ethical life, thus, stands for the theoretical expedients by which Honneth attempts both to systematize, save from arbitrary western centrism, and free from the paralysis of relativism the normative framework for social criticism. Such a normative approach has been called “*strong-normativism*.”¹⁹⁶ For, it normatively bounds the social world

¹⁹⁴ Rousseau and Marx are considered by Honneth as the first philosophers to focus on an anthropological analysis by which a critical perspective on human societies is derived. Rousseau has provided a human anthropology that argues for a monological conception of the human being’s natural state, as living in a sincere and free self-relation if released by intersubjective bonds. Rousseau’s aim was indeed to offer a negative philosophy of history that was apt to interpret the modern phenomena of social competition, social conformism, and personal decentralization as the results of a gradual pathological departure of the individual from an original and natural attitude of care towards its individual capacities and qualities, independently from the look of the others. Instead, Marx offered an essentialist definition of human nature, with the idea of work as the essential, autonomous, and self-determining activity of the human being. Paradigmatically, these two approaches represent, for Honneth, the first philosophical inquiries on human anthropology for social criticism, bearing, at the same time, two theoretical limitations that a post-conventional philosophical analysis can no longer maintain. These limits are respectively the missing consideration of the role of intersubjective relations and the essentialist analysis of the human being as tied to a single type of activity. Therefore, in the following pages of *The Pathologies of the Social*, Honneth focuses on the subsequent philosophical contributions to the critical significance of a human anthropology (from Hegel and Nietzsche to Weber, the Frankfurt School, and Foucault), which lead to its progressive de-essentialization and “intersubjectivization.” Honneth’s conclusive consideration is that the current task for social philosophy, i.e., for a critical analysis of social pathologies, is to find the formal and enough rich ensemble of the intersubjective conditions for human self-realization.

¹⁹⁵ Honneth, 2007a, p. 35.

¹⁹⁶ See Renault, 2010. Here, Renault offers a categorization of the different traditions of social philosophy, according to the parameters of the strongness/weakness of their descriptive part and strongness/weakness of their normative part. “The descriptive side deals with the nature of the social settings and with their effects on individual experience. The specificity of the normative approach is that it endorses a particular kind of social critique that rests upon norms that are particular to social experience” (p. 232). In the case of Honneth, Renault suggests that

and social critique to an ahistorical and context-transcending anthropology which gathers the universal presuppositions for the human being's self-realization, whose substantial meaning depends on the historical existence of social subjects, and which are conceived as the "internally" binding descriptive and normative conditions of the spheres of the social world.

Nonetheless, there is an internal tension within Honneth's argument, both from a methodological and critical point of view. In the first instance, Honneth transforms an empirically but historically regulated human anthropology into a context-transcendent and ahistorically formal human anthropology, to be universally applied to all human societies. Nevertheless, from the previous reconstruction of Honneth's paradigm of recognition, it should be evident how he relates the systematic and categorical distinction between the three forms of recognition – love, respect, and social esteem – to the structural changes that marked the passage from traditional to modern societies. Indeed, from his argument, it seems that in the absence of a specific plexus of interrelated societal transformations, on the economic, subjective, political, and cultural levels, both the progressive demarcation among the sphere of respect and the one of solidarity, the constitutive universalism of modernity, the increasing detachment of the individual from the strict corporativism, as well as the emergence of the logic of social esteem, would not have come about. In a nutshell, the distinctive declination of the general logic of recognition in its three forms manifestly maintains in Honneth's argument a historically justificatory basis.

For, if we want to summarize Honneth's thesis of the general logic of recognition with Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen's proposal in *Analyzing Recognition: Identification, Acknowledgment and Recognitive Attitudes Toward Persons*, we should distinguish between the "genus" and the "species" of recognition.¹⁹⁷ Accordingly, the "genus" of recognition, as fundamental for the ontology of personhood, namely for developing as a subject with intentional and normative contents, can be described as "taking another person as a person [...] that is understood as such taking and accepted by the other person."¹⁹⁸ That is, with the "genus"

Honneth's framework represents a mixed form of the two categories, for he provides a weak descriptive part and a strong normative part. That is to say, from the descriptive point of view, Honneth deals with the social settings from the perspective of an intersubjective human anthropology, without providing a systematic theory of social institutions and the spheres of the social. Whereas, from the normative point of view, Honneth strongly relates the social conditions of human subjectivity as the internally normative conditions of social action, and thus, of any human societies, for "normative expectations are internally associated with institutions" (p. 235).

¹⁹⁷ See Ikäheimo, 2002; Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007.

¹⁹⁸ Ikäheimo, 2002, p. 450. See also Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007. Both Ikäheimo and Laitinen have undertaken, as has been defined (Piroddi 2018), a "microphysics" of Honneth's paradigm of recognition, for they have attempted to deeply analyze in analytical terms his conceptual framework concerning the role of recognition for the ontology

of recognition, Ikäheimo and Laitinen attempt to isolate the constitutively general logic of recognition in terms of affirmatively taking – through both emotional, cognitive, and practical attitudes – the other as a person, who conversely takes the recognizer as a relevant judge. The analytic distinction of the forms of recognition systematically identified by Honneth is then presented as the attempt to distinguish the “species” of recognitive attitudes that the general logic of recognition assumes. Accordingly, love is the recognitive attitude that takes the other as “being someone whose happiness or well-being is important,” right as “having a right/being entitled to a series of non-institutional rights,” and esteem as “being valuable to something/worthy of esteem.”

Although Ikäheimo and Laitinen’s main objective through this distinction among the “genus” and the “species” of recognition, in the aforementioned essay, is to analyze the recognitive basis for an ontology of personhood, rather than providing a normative criterion for the good society, what we are interested in emphasizing is how this useful demarcation allows us to unveil the methodological tension in Honneth’s framework. That is, we could say that Honneth, in *The Struggle for Recognition*, identifies the genus of recognition ahistorically but distinguishes its three species from a historical point of view, then considering them as the universal normative principles by which approaching critically any human society. That is, as long as Honneth argues in general anthropological terms for the intersubjective constitution of practical subjectivity because the subject psychologically can objectify its self-image only with a positive mediation with the other subject, he is methodologically coherent with regards to his pretense of formality and universalism. Indeed, the genus of recognition, while empirically demonstrated through a theory of subjectivity and social psychology, refers to a general

of personhood. Two of their theoretical contributions consist, first, in clarifying, by following Avishai Margalit’s insight (Margalit, 2001), the distinction among identification (numerical or categorial), acknowledgment (of norms and values), and recognition of persons. Their second contribution is in the elucidation of the fact that recognition is a complex of attitudes. Indeed, on the one hand, through recognition the full-fledged development of personhood actually occurs if both the recognizer and the recognizee have a recognitive attitude, the recognizer in taking the other as a person, and the recognizee in taking the other as a relevant judge. This clarification, for both the authors, is highly important, for it allows them to overcome the underlying mechanistic meaning of Mead’s psychological definition of recognition as the internalization of the normative perspective of the other. Therefore, Ikäheimo and Laitinen are willing to stress the intentional and normative attitude that the recognizee also maintains in the face of the other’s recognizing or misrecognizing attitude. Second of all, by the conception of recognition as a complex of attitudes, it is possible to discern the multi-dimensional attitudes that the general attitude of recognition, namely its “genus” of “taking someone as a person,” (Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007, p. 40) can acquire. Consequently, they distinguish the three “species” of attitudes that the “genus” of recognitional attitude can assume, namely, love, respect, and social esteem, which respectively confirm with a variety of cognitive, emotional and practical attitudes, the subject as “being someone whose happiness or well-being is important,” as “having a right/being entitled to,” and as “being valuable to something/worthy of esteem.”

universal condition of human subjectivity. Namely, in order for the human individual to become a full-fledged person with normative self-attitudes, it is necessary for him to be affirmatively “taken” by the other subject as a person as such, i.e., to be confirmed in the intentionality and normativity proper of its practical activity. While the role that recognition as such plays for the constitution of full-fledged human subjectivity can stand for an ahistorical condition, the three species of recognition distinguished by Honneth cannot be considered likewise, because Honneth historically relies the progressive distinction of their distinguishing qualitative logic upon structural changes occurring within modern societies, and therefore, upon a historical proviso.

What we are trying to suggest is that Honneth’s systematization of the forms of recognition is for sure a scientifically grounded depiction of the forms of recognition that social subjects request in modern societies for their self-realization. Indeed, economic, societal, and cultural transformations have disclosed to subjects specific recognitive contexts wherein finding certain forms of self-relation, such as the emergence of right as a form of recognition disentangled from cultural issues, and the capitalism-related conception of social esteem for individual capacities. The truthfulness and the immanence of such recognitive conditions for modern subjects are as well justified, for they offer the conceptual grid to unveil the moral grammar lying under most of the historical struggles for recognition so far occurred. Moreover, such recognitive conditions have manifestly sustained the constitution of social contexts where new possibilities for autonomy and individualization have increased. But from a methodological point of view, is it legitimate for social critique pretending to employ a criterion of the good life universally, despite its historical premises? Would it not be more coherent to maintain the holistic bound between theory and praxis advocated by a critical theory of the social, in opposition to traditional theories? Accordingly, Honneth’s social critique, to be consistent with the premises of his theoretical justification, should maintain as a proviso of its normative criterion the further confirmation of the normative principles that compose it, due to the changeable interactions occurring among social subjects and existing societies’ structures and processes, which he himself has accounted for.

Of course, this methodological incoherence can entail quite serious problems from a critical point of view as well. Namely, “Honneth’s specification of the principle of recognition [...] itself inadvertently plays the ideological role of disguising and legitimating certain

operations of power.”¹⁹⁹ For instance, Iris Marion Young in *Recognition of Love’s Labor: Considering Axel Honneth’s Feminism* (2007) and Beat Rössler in *Work, Recognition, Emancipation* (2007), similarly argue that the cognitive form of social esteem for one’s achievement and contribution to the social world, first, is intrinsically tied to the logic inherent to capitalist societies. Indeed, the development of the relation to oneself as a biographical individual that needs to emerge in its social context according to a logic of personal achievement is a dimension of subjectivity, with cognitive bases, that modern and contemporary social subjects have been feeling deeply. Nevertheless, it is a product of the social processes proper of capitalist societies, which, with the disclosing of open market and free economic relationships have sustained the arousal of the subjective need for worthy individualization and differentiation from others, namely for being “someone” both in the work and the social and cultural spheres, often leading to pathological, i.e., paradoxical, phenomena of individualization, such as self-objectification, self-manipulation, and self-deprecation in cases of unsuccess.²⁰⁰ Second, and this is the core of Young’s and Rössler’s arguments, the

¹⁹⁹ Van den Brink & Owen, 2007, p. 22.

²⁰⁰ Honneth has addressed the paradoxes connected to self-individualization according to the achievement principle in the essay *Organized Self-Realization: Some Paradoxes of Individualization* (Honneth, 2004). Here, Honneth approaches the emergence of such a social pathology without questioning *per se* the principle of social esteem, as a normative principle related to capitalist societies themselves and needing, after having brought positive consequences for social subjects, a critical analysis concerning its normative significance in subsequent social conditions. Instead, it undertakes a socio-cultural analysis of the phenomena that, occurring on the structural, economic, cultural, and communicative levels, have led to a distortion and departure from autonomous and free processes of self-realization through the achievement paradigm. Christopher Zurn, in the essay *Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders* (Zurn, 2007), has provided a clarification of Axel Honneth’s analysis of social pathologies, as the socially shared diseases that originate due to the disconnection in social members between their first-order and second-order of experience. Zurn’s idea is that all forms of social pathology (paradoxes of individualization, reification, invisibilisation, ideology, economic maldistribution, and pathologies of reasons) share a common underlying structure, that of second-order disorders. With second-order disorder, he means precisely the constitutive disconnection in subjects of their experience of the social world’s normativity, both in its positive and negative occurrence, from their second-order of reflexivity. This latter is generally the reflexive dimension of human subjectivity, devoted to critically analyzing the contents of its immediate experience. In its pathological functioning, second-order reflexivity fails to perceive the intrinsic normativity embedded within the first-order of subjective experience in the social context, both in its negative occurrence (as the suffering reaction due to the denial of intersubjective normativity) and its positive one (as the positive moral reaction to the norms of cognitive interactions). With this conceptual structure, Zurn interprets the paradoxes of self-individualization as following. From the first-order experience of the denial of the possibilities for an autonomous way of self-realization, the subject in its second-order of experience does not undertake a critical attitude towards its social context but assumes an heteronomous attitude to itself tied to an ideological sense of responsibility and self-deprecation.

Zurn’s analysis has been then integrated by Laitinen (Laitinen, 2015), who argues for the need to broaden Zurn’s understanding of social pathologies with a multi-layered and encompassing model, apt to grasp different aspects of social pathologies, as running through all the social world’s levels. For Laitinen, Zurn has indeed understood the pathologies of the social merely in the self-relation and internal processes of human subjectivity, without accounting for the pathological existence in which the social world, as the object of the human being’s first-order

interpretation of the worthiness of one's contribution for the social world in terms of personal achievement and economic reward, as occurs in capitalist and neo-liberalist societies and how Honneth himself has proposed in his exchange with Nancy Fraser,²⁰¹ leads social critique to ideologically sustain forms of power and domination, as in the case of recognition of care work. Rössler indeed deems that approaching the issue of recognizing family work and caring for children from the perspective of personal achievement and in financial terms inadvertently fails to grasp the real matter at stake with feminism's requests for social recognition and gender inequality. First, care work questions precisely the achievement principle of social esteem, for in its occurrence it conceptually and ontologically eludes the logic of the biographical achievement and prestigious distinction in the social context. Second, Honneth's paradigm, as missing the real meaning of care work, namely, its irreducibility to the objective of achievement and consequently its potentially creative contribution to the recognition paradigm, also downplays a renewal of the analysis on work, and a serious analysis of the pathological effects that the issues of social esteem and personal achievement nowadays are having on social

experience, can occur itself, both for what concerns its leading criteria and for the manipulative or blocking effect that it exerts on social subjects.

²⁰¹ In *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (2003), Nancy Fraser, in opposition to Honneth, casts doubt upon the feasibility and the functionality of a monistic normativism grounded upon the category recognition for an adequate understanding of justice. Fraser indeed argues for the maintenance of a "perspectival dualistic" normativism, wherein the two normative criteria of redistribution and recognition cannot be reduced to each other. For, they respectively address different levels of injustice, economic inequality and status hierarchy, which refer to different categories of subjects (classes or groups), and advocate for different remedies for social justice, namely, economic redistribution and change of cultural frameworks of values. Whereas the "extreme" cases of the two levels of social injustice always imply the derivative emergence of forms of injustice on the second level, there are, according to Fraser, some "hybrid" phenomena of social injustice as well. With these "hybrid" forms, Fraser means those "two-dimensional" social situations wherein issues on redistribution and recognition do not follow from each other, but rather are "primary and co-original." In their case, accordingly, "neither a politics of redistribution alone nor a politics of recognition alone will suffice. Two-dimensionally subordinated groups need both" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 19). Fraser conceives of gender injustice as one of these "hybrid" phenomena, for it cannot be solved either with economics redistribution alone or with changing cultural frameworks only. In Honneth's monistic approach, the sphere of social esteem incorporates the problem of redistribution, dealing with it as a form of social recognition of one's contribution to the social world. According to such a framework, gender inequality in the division of labour risks to be addressed merely in terms of economic recognition. While, according to Fraser, it would be necessary to discern the economic problem, which is an issue of equal material distribution, and the cultural problem that reproduces unjust forms of androcentrism and paternalism. "Only a framework which integrates the two analytically distinct perspectives of distribution and recognition can grasp the imbrication of class inequality and status hierarchy in contemporary society. The result is an account in which maldistribution is entwined with misrecognition but cannot be reduced to the latter" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 3). Honneth embraces Fraser's criticism concerning the risks to ideologically overcome gender quality through mere economic rewards, but still advocates for the possibility to refer to recognition as the unique category of criticism. Indeed, he argues that her understanding of recognition is misleading, for it refers one-dimensionally only to the cultural dimension of recognition. He misses, therefore, the intimate, juridical, economic, and cultural levels of recognition, in whose interpolation gender inequality is socially reproduced and must be overcome, both by changing existing cultural frameworks and division of labour and by ensuring to any social member the juridical and economic conditions to undertake an autonomous life as a person as such.

subjects. Third, the idea to recognize women's love work retributively, as 'paid work', does but maintain and justify the androcentric division of labour and the inequality of women's social and cultural status, as tied to the private sphere and the rearing of children. Iris Marion Young argues too for the weakness of Honneth's normative principles to seriously explain the persistence of gendered division of labour also within a context of social redistribution, and moreover, the conceptual incapacity of its framework, and social esteem specifically, to grasp and be enriched retrospectively by the different cognitive need intrinsic to love's labour. This is so "because the achievement principle continues to define what counts as a 'real' contribution,"²⁰² while love's work, although it cannot be reduced to bare self-sacrifice of the caring person (even though Young underlines the a-symmetry and unilaterality proper of care relations), is not and cannot be motivated or recognized through parameters of excellence, personal achievement, and economic retribution without betraying itself.

Our main objective here is not to embark on a detailed analysis of the contemporary critical debate devoted either to casting doubts on the differentiation of the forms of recognition proposed by Honneth or to finding alternative forms of recognition to those outlined by Honneth. Instead, our aim is more modest. That is, to underline a methodological tension in Honneth's attempt to find a normative criterion for the criticism of the social world, due to the historical basis from which he distinguishes the three forms of recognition and his further willingness to turn them into tools for a strong normativism. The latter aims indeed at finding cognitive principles to be universally employed for criticizing all historical human societies, as being the ahistorical normative conditions of human self-realization and the social world. Such a methodological tension, of course, entails for Honneth's criterion of the "good life" to run the risk of being unable to detect possible new forms of cognitive requests that may possibly emerge from further historically structural changes of human societies and their cognitive conditions, or to further employing cognitive principles that, after having been critically functional for human societies, may dismiss in the long run their functional sensitivity, becoming conditions for the institution of certain forms of power. With such considerations we are not questioning the necessity for social critique and social philosophy to depend upon a positive criterion for the critical approach to human social context, for the normative reactions of social subjects in front of "pathological" situations imply indeed, both from a conceptual and empirical point of view, the reference to a "normal" or "non-pathological" situation. Rather, we

²⁰² Young, 2007, p. 210.

are suggesting that if the “genus” of recognition can be considered as an ahistorical condition of human anthropology, due to the constitutive dependence of the subject upon relationships of affirmative mediation with others, the “species” of recognition should be further objects of critical analysis by the theorists. For, social critique should accompany his critical activity with a self-critical analysis of the normative principles that compose its normative theory in relation to existing societal changes, their effectiveness in solving critical situation, and their historical origin.

Only in *Reconstructive Social Criticism With a Genealogical Proviso* (2007) does Honneth seem to proceed towards such a methodological strategy. Here, Honneth remains of the conviction that social criticism should both avoid strong context-bound normative relativism and normative abstinence, i.e., the methodological renouncement to provide any normatively positive criterion for avoiding any risk of sustaining silent forms of social power. In fact, in the case of strong context-bound normative relativism, for which social normative criteria are to be immanently grasped from the moral norms embedded in specific social contexts, without pretences of universalism, social critique also risks lacking strong theoretical reasons for sustaining its own hermeneutical processes of immanent reconstruction of norms. In the second case, of which Nietzsche and Foucault stand for the main theorists, social critique should even limit itself to unveil, by means of historical and genealogical reconstruction, the mechanisms of power underlying existing moral norms, without being in a position to normatively provide a positive criterion for critique, if not entangling in imbrications of social power. But conversely, with these presuppositions, such a critical approach ends up, according to Honneth, casting doubt also on the legitimacy of its genealogical reviews as being free from power. In the face of this normative dilemma, Honneth deems it necessary for social critique to maintain the critical ambition to outline a critical criterion embedded within human history, as being thus referable universally to human society as such, but with the “meta-critical” practice of reviewing the shift of meaning that the moral norms (or principles) related to this criterion can undergo in the course of societal development.

To each attempt to carry out an immanent critique of society under the premises of social rationalization must belong the genealogical project of studying the real context of application of moral norms. For without the addition of such a historical test, critique cannot be sure that the ideals it adduces still possess in social practice the normative meaning that originally distinguished them.²⁰³

²⁰³ Honneth, 2009, pp. 52-53.

Here Honneth, for the first time, mentions a *test* of the moral norms related to social critique's normative ideal, thus opening up an approach different from the strong normativism of *The Struggle for Recognition*. He seems to argue for the possibility to identify a universal normative condition of human societies, that is what we have called the "genus" of recognition, but with the genealogical proviso of testing whether its constitutive principles, namely, its species, are still maintaining an emancipative potential or are incurring a *shift* of meaning due to the change of historical situations and contexts.

Chapter Four. Intermediate Reflections. Honneth's Unidimensional Analysis of the Subject-Subject Relations

Chapters Second and Three, thus, have been devoted to providing an overview on the genesis and the grounding theoretical framework of Honneth's mature theory of recognition, mostly exposed in *The Struggle for Recognition* for what concerns both its leading interpretation of the mechanism for which recognition is constitutive for the self-realization of human subjectivity and its empirically regulated identification of the three forms of recognition. Starting from *The Critique of Power*, we have attempted to show how Honneth, in the first instance, advocated for a praxis philosophy accounting for the subjects' *various* interactions that, from a descriptive and normative point of view, participate for the full-fledged formation of the ego. The unilaterality of Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the human being's self-realization through the free aesthetic exchange with external objects was missing, according to Honneth, the fundamental reference to the essential part played by intersubjective relations within the free self-constitution of human subjectivities. Indeed, from a normative point of view, the consideration of the moral expectations of social subjects towards their social contexts remained, for Honneth, the only benchmark for forcefully recovering the intrinsic critical and conflictual potential of social agents within late-capitalist societies.

Horkheimer and Adorno's aesthetics-based anthropology turned out to be inefficient in disclosing, both conceptually and empirically, the maintenance, also in late capitalist societies, of historical subjects' emancipatory interest. By converting the negativistic depiction of the pathological relational logic of instrumental rationality offered by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* into a positive anthropology and theory of ego-development, Honneth rightly emphasizes their strict consideration of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity as the primary dimension of human activity. The free and aesthetic human exchange with the external world, occurring as the fluid communication between the world's qualities and human perceptions, in opposition to the quality-blind and fixed generalization of instrumental thought, appears in their theoretical framework as the primary constitutive interaction wherein subjects develop an autonomous and rich identity. Indeed, they considered only how the subject, by perceiving the world's autonomous values and by thoughtfully projecting itself in these values, with its capacities, body, mind, and sensuousness, freely

expands its identity within the world. Moreover, following Horkheimer and Adorno's displacement of the pathological relational logic occurring between subjectivity and objectivity due to the paradigm of instrumental rationality to the level of the subject-subject relations, Honneth concludes that they related their normative account of the relations between subject and object also to the relations among subjects.

What Honneth is interested in stressing in *The Critique of Power* is that, generally, Horkheimer and Adorno failed in providing an autonomous analysis of the intersubjective dimension of the human subject's constitutive development, in its distinguishing logic from the subject-object relations. That is to say that they did not provide a clear understanding of the distinguishing contribution of the relationships among subjects to the subject's free constitution, as well as of the pathological effects that the disruption of intersubjective relations entails for the subject's identity. The immediate consequence of such a lack of consideration, apart from an evident descriptive shortcoming, is the loss by theory of a fundamental normative source for the subject's pre-theoretical critique of its social context, persisting even within social contexts devoted to silencing the structural denial of the subjects' autonomous constitutive relation with objectivity. Indeed, in the face of both the spread of instrumental rationality through the capitalistic division of labour and bureaucratic administration, the implementation of systems of social control, the monopolistic manipulation of mass culture, and above all, the introduction of forms of material and economic rewards to the social classes oppressed by the exploitative logic of capitalist societies, Horkheimer and Adorno's weak anthropology and theory of ego-development were not able to stand theoretically either for an emancipatory standpoint or for the leading paradigm to detect the resistant critical activity of social subjects. The negative perspective through which they approach the pathological phenomena of post-capitalist societies entailed nothing but the pessimistic anticipation of a progressive regression of human societies. Accordingly, they considered the multi-dimensionality of contemporary strategies of deprivation of subjects' autonomous relation to the world, and the systematic indoctrination of the logic of exploitation as totally shaping and increasingly affecting the individuals' relation to the external world, the other subjects, and themselves. The progressive rootedness of the instrumental logic of usurpation and domination in the human subject by means of systemic social forces and economic rewards led this latter to the mechanical abandonment of the "original" and "primitive" form of praxis characterizing the human approach to the world. Hence, the "original" attitude of free constitution of human

subjectivity through the autonomous existence of objects, because of its entire dissolution within a societal world aiming solely at blind consumption, control, and distance from the bonds with objectivity, cannot but remain a distant past, faded by a set of new habitual attitudes so deeply rooted in the human subject to become a stable second nature, without the chance to surface in subjects' interiority in its normative voice. Consequently, the critical theorists, in front of such a complete substitution of subjects' original form of practical relation, could only limit themselves to denounce the end of social subjects' capacity for critical and conflictual activity, attempting to disclose the malady of the social world through a radicalized overview on human societies. The task of critical theory, thus, turned into unveiling the structural impediments to the subject's original interaction with objectivity, the petrification of the free development of social members' identities, the mere materialization of the external world, the instantiation of violent and oppressive social relationships, and the social constraints of the human potentiality for emancipation and social struggle.

According to Honneth, the primary mistake of Horkheimer and Adorno's philosophical anthropology was the missing consideration of the intersubjective pole of human subjectivity's free development. Indeed, in front of a social world where the normative requests for an autonomous relationship with the world had been silenced through capillary systems of manipulation and strategies of material and economic compensation, it was necessary to consider another source of normative thinking and activity existing within human subjectivity, and retrievable, therefore, through an inquiry into an additional interaction constituting human subjectivity. Accordingly, the human being was to be recovered in its dependence upon relationships with other subjects of reciprocal affirmation and confirmation, namely, recognition. Indeed, from *The Critique of Power*, recognition becomes gradually for Honneth the fundamental category for retrieving an action-theoretic account of human subjectivity. In fact, through such a category, it was feasible to disclose both conceptually and historically the human subject as prompt to undertake critical and normative analyses of its social situations, then engaging in moral conflicts to change unjust and oppressive social structures, as being not something given naturally and passively to the subject, but rather as relying upon the justificatory activity of the latter.

From *The Critique of Power*, Honneth sketched the idea that the human subject learns to normatively perceive itself by internalizing the evaluative perspective through which other subjects interact with it. Thereby, the missing positive consideration from its social context

leads the social subject to oppose and refuse the symbolic social framework wherein it is embedded, namely, the set of both juridical norms and cultural and moral values which govern social life in its entirety. Thanks to Habermas' analysis of social or communicative action, Honneth indeed stresses how human societies' reproduction is not dependent only on strictly material conditions, i.e., on concrete survival through labour, which in capitalist societies, despite their intrinsic malady, finds forms of assurance. Additionally, human societies are based on a system of coordinated and cooperative activities regulated by aims, values, interests, and needs with a social spectrum, thus having been more or less accepted through communicative agreement by the social members, and whose reproduction and transformation relies on their potentiality to sustain social recognitive contexts wherein social subjects, internalizing the cultural and moral framework of the social context, can develop a positive experience of themselves. In the absence of such relations of recognition, it is possible to detect, from a theoretical and, more importantly, historical and empirical perspective, the arousal of social feelings of sufferance and disrespect that prompt the dominated subjects to react in order to change unjust and oppressive societies.

The shift to intersubjective relationships of recognition, hence, appears to Honneth as the fundamental path of inquiry to undertake. For, through the latter, the human subject is able to "objectively" relate to itself, namely, to self-knowing intersubjectively, which is a fundamental confirmation and psychic result that the subject cannot acquire through the relation with mere objectivity, and upon which relies the true possibility for its self-realization and capacity to struggle for self-realization. In fact, self-realization, in Honneth's framework, is not to be conceived as a *reached status*. Instead, it appears as a *process* to be gained through the acquisition of determinate personal or psychic preconditions, namely, those positive forms of self-relations that allows the subject to come out in the social world as a context for free and autonomous self-expression.

As we have seen, between *The Critique of Power* and *The Struggle for Recognition* there is an element of both continuity and discontinuity. The element of continuity lies in the fact that the core topic of investigation of *The Struggle for Recognition* is precisely the systematic analysis of intersubjective recognition, both for what concerns its intrinsic mechanism for the positive constitution of human subjectivity and the different forms or declinations that this mechanism acquires in human societies. With Hegel's paradigm, Honneth retrieves recognition as a movement of confirmation between two subjects from which both can develop a positive

self-experience of their practical subjectivity, with a shift from a contingent and immediate level of self-experience to an intersubjectively mediated and confirmed one, mostly occurring *via* a moral struggle for recognition. From Mead, Honneth recovers the empirical framework suitable to rephrase the Hegelian paradigm of recognition, namely, the explanation of the mechanism of recognition from a psychological point of view, in terms of the confirming relationship by which the individual establishes a normatively positive relation-to-self, as a person with worth. And, again from Mead, he develops the idea to distinctively associate to the three forms of recognition a specific form of psychic normative relation to oneself, and to find in the subject, as endowed with inner psychic creativity, the source to progressively and increasingly extend existing relationships of recognition according to its new individualizing contents and requests of autonomy. Finally, with all such suggestions, Honneth provides a weak and formal anthropology, according to which three forms of recognition are to be correlated both to three psychic normative relations of the subject with itself and to three forms of misrecognition, which seriously and structurally disrupt the possibility for the subject to normatively relate to itself.

We have seen how the cogency of Honneth's paradigm of recognition, as presented in *The Struggle for Recognition*, is, without doubt, the recovery of a fundamental source of the normativity of empirical social subjects, overlooked in its intrinsic logic by the inter-objective account of subjectivity proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer. That is precisely the "specific vulnerability of humans resulting from the internal interdependence of individualization and recognition,"²⁰⁴ which implies, on the one hand, the subjects' capacity for criticism and normative transformations of their social context. On the other hand, due to the possible mechanisms hampering the morality of oppressed subjects to be communicated and to culminate in a social conflict, the critical theorist is able, by means of such a conception of recognition, to denounce and critically unveil any social context wherein the possibilities for the subjects to positively self-relate are seriously affected. Any form of disrespect, such as physical and psychic violence, juridical exclusion, social contempt, and cultural marginalization, even if felt by social members as private, pre-propositional and incoherent experiences of sufferance, can be detected by the critical theorist through such an understanding of recognition and criterion of the good life.

²⁰⁴ Honneth, 1995, p. 131.

Nevertheless, the discontinuity of Honneth's mature paradigm of recognition with the critical project of *The Critique of Power* lies in the abandonment of a philosophy of praxis accounting for *both* the intersubjective and inter-objective conditions for the free development of the subject's identity.²⁰⁵ Indeed, as "Adorno and Horkheimer interpret the development of the individual ego as a process that is played out solely between the individual conscious subject and his or her natural environment,"²⁰⁶ Honneth's starting idea was to add how "the formation of individual identity [cannot be] independent of social recognition by other subjects."²⁰⁷ It seems possible to conclude that Honneth, in *The Critique of Power*, was arguing for something like a "perspectival dualism," anthropologically speaking. Respectively, the "creativity" and the "richness" of ego identity was to be related to the subject's free exchange and sensuous interaction with the objective world, whereas, the subject's establishment of an objectively normative image or experience of itself, or to use *The Struggle for Recognition's* definition, of a positive-relation-to-self, was to be referred to a different level of interaction, the intersubjective and recognitive one. Indeed, through this latter level, it was deemed as possible for social members to participate in the constitution of a social and cultural framework whose set of collectively followed aims, ends, needs, values, and interests regulating social life allowed the *positive identification* and *objective individualization* of individuals within and through their social context.

In *The Critique of Power*, the idea of an anthropology that accounts for both the analysis of the inter-objective and intersubjective interactions that are constitutive of human subjectivity, is thus taken into considerations. But this multilayer philosophy of praxis is still presented precisely in dualistic and un-relational terms, without disclosing a path of inquiry concerning not merely the co-existence of such interactional poles for the human subject, but their strict constitutive interrelation as well. What we are trying to argue is, firstly, that in *The Critique of Power* there is a programmatic broader account of human anthropology, not subsequently maintained in the mature paradigm of recognition that Honneth outlines from *The Struggle for Recognition*. Second, we want to stress that such an anthropological framework, nevertheless, still misses the fundamental, anti-dualistic overview on the correlation existing

²⁰⁵ Concerning Honneth's abandonment, in *The Struggle for Recognition*, of the consideration of the subject's relationship with objectivity for its self-constitution, see Deranty's amazing reconstruction of Honneth's critical theory in *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Honneth's Social Philosophy* (Deranty, 2009).

²⁰⁶ Honneth, 1993, p. 43.

²⁰⁷ Honneth, 1993, p. 45.

between social recognition and the human subjectivity's relationship with its external world, both natural and social. Indeed, in the absence of an understanding of the reciprocally functional relationship existing between the subjects' inter-objective interactions, on which the "concreteness" and "creative development" of subjective identities depends, and recognitive interactions, upon which relies the subject's shift from a contingent conscious self-relation to its practical dimensions to an intersubjectively confirmed normative relationship to itself, neither interaction can receive a successful explanation by critical theory. On the one hand, the specific humane quality that the human being's experiential interaction with the external world acquires through recognitive relationships cannot be grasped. On the other hand, the ontological functionality of recognitive relationships in relation to the normative qualitative kind of interaction with the external world from which the subject develops the needs, interests, aims, and values that substantially compose its personal identity cannot be clarified. A non-dualistic anthropological framework would functionally connect recognitive relationships to an analysis of the kind of interaction that the human being has with the objective world and, thus, of the structural exchange with objectivity from which its identity's contents take shape. Accordingly, the level of societal recognitive relationships and that of the subjects' development through inter-objective relationships would not be considered separately but, on the contrary, as engaged in a reciprocal interdependence. The subject would be dependent on recognition in order to normatively and intersubjectively sustain and secure from contingency its *humane* experiential relations with objectivity, from which the contents of its personal identity (again, needs, interests, ends, values, capacities, abilities) emerge. And conversely, the mechanism of recognition would be descriptively and normatively reconnected to the qualitative exchange that characterizes the human being's interaction with the objective world.

On the contrary, in *The Critique of Power*, despite the reference to both levels of interactions involved in the process of self-realization, there is not any clear intention on the part of Honneth to inquire on their strict interdependence. Instead, he already focuses unilaterally on the intersubjective part of the story. He is interested, namely, in the existence of expectations of social recognition on the part of social members in order to find a confirmation of the worth of their subjective contents, instituting societal contexts whose collective framework can stand for a suitable scenario whereby they reach a positive self-relation and self-individualization. Nevertheless, the transversal analysis of the structure or quality of the inter-objective interactions of human subjects, from which the personal contents of human

subjectivity develop, has been completely overlooked. From such premises, it follows that recognition, occurring historically, has been severed theoretically and critically from the structure that defines both the capacity for action of the human subject with and within the external world and the development of the human subject's identity through inter-objective interactions. These, therefore, should be considered due to the adding normativity they can confer to the normativity recognition, that is, the latter's moral role in ensuring not solely the subject's positive individualization and self-relation, as having bare worth, but also the implementation of its exchange with objectivity, in whose specific structure or quality are contained the ontological conditions for the arousal, the concrete realization, and the development of its personal contents.

This missing consideration of the reciprocal interconnection among the levels of human interactions has been further ratified in *The Struggle for Recognition*. Here, the only topic of inquiry is the bare mechanism of recognition, through which subjects can develop a positive or integral relation to themselves. Accordingly, only through the positive affirmation of the contents that represent the practical dimensions of subjectivity and compose this latter's personal identity is it deemed possible to develop an intersubjectively known positive self-image or self-experience, thus acquiring the personal preconditions for social self-realization. Nevertheless, it is not clarified which normative conditions structurally characterizing the subject's exchange with the external world and the subjective contents' development ethically bond or condition social recognition, as suitable to disclose to the subject the possibility for self-realization. Because of his missing anthropological consideration of the constitutive exchange occurring between subjectivity and the external world, Honneth's formal definition of recognition cannot but remain partly unsatisfactory, both from a descriptive and normative point of view.

Starting with the level of description, what Honneth's mature paradigm of recognition offers to the critical theorist is, on the one hand, the description of the mechanism of recognition as constitutive merely for the subject's intra-psychic establishment of a positive-self-relation. On the other hand, because of such a psychologist understanding of the constitutive mechanism of recognition, this latter is but described with the abstract term of *Bestätigung*.

(i) Honneth provides a psychologist understanding of both the mechanism of recognition and the preconditions for self-realization, for it refers only to the recognition's ontological condition to let the subject develop a positive understanding and experience of itself. And, hence, he

ultimately considers the strictly personal condition of a positive and integral self-relation as the underpinning of the subject self-realization. Therefore, with the idea of a psychologist understanding of the constitutive mechanism of recognition, we refer to the fact that Honneth relies upon an abstract and simplifying conception according to which subjects, since through the social affirmation or confirmation of their subjective contents they can develop a positive self-relation, reaching those personal preconditions of self-worth, *thereby* they are able to realize their needs, interests, qualities, aims, and values freely within and through the social context.

We have previously seen the advantages and benefits of such a psychologist approach, retrieved from Mead's framework. It was feasible to Honneth to reach a threefold result from a theoretical and critical point of view. On the one hand, the impossibility for the subject to establish a psychically integral relation to itself due to socially disrespectful experiences can justify (theoretically and empirically) the unleashing in the subject of a conflictual reaction to get the attention of the other subject, thus struggling for the transformation of existing cognitive contexts. Second, the reference to the intra-psychic status of personal integrity gives Honneth the possibility to firmly provide a moral understanding of social conflicts, according to which they are not pursued for mere reasons of material and individualistic survival. Third, it allows him to conceive of the human subject's self-realization as a *process*, rather than a possession, arising from the human subject's capacity to positively relate and approach its subjective contexts, such as physical needs, expressive emotions, values, interests, and capacities, as worthy of value and social importance, thereby freely and actively pursuing them within the social context.

Nonetheless, the advantages here recollected do not impede Honneth's mature framework from leaving a gap unresolved between the psychic or personal integrity of recognized subjects, namely, their capacity to develop feelings of self-worth (such as self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem) due to the positive valuation of the substantial contents of their practical dimensions, and the normative conditions of human action or exchange with the external world upon which depends the emergence, the development, and the realization of their needs, interests, qualities, and values through and within the social context. From a descriptive point of view, therefore, it is completely missing an anthropological analysis dedicated to the quality or form of interaction that the human being has with its external world, apt to clarify the objective mechanism by which the development and self-realization of

the human being can actually occur. Honneth's paradigm of recognition remains trapped in a mere psychic understanding of the personal result of recognition, which stands for a necessary but not sufficient explanation of the possibility for the subject to attain its self-realization through recognition.

(ii) The mere psychologist understanding of the mechanism of recognition, and consequently, of the underpinning of subject's self-realization, namely, to develop a normative self-relation, implies that Honneth can but limit himself to abstractly describe recognition in terms of a "confirmation" and "affirmation" (*Bestätigung*). From the previous reconstruction of *The Struggle for Recognition*'s conceptual framework, we have concluded that the basic vocabulary by which it is feasible to emphasize the moral meaning of "affirming" or "confirming" recognition is that of love relationships. As Petherbridge underlines,²⁰⁸ Honneth considers love as the recognitive relationship that is not only genetically primary but also the most explicative of the affirming dimension of recognition from a phenomenological point of view. Indeed, in love relationships the "confirmative" attitude of recognition manifestly acquires moral attributes such as "affective approval" (*affektive Stimmung*), "encouragement" (*Ermutigung*), and "appreciation" (*Steigerung*), which therefore underline the emotional and active care of the recognizer towards the recognizee's subjective contents. Honneth refers a similar set of moral concepts to social esteem as well, speaking of "active participation" (*affektive Anteilnahme*), and "felt and emotional concern" (*aktive Sorge*) for the qualities, capacities, interests, and values of the social members. To conclude, we can again argue without no doubts that for Honneth the intrinsic mechanism of ethical recognition, on which human self-realization depends, is that the confirming attitude mediated by active participation, care, and emotional concern for the substantial contents of subjects' practical dimensions is suitable to lead these to know themselves as having a personal worth, positively confirmed in an intersubjective manner. And for sure, Honneth intends to offer a formal definition of recognition in order to avoid any undue reference to western or particular forms of life,²⁰⁹ which is explained by his willingness to describe recognition with a-contextual terms such as confirmation, active participation, emotional concern, etcetera.

Nevertheless, on the level of theory, a clarification of the *ontological conditions* and the *ontological status* that such an emotional or active confirmation should embed in order to count

²⁰⁸ See Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. 4 and 5.

²⁰⁹ Although we have seen the difficulty in outlining an ahistorical criterion of the good life. See the previous discussion at paragraph III. 2.

for an ethical relation of recognition, apt to ensure not only the arousal in the subject of a feeling of self-worth but also the enhancement of its human constitutive interaction with the external world, on which depends the emergence, the realization, and the development of its subjective contents, is completely missing. Subjective contents, indeed, do not spring from the mere psychic creativity of the individual, but rather from the dynamic interplay among the subject and its external context, from the situations wherein it finds itself. Without an overview of the structural exchange occurring between subjectivity and the objective world, a theory of recognition does lack a clearer understanding of its ontological conditions to concretely stand for a confirmation allowing the subject to realize its subjective contents. Furthermore, it cannot better elucidate the ontological status that such a form of confirmation, through which the subject receives a social affirmation of its contents, should have to lead the subject to maintain its creative development through the exchange with the external world.

If a paradigm of recognition keeps avoiding an anthropological analysis suitable to account also for the formal quality or structure of the specific exchange and activity that the human being distinguishingly undertakes with its external environment, while failing to root the conditions and the status of ethical recognition in such a structure or quality, two consequences are unavoidable. The gap between the subject's psychic integrity and the normative conditions for the concrete realization, fulfillment, and development of its personal contents will remain unsolved, and the description of normative recognition will be limited to an abstract idea of confirmation, unrooted from normatively objective parameters concerning the conditions for the realization and development of the individual's contents.

These two descriptive problems – the psychologization of both the constitutive mechanism of recognition and the underpinning of subjective self-realization, and the resultant ontologically abstract description of recognition as “affirmation” and “confirmation” – end up outlining a depiction of the human subject as *entirely* and *unconditionally* dependent from the recognition of others. Without considering the normative limitations to which recognition is to be conformed to as to be ethical, and which emerge from the other constitutive interaction of human subjectivity, the one with its external world, the subject, on the level theory, appears as totally passive and dependent from recognition, regardless of its suitability or not in objectively disclosing to the subject the concrete possibility of realizing and developing the constitutive contents of its identity. Social recognition, therefore, unintentionally appears in Honneth's paradigm as the *unconditional conditio sine qua non* of human subjectivity, this

latter risking the will to receive any social confirmation of its personal worth in order to experience itself as socially considered and intersubjectively respected, regardless of the capacity of such a type of confirmation to be consistent with the structure governing the human subject's capacity for action in the external world and, thus, the effective realization, fulfillment, and development of its subjective contents. Since Honneth overlooks the ontological dependence of ethical relations of recognition upon other constitutive forms of interactions of human subjectivity, he cannot but offer an anthropology and paradigm of recognition according to which the subject is entirely vulnerable to social recognition, as deprived of standards to criticize recognitive relationships from an external point of view, namely, beyond their mere capacity to sustain positive forms of self-relation. In a nutshell, according to such a framework, the mere reception of positive social confirmations, mediated by an attitude of emotional care and active participation, would be sufficient for the subjects to develop practically normative attitudes to themselves, regardless of the aptness of such recognitive contexts to provide the objective conditions necessary for the effective satisfaction, strengthening, and development of their recognitive requests. This way, his descriptive paradigm of recognition would not but interiorize the problematic readiness of historical subjects to both passively and a-critically accept any form of social confirmation and to be willing to please the expectations of their social contexts to receive a confirmation of their personal worth symbolically. Therefore, Honneth's descriptive paradigm of recognition, in its psychologist understanding of the constitutive role that recognition plays for human subjectivity and the consequent abstract ontological description of it, entails the affirmation of the *unilateral* and *unconditional* "constitutional dependence of humans on the experience of recognition."²¹⁰

And now we can arrive at the normative weakness of Honneth's mature paradigm of recognition. This latter seems to be unsuitable to offer a sufficient critical perspective on social contexts because of the two interrelated descriptive problems we have just defined and referred to its strictly anthropological analysis of the intersubjective relations of recognition, without considering the ontological and normative interdependence among recognitive relations and the structure of the inter-objective interactions of the human subject. We have previously seen how his anthropological theoretical framework, in its psychologist premises, is capable of critically detecting all those unjust and oppressive social contexts that seriously harm the social subjects' personal integrity through manifest experiences of social disrespect, such as physical and

²¹⁰ Honneth, 1995, p. 136.

psychological violence or exploitation, juridical invisibility and exclusion, or social contempt and cultural marginalization. Indeed, all those manifestly disrespectful social attitudes and practices cannot but structurally jeopardize the personal development of a positive relation to self, hence preventing subjects from acquiring those psychic preconditions of self-worth necessary to positively relate to their personal contents in order to undertake their realization in the social arena.

Nonetheless, because of its descriptive unilaterality, Honneth's theoretical framework on recognition does not turn out to be a sufficiently critical framework for critically detecting those two categories of inadequate cognitive relationships we have distinguished in Chapter One, namely, ambiguous recognition and ambivalent recognition. That is, it cannot critically deal with both those social contexts that instrumentally use recognition in order to strengthen and reproduce oppressive and unjust relations of domination, and, additionally, those cognitive relationships whose socially constitutive role degenerates into reifying and lifeless determination of subjectivity.

***PART 2. THE STRUCTURAL PROBLEM OF
HONNETH'S MATURE THEORY OF RECOGNITION
AND THE DESIDERATA FOR A CRITICAL THEORY OF
RECOGNITION***

Chapter Five. The Ghost of Domination and Power and The Need for a Broader Anthropological Analysis

In Chapter One, we have referred to two levels of criticism, emerged from the contemporary debate, that have downplayed the feasibility for the contemporary category of recognition, as mostly expressed and systematized in Honneth's framework, to stand for an effective critical category of human social contexts. Generally, they have respectively emphasized how Honneth's anthropological descriptive framework of recognition does not account for the fact that recognition is both an ambiguous and ambivalent category. They both unveil Honneth's naïve assumption that recognition, from an ontological point of view, is unconditionally a normative relationship, therefore, aiming at the free and autonomous self-realization of the human subjectivity. Specifically, we have seen how these two levels of criticism cast doubt on the critical and emancipatory capacity of a critical theory of recognition such as Honneth's more or less structurally.

In the first category, we have gathered all those criticisms that, referring to different philosophical traditions, pointed out Honneth's missing consideration of the ontological and empirical *ambiguity* of recognition. Accordingly, recognition cannot be considered ontologically normative and ethical, as always concurring to the self-realization of social subjects, for it is often entangled in the reproduction of other forms of intersubjective interaction, such as strategic, competitive and instrumental relationships, and therefore, suitable to stand for a constitutive element of social contexts of domination and oppression. Finally, we have emphasized how these criticisms do not call into question the feasibility of normative relationships of recognition as such. Rather, firstly, they argue that Honneth fails in providing an overview on the non-ethical typologies of intersubjective interaction, considering them *a priori* as polarly opposed to recognition. Secondly, that such a programmatic polarity entails the inability of Honneth's conceptual description of recognition in distinguishing adequate relationships of recognition, as strongly normative, from the inadequate or ideological ones, with a weak normative and ethical meaning.

Instead, in the second category, we have clustered the main "negative" accounts of recognition, wherein this latter is presented ontologically as an *ambivalent* category. As we

have seen, the core point of Sartre's and Butler's understandings of recognition is not limited to argue that recognition is often imbricated in relations of domination. But rather, that recognition is *per se* a relationship through which subjectivity is heteronormatively determined while being empowered by the capacity to individually develop the delimited horizon of emotional, conceptual, agentive possibilities that social recognition has disclosed to the social subject. Given the fact that the human subject born into a pre-given social context and then develops by being identified, both descriptively and normatively, through overall social categories, it follows that the individual is necessarily the product or the effect of its social context. From such a framework it follows that recognition, as the social relationship conferring normative qualities, capacities, rights, needs, interests to the social subject, is always a form of constitutive power, which, on the one hand, exteriorly determines the absolute freedom of the subject's capacity for action, and, on the other hand, it allows the subject to be empowered with a productive capacity for action, albeit this latter is always destined to be socially redefined and objectified with new recognitive categories. In Chapter One, we have emphasized how the "negative accounts" of recognition entail a sort of critical ineffectiveness. Indeed, the consequence of such a radical theory turns out to be the theorist's inability to provide a critical perspective on human societies suitable to distinguish the different degrees of dangerousness and sufferance stemming from the unavoidable social existence of subjects. Nonetheless, the extreme radicality of these approaches is to be employed for emphasizing how Honneth's paradigm of recognition does not consider the possible distortion of recognition in its constitutive role, thereby not offering an explanation of the kind of interaction that recognition is to be in contrast to lifeless, reifying, and objectifying relations of recognition.

In front of such criticisms, we have thereby stressed the need for a critical theory of recognition such as Honneth's, which deems as feasible and essential to use the category of recognition for providing a theoretical criticism of human social contexts, to seriously consider such criticisms while attempting to strengthen its theoretical and conceptual framework in order to address them. Nevertheless, we pointed out how to undertake this attempt means to clarify, in the first instance, which challenges these two levels of criticism pose to Honneth's critical theory of recognition. We concluded that they respectively compel the necessity to elucidate further both the *ontological conditions* that recognition must meet in order to be ethical and non-ideological, and the *ontological status* that pertains to normative recognition so as to remain ethical and not be objectifying or lifeless. In the second instance, it is necessary to

understand the theoretical reason for which Honneth's theoretical framework, once the existence of ambiguous and ambivalent forms of recognitive relationships has been uncovered, is not suitable to address such criticisms by providing an account of ethical recognition as distinguishable both in its ontological conditions and its ontological status from its inadequate forms.

In the next two paragraphs, therefore, we want to take a closer look at these two levels of criticism by referring to some of their central arguments. We will then emphasize how they compel a critical theory of recognition to better elucidate the defining elements of an ethical relationship of recognition. Furthermore, we will identify the theoretical shortcoming that structurally limits Honneth's framework in offering a sufficient critical perspective on social contexts, thereby disclosing the inquiry path we should follow in order to strengthen the necessary but not sufficient critical capacity of the contemporary paradigm of recognition. As evident from our previous reconstruction of the genesis and the development of Honneth's mature paradigm of recognition, from *The Critique of Power* to *The Struggle for Recognition*, we want to argue that such a theoretical shortcoming is to be found precisely in his mature paradigm's lack of an anthropological consideration of the inter-objective interactions that are involved in the free development of human subjectivity. In fact, because of the abandonment of any broader philosophy of action, or human anthropology, Honneth has outlined a psychologist explanation of the constitutive role of recognition for human subjectivity, without accounting for the gap existing between the development of a positive relation-to-self and the structural conditions for the effective realization and growth of the subject's contents. Consequently, he cannot but offer an abstract definition of recognition, both regarding the ontological conditions and the ontological status that make recognition actually ethical.

V. 1. Recognition as Domination and the Ontological Conditions of Recognition

What we have called the first level of criticism gathers all those criticisms that complain that Honneth, from a methodological and descriptive point of view, completely conflates human intersubjectivity to normative recognition, without problematically considering, firstly, all those non-ethical intersubjective interactions, such as strategic, instrumental, and competitive relationships among social subjects. Secondly, he also fails to consider how, contrary to

ingenuous expectations, these can be strictly interrelated to recognitive attitudes and, moreover, sustain relations of domination. Accordingly, recognition can be no longer assumed as an interaction among individuals that is intrinsically normative from an ontological point of view, namely, as a relational category polarly opposed to legitimate or illegitimate domination, because recognition can stand for a suitable instrument to strategically maintain oppressed social groups into relations of injustice and submission. Indeed, “relations of power can themselves take ‘recognitive’ forms that foster certain practical relation-to-self,”²¹¹ and a “conflation of the normative with the descriptive” meaning of recognition leads to a “simplification of social and political relationships.”²¹² It is empirical evidence that in any human society there have been or there still are recognitive contexts suited to enhance the capacity of some social groups to maintain other groups in conditions of physical and economical exploitation, juridical inequality, cultural inferiority, or social and political invisibility, irrelevance, and passivity. And the instrument to ensure those social situations of domination and oppression to survive and reproduce themselves without the disrupting emergence of both social feelings of personal disrespect, forms of counter-morality, and social conflicts is precisely recognition.

As emerged from Chapter Two, Honneth, in contrast to Horkheimer and Adorno, attempts to sketch through the category of recognition an explanation of the logic of social domination as distinct from the level of domination of nature. Whereas the domination of nature by humanity occurs through the reduction of living and qualitative nature to mere objectivity, to be instrumentally shaped, limitlessly harnessed, and entirely controlled, the domination occurring among subjects necessitates a further explanation, according to Honneth. Accordingly, social domination’s fundamental core consists of the structural negation by a subject of the expectations of the other individual to normatively know itself on a socially shared level, namely, to be recognized. Therefore, Honneth forcefully provides a conception of domination as constitutively opposed to recognition. This means that domination is suitable: (i) to be described in opposition to the category of recognition; (ii) to be critically detected by the category of recognition; and (iii) to be overcome and dismantled through recognition.

It is precisely this conception of domination and recognition put forth by Honneth that authors such as Barbara Carnevali, Patchen Markell, Danielle Petherbridge, David Owen and

²¹¹ Van den Brink & Owen, 2007, p. 20.

²¹² McNay, 2008b, p. 128.

Bert van Den Brink, Lois McNay, and Nancy Fraser attempted to challenge, by pointing out how recognition and domination, both on a theoretical and empirical level, can be two strictly interrelated relationships. Due to the extreme variety of these critical contributions to a theory of recognition, we want to take a closer look at three arguments that we think explicative for pointing out a number of essential factors: firstly, the descriptive shortcoming of Honneth's paradigm; secondly, the two possible strategies disclosed to a critical theory of recognition for dealing with the existence of ambiguous forms of recognition; thirdly, the difficulty of maintaining Honneth's anthropological framework as apt to critically detecting those ambiguous forms of recognition; and lastly, the strategy that we think would be more suitable to maintain the contributions of Honneth within a paradigm of recognition while enriching its conceptual tools to critically distinguish adequate and inadequate forms of recognition.

Barbara Carnevali, in *Società e riconoscimento* and *Miseria e grandezza del sociale*,²¹³ approaches from an anthropological point of view the naivety of a critical theory that polarly opposes domination and recognition, by recovering the anthropology and sociologist morality that, in the passage from the 18th to the 19th century, inaugurated the "theodicy of the social," in opposition to the Enlightenment's understanding of the social world. Indeed, she underlines how the identification of the modern conception of the social world unilaterally with the Enlightenment's enthusiastic depiction of the human being's social nature is actually misleading. And conversely, she advocates that a more complex consideration of the contrasting conceptions of modernity regarding the social world is both needed for historical coherence and compelling for contemporary reflections on recognition.

In the first instance, she argues that the issue of "recognition" is strictly a product of historical modernity, since the relation existing between the human individual and the social context was "discovered" once the religious belief of an extramundane Kingdom of Ends went into crisis. The discovery of the existence of a constitutive relationship among the individual and the social context, relying on the conscious distinction between what the subject thinks of itself and the personal image that others reflect back, did not entail only enthusiastic and positive interpretations through categories such as social freedom and self-realization, but, more interestingly, also more realistic and pessimistic ones. These more "adherent to facts" or "realistic" interpretations of the human being's social nature aimed at inquiring on the very morality of existing forms of sociality and their effects on the relation of the social subject with

²¹³ Carnevali, 2004, 2017.

itself. In this regard, Carnevali emphasizes how authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, and Adam Smith provided a “theodicy of the social,” since, with different strategies, they unveiled the responsibility of existing forms of sociality for the degeneration of both the individual’s intra-personal relation and the social interactions among individuals, thereby advocating for better forms of social life. Unlike the *Encyclopédie*’s account of the social world, those authors attempted to show how modern social life is marked by the cancer of “social recognition,” because the individual, as placed into a web of relationships with other subjects, is naturally led to search for the social approval of its social fellows by striving for self-distinction. The extreme timeliness of such sociological and anthropological reflections on modernity lies in the disillusioned and realistic understanding according to which, from an anthropological point of view, the human need for social recognition can lead the subject to acquire unethical, but existing anyway, attitudes, first, towards oneself, such as narcissism, self-manipulation, and voluntary servitude. Second, towards the other social fellows, for instance, the blind standardization to existing social codes, the unconditional acceptance of any degree of social confirmation received, social competition or struggle for symbolic recognition, strategic manipulation, and domination of others through the promise of recognition. According to Rousseau and Hobbes, despite their different theoretical frameworks, it is fundamental to point out how, from an anthropological point of view, recognition cannot be ontologically conceived absolutely as a positive social attitude. On the contrary, recognition can stand for a disrupting need for the human being, as the consideration received by the social context can acquire a *totalitarian* and *unconditional* power on subjectivity, regardless of its authentic, autonomous, and concrete contents. Therefore, its increasing importance in modern societies, irrespective of other anthropological attitudes equally fundamental (such as authenticity and *amour de soi*), entailed the development of relationships of social competition for symbolic recognition, and the instantiation of manipulative strategies to maintain subjects into positions of inferiority by exploiting their need for recognition.

Conclusively, Carnevali considers these modern anthropological considerations still compelling for an existing paradigm of recognition such as Honneth’s, because they showed, even if with radical formula and a passed vocabulary, the “dark side” of recognition, namely, that recognition can turn into a source and a tool of social domination, competition, and self-submission.

Human beings are strongly interested in what their fellows think or feel towards them, and this interest – in the form of a worry, of an a-priori engagement in the relationships with the other [...] – stands for a decisive aspect, often the more important one, of their psychic and collective life. [...] Recognition turns into a problem – thus in the forms of conflict and struggle – as it assumes a symbolic power, the divine power to legitimize or not the worth and the meaning of human existence.²¹⁴

Consequently, it follows that a critical theory of recognition should carefully take into consideration this “dark side” of recognition while having a conceptual framework suitable to critically distinguish negative and positive relationships of recognition, or normatively weak and strong relations of social confirmation. Due to the intrinsic dependence of human subjectivity on social recognition, there are contexts of recognition that are instrumentally devoted to keeping human subjectivity into relations of domination, non-solidary competition, and unconditional research and acceptance of social confirmation.

It is a fact that Honneth theoretically overlooked this “dark side” of recognition, as his framework of *The Struggle for Recognition* anthropologically failed to consider, from a descriptive point of view, the human being’s forms of intersubjective interactions other than pure and original ethical recognition, such as competitive, strategic, instrumental, and dominating attitudes, wherein, moreover, recognition plays a pivotal role both for their origin and their reproduction. It follows that Honneth provides, as we have seen, an understanding of social domination as entirely suitable to be described, detected, and solved through the category of recognition. Nonetheless, social domination and recognition can be no longer conceived as opposite or polar categories, the first one as ontologically entailing only disrespectful denials of subject’s personal integrity, and the second one as ontologically entailing only the self-realization of the human subject. Consequently, for the fact that positive forms of attribution of social worth and value to social members also accompany situations of domination, the description of ethical recognition in terms of that relational mediation of confirmation suitable to allow the subject to instantiate a positive relation-to-itself can no longer stand for a critical parameter of distinction among strong or weak normative relations of recognition. Such a description is critically appropriate and sensitive for those social contexts of domination relying upon manifest cases of social disrespect that entail the disruption within the subject of the chances to develop an objectively positive image of itself. Instead, for what concerns those social contexts of domination wherein situations of physical and psychological exploitation,

²¹⁴ Carnevali, 2008, p. 287. (Translation mine).

juridical exclusion or denial, cultural inequality, and marginalization are mitigated by the dominant groups' conferral to the dominated groups of forms of symbolic value and positive confirmation, which is sufficient for subjects to think of themselves as positively integrated within the social context, such a description of ethical recognition and its constitutive mechanism for human subjectivity remains ineffective. That is, such a description of ethical recognition remains abstract for what concerns the ontological conditions that distinguish it from ambiguous, inadequate, and ideological forms of recognition, and critically ineffective for both the subjects' pre-theoretical critical activity and critical social theory. In front of such a "dark side" of recognition and a description of ethical recognition that is necessary but not sufficiently clarified in the ontological conditions of its ethical core, a paradigm of recognition must clarify such ontological conditions in order to maintain its critical program as feasible. But to engage in this attempt, it is necessary to understand the *theoretical reason* or *locus* that theoretically impedes the framework of the mainstream paradigm of recognition, as mostly represented by Honneth in *The Struggle for Recognition*, from overcoming an abstract definition of recognition, whose condition of the subject's positive-relation-to-self can be indeed satisfied both by adequate and inadequate relations of recognition.

To answer this core question, we want now to refer, in the first instance, to two other philosophical strategies, the first of which questions the critical usefulness for critical social theory to maintain the very idea of an integral and full-fledged relation of recognition among subjects. The second strategy, however, argues for the incapacity of the mainstream paradigm of recognition to offer a conceptual framework suitable to distinguish among adequate and inadequate relationships of recognition since its very conceptual framework misses the fundamental analysis of the conditions of human activity. Finally, we will analyze the essay with which Honneth attempts to clarify his paradigm of recognition in order to respond to the problem of ideological recognition while emphasizing his framework's still insufficient critical cogency related to its maintenance of a unilateral anthropology.

Danielle Petherbridge, in *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth* (2013), offers a reconstruction of Honneth's critical theory of recognition, on the one hand, to explain the theoretical exigencies leading Honneth to recover the category of recognition, highlighting this latter's critical contribution for critical theory. On the other hand, she argues how, for critical theory, the very attempt to provide a positive ideal of a full-fledged relationship of recognition

among subjects cannot but undermine the critical theorist's capacity for critical and emancipative action.

One of the main problems with Honneth's attempt to draw a theory of recognition from Hegel's early work is that the terms 'intersubjectivity' and 'recognition' are mutually defining and used interchangeably without question. The unfortunate consequence of this theoretical move is that intersubjectivity is equated with recognition *in toto*. [...] Honneth's interpretation immediately bestows upon intersubjectivity a pre-given ethical content or determinate form as a particular type of intersubjectivity—it assumes a taken-for-granted ethical or normative foundation built into the very fact of relatedness or intersubjectivity as a kind of primordial unity. Thus, rather than forms of intersubjectivity being conceived as all those modes of interaction that precede recognition, recognition is understood by Honneth as a primary category, conceived as first nature.²¹⁵

Her main point is that Honneth's anthropological framework not only does not take into consideration forms of intersubjectivity other than positive recognition but, as well, attempts to place recognition, from the outset, as the primary relational category among social subjects, then conceiving all forms of domination in terms of a "distortion" or a "disruption" of an undamaged relationship of recognition. Once she has retraced the theoretical movement through which Honneth progressively conflated all human interactions to intersubjectivity, and then all forms of intersubjective relationship to normative recognition, Petherbridge points out the descriptive and the normative problems of such a progressive theoretical narrowness. Dedicating few pages to Honneth's reduction of human interactions to intersubjectivity, she first focuses on Honneth's reduction of human intersubjectivity to positive recognition as standing for a very descriptive simplification of human intercourses. Indeed, Honneth's missing consideration of intersubjective relations such as competition, struggle for power, strategic and instrumental behaviour, and manipulation entails his complete merging of the normative and ethical meaning of recognition with its descriptive dimension, that is recognition's ontological standing for a constitutive element for the reproduction of human societies, even the dominant and oppressive ones.

Honneth posits normativity in what he regards as the certainty of recognition. In this sense, intersubjective relations and identity-formation are conceptualized only within the normative terms of recognition, rather than as co-constituted by a variety of modalities of intersubjectivity and forms of interaction, including power and strategic action.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Petherbridge, 2013, pp. 82-89.

²¹⁶ Petherbridge, 2013, p. 121.

Moreover, according to Petherbridge, Honneth's anthropology is not merely one-sided, but also descriptively wrong as it confers to recognition, as evident from his analysis of love relationships, a genetic primacy, without giving reason to the intrinsic "contingency and fragility of human interactions."²¹⁷ These, indeed, cannot be conceived with an internal hierarchy and, thus, qualitatively stationary, namely, as being univocally definable as strongly or weakly normative interactions. Their ethical meaning indeed can change, and ethical relationships of recognition can turn into a mixture of different intersubjective attitudes, such as manipulation and exploitation.

This descriptive change, namely, the outlining of a conception of human intersubjectivity as both various in its forms, without internal hierarchies, and ontologically fragile and contingent, has normative consequences as well for critical social theory, according to Petherbridge. In order to undertake its critical analysis of human societies, critical social theory should drop the reference to a positive description of an undamaged and full-fledged recognitive relationship among subjects, for this latter would stand in the way of a critical analysis devoted to highlighting the slippery existence, the contingent overturns and reversals of subjective interactions. Therefore, Petherbridge suggests that critical theory should proceed according to a negativistic methodology, rather than to a positive criterion, thereby dismantling existing social relationships of recognition in their imbrication with domination, competition, and strategic activity. We could say that Petherbridge opts for something like a "hermeneutics of suspicion" with regards to human social contexts, for critical social theory is called to dismantle human recognitive interactions into their contingent and fragile elements, which, from the perspective of a full-fledged and successful relationship of recognition, could be but overlooked or explained as exterior additions to an original perfect relation. "Honneth reduces power and domination merely to a pathology of recognition thereby reducing the critique of power to the terms of unsatisfactory recognition alone, and this one-dimensionalizes both a theory of power and the possibility for critique."²¹⁸

Certainly, Petherbridge's critiques of the Honnethian paradigm of recognition sheds light, again, on the naivety of its descriptive framework of human interactions, for this latter

²¹⁷ Petherbridge, 2013, p. 78. See Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. 9. Petherbridge critically underlines how Honneth conceives the baby's relationship with the mother in terms of an original fusion and then positive interdependence, considering all the baby's forms of aggression and violence against her or his primary caregiver as secondary and in terms of disruptions of an original status of perfect unity.

²¹⁸ Petherbridge, 2013, p. 121.

does not only fail to account for the equal co-existence of recognition with other forms of interactions relying upon recognition. Moreover, it does not thematize the extreme instability of human interactions, as always on the brink, fragile in their defining status. If we can agree with Petherbridge concerning these two points and, hence, the urgency for critical theory to develop a description of subjective interactions without ethical and normative assumptions, we are more dubious regarding her conclusive normative strategy for critical social theory. Indeed, as we have seen, she argues that, given the unstable and contingent ontology of human interactions, critical social theory should avoid providing any ideal of an undamaged and successful recognitive relationship, rather proceeding from the continuous intermeshing and overlapping of recognition with other qualitative forms of human interaction. Nonetheless, the ultimate consequence of her strategy is the final abandonment of Honneth's insight concerning the very possibility for subjects to reach freedom and self-realization in the social context. The decision to abandon any theoretical effort in defining an adequate relationship of recognition cannot but deny the attempt to base human subjectivity's freedom and self-realization on the ethical relationships with its social fellows. As she points out herself, Honneth's fundamental contribution was to demonstrate how the human subject cannot develop a positive relation-to-self within manifestly disrespecting and harassing social contexts. Hence, he clarifies the very social dimension of the human being's chance to pursue a good and flourishing life, to find its self-completion only with the other human being. Therefore, to exclude from the outset any attempt in providing a formal description of ethical recognition can only appear as a renunciation of such a fundamental intuition, which, despite being still vague and blurred, we cannot abandon, not merely from a theoretical point of view, but critical too. Indeed, the very possibility for social subjects, and critical theorists too, to orient their lives and critical activity within human societies, with the effort to make human societies better ethical contexts within which to live, seems difficult in the absence of a positive ideal of recognitive relationship to pursue and employ for critique. In the absence of such a positive criterion of recognition, social subjects would be deprived of a fundamental tool for critical reflection. Indeed, critical theory would be the inquiry devoted to disentangling the elements of domination and exploitation within social relationships apart from the experience of human subjects and their search for a positive idea of ethical relationships, thereby assuming a hegemonic role in the human practice of criticism. The human subjects' need for ethical recognition, therefore, as standing for a predominant feature of their individual and collective life, should be anyway made significant

and meaningful despite the consciousness of the extreme fragility and contingency of human interactions.

That is to say that once considered the extreme contingent and exploitable character of recognitive relationships among subjects, the very challenge for a critical theory of recognition is still to clarify what distinguishes a relation of recognition as ethical, devoted to ensuring the self-realization of human subjects, although with a lot of accidents due to the enormous dynamic and complexity of social contexts, from inadequate forms of recognition. With the label “inadequate forms of recognition,” we are not referring merely to all those devices of recognition that unavoidably are involved in the institution of any social context for what concerns the establishment of its practices, institutions, and statuses, and that can have different degrees of ethical meaning. Instead, we are interested in clarifying the ethical conditions that some social relations that declare to be devoted to ensuring the self-realization of social subjects prove not to fulfil, thereby standing actually for social relations dedicated to keeping subjects both integrated within the social context and maintained into positions of social, political, juridical and cultural inferiority and vulnerability.

The attempt to preserve Honneth’s insight concerning the social conditions for human being’s flourishing life relies upon the fundamental step to provide further theoretical tools in distinguishing among adequate and inadequate relationships of recognition, apt to clarify the *ontological conditions* of the former. But in order to do so, it is necessary to understand the theoretical reason for which its theoretical framework is resistant to provide further parameters for such a discrimination and to propose a strategy to maintain, while enriching it, his necessary but not sufficient conceptual paradigm of recognition. To handle with these two steps, we want to refer both to the last critical argument that we think explicative for the difficulty of Honneth’s mature paradigm of recognition to clarify such ontological conditions, and the contribution that Honneth provided after *The Struggle for Recognition* for approaching the problem.

In *Bound By Recognition* (2003), Patchen Markell proposes to place the category of recognition alongside that of “acknowledgement,” as a form of social mediation and confirmation that he attempts to distinguish from recognition in order to avoid the slippery and ambiguous meaning that this inevitably acquires in the mainstream Hegelian-derived paradigm of recognition. According to him, the mainstream paradigm of recognition, which includes Honneth’s theory, is used to ground the social interdependence among subjects on a conception of the subject’s identity as something interiorly possessed, relatively stable and determined,

which the subject needs to see confirmed in its social worthiness by the social context in order to develop a positive relation-to-self. It is precisely because of the idea for which subjective identity is something given, possessed by the subject, and expecting to be socially valuable that the mainstream category of recognition appears incapable of distinguishing normative recognition from cognitive relations of domination since these indeed provide to subjects forms of positive confirmation, though without satisfying the concrete and practical situationality of their activity.

For Markell, social critique and political philosophy, until they keep systematizing at the level of theory the mainstream pre-theoretical understanding of subjective identities as something interiorly possessed by the subject and recognition as an affirmation of worth, will not but confirm and sustain the historical subjects' vulnerability, susceptibility to manipulation, and voluntary servitude for the need to see their personal identities acquiring forms of social affirmation. Therefore, the conceptual grammar of the mainstream paradigm of recognition, linked in developing Hegel's intersubjective understanding of human subjectivity, turns out to provide an extremely perilous conception of the reciprocal dependence among social subjects. By insisting on the social worth that subjects expect to receive concerning their personal identity, such a paradigm of recognition unintentionally entails a conception of human subjectivity as entirely vulnerable and dependent on being accepted by the social context, therefore failing to critically distinguish all the empirical social situations wherein the need for recognition of subjects is symbolically satisfied but materially denied, thus strengthening social situations of cultural, political, and social exclusion. For, "if recognition makes the world intelligible, it often does so by stratifying it, subordinating some people and elevating others to positions of privilege and dominance."²¹⁹ And to justify his position, Markell refers to the exemplary historical cases wherein recognition, mostly in its political and juridical dimension for the inclusion of cultural minorities, ended up proving to be a political and social strategy to hold some social group in a situation of both collective social, political, and cultural marginalization from the social world, and internal fragmentation through the dissolution of solidary ties. For instance, Jewish emancipation, from the beginning of the 19th century, resulted in Europe as a series of juridical and political "concessions" emanated by different social and political contexts. Nevertheless, these concessions, in fact, later manifested as cognitive devices that were not only inadequate to Jewish' situational expectations of social inclusion but

²¹⁹ Markell, 2003, pp. 1-2.

were as well devoted to manipulating and blackmailing the cultural minority economically, politically, and culturally, therefore *de facto* holding them in a situation of social domination and injustice.

In order to detect and criticize the “slippery” effects that the German category of *Anerkennung* entails both on the level of empirical social relations and the level of theory, Markell opts for renaming and reframing the ontological interdependence among subjects with additional terminology, relying upon different premises of human action. He aims at recovering:

the practical limits imposed upon us by the openness and unpredictability of the future – what Hannah Arendt called the “non sovereign” character of human action. In this sense, the pursuit of recognition involves a “misrecognition” of different and deeper kind: not misrecognition of an identity, neither one’s own or someone else’s, but the misrecognition of one’s own fundamental situation or circumstances.²²⁰

With the recovery of Hannah Arendt’s anthropology, Markell attempts to identify the conditions of human action in the agentive categories of situationality, temporality, and vulnerability. In fact, he aims at inverting the ontological and epistemological relation that the mainstream paradigm of recognition problematically instantiates between identity and action, in contrast to which he offers an account of human identity as the retrospective result of the subject’s chain of singular actions, developing in their expressive contents according to temporary situations. By stressing the ontological and epistemological priority of human action with respect to human identity, and accounting for its intrinsically “indefinite,” “vulnerable,” and “contingent” substantial development, Markell aims at overcoming the risks entailed by the theory’s and habitual belief’s conception of subjective identity as something relatively stable, to be confirmed in its social worthiness by other social members.²²¹ In contrast to recognition,

²²⁰ Markell, 2003, pp. 4-5.

²²¹ Here, Markell stresses the necessity to contrast, with the category of “sovereignty of *choice*,” the modern one of “personal sovereignty” of human subjectivity. This latter category is indeed strictly related to the conception for which the human subject, as such, knows who or what it is, therefore requiring it to be publicly known by the social context by receiving a symbolic affirmation. Instead, with the concept of “sovereignty of choice,” Markell refers to the indefinite creativity that belongs to subjective activity as resisting any given, spatially fixed, social determination and, unexpectedly, no longer needing, as in the case of identity, to be “known” or “confirmed” symbolically by the social context. Rather, the extremely vulnerable and indefinite human capacity for action and choice cannot but be practically encouraged by existing social relationships acknowledging precisely the situationality and future uncertainty of human activity, without exigencies of personal sovereignty, social worth, social control, predetermination, and fixed symbolic patterns of affirmation.

“acknowledging”²²² the subject’s intrinsically agentive “indefiniteness” means, on the one hand, to accept and sustain human subjectivities in their proper autonomous and indefinite development separate from social ties. On the other hand, it concretely stands for the practical acknowledgment of subjects’ temporary expressive requests, without pretending to conclusively define their developing activity into a stable identity to be uniformed and merely located in socially existing spatial orders. In this way, according to Markell, it would be feasible for social and political theory to flank the category of recognition, which remains a useful concept to detect those extreme and manifest forms of personal injury, with the one of acknowledgment. This latter category is suitable to unveil social contexts that, as being devoted just to spatially locating, through recognition, social groups’ and subjects’ identities into existing relationships of social domination, impede the situational and open-to-contingency expression of the contents of human activity.

I call this alternative a politics of acknowledgement rather than a politics of recognition. In this picture, justice does not require that all people be known and respected as who they really are. It requires, instead, that no one be reduced to any characterization of his or her identity for the sake of someone else’s achievement of a sense of sovereignty and invulnerability, regardless of whether that characterization is negative or positive, hateful or friendly. [...] It demands that each of us bear our share of the burden and risk involved in the uncertain, open-ended, sometimes maddeningly and sometimes joyously surprising activity of living and interacting with people.²²³

Markell’s suggestion to place “acknowledgement” alongside “recognition,” while redeeming an overlooked dimension of human activity, namely, its contingency, openness-to-the-future, and practical situationality, is for sure an interesting attempt to both emphasize the intrinsic problems of the mainstream paradigm of recognition and to find an alternative relational category for mitigating the critical and normative shortcomings of the former. From Hegel to Honneth, the anthropology beneath the category of recognition relied on the perilous idea of the human subject’s *absolute* dependence on recognition, as being *entirely* tied to social bonds since it needs to see its identity-contents to be symbolically taken into consideration by the social context. The recognition paradigm, therefore, surely offers a normative perspective

²²² Markell retrieves the category of acknowledgment by Stanley Cavell (Cavell, 2002). This category refers to a confirmation of human practical intentions and requests, rather than of human identity. Honneth later uses Cavell’s notion of acknowledgment in *Reification* (2005) in order to thematize the emotional, ethical engagement underlying the “understanding” of the other’s intentions.

²²³ Markell, 2003, p. 7.

to point out disrupting phenomena of disrespect and contempt for human subjectivity. But, at the same time, as relying upon the dangerous idea of human subjectivity's unilateral willingness to be symbolically integrated within its social context, it unintentionally overlooks and incorporates on the level of theory all those social situations wherein the need for recognition of social groups is only symbolically satisfied and instrumentally exploited for reproducing situations of social marginalization, political and juridical inequality, and cultural exclusion. Hence, in the face of such a problem, Markell's strategy is to refer to a different form of social mediation that does not confirm the subject in its ready-made determinateness through forms of symbolic worth, but rather practically satisfies its situational expressions and encourages its future indeterminacy.

Nevertheless, we want to draw some considerations with respect to Markell's strategy. The first one casts doubt on the very necessity to add a relational category different from the one of recognition since it could be possible to directly expand the anthropology usually employed for explaining the mechanism of recognition and providing its description. Indeed, as the very first problem of recognition theory lies in the undercut analysis of the conditions of human action, which concerns its intrinsic context-reliance, contingency, and unpredictable creativity, why not directly enrich the anthropology of recognition? Why not emphasize and overcome this latter's focus only on an analysis of subject-subject relations devoid of a broader investigation on human activity, as being, at the same time, beyond and at the basis of social recognition? In a nutshell, why does he not opt, instead, for enriching the human anthropology at the basis of the mainstream paradigm of recognition, consequently strengthening the description of recognition and its constitutive mechanism? Although Markell emphasizes a core problem of the critical theories of recognition of Hegelian inspiration, namely, the lack of consideration for the very conditions of human activity, with manifest consequent problems for their critical and normative sensitivity, it remains less clear why he multiplies the forms of social mediation that are necessary for human subjectivity rather than directly enriching the existing notion of recognition. Is the normative split of the interaction of positive mediation among subjects in two different categories, "recognition" and "acknowledgment," efficacious or necessary? Following Markell, recognition is to be conceived as dedicated to symbolically "affirming" something of human subjectivity as valuable for the social context. In contrast, acknowledgment should be the form of practical sustenance and encouragement by other social members of both the subject's situational expressiveness (that is the situational and substantive

contents of its subjective activity) and their existential vulnerability and openness to the future. Nonetheless, it may not be necessary to split these two categories by providing, alternatively, a broader anthropology of human activity at the basis of recognition.

Outlining an anthropology that is broader than the one of Hegelian inspiration entails, first, to understand the intrinsic anthropological shortcoming preventing the mainstream paradigm of recognition from being critically sensitive to ambiguous recognitive relationships, whose normative inadequacy is due to:

- (i) Their masked instrumental aim to maintain existing social relations of domination
- (ii) Their consequent detachment from the contextual expressiveness of subjects, thus standing as an inadequate response to the latter, as being devoted to partly satisfy the need for the subject to be recognized in its social worth but for keeping it in illegitimately asymmetrical relationships within the social, cultural, political, and juridical dimensions.
- (iii) Their interest into “spatializing,” objectively “integrating” human subjectivity without changing existing social spaces, with the denial of both the context-based and openness-to-the-future of its capacity for action.

As Markell rightly pointed out, the reason why the leading paradigm of recognition cannot be sensitive concerning this inadequate form of recognition is that, by focusing *strictly* on the constitutive dependence of human subjectivity upon the recognition of other subjects, without inquiring more generally on the conditions of human activity, it finally outlines a “symbolic” and “sovereignty-based” explanation of both the subject’s need for recognition and recognition itself. In other terms, his criticism is closed to our previous critique of Honneth’s mature paradigm of recognition, for we argued that, due to his narrow anthropology, Honneth could but provide a psychologist conception of the subject’s constitutive need for recognition and an abstract description of recognition in terms of affirmation or confirmation. Accordingly, it could be feasible to argue that normative recognition cannot be limited to the symbolic affirmation and confirmation of the subject’s personal worth, but, at the same time, is to be a practical relation strengthening and encouraging human subjectivity’s context-bound expressiveness and open-to-the-future creativity. The split between the categories of recognition and acknowledgment, thus, seems to be unnecessary while maintaining the inherent problems of the mainstream recognition paradigm.

The second consideration regards Markell’s anthropological attempt to recover the context-based, temporal, and creative conditions of human activity. These conditions of human

activity are enumerated by carrying on a subject-based type of inquiry. Accordingly, the subject is *in se* and *per se* contextual, temporal, and creative activity and, hence, the social acknowledgment of the conditions of human agency is to occur as a form of practical encouragement of the contingent vulnerability of human subjectivity. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how the normative conditions pointed out by Markell – contingency/situationality, temporality, creativity – by means of a subject-based analysis of human action can less abstractly specify the requirements for a social mediation aiming at subjectivity’s agentic self-realization. Indeed, through a subject-based analysis of human activity that does not give higher consideration to human activity as being related, according to a specific structure or quality, to an external objective world, it does not seem possible, in the first instance, to give concreteness and objectivity to the so far mentioned categories of situationality, temporality, and creativity. Consequently, the possibility to further explain how an acknowledging social mediation can actually sustain practically human activity in its defining conditions is compromised. What we are trying to argue in this second point is that the missing consideration of the strictly constitutive relation existing between subjectivity and its external world is overlooked in the mainstream paradigm of recognition as well as in Markell’s anthropology of Arendt’s inspiration. Even Markell’s paradigm, since he proposes an overview on the conditions of human action that does not strictly rely it upon its exchange with the external world, is based on a subjectivist notion of human activity still missing its status of “praxis,” namely, of a result stemming from a specific relational structure between subjectivity and objectivity. Indeed, how is it possible to more deeply explain in what should consist the practical acknowledgment of subjective activity’s situationality and creativity if these are merely considered in their givenness and not inquired in their derivation from the specific relational structure existing between the human being and its external environment? That is, how can the context-bound occurrence and the creativity of human activity be practically sustained by other subjects if there is not any clear analysis of them in light of the subject’s interaction with the world of its experience? What does it mean that human activity is in-context and open to creativity, and what do these properties of human actions entail for the relationships of social mediation concerning their normativity?

In the absence of an anthropology gathering subjective interactions and human activity as a form of practice, which occurs within an objective external world according to a specific structure, it remains abstractly defined, first, in what the conditions of human activity consist.

Secondly, the consequent normative ties that human activity can exert on recognitive relationships to being effectively ethical for human subjectivity, rather than exploitative, and therefore adequate to the context and encouraging human creativity, remain unexpressed. Indeed, a conceptual framework should be provided that is suitable to describe in more detail what the adequateness of social interactions consists of by specifying the meaning of the contextuality and creativity belonging to human activity due to a certain qualitative relation of the subject with the external world.

Markell's contribution, therefore, has been to criticize the mainstream paradigm of recognition's anthropology as necessarily leading to a description of normative social interactions that unintentionally hides, while sustaining, existing forms of social domination. Despite the rightness of his criticism, we have subsequently underlined how his strategy to find another normative category of the subject's relational development other than recognition, i.e., acknowledgment, which relies upon an analysis of subjective activity's conditions, is, first not necessary. Secondly, we have stressed how the anthropological framework he refers to, which aims at outlining the conditions of human activity, as long as it is severed from an analysis of the latter as a form of practice that occurs in relation to an objective external environment, according to a specific relational structure, cannot offer a more concrete overview on the normative ties that the conditions of human activity can exert on normative intersubjective relationships.

Finally, we want now to refer to *Recognition as Ideology* (2007), the essay wherein Honneth attempted to address the intrinsic ambiguity of recognition by maintaining his leading theoretical framework. What we aim to demonstrate is that here Honneth aims at clarifying the ontological conditions of adequate or strongly ethical recognition by employing his reference paradigm but insisting on the necessity to retrieve the *materiality* or *objectivity* of recognition. Nonetheless, moving from the acknowledged need to overcome the psychologist definition of recognition's constitutive mechanism and description, Honneth's paradigm remains deficient in accounting for such a material and objective dimension of recognition since it does not parallelly supply the anthropological expansion that would be necessary for grounding it.

Honneth rightly summarizes the problem we defined as the ambiguity of recognition as follows:

The act of praising certain characteristics or abilities seems to have become a political instrument whose unspoken function consists in inserting individuals or social groups into existing structures

of dominance by encouraging a positive self-image. Far from making a lasting contribution to the conditions of autonomy of the members of our society, social recognition appears merely to serve the creation of attitudes that conform to the dominant system.²²⁴

Therefore, the ambiguity of recognition is to be related to the possible assumption by recognition of an exploitative meaning, due to the instrumental aim that leads a social group (either social, cultural, or institutional) to encourage, through an attribution of social worth, individuals and social groups to develop a positive relation-to-self, but only for inserting and placing them into the existing asymmetrical relations of domination. Thus, recognition as domination is but a series of ritual affirmations that lead subjects to develop a positive self-image that is nonetheless coherent with existing relationships of domination, being therefore willing to reproduce them with an oxymoronic attitude to voluntary servitude, without the arousal of negative feelings of personal injury.

In the first instance, Honneth stresses the extreme complexity in unveiling within a social context those cognitive relationships not aiming at the subjects' free individualization but that anyway constitute a relational context where, without manifest repressive tools, individuals are positively encouraged to maintain the unjust *status quo* of the symbolic, moral, and cultural framework of reference. Indeed, well known examples, such as the social worth conferred to the docility of slaves in slave-owning societies or to the contribution of women as "good mothers," prompted to sacrifice themselves for the private life of their families, represent the mechanism through which recognition turns into a domination tool by exploiting the subject's intrinsic need for positive social integration. But they are manifestly revealed as ideological according to a historically retrospective perspective, where our moral values are developed so to denounce them as ideological and dominating, as not actually allowing the subjects' free self-realization. The main problem for subjects and critical theorists is, thus, to detect within *their* existing social contexts those cognitive relationships that, without entailing in the social members the arousal of feelings or beliefs concerning their "being repressive, constricting or as fostering stereotypes,"²²⁵ *de facto* possess these three characteristics. In the absence of the possibility for a retrospective perspective, the main problem, therefore, is to discover in an attitude of recognition, which *per se* is ontologically a positively expressed "public display of a value or achievement [...] attributed to a person or social group,"²²⁶ on the

²²⁴ Honneth, 2007, p. 323.

²²⁵ Honneth, 2007, p. 327.

²²⁶ Honneth, 2007, p. 327.

one hand, an act of oppression, discrimination, exclusion, or asymmetrical determination from the part of the recognizers and, on the other hand, an act of voluntary servitude from the part of the recognizees, who, nonetheless, are able to develop a positive image of themselves within the social context.

For Honneth, such a discrimination depends on a clarification concerning the normativity of a practice of recognition. That is, the only strategy to distinguish among normatively strong and normatively weak recognitive relationships is to specify, given the constitutive mechanism of recognition Honneth refers to, the *further conditions* on which recognition is dependent for being normative, and with respect to which it is feasible to detect ideological or dominating forms of recognition as being deficient and with an intrinsic “irrational kernel.” Honneth, therefore, lays the distinction between these two categories of recognition on their different degrees of *rationality*, which depends on their capacity to satisfy or not the further conditions defining a practice of recognition as devoted to the subjects’ self-realization within the social context. According to Honneth, the capacity for self-reproduction of ideological recognitive relations should make evident their irreducibility to absolutely irrational forms of confirmation, just for the mere fact that they are coherent with the system of values publicly accepted within a social context, in such a way that oppressed social members do not clearly perceive their effectively unjust, unequal, and excluding character. Therefore, it is necessary, firstly, to not conceive of such inadequate forms of recognition as *completely* irrational. Secondly, Honneth admits how, in order to unveil their irrational kernel, it is not sufficient to refer to the “semantic surface of our evaluative vocabulary,”²²⁷ namely, to the sole evaluative mechanism of recognition as allowing human subjects to establish a positive experience of themselves in the existent social world. Instead, “I suspect that this irrationality [...] is to be found instead in the discrepancy between evaluative promises and material fulfillment.”²²⁸ It is precisely this point of Honneth’s argument we are interested in, for he stresses the necessity to recover the *material* and *objective* side of recognition for elucidating its normative and ethical meaning. In order to highlight and explain such a dimension of recognition, he first briefly summarizes the core ontological conditions of the genus of recognition he already pointed out from *The Struggle for Recognition*.²²⁹ These conditions are

²²⁷ Honneth, 2007, p. 328.

²²⁸ Honneth, 2007, p. 328.

²²⁹ For the debate on the “genus” of recognition, see Ikäheimo & Laitinen (2011) and the previous section III. 2.

mainly three, and all presupposed by the German meaning of the concept of *Anerkennung*. Recognition is:

(i) “the affirmation of positive qualities of human subjects or groups.”²³⁰ These normative qualities of the human being, according to Honneth, are to be considered according to a “weak value realism but with a strong idea of progress.” With this latter label, Honneth is trying to reassess the leading idea of *The Struggle for Recognition* according to which it is possible to provide a weak anthropology of the practical dimensions of human subjectivity that need to be confirmed intersubjectively in their values. This position entails, first, that ethical recognition cannot be considered in absolutely constitutive terms, namely, as a mere form of “labelling” or arbitrary attribution of valuable qualities to the human subject. Instead, for avoiding the misleading idea that the human subject is entirely constituted from an external and arbitrary point of view, recognition should be conceptualized in terms of an affirmative reaction to existing and objective personal values that allows their free and autonomous expression within the social context.²³¹ In fact, human subjectivity, as such, possesses three main defining practical dimensions: to be an individual being with needs and emotions, to be a rational personal with moral responsibility within its social context, to be a social member with qualities, capacities, and values of some worth for the material and symbolic reproduction of social life. Accordingly, all such subjective dimensions objectively stand for the main and persistent features of human subjectivity, whose free and autonomous development is feasible only through forms of confirmation of their value from other subjects, namely, as being intersubjectively known in their worthiness. “The suggestion developed in this chapter assumes the possibility of an appropriate and rational form of recognition that would consist in giving public expression to existing evaluative qualities in a performative way.”²³² Therefore, Honneth’s weak anthropology attempts to both avoid a radical “constitutivist” understanding of recognition by referring to the objectivity of personal values, while avoiding the extreme localism of value realism by identifying three main practical dimensions of human subjectivity. Additionally, he clarifies how such a weak objectivism is to be accompanied by a strong idea of moral progress, according to which through the long human history, those practical

²³⁰ Honneth, 2007, p. 329.

²³¹ See Laitinen (2006), from which Honneth retrieves the fundamental issue of clarifying whether recognition is entirely constitutive of personhood or, rather, a reaction to pre-existing personal capacities of human subjectivity. The main idea is that recognition is both a reaction to existing personal values and an act of constitutive development and expressiveness of such values.

²³² Honneth, 2007, p. 336.

dimensions engage in a movement of an increasing autonomization and individualization of their substantive contents. This means that the substantive moral meaning of these dimensions' worthiness, for what concern both their contents and the respective cognitive reaction needed, progressively develop in such a way that previous social stages always appear as morally undeveloped and hardly recoverable without the immediate arousal of moral reactions in social members.

(ii) recognition is a social confirmation that occurs in the form of an action. Here, Honneth reinstates the participatory or active component of recognition.

There is now general agreement that recognition's character as an action must be emphasized: an act of recognition cannot consist in mere words or symbolic expressions, since it is only through corresponding modes of comportment that the credibility so normatively significant for the recognized subject can be engendered.²³³

As already affirmed in *The Struggle for Recognition*, recognition cannot be solely an epistemic kind of subjective interaction, relying upon a mere mental or symbolic identification of the human subject's needs, capacities, values, and interests. Rather, being an attitude constitutively entangled with strong moral evaluations, it cannot take place without a series of comportments and behaviours.

(iii) it is a social affirmation that, in order to be ethical, cannot entail the presence of instrumental or conditional premises. Namely, the first aim of recognition is to be the mere positive evaluation of the human subject, without overlapping egoistic aims. "Such acts of recognition represent a distinct phenomenon in the social world, which cannot, therefore, be understood as a mere side-effect of an action aimed at some other goal, but must instead be conceived of as the expression of an independent intention."²³⁴

Once he recovered the ontological conditions of ethical recognition he had already outlined in *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth subsequently admits their being insufficient for discriminating ideological or dominating forms of recognition, for these latter "are only capable of fulfilling the function ascribed to them if they give individuals the opportunity to

²³³ Honneth, 2007, p. 329.

²³⁴ Honneth, 2007, p. 330. For a further analysis of the unconditionality of recognition, see Ikäheimo, 2015. The issue of the extreme purity of the act of recognition, freed by any overlapping interest from the part of the recognizer, is extremely radical since it prevents the theorist from distinguishing personal interests of the recognizer that do not harm the occurrence of the positive affirmation of the recognizee from the more problematic and disrespectful ones.

relate to themselves affirmatively, such that they see themselves encouraged to take over willingly certain specific tasks.”²³⁵ Therefore, it seems that ideological and exploitative relationships of recognition fulfil, on the one hand, the first two ontological conditions of recognition. Indeed, they are subjective interactions that, firstly, affirm and confer to the subject forms of positive social evaluation with regards to their practical dimensions, which, in order to be convincing and persuasive for what concerns their ethical meaning, are to be somehow coherent with the moral, social and cultural exigencies of the social context. Secondly, to be convincing, they must be sustained through corresponding forms of behaviours and comportments. For what concerns the last condition, the one of instrumentality or conditionality, its critical inefficacy should seem obvious for it belongs to a mere private and subjective dimension. Indeed, in the absence of some other parameter helping to make manifest the instrumental character of a recognitive relationship, this latter cannot but remain a private content of oppressing subjects.

So, what is it the further condition that helps in discriminating between ethical and ambiguous relationships of recognition while allowing the theorists and the social subject to grasp the irrational kernel of the latter? Honneth approaches such a question by starting from a feature of ideological relations of recognition, stressing that:

[their] value-statements not only have to be positive and credible, but also contrastive in the sense of giving expression to a particular new value or special achievement. This restriction follows from the fact that individuals have the possibility of identifying with the definitions ascribed to them only if these values give them the sense of being distinguished in a certain way.²³⁶

That is, the ambiguity of recognition in being suitable to maintain existing relations of domination is due to the fact that recognition can be conferred to social subjects not according to the objective and material needs, interests, and values that they have in a specific social context, but according to contrastive and new material needs, interests, and values, whose extreme ambiguity, and thus, functionality, is due to their being both in a sort of continuity with the objective contents of human subjects and at the same time suitable to allow social members to “alter their self-conception in such a way as to promise a psychic premium of heightened self-respect, on the condition that they do in fact take over the abilities, needs, and virtues

²³⁵ Honneth, 2007, p. 338.

²³⁶ Honneth, 2007, p. 339.

associated with this distinction as being their own.”²³⁷ Therefore, the exploitative and manipulative dimension of recognition develops as long as the social subjects’ needs, interests, aims, values, and capacities are impeded in their fulfilment on a public and social level while being blurred in their missing realization through the social and public affirmation of continuative but alternative contents. Such contents are but alternative formulations of the subjects’ original ones, therefore, remaining somehow related to them from a conceptual and symbolic point of view and allowing the human subjects to develop a positive relation to self for it receives symbolic and behavioural forms of confirmation from its social context. Nevertheless, despite their recognitive meaning on the evaluative dimension, which is fundamental for the subject to reach a positive image of itself, the normative inadequacy of those recognitive relationships is retraceable in their *inappropriateness* regarding the material and objective response that is needed for the contents of social subjects to be not only conceived as valuable, but as well satisfiable and strengthened practically within the social world. “Alongside the evaluative dimension of the credibility of social recognition, we must also consider the material element, which, according to the degree of complexity of a given social interaction, consists in either appropriate individual conduct or suitable institutional procedures.”²³⁸

We can conclude that the further condition Honneth enucleates for a relation of recognition to be genuinely ethical is related to the gap we have previously mentioned between a positive-self-relation and the effective self-realization of human subjectivity. The main problem with Honneth’s mature theory of recognition is indeed the risky idea that recognition, as a form of cognitive, emotional, and practical affirmation of the contents of human subjectivity, plays a constitutive role for this latter because its positive affirmation entails the possibility to develop a normative or positive psychic relation to self, i.e., to reach an integral and undamaged self-experience. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, the acquisition by the subject of the three forms of normative self-relation appears as the necessary and sufficient condition for obtaining its social self-realization, namely, the satisfaction and the fulfilment of its identity contents on and through the public level. From such a psychologization of the constitutive role of recognition and the subject’s self-realization it cannot but follow an abstract definition of recognition as active “confirmation,” without a further clarification concerning its ontological

²³⁷ Honneth, 2007, p. 342.

²³⁸ Honneth, 2007, p. 345.

conditions. It is precisely such a psychologization of both human subjectivity, its self-realization, and recognition that stands for the *locus* wherein, on the one hand, the ambiguity of recognition, in its exploitative, manipulative, and dominating occurrence, originates and gains its strength and credibility, and where, on the other hand, a critical theory of recognition loses both its critical sensitivity and critical feasibility, for it unintentionally risks becoming an integral part of structures of social domination. In order to deal with such a locus of ambiguity, Honneth, in *Recognition as Ideology*, stresses that recognition, to be ethical, is needed to be a positive confirmation *adequately sustained materially and objectively*, whose evaluative dimension is called to provide the adequate change of comportments, social practices and institutions suitable to sustain the subjective contents to be concretely recognized and satisfied.

From such a methodological strategy, we deem it necessary to draw two considerations. The first one is precisely Honneth's acknowledgment of the risks that his mostly psychologist understanding of recognition and subject's self-realization entails. The second one is that his insight on the objective and material dimension of practical recognition still remains too superficially analyzed for several reasons. On the one side, he insists on providing an understanding of the ambiguity of recognition that stresses its *irrational* outcome. Indeed, the incoherence of these recognitive forms between their evaluative and practical level is ultimately described in terms of *irrationality*, without stressing, first of all, due to its own argument, the emotional and practical blockade that such forms of recognitive relationships entail both on the individual and social level. For better explaining this point, we want to refer to the main example he refers to in the essay, the one of the "worker" in developed capitalist economies. Honneth argues that the main problem of those relationships of recognition designed to publicly present the worker in terms of a "creative entrepreneur of his own labour" is that they entail both the development in herself/himself of a sense of personal self-respect, for she/he feels socially confirmed as being an autonomous and promising worker, with a massive range of possibilities that it is up to the worker to catch, while actually denying those economical, juridical, and institutional conditions that are necessary for the subject to satisfy its need, interest, and value for work within existing social conditions. The conclusion that Honneth draws from such an example is that because of the missing adequate material fulfilment of the evaluative judgment belonging to this practice of recognition, this latter is to be conceived as keeping an irrational kernel, due to something like an internally logical disassociation. Honneth, therefore, conclusively places the inadequateness of ideological recognition in its being an

irrational form of recognition, for it is a relation of recognition that cannot fully stand into the space of reason. Thereby, the very and original problem of the missing materiality and objectivity of recognition, in the end, is treated in terms of an internally logical rupture of the relation of recognition, rather than as an impediment of recognition regarding a certain capacity for *praxis* of the human subject in the social context.

What we are trying to argue here is that Honneth's ultimate understanding of the ambiguity of these forms of recognition stresses their rational incoherence instead of the structural block of both the human subject's specific potentiality for action within their social contexts and the social contexts' internal development. The example of workers in late capitalist societies, indeed, seems to show that the inadequacy of the recognitive devices lying under the rhetoric of the self-entrepreneur is an issue of preventing the human subject from a particular structural exchange with its external environment, before it is an issue of intrinsic irrationality. That is, they impede the subject from developing its proper quality of action within the world of objectivity, natural and social, which is its capacity to practically transform the social world in order to fulfil and strengthen its values, needs, interests, and aims intelligently, as rationally processed concerning their objective conditions in given social contexts. And at the same time, they impede the social context, in its entirety, to concretely and materially developing in its practices, social institutions, and values, thus remaining blocked in that progress constitutively belonging to them because of the movement of recognition. In conclusion, in *Recognition as Ideology*, Honneth considers the perilous gap existing between a positive relation-to-self and self-realization, thereby acknowledging the importance of stressing how a fundamental ontological condition of ethical recognition is its material and objective dimension in sustaining adequately the value conferred to social subjects' contents. Nonetheless, such an explanation of recognition's further condition is still considered with respect to the rational coherence of recognition, rather than to a deeper analysis of the human subjectivity's capacity for action, namely, of the qualitative exchange that the human being undertakes with its external environment. Indeed, the worker's impossibility to realize her/his need for work through the symbolic, practical and institutional framework of late capitalist societies suggests that the human being develops its needs, aims, and values always as "attached" to an external environment. An external environment determined in certain objective conditions, with which the former, as a human subject, has a specific practical exchange that makes its activity a form of "practice." The specific practical exchange of the human subject with its external

environment relies upon an existing transformative interplay among the two. This implies that the human being develops and defines in a sensible and substantial way its contents only in relation to an external environment, being able at the same time to transform it by rationally identifying the objective conditions of the latter that are suitable to allow the satisfaction and strengthening of its subjective contents. The ambiguity and inadequacy of ideological recognition, therefore, should not be conclusively related to its rational or logical incoherence, nor should its missing normative condition be related directly to the “space of reason of recognition.” Instead, firstly, its ambiguity and inadequacy should be related to their impeding the human subject from developing its distinguishing practical exchange with the objective world, therefore, from denying its capacity for action closely related to its being an *embodied subject*. To redefine the inadequacy of recognition in relation to the embodied dimension of human subjectivity, thereby giving sense to its constitutive material and objective dimension not from a perspective of “rationality” but rather of the specific capacity for action of the human subject in and through the world of objectivity, would compel an expansion of Honneth’s mature anthropological framework. This latter, indeed, misses the fundamental analysis of the constitutive role that inter-objective interactions has for the definition and the development of human subjectivity. Therefore, a reflection concerning the formal structural or qualitative exchange occurring between subjectivity and objectivity, or subject and external world, seems to be relevant for more deeply analysing both the further reference to the objective and material condition of ethical recognition, and moreover, for reframing the normativity and ethical description of recognition in relation to the subject-being-in-the-world.

Accordingly, the constitutive mechanism of recognition would not be considered independently from the other fundamental form of interaction of subjectivity, but, on the contrary, in strict interdependence with this latter, thereby being firmly devoted to lead the subject both to develop a positive-relation-to-self and to strengthen the capacity for action related to its being an *embodied subject*. Moreover, the definition of ethical recognition would not be limited to the abstract term of active confirmation but would be reformulated in terms of a relation destined to strengthen such a specific quality of action belonging to human subjectivity. A broader anthropological reflection on the qualitative exchange or capacity for action of the human subject with and within the external environment may strengthen a critical theory of recognition enlarging the theoretical framework provided by Honneth. Indeed, the gap he left among the subject’s positive relation-to-self and the concrete and effective

realization of its contents, that as we have seen stand for the *locus* wherein ambiguous relations of recognition prosper while becoming blurred for critical theory, would be filled by firmly overcoming the structural shortcoming that unintentionally maintains such a gap. That is, the missing consideration of the quality of human activity in its interaction with objectivity, and its ontological interdependence with relations of recognition.

What interests us for proceeding with our analysis, therefore, is not the need for a critical theory of recognition to be accompanied by a different category such as the one of acknowledgement. Nor is it the essentiality for a critical theory of recognition to be enriched by an analysis of human activity that still remains based on a subjectivist understanding of the human capacity for action, namely, as suitable to be analyzed independently from an inquiry on its structured occurrence in relation to an external world. Instead, what is fundamental for a critical theory of recognition, as mainly represented by Honneth, to be sensitive with respect to social contexts wherein recognitive contexts are instrumentally employed for reproducing relations of domination and symbolic competition, is to enrich its anthropology through a broader anthropological analysis that focuses on the normative conditions stemming from the constitutive interaction existing between subjectivity and objectivity. Indeed, by systematically organizing both the critical points that the authors of this first level of criticism pointed out concerning a critical theory of recognition such as Honneth's, and our considerations so far collected, we see that:

(I) Honneth's mature anthropological framework in *The Struggle for Recognition* does not sufficiently consider other intersubjective interactions other than the one of normative recognition, such as instrumental, strategic, exploiting, or dominating social attitudes, whose reproductive source can be precisely the subject's need for recognition, thereby offering a naïve description of the human being (Carnevali, 2004, 2008, 2017). Honneth's descriptive overlooking of these other intersubjective relations entails that his account of social domination erroneously opposes domination and recognition, with the consequence that his analysis of the constitutive mechanism of ethical recognition and the correlated definition of such a relational mediation does not clarify the ontological conditions of normatively strong/ethical/adequate recognition in order to distinguish it from normatively weak/ambiguous/inadequate recognitive relationships. Indeed, the understanding of the constitutive mechanism of recognition in terms of that relational mediation by which the subject can develop a positive relation-to-self, the identification of "personal integrity" as the underpinning for the human subject's self-

realization, and the definition of recognition in terms of active confirmation represent the ontological conditions of Honneth's framework on ethical recognition. If this framework is suitable for critically approaching manifestly misrecognizing social contexts, nonetheless it remains ineffective and insensitive, both from an empirical and theoretical point of view, in critically detecting those inadequate forms of recognition which satisfy the condition of allowing the subject to develop a positive relation-to-self through the conferral of social worth but impeding social members from concretely realizing their personal contents.

(II) In front of such an issue, commenters have proposed two different options:

(II).1. According to Danielle Petherbridge, the very attempt of Honneth's critical theory of recognition to offer a normative ideal of an integral and undamaged relationship of recognition among subjects is critically and normatively counterproductive for critical theory. In this way, critical theory would indeed pretend to overcome on the level of theory the intrinsic fragility and instability of the relations of recognition among subjects, which stem from their vulnerability to being entangled with other intersubjective relationships, such as strategic action, domination, and power, becoming completely blind to the unavoidable slippery ontology of recognition. Therefore, any attempt to provide a conceptual framework suited to gather the ontological conditions for an undamaged and full-fledged relation of recognition, as distinguished from inadequate relationships of recognition, stands in the very way of critical theory for it overshadows the empirical and historical existence of intersubjective relationships not reduceable to primary recognition, and the intrinsic fragility of intersubjective relations of recognition as being imbricated into relations of domination and power. Instead, critical theory should start from these empirical considerations and provide a theory of subjective attitudes for exploitation, domination and power as well, in order to disclose them in their co-extensive existence with recognitive relationships. Petherbridge, hence, suggests that critical theory should proceed according to something like a "hermeneutics of suspicion," or a negativistic procedure. Accordingly, critical theory should limit itself to enucleate and disclose within existing relationships of recognition the dynamics of exploitation, strategic domination, and power, without being guided by a normative ideal of a full-fledged recognitive relationship.

Nevertheless, Petherbridge's strategy, despite rightly pointing out the necessity for critical theory to also possess an anthropological theory of subjective attitudes for strategic action, domination, and exploitation, *de facto* jeopardizes Honneth's insight according to which subjects can actually find their freedom and self-realization within and through the social

context. Indeed, the cogency of Honneth's argument of a normative theory of recognition is the idea that a human individual can self-realize only due to the interactions with other subjects. To completely abandon the feasibility to positively provide an ideal of an integral and successful relation of recognition, due to the fragility and vulnerability of intersubjective relationships, seems to entail the very loss of such an intersubjective theory of human freedom. Hence, to maintain both theoretically and ontologically the very possibility of an intersubjective self-realization of human subjectivity, the main task for critical theory does not seem to drop any ambition to provide a normative ideal of a full-fledged relation of recognition among subjects, due to their extreme vulnerability and fragility. On the contrary, the core challenge is still to find a theoretical and conceptual framework for recognition suitable to distinguish between adequate and inadequate relationships of recognition. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what theoretical aspect of Honneth's paradigm structurally impedes such a clarification, thereby finding out how to strengthen and enforce a paradigm of recognition.

(II). 2. Patchen Markell has pointed out how the mainstream paradigm of recognition of Hegelian inspiration, such as Honneth's, relies upon an anthropological framework that does not allow the theorist to normatively detect and criticize the forms of domination relying upon recognitive relationships. This is so because the anthropological grammar of recognition constitutively relies upon a psychologist conception of human identity and a "symbolic" understanding of such a social mediation. Consequently, the human subject is conceived as entirely dependent on the symbolic affirmation of its personal qualities within the social context, regardless of the adequateness of the social confirmation received. In this anthropological juncture lies the possibility for relations of domination to reproduce through recognitive devices, thereby exploiting the subject's dependence upon recognition. Despite the functionality of such a paradigm to criticize the evident cases of social misrecognition, all those forms of domination that strategically rely upon forms of positive and encouraging conferral of symbolic worth to the oppressed subjects are but blind spots. For this reason, Markell opts for an alternative category to recognition, to be employed in parallel to it. The notion of acknowledgment is based indeed on a different anthropology focusing on the conditions of human activity rather than on the dimensions of human subject's practical identity, which helps in clarifying the necessity of a form of acknowledgment that is practical, rather than symbolical, and focused on the context-bound expressiveness and creativity of human activity. We have pointed out, first, how Markell's criticism of the mainstream paradigm of recognition is

consistent with our previous criticism regarding Honneth's psychologist understanding of both the constitutive role of recognition and the description of normative recognition in terms of "affirmation" or "confirmation." Secondly, we have underlined how we diverge concerning both the strategy and the type of anthropology that are needed for a critical theory of recognition to provide a conceptual framework suited to detect both manifest forms of misrecognition and inadequate forms of recognition devoted to reproducing social relations of domination. Markell's strategy is to split the normative categories for critical social theory into recognition and acknowledgment, which, nevertheless, does not seem necessary from a methodological point of view. The split indeed implies the problematic maintenance of recognition's anthropology and the uneconomical use of a second type of social mediation, when it would be more coherent and systematic to strengthen and enlarge the traditional anthropology beneath recognition directly. Secondly, we have also stressed how the different anthropology or theory of human subjectivity's action that Markell attempts to delineate, despite it focuses on a retrieval of the conditions of "contextuality" and "creativity" of human activity, is still outlined in a subjectivist way, namely, without a further inquiry on the structural interaction existing between subjectivity and the objective world. Indeed, in the absence of an analysis about the specific structure or quality belonging to the exchange between these two poles, it seems difficult to provide, in the first instance, a clarification concerning the conditions of human activity, such as situationality/context-reliance and creativity. Consequently, it hinders a better understanding of the normative ties that the analysis of human activity can exert on social relationships of confirmation for being ethical, therefore, devoted to the subject's self-realization.

(III) Honneth attempts to deal with the critical problems that his conceptual framework on recognition inadvertently entails by moving in the right direction, still without firmly advocating for the theoretical expansion and integration that is needed for its theoretical paradigm in order to address the problem of the ambiguity of recognition. Indeed, we have seen how Honneth, in *Recognition as Ideology*, deals with the problem of further specifying the conditions of recognition to be ethical. And he rightly realizes that his mature framework's problem is to have not stressed enough the objective and material dimension of recognition, thus leaving the human subject's self-realization depending only upon the possibility to develop a positive relation-to-self *via* the affirming mediation of its social context. Therefore, he concludes that ideological relationships of recognition can be detected in relation to their

intrinsic irrational incoherence between their evaluative and practical dimension, thereby ultimately affirming that the distinguishing character among ethical and ideological recognitive relationships lies in the space of reason that recognition is part of.

Nonetheless, we have concluded that Honneth's strategy to further elucidate the conditions of ethical recognition, despite stressing the material and objective dimension of recognition, ultimately does not link this objective and material dimension to the need of a proper anthropological analysis of the capacity for action of human subjectivity in its exchange with the objective world, thereby relating the normativity of recognition directly to the kind of interaction that subjectivity undertakes with its external environment. Instead, he maintains the material and objective dimension of recognition in terms of a mere constitutive part of recognition, in the absence of which recognition takes on an irrational kernel. Therefore, it follows that the normative inadequacy of ideological recognition is due to its being partly irrational and intrinsically incoherent. In this way, we think that Honneth cannot stress the real problem of ideological recognition, that is the practical blockage this entails for both human subjectivity as such, as being deprived of a certain capacity for practical transformation of the external world, and human societies, as being stuck in the objective and material development that the progress of recognitive relationships would entail. From such considerations, it follows that, first, the meaning of the material and objective dimension of recognition cannot be entirely made significant by Honneth. That is, it cannot be related directly in its *raison d'être*, role of mediation, and normative dependence upon the objective dimension of human subjectivity itself, namely, the structural exchange with the external environment through which human subjectivity develops its capacity for action. Consequently, Honneth does not go so far as to modify its leading theoretical framework with an expansion of its anthropological premises, entirely focused on the intersubjective conditions of human subjectivity without considering the subject's dependence on other forms of interaction. Rather, he stresses the materiality of recognition but without inquiring on the reference of such a materiality, thus preventing himself from providing forcefully a different understanding of both the constitutive role of recognition for human subjectivity, a different definition of ethical recognition, and a clarification of its ontological conditions. Such a strategy would indeed allow a critical theory of recognition to rely upon a conceptual and theoretical framework enabling the theorist to critically discriminate among adequate and ambiguous relations of recognition on a matter of blockage and impediment to the subject's capacity for action with the external world, occurring on different

levels, rather than on a matter of internal irrationality. The importance of this last point would be relevant not only from the part of the theorist, but of the social subjects too, who would develop in social life with a clearer consciousness of their own activity, thereby having the opportunity to gain a critical approach to recognition not according to the mere standard of rationality, but on the contrary, as precisely Honneth's own idea of human subjectivities' emotional sensitivity suggests, to the practical impediments that the social world can illegitimately and objectively impose on them.

(IV) We can conclude that the structural problem of Honneth's mature theory of recognition is the missing consideration of the inter-objective interactions of human subjectivity, namely, the lack of an anthropological analysis of human activity as a form of "praxis" occurring according to a specific structure or quality in relation to an external environment. Indeed, we have previously seen how Honneth, in his mature theory of recognition, neither developed nor maintained *The Critique of Power's* intuition to rely a critical theory of the social upon an analysis of the various interactions partaking in the free development of human subjectivity. Indeed, from *The Struggle for Recognition*, he focuses on providing a systematic explanation of the constitutive role that recognition plays for human subjectivity, without as well pointing out the dependence of subjectivity, both for its survival, for the definition of its capacity for action, and the realization and development of its subjective contents, upon the interactions with its external world. To provide an account of this level of interaction among subjectivity and objectivity would have permitted him to maintain human activity as a form of "praxis," always occurring within an external environment, therefore, according to both an ensemble of subjective and objective conditions and through a particular qualitative structure, and to consider recognition in relation to the subject's capacity for action with and within the external world. In such a theoretical framework:

- i. The constitutive mechanism of recognition would be related to the development by the subject not only of a positive relation-to-self but also of its distinctive capacity for action with and within the external environment.
- ii. The ontological conditions for recognition to be ethical would not be narrowed to the psychic or personal integrity of the human subject, to the lack of instrumentality, and to the material and objective condition of recognition deprived of a respective anthropological analysis devoted to give meaning to such a material and objective dimension. Instead, this last condition would be enriched in light of the specific conditions belonging to human activity in its relation

to the world of objectivity, and recognition would be adequate or inadequate according to its ability to develop or not the subjects' distinguishing practical exchange with the external world.

iii. The definition or the genus of recognition would not be limited to the one of "positive affirmation" or "taking another subject as a person with normative dispositions", as eradicated from an analysis of its capacity for action but would be considered in terms of a "function" of the specific capacity for action of the human being as an embodied subject.

Before presenting the broader anthropology we think may be useful to reframe and rethink recognition in both its constitutive role for human subjectivity, its genus, and ontological conditions, in order to enrich and strengthen the paradigm of recognition in its critical capacity, we want to take a closer look at the second category of criticism that a critical theory of recognition is supposed to address. Our aim is indeed to retrace the compelling problem that such a level of criticism raises against Honneth's paradigm while arguing that the resistance of its theoretical framework in addressing it is again partly related to the missing consideration by his mature anthropology of the analysis of the qualitative interaction of human subjectivity with the world of objectivity.

V. 2. Recognition as Constitutive Power and the Ontological Status of Recognition

In Chapter One, we have analyzed two "negative" accounts of recognition, Sartre's and Butler's.²³⁹ The "negativity" of these accounts of recognition lies, as previously said, in their positing recognition as a fundamental relational category for the development of human subjectivity while conferring it an ambivalent meaning, which structurally downplays the feasibility of recognition to stand for a moral and critical category of the social context. Indeed, the core point of such criticisms is not that recognition can be instrumentally employed for maintaining relationships of social domination of some social group upon others. Rather, they argue that recognition is ontologically *co-extensive* with power, as distinguished from

²³⁹ See the previous section I. 2.2. for a more detailed overview of Sartre's and Butler's arguments. Here, we are referring specifically to their reflections respectively contained in *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 2003) and *The Psychic Life of Power* (Butler, 1997).

domination.²⁴⁰ Indeed, with “power” is meant the anonymous capacity of the overall social context to substantially constitute human subjectivity without manifest or ideological forms of constriction and oppression, but rather enabling and empowering the social subjects with a limited horizon of emotional, agentive, and conceptual possibilities, to be disclosed in their declinations through the individual performativity of human subjects. Power, therefore, stands for the asymmetrical force of the social world in both determining through its supra-subjectively given or socially redefined personal contents the individual but empowering the latter with certain descriptive and normative qualities, capacities, and statuses. Because of its ambivalent ontological status, in both shaping and freeing the individual subject’s capacity for action, such a form of power of human societies has been described, from Foucault onwards, in terms of “constitutive power,” to express how it is both a determining and productive force.²⁴¹ It is a determining force because the individual, in order to stand for a human subject on the social and the public level, cannot but internalize the overall symbolic framework of its social context, thereby being integrated and identified as a social subject only by assuming and reproducing its symbolic horizon. On the other side, it is a productive force because it “produces” a new ontological dimension for the individual – the one of subjectivity and social membership – while enabling the subject with a certain power, namely, the agentive capacity to develop through its individual activity the substantial meanings of the emotional, agentive, and conceptual possibilities that the social horizon entails as “feasible,” “imaginable,” “thinkable,” and “reachable.” From such considerations, it follows that the human subject is a product of social power and that its social being entails the unavoidable ambivalent co-existence of determination and freedom. That is, to be a social subject, the individual cannot but be somehow determined, and to be socially determined cannot but mean a certain degree of freedom in redefining such determinations, even if remaining in the ontological borders of their ontological possibilities.

Even with different conceptual tools and philosophical traditions in the background, Sartre and Butler outline a very different account than Honneth’s of the relation existing between the human being and the social world, which entails both a different qualitative

²⁴⁰ Concerning the ambivalence of recognition and its “co-extensiveness” with power, see also Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. 5.

²⁴¹ Paradigmatic for such an understanding of constitutive power have been the reflections that Foucault brought about in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976). “A power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them to submit, or destroying them” (Foucault, 1980, p. 136).

understanding of social freedom and recognition. Indeed, we have previously seen how Sartre and Butler interpret the social existence of the human being in terms of a limitation, an objectification, and an unavoidable abandonment of the indefiniteness of the subject's capacity for action. The human being is willing indeed, in order to have a social existence and acquire a new power of agency, to be integrated within the existing structures of its social context, becoming at the same time something described and objectified through social categories (both descriptive and normative), heteronormatively given or supra-subjectively defined. Hence, they conclude, with an extreme and radical perspective though, that becoming a human subject for sure means accomplishing a new status, related to the acquisition through the generalized other (the single individual but also the overall social context) of social existence. But at the same time, it stands for an unavoidable abandonment of the real freedom of self-determination, for the capacity of action of human subjectivity is destined to be the mere reproduction of the supra-subjectively determined symbolic framework that organizes and coordinates the social context, although the reproduction of these contents does not occur merely mechanically but through the individual performativity of their possible declinations.²⁴² Therefore, they both conclude, first, that the condition of absolute freedom is radically precluded to the human being, as being always a human subject in a social context. Second, that the degree of freedom of the human subject, namely, its freedom-in-context, cannot correspond to social existence as such. This means that individual's freedom, even if it is dependent upon the social, cannot coincide with the subject's integration and inclusion in the social context as such. Instead, it should be grasped in the attempt of the social subject, never absolutely and fully reachable, to overcome existing social ties and determinations. In a nutshell, human freedom lies in the "sites of resistance or alteration" within existing social determinations, which, however, are destined both to emerge from these social determinations' horizon of thinkability and ontological potentialities, and to be redefined and lead to a socially new constitutive horizon of sociability and subjectivity.²⁴³ Indeed, Sartre and Butler argue that the freedom of the human subject lies in the ongoing and never reachable attempt to overcome existing social ties, which paradoxically represent the

²⁴² See Butler, 1997, p. 13: "Where conditions of subordination make possible the assumption of power, the power assumed remains tied to those conditions, but in an ambivalent way; in fact, the power assumed may at once retain and resist that subordination. This conclusion is not to be thought of as (a) a resistance that is really a recuperation of power or (b) a recuperation that is really a resistance. It is both at once, and this ambivalence forms the bind of agency. Power acts on the subject: an acting that is an enacting."

²⁴³ See Sartre, 2003, p. 521: "To be free is not to choose the historic world in which one arises – which would have no meaning – but to choose oneself in the world whatever this may be."

conditio sine qua non of human subjectivity's freedom but not its dimension of concretization. The social world, therefore, fulfils a causal but not performative role for the degree of freedom that the human subject can reach. In fact, the human subject can experience its creative activity only by attempting to partly (never fully) overcome the objectifying and constitutive power of social contexts.

Of course, these “negative” accounts of the social world and the existence of human subjectivity entail a conception of recognition entirely consistent with their theoretical premises. Indeed, recognition is grasped as the primary fundamental device through which the social world, with its social categories, social practices, institutions, and behavioural norms, on the one hand, constitutes the individual as a social subject. Hence, recognition stands for the relational mediation through which the individual acquires, firstly, the status of subject, since, as also the “positive” accounts of recognition state, the status of subjectivity is but mediated by the intersubjective confirmation of other subjects. Secondly, because of the human being's social organization, recognition represents the social condition through which the individual's social membership receives a social confirmation, thereby mediating the conferral, since childhood to adulthood, of a set of descriptive and normative juridical and political statuses, or social and cultural categories, which allow the individual to act and move legitimately within a range of feasible emotional, agentic, and conceptual possibilities. So far, it seems that these “negative” accounts of recognition entirely accept the premises of the “positive” ones. In fact, recognition is grasped in its constitutive role, to be considered in this case in the weak sense of the term, namely, as bringing human individuality in the new ontological dimension of a social existence publicly confirmed and entailing a certain power for action. That is, the power to limit the other subjects' capacity for action, and to perform a set and order of agency.

Nonetheless, the discriminating point of the negative accounts of recognition is precisely the additional strong meaning they unveil concerning the constitutive role of recognition. Indeed, Sartre, with the idea of “objectified existence,” and Butler, with the category of “subjection,” disclose the existential trap for which, for becoming a subject, the individual is willing to abandon its indeterminacy and potential for creativity in order to be recognized from its social context, thereby internalizing both the heteronormatively given and supra-subjectively determined symbolic framework of the social world. Therefore, through such a perspective, recognition is “constitutive” both as productive of a new dimension for human individuality, namely, its social existence. But, at the same time, it is more strongly

“constitutive” as internally shaping and determining the human being’s potential creativity through descriptive and normative social categories. These categories are both pre-existing to the human individual, thus heteronormatively interiorized without the deliberative assent of human subjects. Or they are redefined in the course of human intercourses but still on a supra-subjective level, therefore standing in front of the potential creativity and indeterminacy of the human being as “determining,” “identifying,” “objectifying,” “classifying,” “describing,” or “prescriptive” categories.²⁴⁴

Two specific and interrelated theoretical consequences follow from these negative accounts of recognition. In the first instance, as recognition is constitutive, at least, under two meanings, critical theory cannot consider it in terms of an absolute emancipative relationship or category. Although the core point of these arguments is not that recognition can overlap with relations of domination, therefore to oppressive and repressive social relations, the impact of such accounts on the critical potentiality of recognition is misleadingly less impressive. On the contrary, it is more pervasive and structural, for recognition is not just considered in its possible ambiguous outcome, but rather it is enlightened in its intrinsic relational ambivalence, as entailing co-extensively and indissolubly both the freedom and the subjection of the human being within its social context. To the thesis of the ambiguity of recognition, according to which recognition cannot be polarly opposed to domination, the thesis of the “ambivalence of recognition” entails that recognition is intrinsically the harbinger of the asymmetrical constitutive power of social contexts. Thus, recognition intrinsically becomes an ambivalent relational category both from an ontological and theoretical point of view. On the one hand, its potential for subjective freedom is always accompanied by an effective restriction, determination, and subjection of human subjectivity. On the other hand, any critical theory that does not consider such an intrinsic ambiguity of recognition and still grounds its critical project upon its critical capacity is prevented from a real critical approach to social contexts because it cannot stand for an emancipatory theory able to overcome and struggle against the intrinsic attitude of the social subject to subjugate to its cognitive context.²⁴⁵ These accounts, hence,

²⁴⁴ See Sartre, 2003, p. 519: “The Other’s existence brings a factual limit to my freedom. This is because of the fact that by means of upsurge of the Other there appear certain determinations which I am without having chosen them.”

²⁴⁵ See Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. 8 and 9, for her overview of the notion of constitutive power, its ambivalence, and the consequent problem that this entails for a theory of recognition and its conception of the subject’s individualization. Indeed, this latter occurs one way or the other through cognitive relationships characterized by asymmetries of power, and due to such asymmetries, it is better to drop a strong ethical ideal of a full-fledged relationship of recognition.

suggest that critical social theory should descriptively refer to recognition in order to explain the development of human subjectivity. Nonetheless, from a normative point of view, they deem that it cannot programmatically posit recognition both as the reference point of critique and the ultimate aim of human subjectivity to attain its freedom. On the contrary, the relative degree of freedom attainable for the human being, due to its social existence, lies precisely in the ongoing and never fully realizable attempt to overcome existing cognitive ties and bonds, given social objectifications and identifications, by exploring the most extreme potentialities for change and transformation contained therein.

Therefore, these negative accounts of recognition, despite being descriptively tied to the notion of recognition, manifest in their normative and critical premises as entirely opposed to a positive account of recognition such as Honneth's. Indeed, we have seen how Honneth, who takes into analysis the issue of power only in the traditional meaning of domination,²⁴⁶ does not consider the social world and social recognition as the social conditions from which the subject's freedom emerges in terms of a "liberation" from social constraints. Instead, according to Honneth, they stand for the final *loci* wherein the mere abstract potentialities of human freedom can acquire an effective and objective form.²⁴⁷ Indeed, the social world is the context where the human potential for freedom becomes concrete and real through other subjects, and recognition is precisely the moral and ethical relationship wherein the contents of human subjectivity can find expression exactly through their normative identification by the social context, becoming part of the symbolic and spiritual framework of the social world. From these two accounts, it is feasible to observe how the notion of social freedom can be declined in a twofold manner: human freedom is social because it is factually always "in context"; or because it is effective and concrete thanks to and through the social context and its cognitive structure.

As we pointed out in Chapter One, this kind of opposition among theories of subjectivity and theories of the social world cannot but raise some suspects, due to their respective radicality and unilaterality. Indeed, on the one hand, a positive account of recognition such as Honneth's, after the considerations drawn above concerning the ideology of recognition, interprets any relation of recognition not implying any imbrication with oppressive and repressive domination

²⁴⁶ See again Petherbridge, 2013, Ch. 3, 8, 9. With an amazing reconstruction of Honneth's critical theory, Petherbridge underlines how Honneth, in *The Critique of Power*, proves to be entirely aware of the necessity for critical theory to account also for the Foucauldian notion of "constitutive power," stressing, nevertheless, how Honneth has subsequently abandoned such a critical point.

²⁴⁷ For a further overview on Honneth's understanding of social freedom, see Honneth, 2000, 2014.

as entirely ethical and successful, thereby destined to concur to the flourishing realization of human subjects. Although we have seen the problems deriving both from Honneth's notion of domination, as polarly opposed to recognition, and from the need for a structural modification of its anthropological framework in order to address the empirical fact of the intermeshing of recognition with domination, Honneth attempts, through his paradigm of recognition, to deal only with the phenomenon of social domination. Namely, the kind of social relation that he identifies as both the fundamental object of criticism for critical theory and the contrasting reality against which an ethical paradigm of recognition, through its ontological conditions, is to be sensitive, is the one of domination. And his subsequent conclusion is that, in the absence of elements of social domination, recognition can stand for the genetic and constitutive condition for the human being's free realization within the social context.²⁴⁸

On the other hand, these negative accounts of recognition point out a different form of power than of domination, then concluding that any form of recognition is but a mediation and device of constitutive power, i.e., the asymmetrical force that the social context, in its relational structures and through its horizon of thinkability and agency, has in determining and substantially constituting the human subject's capacity for action. As incisively pointed out by Rahel Jaeggi and Robin Celikates, these negative accounts of recognition unveil a relevant aspect both of the social world, namely, its asymmetry with respect to the individual, and of recognition, that is its standing for a relationship whose response to the requests of subjectivation and individuation of human individuals unavoidably occurs through the mediation of supra-subjective symbolic and social frameworks, thus partly both enabling and determining the human subject's potential for creative activity. Nonetheless, the critical and normative risk intrinsic to such accounts lies in their possible "critical inefficacy," for they end up considering any relationship of recognition as an object of critique and as a relational category that cannot stand effectively as a real tool for liberation and emancipation. In this way, any capacity to distinguish between the inevitable and the problematic degrees of social asymmetry and constitutive recognition gets blurred, and the relational and social development of human subjectivity is uniformly considered problematic.

²⁴⁸ Here, with "constitutive," we intend the weak meaning of the term pointed to in the previous pages. That is, recognition is weakly constitutive in the sense that it is the affirming confirmation in the absence of which the subject is prevented from a socially and publicly known existence, thereby lacking the possibility to develop a positive relation to itself.

[This philosophical approach] seems to be locked in a paradoxical and aporetic description of the inevitable social character of our existence. It makes difficult, indeed, to demarcate social relations of reification, alienation and domination from those cognitive relations which, instead, are constitutive of the process of subjectivation [...]. The issue regarding how we can become free in front of constrictive norms and their normalizing social pressures, is to be conceived as related to the possibility for subjects to appropriate and transform social determinations, rather than as an alternative among determinacy and indeterminacy.²⁴⁹

What Jaeggi and Celikates are attempting to stress with this argument is that the negative accounts of recognition transform the inevitable situationality or sociability of human subjectivity, namely, its unavoidable birth and development within and through a social world whose existence, reproduction, and coordination cannot but rely upon supra-subjectively regulating contents, into a problem as such. They provide an ontology of the social world and a theory of human freedom wherein the normative dimension overlaps the descriptive one. Indeed, the social world is now rightly described in that dimension of its material and symbolic reproduction that is:

- (i) supra-subjective, i.e., occurring beyond the singular, conscious, intentional, and reflexive activity of the human subject.
- (ii) anonymous and trans-relational, as proceeding from the interrelation of the simultaneous and dynamic systems of integrations that coordinate, give unity, direction, meaningfulness and empowerment to the overall set of social relationships.

Correspondingly, the development and formation of human subjectivity is also descriptively unveiled in:

- (i) its passive, unintentional, often pre-reflexive dimension, since becoming a human subject entails becoming and developing as a publicly acknowledged *social* member, being thus integrated and dynamically redefined in its new contents in and through a partly given and supra-subjective social framework, which is performed simultaneously and dynamically by the overall contexts of social relation.
- (ii) its partial heteronormative constitution, which, despite the empowering and individualizing capacities that the subject acquires through the mediation and integration of its contents in the overall symbolic framework, is due to the unavoidable determination and restriction of its potential for undetermined activity.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017, p. 74. (Translation mine).

²⁵⁰ The “negative” accounts of recognition, hence, cast doubt on an action-theoretic account of the social world and the human being, by highlighting the anonymous and supra-subjective existence and reproduction of the social world with respect to the individual being. For the consideration of the anonymity and trans-relationality of social

Nonetheless, this descriptive dimension of the ontology of the social world and human subjectivity's constitution, which is overlooked by any action-theoretic paradigm of human subjectivity and the social world, is subsequently translated into an evaluative and normative consideration. Accordingly, the social world is but a depotentiation of absolute freedom and indeterminacy, and becoming a human subject is but an act of subjection to the social world. Therefore, they start from a descriptive level, which additionally and enrichingly stresses the unavoidable social situationality of human subjectivity, and the asymmetrical, anonymous, and pervasive power of the social world, as standing in front of the individual while integrating its contents into a symbolic level partly self-reproducing and developing without the reflexive, intentional, and individual influence of the human subject. But then, they evaluatively conclude that in and through any social context and relation of recognition the freedom of the human being is prevented from the very beginning.

What we can say about such a philosophical approach is, first, that its descriptive framework is radicalized into a normative framework that seems to maintain from the outset an ideal of human freedom as absolute indeterminacy and a-situational or unconditioned power for action, in relation to which the effective social and situational condition of human subjectivity is but a pejorative outcome. Therefore, the descriptive overview on the human being's very existence appears to be already framed into a normative and inaccessible account of human freedom, which entails *a priori* a negative evaluative understanding of the ontological status of both human subjectivity, the social world, and recognition. Such an approach, by inverting the order between description and prescription seems to still rely upon a metaphysical conception of human freedom, which prevents the theorists from deducing the core of normativity and prescription, that is the ethical aim and the evaluative tools for the critique of the social world, the human being and recognition, immanently from their ontologically descriptive conditions. What we are trying to argue is that the unavoidable situationality and sociability of the human being cannot be considered *per se* negatively, but rather the theorist should determine, given the ontological conditions of determinacy, relationality and situation-boundness of human subjectivity within the social world, the positive and negative declination

power, Foucault has been a central figure since he has paradigmatically described power as “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (Foucault, 1978, p. 92). See also McNay (2008a and 2008b), wherein the anonymous and pervasive power of the social contexts towards the individual subject is approached through Bourdieu's theory of the social, relied upon the notion of “field” of social forces and the category of *habitus*.

it may assume. Therefore, these negative approaches for sure add to the positive ones a further dimension of the social world's ontological constitution and reproduction, having consequences both on the description of human subjectivity's development and on the ontological status of recognition. Firstly, the social world's constitution and reproduction cannot be entirely described by means of an action-theoretic perspective, focusing on the conscious, reflexive, intentional capacity for action of social members. Indeed, this latter intermeshes with the supra-subjective, anonymous, inter-relational systems of social integration, which transmit and reproduce a specific material and spiritual framework that the subject passively and often pre-reflexively interiorizes, thus partly constituting its subjective contents and determining the horizon of thinkability and possibility for action where its individual activity can find expression.²⁵¹ Secondly, it follows that the subject's process of development and constitution, occurring intersubjectively (with other subjects or defined social groups), is always mediated by overall social categories, statuses, and values that asymmetrically govern the intersubjective and social relations. Lastly, recognition, as the relational form of mediation through which the human subject becomes a social member through the legitimate integration within existing social frameworks and structures, is emphasized in the strong meaning of its constitutive role, as entailing the identification, the determination, and the limitation of the subject's capacity for

²⁵¹ We can see how the "negative" accounts of recognition bring back to the fundamental problem against which Honneth was struggling in *The Critique of Power*, with a different declination though. We have seen indeed how Honneth, in *The Critique of Power*, started to conceive of recognition as the fundamental category to recover an action-theoretic account of human subjectivity within the social world, having a fundamental role in individually, actively, consciously, and communicatively agreeing or disagreeing with existing social symbolic frameworks and their reproduction. Indeed, he aimed at contrasting the pessimistic and systemic theories of human history and the social world developed by Horkheimer and Adorno, which unavoidably led to an extremely radical conception of human subjectivity as a passive and inert victim of the social world, entirely depotentiated in its capacity for critical, transformative and revolutionary activity. Instead, at this point in our analysis, the negative approaches here mentioned, firstly, use the category of recognition (unlike Adorno and Horkheimer), thereby giving great importance to the relational dimension of human subjectivity's development. Secondly, they refer to a different dimension of power than the one considered by Adorno and Horkheimer. Whereas the two German critical theorists focus on the oppressive and restrictive action that the systems of the social world (economical, bureaucratic, and cultural) exert on singular individuals, here the reference notion of power is constitutive power, the one productive and enabling, rather than repressing, thereby more silent and pervasive. Thirdly, Honneth's theoretical weapon for maintaining both the autonomous self-realization of the human being and the subjective processes of legitimization of the social world's reproduction, namely, recognition, turns out in this negative account to mediate precisely the productive power of social contexts, thereby being unveiled in its ontological status of substantial constituent of human subjectivities. Therefore, recognition manifests here as constitutive for human subjectivity in a further sense than Honneth's paradigm. It is not just a condition for the development of human identities, but, as always occurring through the mediation of existing supra-subjective and supra-individual categories, it constitutes human subjectivity while delimiting, identifying, and pre-determining its capacity for action from a substantial point of view either.

action, as responding to subjective contents through the given or redefined supra-subjective horizon of thinkability, sociability, and agency of social contexts.

By starting from these added descriptive premises regarding the ontology of both the social world, human subjectivity and recognition, it should be possible to conclude, without giving any normative evaluation, that the human subject is but a social individual, whose freedom cannot be thought out of the social world, if not holding on an unacceptable metaphysical ideal of absolute freedom. Human freedom and autonomous self-realization are to be always related to their social conditions, which both determine and enable the human subject. Thereby, the social theorist should describe the subject's freedom and self-realization as being feasible and reachable not *despite* social constraints and constitutive recognition, but rather *through* them. But this can be possible, and it is of essential importance for a critical theory of recognition both to maintain its critical program and overcome its critical insensitivity, only by better clarifying, first, the ontological and constitutive exchange between the human individual and its social world, and secondly, the ontological status of recognition, as the mediating point among the individual and the social world. Accordingly, a critical theory of recognition should elucidate the type of relation that recognition, even if non-ideological and devoted to the adequate realization of subjective contents, should be subsequently in order to avoid the institution of social contexts whose horizon of meaningfulness radically restricts and blocks the polyvalent capacity for action of human subjects. Thereby, the object of critique should not be recognition as such, but rather, recognition once assuming an ontological status that is "rigid," "static," or "reifying." That is to say, recognition, as constitutive in both the senses here pointed out, is to be criticized as it enables the subject but empowering it with a restricted and mechanically repetitive set of actions, emotions, and thoughts, implementing for the subject an objective status of "*non-relation*," thus of impeded transformation of itself and the social context where it finds itself "identified." The missing consideration by the positive accounts of recognition of both the other dimension of power and the strong meaning of recognition as constitutive for human subjectivity pervasively weakens their critical programs. Indeed, their normative description of recognition in terms of an "affirmation" remains entirely abstract concerning the ontological status that recognition, given the very two meanings of its constitutive role, should have in order to be distinguished and be able to critically distinguish all those cognitive contexts that turn into objectifying and reifying ones. It follows, therefore, that a critical theory of recognition, such as Honneth's, for rehabilitating the feasibility of

recognition as a critical category and strengthening its critical sensitivity towards the pathological deviations that its constitutive meaning can acquire, is compelled to address the descriptive enrichment deriving from the negative accounts of recognition.

To accomplish such an aim, we deem as fundamental, in the first instance, to refer to a descriptive ontology of power that, contrary to Sartre's and Butler's positions, does not overlap with a negativistic evaluative consideration of the social and relational status of human subjectivity. In the second instance, we want to argue that for attempting to define the ontological status of ethical recognition, a critical theory of recognition should not only descriptively account for an ontology of power. Instead, at the same time, it should rely upon an anthropological analysis of the distinctive structural transaction or interaction among the human subject and its external environment, since a mere ontology of power seems both insufficient in giving concreteness, or body and flesh, to the notion of human activity, and consequently, limited in offering a conceptual framework wherein the ontological status of recognition can acquire a more defined description.

By starting with the first point, namely, the necessity for a critical theory of recognition to rely upon a descriptive ontology of power without overlapping evaluative considerations, we want to refer to the theoretical framework that Martin Saar develops in *Power and Critique* (2010) and *Ordnung – Praxis – Subjekt. Oder: Was ist Sozialphilosophie?* (2019). In *Power and Critique*, he points out how critical theory should abandon any unilateral approach to power, as power contains various conceptual and ontological meanings indeed. In critical theory “on the one hand, there is an understanding of power as domination, whereas on the other hand, there is a concept of power as constitution. The former is concerned with the realization and subjugation of wills, whereas the latter with the unleashing and challenging of multifarious forces.”²⁵² He argues for the necessity in critical theory of a parallel consideration

²⁵² Saar, 2010, p. 11. Saar explains how domination refers to all those forms of power occurring according to an action-theoretic attitude of singular individuals or specific social or institutional groups, that is as mediated by self-consciousness and purposeful individual action, to take possession of power in terms of “having the capacity to act,” to which “the other does not have” (p. 11). Therefore, domination refers to all those relations where an identifiable “concrete other” attempts to individually possess unilaterally the capacity for constriction, thereby depriving others of their power to act. Instead, with the notion of constitutive power, according to Saar, a different dimension of power comes to the foreground, the one that is not perpetrated individualistically and with the purpose of depriving or oppressing the subject's activity. Indeed, it stands for the power of the social world, in the plurality of its overall systems or complexes of interaction, in bringing, through its symbolic, cultural, relational, and spiritual horizon that coordinates social life, the human subject to act, think and perceive according to some coordinates, empowering and allowing it to be productive of certain capacities for action and individualization.

of these two dimensions of power, with the programmatic attempt to understand the existing interrelation among the two.

Rethinking power as domination and constitution at the same time requires complex and non-reductive models of social analysis. It is only in a description along the lines that it is possible to problematise phenomena such as the coexistence of formal freedom and new deprivations of rights, the almost imperceptible complicity of subjects with evaluative and pejorative identification and the self-stabilizing character of the processes of normalization.²⁵³

To make evident the necessity for critical theory to additionally consider the notion of constitutive power, as being different but empirically linked to domination, he starts from considering constitutive power as an ontological property of the social world and existence as such. Indeed, Saar interestingly refers to power not only from a socio-ontological point of view, namely, as the kind of force that the overall social context, in its asymmetry, has on the human subject, but from an ontological and anthropological point of view either. By retrieving Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* and *Political Treatise*, Saar stresses how the Dutch philosopher identifies *potentia* as an overall ontological and anthropological feature, standing for:

the ontological constitutive force from which all the specific capacities and capabilities of a person or a thing arise. For *potentia* 'is' in a certain sense that which makes a person or a thing what they are, namely their radius of possible effects and actions in relation to other persons and things. What a person or a thing is, arises from their 'powerfulness'; this makes them what they are, that is to say, constitutes them. Understood in this way, power is not an additional characteristic of persons [...]; it is part of their constitution. [...] Not at least for these reasons, [...] Spinoza sees the possibility of a collective accumulation of the power and rights of individuals who experience a transformation and acquire a new, collective quality. The power of the State in Spinoza, [...] remains the 'power of the multitude, the *multitudinis potentia*.'²⁵⁴

Thus, power, as the powerfulness to develop, to become a specific thing or a person, thereby entailing certain effects and consequences on the outer states of affairs or situations, is something that constitutes and belongs to any form of life, without being acquired additionally or at a secondary moment. From this ontological assumption, it follows that the human being is constituted by power because it is structurally a source of power for action but resulting relationally from the bilateral exchange of possibilities for empowerment occurring among the human being and the external context. Namely, the power or the will to be of the social subject

²⁵³ Saar, 2010, p. 17

²⁵⁴ Saar, 2010, p. 11.

stems from the possibility of external things (the natural environment, the social context, and the other subjects) to be acted upon, as well as the possibility for the subject to materially manifest its power to act is due to the power of the external world (the natural environment, the social context, and the other subjects) to act and have some effect on the human subject, being thus framed into a process of passive change and transformation that entails a development of its capacity to act.²⁵⁵

The interesting aspect of Saar's approach, thus, is to descriptively and normatively conceive the human being, the interactions with other subjects, and the social context as constituting a network of exchange of power to act. Indeed, social life is to be descriptively conceived as a chain of the power to act upon, have effects, consequences on external things, in a nutshell, to transform external things, situations, persons, groups while entailing the acquisition by them of further possibilities for power, namely, for chances of transformation, in an endless transaction of possibilities for agency. Accordingly, following Spinoza, Saar outlines an ontology of power, gathering all forms of life, from nature, to the human being, to the social world, that portrays existence as such as the power to act, to bring about transformation according to both a passive and active logic, that is, the possibility to be acted upon being empowered for further capacities to act, and the possibility to act upon the external world empowering it with new possibilities for transformation, which are going to disclose a new chain of chances for action and transformation. Therefore, he does not conceive power as ontologically opposed to a metaphysically positive ideal of human freedom as indeterminacy or absolute possibility for self-determinacy. Instead, he conceives human freedom precisely as relying upon the power of the human being to partake in the chain and exchange of power investing the entire external world, which includes other subjects and the overall structures and frameworks that regulate societies and are reproduced relationally. According to his perspective, to become a human subject in a social context means both to be entailed by the external world with a certain power to act and to bring about a consequent transformation on the social context, disclosing relationally further possibilities for action. Therefore, his conception of human society is entirely relied upon the notion of constitutive power. Nonetheless, power is conceived as an ontological property of life in general, and, moreover,

²⁵⁵ Apart from Spinoza, Saar refers to the similar conception of the "power to act" that Hannah Arendt developed in *On Violence* (1969). Indeed, in her reflections on the nature of the social world, she reserves a central role in the anthropological notion of power but understood as "not a feature of persons but of the constitutive space of interpersonal relations; power is the medium of the social" (Saar, 2010, p. 12).

as a relational property that, belonging to human subjects, social interactions, and social contexts only within a context of interrelation, should maintain a status of permanent transaction and exchange, with a progressive creativity and disclosure of possibilities for transformations.

It should be evident how Saar derives the normative dimension for critique and conflict directly from this descriptive understanding of the constitutive power that relationally transits and progresses in social life, among individual persons, social interactions, and social and cultural structures. As he further points out in *Ordnung – Praxis – Subjekt. Oder: Was ist Sozialphilosophie?*, critical social analysis should precisely intervene and critically approach human societies as this chain or transaction of power among all the levels of human societies – the level of social structures or order, the level of interactions, the level of subjectivity²⁵⁶ – becomes unilateral, thus, petrified, stuck, bringing about pathological phenomena to be considered in terms of ontological deformations of the exchange of power belonging to existence as such. Such pathological phenomena can be analytically related, firstly, to the level of social structures and their frameworks of reference,²⁵⁷ in the form not only of repressive social domination but also of “tightening” and “over-structuring” the entire social world.

A social context becomes a context of domination [...] when it abandons what excludes, when it distributes unilaterally the possibilities of both action and interaction *or* structures the latter systematically. In these conditions, classes, aggregations, gender groups – or to put it differently, the powerful – dominate. Nonetheless, this is not to be necessarily personified. Social philosophy is interested in the effects of both domination, social tightening and over-structuring that run the entire social world.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ In *Ordnung – Praxis – Subjekt. Oder: Was ist Sozialphilosophie?*, Saar outlines his account of social philosophy, namely, the philosophical branch devoted to criticizing the pathological phenomena occurring at the level of the relation of the social subject with the social world in the form of power relations. In order to provide it, he first identifies the three ontological levels constituting the social world, the level of structures, the level of practices, and the level of subjectivity, then identifying the three pathological phenomena, or forms of social power, that can occur among these three ontological levels.

²⁵⁷ With “social structure” or “order,” Saar refers, following Weber’s idea of *Vergesellschaftung* (*Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, 1921-1922), Berger and Luckmann (*The Social Construction of Reality*, 1980) and Searle (*The Construction of Social Reality*, 1995), to the overall symbolic and material unity that coordinates the social world, which “makes possible that in a society certain phenomena (such as education, work, consumption, the image of itself, the relationship with nature, the approach to history) occur with and take a certain form rather than another” (Saar, 2019, p. 128. Translation mine).

²⁵⁸ Saar, 2019, p. 132. (Translation mine). With the level of social practices and interactions, Saar attempts to identify that social level wherein the symbolic and material framework of the social world is “done” practically by the agents of the social world, who become, therefore, co-authors of the social world by not mechanically reproducing it but transforming it through their creative capacity for action. Retrieving Giddens (*The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, 1966) and Castoriadis (*The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 1975), Saar conceives of the level of practices as the locus wherein the dialectic between institution and instituted becomes effective.

Secondly, the level of social interactions among subjects and social groups, organized in forms of social practices and social relations, stands for a series of forms of practice and capacities for action, but with the pathological risk that “a form of practice, as such open and polyvalent, can turn out into a restricted and determined form of action, [...] with an unnecessary impediment of its horizon of possibilities,” thus becoming “a normalized and regular form of activity.”²⁵⁹ Finally, the third and micro-level whereby pathological phenomena can occur is the one of subjectivity, whose self-understanding and self-realization occurs through the symbolic, spiritual, and practical horizon enacted by the structures and interactions of the social world, but with the retro-active possibility to change and transform both interactions, structures, and their horizon of possibilities.²⁶⁰ Here, the pathological moment springs from the *subjection* of the human being to the social world, namely, from the “subjugation” and determination of its capacity for creative transformation to the norms, the categories, the statuses, the values, and the aims of the structures, frameworks, and interactions of the social world, which impede the subjects from *deviating* explosively and creatively from the determinations of the social world.

To conclude, with regards to Saar’s descriptive approach to constitutive power, we want to stress the difference that distinguishes it from the descriptive approaches previously taken into analysis. These, indeed, prove to be not evaluatively neutral. Indeed, their social ontology of power, relying upon the notion of constitutive power, entails from the outset a description of human subjectivation, recognition, and the social world that is not neutral from evaluative considerations, as the terms “existence-in-subordination” or “being-for-others,” and “objectification” or “subjection for stubborn attachment,” suggest. Instead, Saar confers to the notion of constitutive power the evaluative and critical evaluation of “subjection” once the human subject is impeded in the social context, through this latter’s symbolic and material framework and consequent social structures and interactions, to extend “existing spaces of possible action and the constitution of social life [...] for new ways of acting and ‘being in the world’.”²⁶¹ Hence, according to us, Saar’s approach can represent a philosophical and critical

²⁵⁹ Saar, 2019, p. 132. (Translation mine).

²⁶⁰ Saar strongly claims that social philosophy needs to maintain the level of the individual subject, since “a social philosophy without a conceptual space for the self is not a real social philosophy (only a theory of the system). [...] What should interest social philosophy is the subject framed into a social framework where he exists and self-conceives only in relations with other individuals, being directed and channelled but, at the same time, directing and channelling itself” (Saar, 2019, p. 130. Translation mine).

²⁶¹ Saar, 2010, p. 16.

perspective that is based on the notion of “constitutive power,” underlining the reciprocal impact and co-constitution of the social world and human subjectivities. Nonetheless, he maintains it without directly entailing a negativistic understanding of the subject’s relational existence, rather interpreting such a relationality as the ultimate condition for the power to act belonging to any existing thing as such. For Saar, critical theory should enrich its concept of power indeed, flanking the notion of constitutive power to the one of domination, in order to theoretically consider, detect, and retrace the progressive blockage and petrification of the exchange of the power to act circulating among human subjects through their interactions with others and the social world.

Therefore, the contribution that we think his ontology of power gives to the previously presented opposition among “positive” and “negative” theories of the social world and recognition lies in its evaluatively neutral understanding of the relational and social existence of human subjectivity but with the added awareness of the very fact that human subjects and social life are ontologically based on the power to act. Such a descriptive consideration of constitutive power, not taken into analysis from the mainstream paradigm of recognition is of a fundamental importance, for a twofold reason.

In the first instance, his ontology of constitutive power allows, from a general point of view, a “positive” critical theory of recognition to disclose a second dimension of the subjects’ social subjugation. He indeed describes power as an ontological and constitutive feature of existence and, for what concerns us, of the human being, as the *capacity* or *power* to act. This power to act, nonetheless, is not an individual property but rather a relational one. It occurs only through the relation of the subject with its social world, as it is the capacity to act that emerges according to the power of the external world to have effects and consequences upon the subject while disclosing to it a range of possibilities for action and, thereby, of respective transformation of the external world as well. From a descriptive point of view, power is a constitutive ontological element of the subject’s life and manifests as a form of dynamic chain and fluid exchange wherein the polyvalence and creativity of possibilities to act grows accordingly. Therefore, critical social theory does not consider equally and unconditionally any social situation or context as an object of critique as such, as impeding the subject to be *absolutely* free and autonomous in its self-realization. Instead, it is equipped with a descriptive overview that accompanies the unavoidable sociality and relationality of the human subject with the awareness that human freedom, as a power to act, relationally emerges in the fluid

transaction of reciprocal determination and transformation with the external world. From such descriptive premises, it follows that social critique is required to be critical not only of relational contexts of domination, but as well of those relational contexts that *weaken* such a fluid transaction of power and growing possibility and polyvalence to act, over-structuring and channelling the human being's transformative and empowering activity through an extremely fixed material and symbolic horizon. The notion of domination refers to the unequal and exclusive possession from an individual entity (individual, social group, institution) of the power of determination and constriction of other subjects, depriving them of their very capacity to act. Whereas the notion of constitutive power makes it possible to identify those social contexts wherein the capacity for action of the social subjects is not manifestly impeded or ideologically obstructed, but where, instead, their capacity for action is over-structurally and statically channelled into inert social contents, social categories, and social statuses. In a nutshell, objects of criticism are also those social contexts where the subject is *powerfully* determined into forms of self-individuation and identification through an overall material and symbolic social framework that, even if empowering and enabling, nonetheless blocks and impedes the subjects' power to creatively and dynamically experience other possibilities for action and being-in-the-world, to transformatively be acted upon and act upon the social worlds and its mediating social interactions.

In the second instance, such a descriptive enrichment turns out to be fundamental also for further reflecting on recognition. Saar's description of constitutive power, which allows the critical theorist to maintain the critical insight of "negative" accounts of social freedom while refusing its radicality, and to enrich the descriptive framework of "positive" accounts of social freedom thus strengthening their critical sensitivity, entails also the necessity for any critical theory of recognition to rethink the *ontological status* of recognition. Although Saar does not directly analyze the theoretical consequences that his ontology of power can have for the debate on recognition, we think, nonetheless, that a reflection on constitutive power cannot but entail the necessity for a critical theory of recognition to rethink not only the ontology of existence, but of ethical recognition as well, that is, its fundamental critical category.

Indeed, we have previously seen how a positive account of the social world and social freedom, as Honneth's, assumes that recognition, if not entrenched manifestly or ideologically with domination, ensures an *absolutely* free and autonomous self-realization of human beings, regardless of the stronger meaning actually belonging to its constitutive role for human

subjectivity, that only a concept of constitutive power can highlight. This latter indeed occurs in terms of an affirmation of social subjects' contents, and even if standing for an adequate and non-ideological affirmation, it is however mediated both by already existing or redefined supra-subjective contents, which empower while determining the individual subjects or groups with a specific horizon of thinkability, imagination, and possibilities for action. In the absence of a consideration of the constitutive power relationally exchanged between the social subject and its social context, recognition cannot but remain undefined with respect to its being the relational mediation through which the subject is both determined and empowered by the social world. And critical social theory cannot but remain critically insensitive and blind to those relations of recognition that are not *per se* unjust, repressive, and constrictive but rather static and lifeless, because they petrify and reify the subject's power to respectively be transformed and transform its social world through a polyvalent and creative capacity for action.

Instead, the negative accounts of recognition, descriptively relying upon a notion of constitutive power, nonetheless conflate such a descriptive concept with a normative ideal of absolute freedom, thereby considering any form of recognition as a relational mediation leading to a *subjection* of the subject to its social context, thus impeding the possibility for a critical theory of recognition to consider recognition as a relation that actually allows the subject to realize itself *freely* and *autonomously*. Although such approaches permit the recovery of both an overlooked but fundamental dimension of the relational constitution between the subject and its social context, i.e., constitutive power, and the role that recognition plays in allowing this constitutive exchange between the two, they end up falling into a sort of critical ineffectiveness, due to their evaluatively-biased description. Indeed, since they present recognition from the outset and unconditionally as a form of subjection of the subject to its social world, they cannot but ultimately consider, without gradations, any relation of recognition as an equal object of critique. Thus, they cannot distinguish the ontologically unavoidable sociality of the human being and the constitutive role of recognition from those social relations of recognition whose constitutive role becomes effectively problematic, leading to an extremely *powerful* determination, petrification, reification of the subjects' possibilities for action and creative transformation of the symbolic and practical horizon of its social context.

Saar's contribution to constitutive power indirectly makes evident how the strategy to dampen the opposite understanding of recognition provided by these two approaches, while maintaining the feasibility for critical theory to refer to a critical category of recognition,

sensitive to the pathological distortions of constitutive power, is necessarily a clarification of the *ontological status* of ethical recognition as being a constitutive relationship. Indeed, a critical theory of recognition is supposed not only to be aware of the dimension of constitutive power in social and human existence, thus being critically sensitive when the fluid exchange of power among the levels of the social becomes powerfully channelled and creatively restricting. Moreover, it is required to update also the ontological status of recognition due to the two meaningful shades of its constitutive role. Indeed, we have pointed out that recognition is constitutive both in the weak sense, for it is a confirming mediation in whose absence the subject is prevented from realizing its personal contents. And in a strong sense, for it is a confirming *social* mediation, which, in such an affirmation, conveys supra-subjectively existing or redefined social categories, meanings, and statuses, thereby partly constituting *substantially* and conferring a *defined* shape to subjective contents. If recognition, as pointed out by negative approaches, stands for the primary mediation by which the social world constitutes the human subject, and if we rely upon Saar's evaluatively-neutral understanding of constitutive power, we can thereby suggest that, due to such ontological reflections, the ontological status of recognition is one of "*transaction of power*." That is, recognition is to be the relational mediation by which the exchange of power occurring among the subject and the social world can actually occur and be maintained. Once clarified the two meanings of recognition's constitutive role for subjectivity, the ontological status belonging to ethical recognition, as allowing the subject to *autonomously* self-realize in and through the social context, can be elucidated by pointing out that it is to be a confirming mediation occurring in the form of a transaction of power. Indeed, it should disclose to the subject forms of positive social determinations, identifications, and individuations but conversely and retrospectively enabling the power for action of the human subject, namely, its capacity to transform and develop them creatively and dynamically. Understanding the *kind* of relationship that recognition is and should be for maintaining a dynamic and unfossilized exchange of power among the social subjects and their social world is essential for a critical theory of recognition in order to distinguish ethical recognition from all those wrong forms of recognition that we can define and feel as "wrong" not because they are *per se* unjust, repressive and suppressive. But rather, because they *powerfully* empower the subject's capacity for creative action, enabling it with a symbolic and material horizon that, nonetheless, over-structures, over-channels, over-defines its power for polyvalent activity, turning the subject into an object to manipulate and

normalize, deprived of its capacity of undertaking a reciprocal process of transformation with its external world.

We could define this latter category of recognitive relationships as “lifeless,” “reifying,” or “alienating,” for they stand for an ontological exaggeration of the constitutive power of recognition, to be criticized as entailing both an objective blockage of social life and its members, and, as well, subjective feelings and practical statuses of “loss of power” on and within the social context, inertia, passivity, and lack of understanding. We want to use the adjective “alienating” for referring to the ontological distortion of the status of recognition, due to an exaggeration of its constitutive power, with the meaning of “alienation” outlined by Rahel Jaeggi.²⁶² With alienation, she indeed conceives a status of human subjectivity of “relation of nonrelation or relation of relationlessness” with the social world, the other subjects, and thus, with itself. This subjective status stands for a distortion of the human subject’s relational structure of appropriation of its social context and social interactions.²⁶³ Using different philosophical traditions than Saar’s, such as Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Simmel, and Tugendhat, Jaeggi considers alienation as the subjective pathological status, both emotional and practical, of powerlessness, namely, of loss of transformative and creative power towards existing social frameworks. Jaeggi’s common point with Saar’s description of constitutive power and its pathological deviation consists in considering alienation as different from domination, for it remains a subjective form of relationality with the social world not entailing an oppression and repression of the human being’s possibility for action, but rather a form of relation revealing to be repetitive, performative, and reproductive of existing social frameworks. Jaeggi’s

²⁶² Jaeggi, 2014, p. 25. In *Alienation*, Jaeggi attempts to recover the critical category of “alienation” and to re-actualize it for critical social theory, presenting it as a fundamental concept to refer to a form of social oppression that, paradoxically, is assumed and perpetrated by the social subjects itself. By abandoning the essentialist understandings of alienation in terms of the abandonment or loss by the individual of its substantial nature or identity due to social causes, Jaeggi proposes to formalize such a pathological phenomenon of the social subject’s life by conceiving it as a loss by the individual of a specific structural relation with its social world, and consequently with itself and other subjects, the one of “relation of appropriation.” “These relations of appropriation must be understood as productive relations, as open processes in which appropriation always means both the integration and transformation of what is given. Alienation is a failure to apprehend, and a halting of, the movement of appropriation” (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, according to Jaeggi, alienation is to be considered as the pathological turning of the subject’s structural relation of appropriation of its social world (categories, practices, institutions) into a form of relation that, nonetheless, stands for a non-relation, since the subject is impeded in its capacity of creative reformulation and transformation of the social environment.

²⁶³ See Jaeggi, 2014, p. 22: “Alienation is tied to the problem of a loss of meaning; an alienated life is one that has become impoverished or meaningless, but it is a meaninglessness that is intertwined with powerlessness and impotence. Alienation is (therefore) a relation of domination, but of a kind that is not captured by standard descriptions of unfreedom and heteronomy. Alienation means disconnectedness or alienness, but an alienness that differs from simple relationlessness.”

description in terms of alienation of the subjective status deriving from a social obstruction of the power to act of social members, due to the instantiation of social frameworks and consequent social structures and interactions that over-determine, over-channel, over-structure their capacity for creative and transformative activity, can be useful for a twofold reason. On the one hand, it allows the status of the human subject into over-constitutive social contexts to be expressively stressed in terms of a “relation of nonrelation”, thereby underlining how in such a context of subjugation the subject is not entirely deprived of its capacity for action and productive action. Instead, it is involved in a unilateral relation of reproduction of existing social contexts, in their frameworks and structures, without the possibility to turn such a relation into one of respective appropriation and transformation of social contexts. On the other hand, Jaeggi’s concept of alienation permits us to shift its meaning also to recognition, thereby considering as wrong those recognitive relationships whose ontological status of “transaction of power” turns into an alienating form, determining in the subject a status of “relation of nonrelation.” That is, they are “wrong” or “unethical” not because they are repressive, but rather because they stand for relational mediations that entail the possibility for the subject to instantiate a relation with its social world while not allowing the human subject to undertake a progressively creative transformation of the descriptive and normative meanings that the social world confers to its subjective contents.

At this point in our argument, we have concluded that:

I. A critical theory of recognition willing to employ such a category as a critical tool for the analysis of human societies, such as Honneth’s, should consider power not only in terms of domination but also of constitutive power. Indeed, the “negative” accounts of recognition, despite their problematic radicality, suggest the necessity to unveil the strong meaning of the constitutive role that the social context and recognition, as one of the primary devices of the former, have for the human being’s subjectivation and individuation. The constitutive role of recognition is not limited to standing for the social condition of affirmation in the absence of which the subject is impeded in developing its subjective contents. Moreover, its constitutive role occurs as well under a more substantial meaning, as it partly determines while enabling the capacity for action of the subject, since its subjective contents can acquire a social acknowledgment and a normative stance only once they are mediated and integrated into the given or redefined supra-subjective symbolic framework that coordinates social life. The notion of constitutive power, thus, is fundamental for unveiling an overlooked meaning of recognition

as constitutive for human subjectivity, but nonetheless it cannot be considered within the radical and evaluatively biased theoretical framework provided by the negative accounts of recognition we have taken into analysis. Their descriptive framework of constitutive recognition is indeed conflated with an *a priori* normative ideal of human freedom as indeterminacy and absolute creativity, which entails that, from the very descriptive beginning, recognition is unconditionally conceived as a form of determination, objectification, and reification of human activity, involving the human being's subjection to the social world. The descriptive framework of constitutive power and recognition that such approaches outline, therefore, proves to be problematic both from a descriptive and normative point of view. Indeed, it turns the human being's ontological sociality and relationality into a problem as such and prevents the theorist from critically distinguishing those relationships of recognition whose constitutive role effectively becomes problematic for the human capacity for creative action.

II. We have argued, therefore, for the necessity for a critical theory of recognition to find out a descriptive framework of constitutive power suitable to enrich while critically strengthening its theoretical framework, rather than jeopardizing both its critical program and the emancipatory ideal of ethical recognition. We have identified in Saar's ontology of power such a descriptive framework. He presents indeed the "power to act" as an ontological part of existence, thus of the human being too. It belongs to any entity relationally, as the capacity respectively to be acted upon by the external world while finding out new potentialities for creative and transformative action. The human subject, thus, ontologically possesses the power to act, which occurs in the form of a reciprocal continuous transformation with the social world. Saar's descriptive framework, therefore, considers constitutive power – or the power to act, related both to an active and passive logic – as standing for the very possibility for the human being's freedom, as freedom is presented as the capacity to be enabled by external circumstances in order to have a transformative and polyvalent action upon them. From such descriptive considerations, it follows that a critical theory of recognition is not supposed to abandon a positive account of social freedom nor an ethical ideal of recognition. Instead, by being equipped with this notion of power, theory is to be critical of those social contexts wherein the exchange of power to act among the subjects and the external world gets blocked, stuck, where, therefore, the social world, in its symbolic framework and the structures and interactions that enact it, over-structured, over-determined, over-channelled the subject's capacity to

progressively develop its subjective contents and to creatively transform the social context with human activity, which as such is to be open and polyvalent.

III. This notion of constitutive power of social contexts proves to be an essential descriptive acknowledgement for a critical theory of recognition since, first, it allows the latter to consider problematic not all social contexts as such, but rather those social contexts wherein the power of the human subjects to act, both in its passive and active logic, is obstructed, weakened, *powerfully* determined in relation to its possibility for polyvalent, creative, and transformative activity due to over-structuring and over-channelling social frameworks, structures, and interactions. Secondly, it indirectly entails the necessity for a critical theory of recognition to clarify the *ontological status* of recognition. That is, the *kind* of relationship that it should be in order to stand and *remain* ethical and to be distinguished while critically detecting all those recognitive relationships turning into lifeless, reifying, and alienating relations of recognition, which, despite being not oppressive and repressive, weaken the creative and transformative development of human activity within and towards the social context.

We have concluded that, with Saar's descriptive ontology of power on the background, it could be possible to enrich the description of ethical recognition, which in Honneth's account of recognition is abstractly defined as a form of positive affirmation, by clarifying its *ontological status* in terms of a *transaction of power to act*. That is, recognition can be considered as a relation devoted to socially determine subjective contents by integrating them into given or redefined symbolic social frameworks, through the conferral of descriptive and normative categories, statuses, roles, and values. Nonetheless, it should not stand for a unilateral interaction of power, of the recognizer to the recognizee, which spatializes, objectifies, and reifies the subject's contents and its relational capacity for creative action. Rather, it must empower the subject to progressively develop the further potentialities for action deriving from such social forms of individuation and identification, by transforming and creatively enriching the social framework that enables its social individuation and identification, in a nutshell, by appropriating the social world where it lives. Moreover, also by referring to Jaeggi's concept of alienation, we have seen how, conversely, all those wrong relationships of recognition that do not allow the subject to develop its power to act in the social context, can be considered as lifeless, reifying, or alienating forms of recognition. Indeed, they allow the subject to instantiate a relationality with the social context, but of mere repetition and mechanical re-enactment of the social world's contents, without entailing the possibility for the individual to respectively

appropriate, in a progressive manner, its defining social roles, categories, and statuses, through the transformative potential of its creative capacity for action.

IV. As the last and conclusive point of our argument, we want nonetheless to underline a still problematic aspect with respect to the enrichment of a critical theory of recognition with a descriptive ontology of power, as the one of Saar, thereby suggesting the necessity for a further theoretical element in order to strengthen the theoretical framework of a critical theory of recognition, like the one proposed by Honneth.

For sure Saar's ontology of power can enrich the mainstream paradigm of recognition, of which Honneth's theory represents the most explicative and systematic framework, by considering a new dimension of social power. Moreover, it represents an expansion of Honneth's anthropological framework and description of recognition as well. From an anthropological point of view, it outlines a description of the human subject and its capacity for action with at least two more elements. First, the human subject's capacity for action is not considered only in its conscious, reflexive, voluntary, and intentional dimension, but as well in its passive, unintentional, pre-reflexive, and unconscious component. Indeed, the subject's potentialities for a creative, transformative, and polyvalent activity cannot but derive from the partly determining action of the surrounding social situations. Second, we have seen also the importance that such an analysis of human action has for further reflecting on the relational category of ethical recognition, for it compels the need for the clarification of the ontological status that recognition, as a positive confirmation of the human being's subjective contents, has to maintain in order to be and remain ethical, namely, to be a transaction of power.

Nonetheless, an ontology of power, through its theoretical framework does not offer further descriptive conceptual tools in order to deeper understand what the subject's capacity for power is due to, that is to be determined by the social context while being capable to creatively and dynamically reformulate and deviate the enabling categories, statuses, and practices acknowledged by its social context. Saar refers very abstractly to the fact that power, namely, the capacity to be acted upon and act upon the external world is an ontological feature proper of existence as such, and thereby, also of the human being in relation to its social context, whose capacity for action is generally presented both as determined but as well substantially *creative, polyvalent, dynamic*. Nevertheless, such defining categories of human activity are not directly explained in their ontological reason, that is in their ontological source. What is the creativity, polyvalence, and dynamics of human activity and its contents due to, if

we do not relate it to a further anthropological explanation of human action in its development through the exchange with objectivity?

From the analyses of the previous chapters,²⁶⁴ we have seen how to really understand the normative grammar of ethical recognition we cannot avoid the relating and framing of the normative and acknowledging interactions of the human being with other subjects or groups or social contexts within a broader anthropological analysis of the conditions of human activity in its interaction with the objective world, as occurring according to a certain structural exchange that accounts both for the arousal, the realization, and the *development* of subjective contents. We have seen indeed how subjective needs, interests, and values cannot be merely considered as psychological, private, and inner contents, since they are always “attached” to the objective situations wherein the subject finds itself. And we have seen how this attachment of subjective contents to external conditions and situations cannot but suggest the necessity to more clearly understand the interactional exchange that the human being has with the external world, in order to explain the conditions that govern it, thereby clarifying how the subject’s contents both emerge, can be fulfilled and realized, and creatively develop.

It follows that in order to grasp the meaning and the source of the human subject’s creative development of the social categories by which its subjective contents or cognitive requests have been normatively and adequately recognized, it is fundamental to refer again to the interaction of the human subjects with its external world. Indeed, a theoretical framework is needed that goes deeper into an anthropological analysis of the human subject as an *embodied being* in the external world, which stands for an integral and interconnecting part of the external world. This lack of inquiry entails a difficulty for a critical theory of recognition, firstly, in theoretically unveiling and sustaining the sources of human creativity, dynamics, and polyvalence. Secondly, to accordingly provide a theoretical framework wherein the ontological status of recognition as a “transaction of power” can acquire consistence, or “body and flesh.” For recognition is a transaction of power to act creatively, but what does the subject’s creativity depend on and consist of? To answer this question, it is necessary to inquire further on the other interaction upon which human subjectivity relies, the one with the world of objectivity, on which the arousal and the development of its contents depend.

In the following chapters, therefore, we seek to introduce the broader anthropological analysis of the human being’s interaction or exchange with the external world that we think can

²⁶⁴ See Chapter Four and Five (section V.1.).

be of help in better understanding both the ontological conditions and the ontological status of ethical or normatively strong recognition, thus devoted to the self-realization and flourishing of the human subject.

We will refer, firstly, to one overlooked work of Honneth's production, written with Hans Joas, *Soziales Handeln und menschliche Natur* (1980), not subsequently developed in its theoretical novelties nor integrated by him into his reference paradigm of recognition. In this work, even if with different strategies and theoretical finalities, the issue of recognition is not considered separately from a reflection upon the structure of human action with its external environment. Rather, recognition is presented as the genetic and performative condition of the specific structural exchange that the human subject has with the external world. This is an exchange that, precisely, entails, firstly, the arousal of the subject's needs and interests from the sensuous and affective interaction with external objects and situations, as representing something valuable for its physical survival and well-being. Secondly, it entails the human capacity to intelligently process its affective and needy feelings towards external objects and situations by reformulating them through symbolic unities, that is, meanings and knowledge, devoted to grasping the grounding properties and conditions of external objects and situations. Finally, human processes of signification and knowledge are considered not purely theoretically but pragmatically linked to identifying the forms of practice devoted to transforming external objects and situations in order to satisfy the subject's needs intelligently.

In such work, therefore, from a descriptive point of view, the human subject is recovered, firstly, in its primary natural dimension, that is, of being an embodied organism embedded within the external environment, which, as such, is dependent upon the dynamic interaction with the external world in order to self-reproduce, develop, and satisfy its needs. The retrieval of such an embodied and embedded dimension of human subjectivity is fundamental to replacing the human being in its natural dimension, standing for an entity not outside of nature, but rather in continuity with it. Indeed, to recover the human being as an organism, which constitutes, develops, and changes in the sensuous and practical interconnection with the outer world stands for an essential point of departure for reassessing, on the one hand, the affective, passive, object-related, and dynamic needy-dimension of the human subject. On the other hand, it is fundamental to understand the specific connotation that the sensuous and practical exchange of any natural organism with the external environment assumes in the human subject, as equipped with theoretical tools such as language, rationality,

and knowledge. Indeed, these distinguishing capacities of human subjects are not considered *per se*, but rather in their direct relation to the needy structure of the human organism, as entailing further capacities to grasp both the properties and the conditions governing external objects and situations, and consequently the practical transformation suitable to change the objective world for the satisfaction of the subject's needs. Accordingly, Honneth and Joas identify the quality of human activity in the external world in terms of a *humanization of nature*, wherein the subject both humanizes nature for satisfying its needs, but at the same time sensuously, intelligently, and practically enforces the interconnection of all living entities and its being a part of nature.

The further interesting part of such an anthropological description of human action is that recognition appears in its descriptive and normative interdependence with it. Indeed, in this work, recognition appears as both the genetic and performative condition of this humane quality of action with the external world. That is, it is the relational mediation that is fundamental for the subject both for developing and performing such a kind of qualitative transaction with the world of objectivity. Indeed, the humane satisfaction and enforcement of the subject's needy dimension occurs according to the social intelligent mediation and processing of the objective properties and conditions of the external world that determine and sustain this neediness, and in the following practical governance and transformation of them. Recognition, here expressed through the formula of "taking the perspective of the other subject," stands for the relational mediation by which subjects reciprocally take the perspective of the needy experience of the other subject in its sensuousness, consequently attempting to intelligently understand it while accordingly satisfy it practically through the transformation of the external world.

Nevertheless, Honneth has not further elaborated this naturalistic theory of human action and recognition nor he has subsequently attempted to integrate it with his mature paradigm of recognition in order to strengthen it with respect to the criticisms aroused against the contemporary paradigm of recognition. The "underdeveloped" aspect of his reflections, thus, relies upon a twofold reason. The first one, as we will see, is that, to outline this broader philosophical anthropology of human action, Honneth and Joas refer to a variety of philosophical contributions highlighting respectively different aspects of human activity in its relation with the external world, without thus disposing of a systematic naturalistic understanding of the human being. We will see how their reflections on human inter-objective interactions with the external world remain somehow "scattered," therefore incapable of

standing for a systematic theory of human experience or active exchange with the external world. In fact, we will argue that they are not suited either to account in depth for the transformative meaning of human activity or to give reason to the *relentless* dynamics existing between the objective situations of the external world and the functional role of human subjectivity in “humanizing” them.

In the second instance, the placement, in *Social Action and Human Nature*, of recognition in a broader naturalistic anthropology has not entailed a consequent descriptive and normative redefinition by Honneth of the paradigm of recognition, both for what concerns its constitutive mechanism, its genus, its ontological conditions, and ontological status, to then be employed for dealing with the problems of the mainstream paradigm of recognition.

Once the alternative methodology and sketched anthropology of this work of Honneth and Joas, that we deem as interesting for a redefinition of recognition, have been presented, we seek to present, given the limitations of this underdeveloped project, the naturalistic anthropology outlined by a pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, with three theoretical aims. The first is to present his pragmatist social philosophy as relying upon the category of recognition, with certain common points with Honneth’s theory of *The Struggle for Recognition*, but with a naturalistic anthropology at its base. The second one is to present his Naturalistic Humanism as a conceptual framework wherein the exchange between the human being and its external world is theoretically deepened in its naturalistic meaning and relentless dynamic. The third one is to highlight the place that Dewey confers to recognition in such an anthropological framework and the consequent critical meaning that the category of recognition acquires in his social philosophy. From it, we will thus emphasize the consequent theoretical enrichment and contribution that Dewey’s naturalistic anthropology, which refers to recognition in its role for the inter-objective interactions of the human subject, can provide for a contemporary theory of recognition, helping to address the challenges of its criticisms.

Accordingly, what we will attempt to propose is to consider the category of recognition not independently from the human subject’s natural existence, that is, its embodied and embedded existence within an external environment, but rather, in its constitutive role for realizing it. For a contemporary critical theory, to integrate its current paradigm of recognition, of Honnethian setting, with Dewey’s broader and naturalistic anthropological framework would disclose the theoretical path:

i) to reconsider the constitutive mechanism of ethical recognition for human subjectivity. This would not be limited to the development in the human subject of a positive relation-to-self but would also entail the possibility for the subject to develop its qualitative exchange with the external world, that is to “humanize” external and internal nature. The conditions of human activity, i.e., being an intelligent practical transformation of objective conditions suitable to strengthen the living interaction between the human being and its external world and its intrinsic dynamism, would further normatively clarify, on the one hand, the ontological conditions of recognition. Recognition, to be ethically devoted to sustaining the self-realization of human subject’s, namely, the flourishing of its subjective contents, would be compelled to stand for the sensuous, cognitive, and practical response adequate to sustain the rational processing of the subjects’ affective and sensuous needs in their objective conditions, with the consequent transformation of external situations suitable to satisfy them and, thus, to implement the conscious humanizing interaction of the subject with the external world.

On the other hand, the ontological status of recognition, which through Saar’s ontology of power can be conceived as a “transaction of power,” namely, as a conferral to the human subject of the capacity to creatively transform and change the descriptive and normative categories socially conferred to it to acknowledge its recognitive requests and contents publicly, would be more deeply defined. In the first instance, by recovering the naturally organic and embodied dimension of the human subject, it is possible to directly give reason and refer the source of the creativity of the subject’s contents to its dynamic and developing exchange with the external world, which occurs sensuously, pervasively, affectively, and emotionally. By means of an anthropological analysis that more deeply analyzes human activity in its interaction with the world of objectivity, it seems possible, thus, to give reason and meaning to the creative and transformative power that an ontology of power assumes that the human being exerts towards the descriptive and normative social categories identifying their subjective contents. It seems possible to more clearly understand and thereby socially sustain the source of such a humane creativity. Lastly, there is the possibility to give more concreteness to the ontological status of recognition as a “transaction of power.” Indeed, through such a theoretical framework, recognition can be considered as a transaction of power to act in view of a further sensuous and meaningful exchange of the human being with the external world. Therefore, it can be highlighted in its being a relational mediation that does but participate and enable the living relationship of the human being with the external world. Hence, recognition ceases to be

considered a mere societal or subjective transaction by acquiring a meaning for existence in general.

ii) to enrich the definition of recognition, namely, its *genus*. The latter, instead of being narrowly phrased in terms of “the positive affirmation of human subjectivity” or “the taking of the other as a person with normative dispositions,” would be also reconsidered as “a reconciliation of the human being, as an embodied subject, with the world” or as a “function of the human being’s life.”

iii) to strengthen the theoretical tools for detecting the inadequate or normatively weak forms of recognition discussed previously, namely, ideological and lifeless/reifying/alienating recognition. The compelling questions that such forms of recognition pose to a paradigm of recognition in order to maintain the feasibility of its critical program are related to the clarification of the ontological conditions and the ontological status of ethical or normative recognition, both for distinguishing it and critically detecting its inadequate forms in human societies. Through such a broader anthropological framework and the normative considerations it allows a critical theorist to draw concerning the ontological conditions and the ontological status of recognition, it would be possible to criticize those recognitive relations that impede the human subject to perform its distinguishing qualitative transaction with the external world. Indeed, we have seen how these two inadequate categories of recognitive relations actually permit the subject to develop a positive experience or relation-to-self in the social context. Nevertheless, their normative inadequacy could be related to the conditions characterizing the human being’s qualitative action in the external context, intelligent transformation and creative dynamism.

With regards to the first category of inadequate recognitive relationships, namely, ambiguous or ideological relations of recognition, their normative inadequateness can be reformulated and detected in terms of an inadequate normative response to the subject’s contents. That is, they fail to offer the adequate learning process suitable to grasp from a theoretical and practical point of view the objective conditions of the external world that are to be transformed and instantiated in order to allow the meaningful and practical satisfaction of the subject’s needs, and hence, the enhancement and reinforcement of the subject’s successful sensuous, cognitive, and practical interaction with the external world.

With regards to the second category, concerning the lifeless/reifying/alienating recognitive relationships, such a naturalistic anthropological framework allows the theorist to

criticize all those recognitive relationships that are resistant to stand for a transaction of “living” power, namely, for a living relational mediation. That is to say that they fail to entail the further living and creative relation of the human subject with external situations by adjusting to and allowing the sensuous and meaningful projection of its subjective contents. Recognition, in its pathological status, dismisses its role of enriching mediation of the human subject’s exchange with the external world.

Chapter Six. Intermediate Reflections. Honneth's Unresearched Path in Social Action and Human Nature

We seek now to analyze *Soziales Handeln und menschliche Natur* (1980), the overlooked work wherein Honneth, with Hans Joas, has developed a different approach, both theoretical and methodological, to the issue of recognition.²⁶⁵ We will see indeed how, here, Honneth does not programmatically start with a unilateral analysis of recognition, as the primary relationship for human subjectivity's self-realization. Instead, he begins with the study on human action in relation to the external environment, that is, on the relationship that the human subject instantiates with the objective world and from which it is possible to define the subject's specific capacity for action.

As regards such a theoretical framework, two fundamental points are to be stressed. The first one is that the human being is recovered in its primary natural dimension, namely, its being a natural bodily organism that, for its self-reproduction and self-development, is dependent, as other living organisms, on the interaction with external objects. Such a recovery is essential to understand both the human subject's continuity with nature and the specific outcome that its naturalness and relationship with the outer world assumes. The second point is that recognition, as the relational mediation of affirmation among subjects, is not considered here regardless of the other relational pole of human subjectivity, namely, its interaction with the external world. Rather, recognition is framed within a broader human anthropology that, before considering the typologies of the practical dimensions of human subjectivity, delves into the non-essentialist and formal analysis of the specific qualitative exchange of the human being with the external world. Through such a theoretical and methodological strategy, recognition is now considered according to its functionality for the quality of the human organism's action in the external world.

²⁶⁵ The references to *Social Action and Human Nature* in the secondary studies mainly occur within the works devoted to reconstructing Honneth's critical theory and critical project, see for instance Deranty, 2005, 2009; Petherbridge, 2013. Instead, in the contemporary debate on recognition and on the contributions and limits of Honneth's critical theory to such an issue, the attention is focused on his mature works, in the first instance, *The Struggle for Recognition* and *Freedom's Right*.

What we want to argue, therefore, is that, within this theoretical framework, the ontological conditions and the ontological status of recognition can be further clarified in light of the qualitative structure characterizing the human subject's exchange with the external world, and thereby in view of a depiction of the human being as a bodily subject, embedded into an objective world according to specific conditions. The theoretical potentialities for a critical theory of recognition contained in *Soziales Handeln und menschliche Natur*, which is positioned at the very beginning of Honneth's philosophical production,²⁶⁶ had not been rendered explicit nor developed nor integrated into his mainstream theory of recognition by Honneth. Hence, in the following sections, we aim at analysing the methodological and theoretical novelties of this work by pointing out and enlightening, firstly, their critical potential to enrich and strengthen the mainstream paradigm of recognition. Secondly, their unsystematic and scattered conceptual ground, which, in order to be employed to critically enforce the ontological grammar of normative recognition needs a systematic and coherent anthropological and socio-philosophical project, which we will argue can be found in John Dewey's *Naturalistic Humanism* and social philosophy.

VI. 1. Human activity as the Humanization of Nature

In *Social Action and Human Nature*, Honneth attempted to sum up with the pragmatist Hans Joas the theoretical reflections about human action they had developed together since the 1970s at the Free University of Berlin. They present their work in terms of a philosophical anthropology, devoted to clarifying the unchangeable preconditions of human activity in the long course of human history. The finality of their descriptive analysis on human capacity for action is to outline a normative theoretical tool for the critique of human social contexts, both in their social practices, categories, institutions, and scientific frameworks.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ *Social Action and Human Nature* is the result of the theoretical reflections on human action that a young 30-year-old Honneth had developed with the pragmatist Hans Joas since the 1970s at the Free University of Berlin.

²⁶⁷ Honneth and Joas' interest in the issue of human activity takes place in the sociological and philosophical debate of the 1970s, marked, first, by the publication of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in 1932. The discovery of this juvenile writing of Marx aroused an enormous discussion among the orthodox and revisionist factions of Marxism. Indeed, the humanistic and naturalistic anthropology of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which for revisionists stood for the possibility to overcome the systemic and scientific framework of the *Capital's* social critique, represented for orthodox Marxists a threat for the international affirmation of the economic and social science of Marx's "mature" thought. Indeed, in these juvenile manuscripts, the critique of the social world proceeds in relation to a reflection on the human being's activity in the natural world, rather than from the direct analysis of the systemic forces underlying capitalist societies and their future overcoming (for an analysis

Anthropology must not be understood as the theory of constants of human cultures persisting through history, or of an inalienable substance of human nature, but rather as an enquiry into the unchanging preconditions of human changeableness. [...] Anthropology is a reflective step in the scrutiny of the suitability of social-scientific theoretical frameworks that has become autonomous.²⁶⁸

The core intention of the two authors, thus, is not to offer a substantial or essentialist definition of human action in the attempt to identify *the* type of activity that defines humanity as such, like politics (in the case of Aristotle and Hannah Arendt) or work (in the case of Marx). They are rather interested in carving out the formal structure or quality that generally characterizes the human being's capacity for action in relation to the external environment, which represents the unchangeable structure upon which relies, and through which develops, the changeableness of the human being. It follows that, from a methodological and theoretical point of view, in the first instance, the leading strategy to attain such an aim is not to compare all human cultures, but to recover the human being in its primary dimension, that is to be a natural organism embedded in an external environment, but which is, at the same time, "an upstart out of the animal kingdom."²⁶⁹ Hence, according to the two authors, the possibility to clarify not essentially or substantially the ontological category of human action is to recover the human subject in its continuity and distinction from other natural organisms for what concerns their relationship and interaction with the outer world.

In the second instance, with grasping the distinguishing quality of human activity in its interaction with the world they do not mean the mere identification of the biological and mental capacities belonging to the human subject. Instead, they literally intend to clarify the qualitative or structural type of exchange between the subject and the world of objectivity, with the

on the debate inside Marxism, see Andolfi, 1976, 2018). Secondly, those years were crossed by the philosophical critique of the traditional account of the scientific and social sciences, which began with the authors of the first and second generation of the Frankfurt School (for the critique of traditional theory and the dispute with Positivism see Horkheimer, 1937; Adorno, ed., 1976). In front of these two erroneously different debates, it opened up a critical path for Honneth and Joas. That is, to approach the critique of scientific and social sciences, devoted to describing and sustaining given social contexts, by referring to an account of human action. With the analysis of human action in its natural conditions of exchange with the external world, the two authors do not aim to provide ethnocentric or substantial definitions of human nature. But rather, they formally outline the structure of action that has been accompanying humanity in the course of its history and change, so to criticize the social and scientific framework that distance the human being from its agentive conditions.

²⁶⁸ Honneth & Joas, 1988, pp. 7-8. See the German edition, 1980, p. 13: "Anthropologie darf dabei nicht mißverstanden werden als die Lehre von sich durch die Geschichte hindurch erhaltenden Konstanten der menschlichen Kulturen oder von einer unveräußerlichen Substanz der menschlichen Natur, wohl aber im Sinne einer Frage nach den *unveränderlichen Voraussetzungen* menschlicher *Veränderlichkeit*." (Italics mine)

²⁶⁹ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 10.

identification of the ontological conditions enabling such a quality or structure of action to develop. Honneth and Joas express this qualitative type of exchange in terms of:

a humanisation of nature. This is to be understood in three ways. First, the human being *humanises nature*; that is, he transforms it into what is life-serving for himself and thereby creates, in an interknitting of the transformation of nature and the development of the human personality which requires more exact clarification, the cultural shapings of his nature. Second, the human being *humanises nature within himself* in the course of the long civilizing process that has been engaged in by the human species. Lastly, the human being himself is a humanisation of nature, being an upstart out of the animal kingdom; in the human being, nature *becomes humane*.²⁷⁰

Human activity, in its exchange with the outer world, is thus conceived as the capacity to humanize nature, that is, to transform meaningfully and creatively the external world for what is needed for the individual to survive and develop. The possibility to formally grasp the quality of the human being's interaction with the external environment lies, first, in retrieving its natural, organic, and bodily dependence on objectivity. Second, it lies in the identification of the different declination that such a dependence assumes for the human being, that is, its specific approach both to the external world – the one of transformation and humanization – and to its own natural and bodily dimension – the one of humanization of its own needs. It is feasible to observe, therefore, how Honneth and Joas attempt to outline a depiction of the human being that does not consider the latter as a subject that develops from without nature, namely, merely in relation to other subjects. Instead, they approach human subjectivity as developing from within nature and the external world. Because the human subject is a natural and organic body and develops as a subject according to and through the ontological meaning that its needy and practical interaction with the external world acquires.

In order to deeply understand human action as a humanization of nature, that is as a transformation of the external world and natural human dimension too, it is necessary, according to Honneth and Joas, to identify the ontological conditions (*Voraussetzungen*) that interdependently participate in the development of such a humanizing capacity of the human being while explaining it. Accordingly, they identify the two conditions or structural elements,

²⁷⁰ Honneth & Joas, 1988, pp. 9-10. Italics mine. See the German edition, 1980, p. 16: "Unser Ansatz [...] orientiert sich an der Perspektive einer *Humanisierung der Natur*. Dies ist in dreifachem Sinn zu verstehen. Der Mensch humanisiert die Natur, er verwandelt sie also ins Lebensdienliche und schafft in einer genaueren Klärung bedürftigen Ineinander von Naturumwandlung und Persönlichkeitsentwicklung damit die kulturellen Formungen seiner Natur. Der Mensch humanisiert die Natur in ihm selbst im Laufe des langen gattungsgeschichtlichen Zivilisationsprozess. Der Mensch ist schließlich selbst als Emporkömmling aus dem Tierreich eine Humanisierung der Natur: im Menschen wird die Natur human."

reciprocally interconnected, on which human action as “humanization of nature” is grounded in the human being’s “sensuous openness to the world” (*weltoffene Sinnlichkeit*) and “intersubjectivity” (*Intersubjektivität*). From a methodological point of view, Honneth and Joas distinguish these two elements within the text through the reconstruction and comparison of the anthropological suggestions of two main authors, Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx, who anticipated the theoretical path of many philosophical anthropologies of the 20th Century.²⁷¹

VI. 1. 1. “Sensuous Openness to the World” and “Intersubjectivity” as the Structural Ontological Conditions of Human Action: Feuerbach’s anthropological Materialism

The first author to whom Honneth and Joas confer a central role for rethinking human activity while providing a critical approach to human societies, in their social practices, institutions, and theoretical products, is Ludwig Feuerbach. Indeed, the two authors stress how Feuerbach’s anthropological materialism represented a turning point for modern philosophy, since it marked the beginning of the philosophical movement of reaction to German Idealism, namely, the Left Hegelianism. From *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie* (1839), Feuerbach argues that modern philosophy, reaching its highest point of expression in German Idealism and the figure of Hegel, has provided a depiction of human subjectivity that did but sustain the practical and existential alienation (*Selbstentäusserung*) of the human being from the ontological conditions of its species, that is, from its sensuous and bodily relation with the external world and its intersubjective status.

Feuerbach’s core critical point is that modern philosophy has misleadingly instantiated an ontological and epistemic reversal of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, being and reason, sensibility and thinking, individuality and universality. Indeed, from Descartes’ rationalism and British Empiricism, to Spinoza’s pantheism and German Idealism,

²⁷¹ *Social Action and Human Nature* is organized into three parts. The first two parts (*Anthropology and Historical Materialism, Anthropological Foundations of Human Action*) focus on the reconstruction and comparison of the philosophical-anthropological accounts that progressively cooperated in clarifying the category of human action, thus respectively accounting for ontological and qualitative aspects of human activity that Honneth and Joas attempt to gather into a unique overview. In these two parts, Honneth and Joas take into analysis a vast number of authors, from Feuerbach and Marx to George Mead, Arnold Gehlen, Helmuth Plessner, Agnes Heller, and Klaus Holzkamp. Nevertheless, Feuerbach and Marx stand as Honneth and Joas’ primary theoretical references because their anthropological insights have represented the theoretical directives further followed and developed from the other mentioned authors. Instead, the third part (*Historical Anthropology*) is dedicated to the reconstruction of the 20th century central philosophies of history that attempted to interpret human history’s process according to an anthropological reading key and a progressive and processual logic. For instance, they analyse the philosophies of history of Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas, considering problematic to read all the course of human history according to a progressive explication of anthropological traits of the human being.

he carves out a uniform and progressive attempt to confer and return to the human being its human capacities, but with the paradoxical result of distancing the individual from the very appropriation of the latter. In fact, they committed a common twofold mistake. On the one hand, modern philosophy abstractly identifies the human being with thinking (like Rationalism and Idealism) or with bare sensibility (like Empiricism), subsequently positing rationality or sensibility as the primary ontological dimensions and epistemic sources of human subjectivity. To put rationality before sensibility meant, according to Feuerbach, to sever the human being from its sensuous encounter with the external world and to detach human rationality both from the source of its truthfulness and its functionality for human life in the outer world. Instead, to identify the human being with sensibility, without conferring any stable and veridic role to its rationality, leads philosophy to negate the contribution that human rationality entails for human sensibility and, thus, for the human subject's exchange with being and the external world.

The subsequent result of these methodological and theoretical attempts to return to the human being its defining human capacities entailed, for Feuerbach, the practical internalization by human subjects of a misleading self-image that severs them from their real exchange with the external world. Through a rationalistic understanding of the human being, the human subject becomes suited to consider its rationality as the very epistemic source and validity criterion of the knowledge the external world, and as the ultimate aim of human life, and is prevented from contextualizing rationality in the sensuous dimension of human existence. From the empiricist approach to human subjectivity, the subject does reconsider rationality and knowledge in relation to its sensible encounter with the external world, but without both considering the sensuous meaning of human sensibility and the functionality of human rationality for the sensuous encounter of the human subject with external objects.²⁷²

In order to overcome these failed philosophical efforts to free human subjectivity through the conscious acknowledgment and acquisition of its human capacities, Feuerbach suggests reversing the mainstream methodological and theoretical approach of modern philosophy, which first takes the human subject as an entity "closed" in itself, severed from the

²⁷² Feuerbach develops his critique of modern philosophy at first by critically discussing Hegel's Idealism in *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie* (1839), and then by reconstructing the alienating process of modern philosophy, from its beginning with Descartes to its highest expression in German Idealism, in *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (1843). This is not the place to discuss Hegel and Feuerbach's intricate relation and to analyze in more detail Feuerbach's specific interpretation of Hegel, which could be open to some revision and perplexities. The core point of interest for us is that Honneth and Joas consider Feuerbach the beginner of a theoretical revolution in philosophy, the one dedicated to overcoming the ontological and epistemic dualisms permeating all modern philosophy.

external world, and then attempts to consider its ontological and epistemic relationship with objectivity. Inverting such logic means to recover the human subject as a needy body engaged in a sensuous transaction with an objective world, rather than as a theoretic being endowed with rationality and sensibility, then reconsidering perception, rationality, and knowledge as functionally dependent, in their source, their mediation, and finality upon human neediness. According to Honneth and Joas, Feuerbach's theoretical shift is enormously important, for now:

The thinking ego is not just a thinking being, that indeed it could not even exist as such, if it were not first of all a corporeal ego endowed with needs. [...] He [Feuerbach] primarily conceives of the relation of subjects to objects not as one effected through thought, but as one funded on and determined by need. [...] Natural objects possess their own proper structures, which become experienceable as the resistance of objects in relation to the subject's neediness.²⁷³

Indeed, the German philosopher, from *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) to the *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843), seeks to replace the human subject in its sensuous constitution with the objective world: "man is nothing without an object."²⁷⁴ The human being cannot be anymore conceived as a thinking subject that lives and theoretically approaches the external world from without. Instead, it is intrinsically connected with the natural world, firstly, from an ontological point of view.

Indeed, its self-development and well-being, both physical and psychological, cannot be considered independently from the sensuous interactions with external objects. The subject is an organic body, sensuously opened to the world, with needs that arouse and can be fulfilled through the sensuous and active mediation with external objects, which have their "own proper structures"²⁷⁵ and qualitative properties that are necessary for its self-reproduction and well-being.²⁷⁶ Apart from the sensuous perception of outer objects' qualities and properties, the

²⁷³ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 14. See the German edition, 1980, pp. 20-21: "Das sich selbst voraussetzende denkende Ich vergißt, dass es nicht nur ein denkendes ist, als solches ja gar nicht existieren könnte, wäre es nicht zunächst ein leibhaftiges, mit Bedürfnissen ausgestattetes Ich. [...] Die Beziehung von Subjekt und Objekt wird primär nicht als eine Denk-, sondern eine Bedürfnisbeziehung aufgefaßt. [...] Die Naturdinge besitzen eine Eigenstruktur, welche als Objekt-Widerstand gegenüber der Bedürftigkeit des Subjekts erfahrbar wird."

²⁷⁴ Feuerbach, 2008, p. 5.

²⁷⁵ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 14.

²⁷⁶ See this beautiful and explicating quote from the *Essence of Christianity* (2008), pp. 6-7: "It is true we, as physical beings, depend on the beings external to us. [...] Physical life in general is nothing else than this perpetual interchange of the objective and subjective relation. [...] That is dependent the possibility of whose existence lies out of itself; that is independent which has the possibility of its existence in itself. Life therefore involves the contradiction of an existence at once dependent and independent, the contradiction that its possibility lies both in itself and out of itself."

material arousal and fulfilment of the subject's needs would be both ontologically impossible and theoretically unconceivable. Honneth and Joas mainly focus on Feuerbach's idea of the subject's *bodily* dependence on external objects. In addition, we want to stress how, according to Feuerbach, this subject's process of material interaction with the outer world in order to physically self-reproduce acquires a further meaning. It is a process of psychical development as well, for the subject, by sensuously perceiving external objects according to its needy structure, contemporarily undertakes a process of self-identification by projecting itself into the qualitative properties of outer objects, as representing and reflecting objectively what the individual human being is. The object of sensuousness stands for an objective representation both of the human species, for it is an object that can be perceived and approached by the human being in general, and of the individual subject, as something with which it identifies itself, representing something constitutively interconnected with its survival, perception, and well-being. Indeed, the object exerts a *power* on the subject that subsequently turns into a power of the subject itself, which sensuously and practically interacts with the object. As Feuerbach writes, "in the object which he contemplates, therefore, man becomes acquainted with himself. [...] The power of the object over him is therefore the power of his own nature. Thus, the power of the object of feeling is the power of feeling itself."²⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Honneth and Joas emphasize how Feuerbach identifies a distinctive element of the human being's ontologically constitutive interaction with external objects. Of course, the human being is to be conceived as being part of nature. It is a living, organic being who, like other living organisms, undertakes a passive and active exchange with the outer world to ensure its physical survival while undertaking its psychic development. Therefore, recovering the human subject in its organic nature is necessary for philosophy because the individual is reconnected with its very primary active dimension. This manifests both in the sensuous component of the subject's experience, that is, in its being always related to external objects having a qualitative impact and constitutive role for the organism, and in its consequent practical relationality with external objects. However, for the two authors, the further significant aspect of Feuerbach's approach is that the sensuous, both active and passive, interaction of the human being with the external world is marked by a different relevant quality from other natural and animal organisms. Human inter-action distinguishes from other organism's activity by the significant and meaningful quality that its sensuous and bodily relation to the external world

²⁷⁷ See Feuerbach, 2008, p. 5.

acquires. Indeed, human action is “significant” because the subject does experience external objects in their singular and sensuous qualities but while intelligently correlating the outer qualitative objects of need into symbolic unities, namely, into universalized and idealized objects of knowledge.²⁷⁸ Therefore, the sensuousness of the human subject is accompanied by rational and cognitive capabilities, which are able to turn the singularity and individuality of external qualities into qualities grasped in their generality, in “their own proper structures.”²⁷⁹

For Honneth and Joas, such a significant component that Feuerbach confers to the human being’s active exchange with external objects entails a fundamental theoretical consideration. Human rationality cannot be regarded either in terms of the very epistemic source of human knowledge or as ultimately finalized at creating and possessing inert symbolic and universal unities of external objects. He indeed “rehabilitates sensuous pre-philosophical experience of the world not only as the foundation, but also as the medium and the end of thought.”²⁸⁰ On the one hand, thinking or rationality does not stand for the logically and ontologically *a-priori* condition for the knowledge of objectivity. Instead, being or objectivity is given to the subject only sensuously, under the pressure of physical and practical needs, in the bodily encounter and reciprocal activity among subject and object.

Taken in its reality or regarded as real, the real is the object of the senses – the sensuous. Truth, reality, and sensuousness are one and the same thing. Only a sensuous being is a true and real being. Only through the senses is an object given in the true sense, not through thought for itself. The object given by and identical with ideation is merely thought.²⁸¹

This means that thinking and rationality can really attain a knowledge of the external world once the latter is concretely disclosed to the human subject, in its objective structures, through the bodily and sensuous encounter with the embodied individual. On the other hand, if the ontological foundation of thinking and rationality is human sensuousness, and if the ontological object of the process of knowledge is the sensuous being, the ultimate aim and

²⁷⁸ For a beautiful analysis of Feuerbach’s theory of object-relation, see Deranty, 2015. Here, Feuerbach’s insight on the constitutive relationship occurring among subjectivity and objectivity is presented as a valid forerunner of Winnicott and Benjamin’s psychoanalytic theory of transitional objects. Concerning the constitutive and psychic relation among the two poles, Honneth and Joas also analyse the theory developed by Mead in *Philosophy of the Act* (1938) concerning the subject’s process of self-constitution and “self-reflexive acquisition of a sense of itself as a unitary body” (p. 70) through the manipulation and perspective-taking of external objects. Concerning Mead’s theory, see also Deranty, 2009, pp. 175-178.

²⁷⁹ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 14.

²⁸⁰ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 15. See the German edition, 1980, p. 21: “Er rehabilitiert die sinnliche vorphilosophische Welterfahrung nicht nur als Grundlage, sondern auch als Medium und Ziel des Denkens.”

²⁸¹ Feuerbach, 1972, p. 60.

finality of human thought and its process of knowledge is the “the subject’s neediness,”²⁸² that is the rational grasping of the own proper structures of the qualitative objects through which the individual both physically and psychically self-develops. Rationality, thinking, and knowledge are emphasized in their ontological and functional dependence upon the active exchange occurring between subjectivity and objectivity, being finalized in the meaningful and conscious disclosure of the constitutive bond between the two. What emerges from Feuerbach’s attempt to recast philosophy by overcoming the ontological and epistemic reversal of the relation among rationality and sensuous corporeity, thinking and being, subjectivity and objectivity, which is proper of modern philosophical thought, is to provide an understanding of the human subject as “interactively oriented and sensuously open capability for action.”²⁸³ Philosophy, thus, is compelled to reconstruct a non-alienating conception of human subjectivity. If modern philosophy was imprisoning the subject into an abstract and detached-from-the-world thinking, Feuerbach was willing to return to the human being its very capacity for action, that is, its sensuous and active constitutive interaction with the external world mediated by rationality.

The final element that Honneth and Joas find essential in Feuerbach’s analysis of human action is that its distinguishing quality, i.e., to be an “interactively oriented and sensuously open capability for action,” cannot be structurally given or explained without a condition other than “sensuous openness to the world” and its meaningful dimension. This second condition, strictly interrelated with the sensuous openness to the world, is intersubjectivity (*Intersubjektivität*). Indeed, the development of the human being as an embodied subject who can self-consciously undertake a cognitive analysis of the structure of external objects’ qualitative properties, thus intentionally pursuing its constitutive, interactional unity with the external world, needs a further constitutive principle, which, in this case also, is to be identified with another practical interaction of the human subject. As the capability of taking the experiential perspective of the other subject, intersubjectivity can, according to Feuerbach, adequately justify, first, the human subject’s self-identification as an embodied subject, who has, like other natural animals, a sensuous interaction with the external world, but that develops into a conscious, meaningful, and intentionally pursued interactional unity. Secondly, it can justify the very practical realization of the human being’s proper capacity for action, i.e., its interactive and sensuous activity with external objects, significantly and meaningfully mediated.

²⁸² Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 14.

²⁸³ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 17. See the German edition, 1980, p. 23: “interaktiv orientierte und sinnlich offene Handlungsfähigkeit.”

To start with the first ontological or genetic role of intersubjectivity, Honneth and Joas stress how for Feuerbach “[the subject] becomes an ego only by means of its relation to others, that the very talk of an ‘I’ is meaningless if it is not accompanied by the thought of a ‘you’.”²⁸⁴ Indeed, as Feuerbach writes:

the concept of the object is originally nothing else but the concept of another I. [...] An object or an alter ego is given not to the ego, but to the non-ego in me; for only where I am transformed from an ego into a You – that is, where I am passive – does the idea of an activity existing outside myself, the idea of objectivity, really originate.²⁸⁵

The process of the subject’s self-individualization as an embodied rational individual occurs for Feuerbach only through the recognitive encounter with another individual subject, in the medium of physical and spiritual *love*. With the latter, Feuerbach refers, on the one hand, to the human subjects’ reciprocal capability to emotionally care for the other as a sensuous being, namely, to partake in its sensuous needy experience within the world. Through such a decentralizing process, both in its active and passive logic, the individual self-apprehends as a differentiated I and a Thou for the other subject. Thus, the subject develops its practical self-identity as a corporeal individual with needs through its projection and mediation with the other, namely, *dialogically*. And because of such a decentralizing and identifying process, the human being becomes aware of itself, consciously approaching the objective world as interactionally constitutive for itself, graspable in its intelligible structures, and rationally openable in its qualitative properties.

But the recognitive mediation among subjects, which manifests in the form of the reciprocal bodily and sensuous participation in the experience of the other, has not merely a genetic role for the development of the subject’s practical self-relation as an embodied rational subject. According to Feuerbach, it remains the condition for developing and concretely performing its distinguishing capacity for action. Honneth and Joas underline that, for Feuerbach, intersubjectivity is as well “the precondition for sensuous certainty about the existence of objects but is also the criterion for the validity of all cognitive judgments whatsoever.”²⁸⁶ Indeed, in such a framework, wherein Feuerbach outlines a “consensus theory

²⁸⁴ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 14. See the German edition, 1980, p. 20: “[...] es zum Ich nur durch den Bezug auf andere wird, ja dass selbst die Rede vom «Ich» sinnlos ist, wenn nicht ein «Du» mitgedacht wird. Damit sind empirische, leibhaftige Gemeinschaften Voraussetzung aller Erkenntnis.”

²⁸⁵ Feuerbach, 1972, § 32, pp. 60-61.

²⁸⁶ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 16.

of truth based not on the fact of the assent but on an agreement reached through reasoned argument,”²⁸⁷ the meaningful or rational interaction with the external world remains dependent on the cognitive participation of the other subject. This is so because both the sensuous certainty about the object of needs and the processes of rational signification and knowledge of their qualities’ structure genetically and performatively occur through the common effort and mediation with the other subject. The intentional and performative prosecution or continuation by the human subject of its interactional unity with objectivity, both for its self-survival and well-being, cannot be practically independent from the cognitive interaction with other subjects. As taking the sensuous experience of the other embodied subject, intersubjectivity,²⁸⁸ here, means the participative interaction to the needy dimension of the other subject in order to render it meaningful and significant, implementing the potentially human interaction with the outer world, through a common bodily, sensuous, and cognitive effort. The constitutive role of mediation occurring among subjects in order to perform their distinguishing human interaction with the external world is even more stressed in a quote of the *Essence of Christianity* that Honneth and Joas do not refer to in the text:

The ego first steels its glance in the eye of a thou before it endures the contemplation of a being which does not reflect its own image. My fellow-man is the bond between me and the world. I am, and I feel myself, dependent on the world, because I first feel myself dependent on other men. If I did not need man, I should not need the world. I *reconcile myself with the world* only through my fellow-man. Without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty, but meaningless.²⁸⁹

Honneth and Joas conclude that Feuerbach’s philosophical anthropology had been, besides an exceptional anticipation of Darwinism,²⁹⁰ a turning point both for rethinking philosophically the human being and, consequently, for returning to philosophers and to empirical subjects the capacity to criticize existing societies and reappropriate their own capacity for action. This fact, that is, to redefine anthropologically the human being by recovering its primary active component and sensuous constitution with the external world,

²⁸⁷ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 16.

²⁸⁸ Here, the meaning of intersubjectivity is manifestly normative, namely, it is intentionally equated to ethical cognitive relationships, devoted to the self-realization of the human being.

²⁸⁹ Feuerbach, 2008, p. 47.

²⁹⁰ We are referring, here, to Darwin’s main thesis of the organic process of adaptation of all species, the human one as well, to the changing conditions of the external environments, not to the subsequent moral evolutionistic theories (for instance of Herbert Spencer) arguing that the natural laws of the struggle of the fittest and struggle for survival govern the social and human world as well.

stands, according to Feuerbach, for a crucial instrument for critically approaching human societies. Honneth and Joas underline that:

The cognitive intent of this materialism is defetishisation: the attempt to explain all pseudo-nature, all forms of action and consciousness that have slipped away from human control and become autonomous, by tracing them back to need-guided structures of action. Religious conceptions of the world and of life become the object on which Feuerbach's critique of ideology focuses. He not only unmasks them as cognitive errors, but also grasps and demonstrates their great emotional and communicative importance; thus, he criticises religion less as a false or deficient form of human cognition, than as an illusory form of the satisfaction of human needs.²⁹¹

In the *Essence of Christianity* and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, Feuerbach undertakes his critique of the institution of religion precisely according to his anthropological redefinition of the human being as an *embodied subject*. That is, as embedded into an external world with which it maintains a reciprocally constitutive exchange, occurring through sensuousness and action, functionally mediated by intelligence and knowledge, and constitutively grounded upon intersubjective recognition. According to such a quality of human action, religion, and specifically Christianity, is criticized by Feuerbach as a failing institution. Religion manifests indeed as an inadequate response to the human subject's self-realization, not because it is *entirely* irrational or deprived of any cognitive and communicative importance for human subjects. But because it impedes the individual from developing its ontological capacity for action, namely, the meaningful disclosure of the dynamic needs emerging from the encounter with the external world. For Feuerbach, religion, from an anthropological point of view, was originally necessary for the human subject in order to gain an external and objective image of the human species in all its infinite potential and capacity for action. Still, it ended up assuming a reified and autonomous stance in front of the individual, impeding the latter from identifying and reappropriating its self-image once objectively observed in the figure of God. Therefore, religion, according to Feuerbach, did represent an anthropologically important practice, developed by a community of believers reciprocally recognizing and destined to

²⁹¹ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 18. See the German edition, 1980, pp. 23-24: "Die Erkenntnisabsicht dieses Materialismus ist Entfetischisierung: der Versuch nämlich, alle Pseudonatur, alle menschlicher Kontrolle entglittenen, verselbständigten Bewußtseins – und Handlungsformen selbst noch einmal auf bedürfnisgeleitete Handlungsstrukturen zurückzuführen. Zum zentralen Gegenstand der Ideologiekritik Feuerbach werden religiöse Weltbilder, die er nicht nur als kognitive Irrtum, sondern in ihrer eminenten emotionalen und kommunikativen Bedeutung durchschaut; er kritisiert mithin die Religion weniger als falsche oder defiziente Form menschlicher Erkenntnis denn als illusionäre Form menschlicher Bedürfnisbefriedigung."

respond to the need of the human being to objectively grasp its capacity for action by projecting it into an external figure. Nevertheless, once its functional role of mediatory step for the human process of self-identification had been exhausted, its historical maintenance turned into a practice and instrument of oppression, ideologically masked, which severs the human being from freely living and practically performing the humane predicates previously projected in the figure of God, that is, creative sensuousness, rationality, and will. Indeed, religion and its community present themselves as recognizing and responding to the developing needs of the human subject with affection and care, but without actually sustaining, both from a cognitive and practical point of view, their real, sensuous and active component, thereby maintaining the human subject in a pathological situation of practical inertia, repression of corporeity, voluntary servitude, and self-dissociation with its very capacity for action.

As emphasized by Honneth and Joas, Feuerbach undertakes the critique of the ideology of religion not in relation to its complete cognitive irrationality, but rather according to the dissociation of such a practice, both in its theoretical and practical constituents, from the concrete needs of the human subject. Since the human being is an *embodied organism*, its needs develop sensuously in relation to an external and objective world, and since it is as well an *embodied subject*, such needs are potentiated through the mediation of knowledge, which orients subjective and voluntary action according to the structures of objectivity. In front of such an anthropology of the human being, religion, with its misleading conception of the human being and set of practices, severs the subject from its sensuous, bodily, and cognitive interaction with the external world, and hence, does but *block* the subject's capacity to pursue consciously and intentionally the constitutive unity with its external world.

VI. 1. 2. Marx's Historical Materialism: Human Activity as Historical and Revolutionary Practice

The second author to which Honneth and Joas refer to in the first section of *Social Action and Human Nature*, who provided a fundamental contribution for rethinking human subjectivity through an analysis of its capacity for action in order to approach human societies critically, is Karl Marx. Marx, indeed, is presented in his philosophical continuity and discontinuity from Feuerbach's anthropological materialism, thus, as both sensibly influenced by and critical of its predecessor. By focusing primarily on Marx's *Economic and Philosophical*

Manuscripts (1844) and the *Thesis on Feuerbach* (1845), Honneth and Joas stress how Marx turns Feuerbach's anthropological materialism into a historical materialism, developing his theory of action into a theory of praxis or practical and revolutionary activity, both with positive and negative consequences for a philosophical anthropology with critical finalities.

As Marx writes in the preface to the *Third Manuscript*, "it is only with Feuerbach that *positive*, humanistic and naturalistic criticism begins. The less noise they make, the more certain, profound, extensive and enduring is the effect of Feuerbach's writings, the only writings [...] to contain a real theoretical revolution."²⁹² According to Marx, Feuerbach enabled philosophy and the human subject to overcome abstract thinking, identifying sensuous activity with external objects as the primary dimension of the human being. Nevertheless, the first problematic point of his anthropological materialism, to be interpreted in the sense of the re-establishment of the concreteness and sensuousness of human life, is, according to Marx, that herein:

things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity*, *practice*, not subjectively. [...] Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. [...] Hence, he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical", activity"²⁹³.

The first intent of Marx was to develop Feuerbach's "aesthetic" and theoretically "contemplating" conception of the exchange among the human subject and the external world with the fundamental clarification that the qualitative approach of such an interaction does not only consist of the human being's meaningful understanding of its sensuousness and sensuous objects, implicating a general form of reciprocal action among subjectivity and objectivity. Moreover, according to Marx, such an action is to be considered in terms of a practical and material transformation of external objects and objective conditions, both in the form of work, i.e., the practical transformation of external objects in order to fulfil human sensuous neediness, and in the form of the revolutionary transformation of the social world's bunch of practices and institutions.

As clearly present already in the *Manuscripts*, Feuerbach's naturalistic understanding of the human subject as a natural and embodied subject is further enriched by Marx with the

²⁹² Marx, 1975, 3, p. 232.

²⁹³ Marx, 1976, 5, p. 3.

consideration that the subject does not merely contemplate its needs and constitutive objects. But rather, it also concretely and practically transforms such objects while considering its knowledge and theories of the objective world as “true” according to the successful satisfaction of the subject’s neediness. Thus, the distinguishing quality of human action in the natural context is the capacity to know nature theoretically but for transforming it, finding in such a transformation, both subjective and objective, a concrete expression of the human being and its conscious, rational unity with the external world. Because of such an interpenetration and concrete transformation between subjectivity and objectivity – on the part of objectivity because of its sensuous conditioning human activity while mirroring this latter’s development, and on the part of subjectivity because of its subjective conditioning external objects through its needs, knowledge, and transformative activity – Marx does not use the abstract concept of human action, but rather the one of *practice*. Human action is “praxis” because both its sensuousness and cognition are primarily conceived as moments in the subject’s practical and transformative exchange with the external world. As Honneth and Joas point out:

Marx understands the human being’s sensuous-cognitive capabilities as achievements that are integral to the process of the very activity which transforms nature. The human species, therefore, gains access to nature for itself only through praxis, by means of which it also emancipates itself from the domination of nature, in socially organized world.²⁹⁴

The understanding of human activity in terms of practice, “in its subjective and objective conditionings as well as in its subjective and objective transformative potentials,”²⁹⁵ leads Marx to criticize Feuerbach’s very ahistorical and a-social understanding of human needs and their satisfaction. Human needs do not arouse through the exchange with an uncontaminated natural world, but rather always with an external environment that, first, is progressively transformed subjectively by historical and social subjects, entailing the ongoing different declination and significance of human need. Second, it is an external world that gathers both nature and a social world made of instituted social practices and institutions, devoted to the satisfaction of human neediness, such as the economic system with its division of labour and the state. This fact entails

²⁹⁴ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 20. See the German edition, 1980, p. 25: “Marx begreift stattdessen die sinnlich-kognitiven Fähigkeiten des Menschen als Leistungen, die in den Prozeß der naturumarbeitenden Tätigkeit selbst eingebunden sind; die menschliche Gattung erschließt sich einen Zugang zur Natur daher nur in dem Praxiszusammenhang, in dem sie sich in gesellschaftlich organisierter Arbeit auch von Übermacht der Natur emanzipiert.”

²⁹⁵ Renault, 2018, p. 22.

that the subject's exchange with the external world for the practical fulfilment of its neediness occurs, on the one hand, through the practical transformation of external objects "that while indeed natural, are objects that have nevertheless always been 'fashioned' in some way and to some extents by human activity."²⁹⁶ This means that the objects of human sensuousness are never the same but have been somehow already subjectively and socially shaped in the previous course of human history, therefore conditioning the further development of human subject's sensuousness and practical capacity for transformation. On the other hand, human exchange with the external world occurs through the transformation of the social world itself, in its organized practices and institutions. Human activity, therefore, is to be conceived as the ongoing practical transformation of both external and socially shaped objects and social structures for the satisfaction of the subject's neediness.²⁹⁷

In conclusion, the fundamental contribution of Marx with respect to the anthropological materialism of Feuerbach concerns, according to Honneth and Joas, the way to intend the quality of human action in relation to the external world. The overall quality or structure of human activity is no longer conceived in the abstract, a-social²⁹⁸ and ahistorical Feuerbachian manner, that is as the "interactively oriented and sensuously open capability for action,"²⁹⁹ regardless of the practical and historical transformations occurring between the subject and its external world. Instead, now human action entails the subject's capacity to practically transform, through the mediation of rationality, the natural and social conditions for the practical satisfaction of its neediness. Since the practice of the human being is understood as the ensemble of both "objective and subjective conditionings and potentials of transformation,"³⁰⁰ the external environment (natural and social) is both modified by the subject and modifying the subject sensuously. The subject's neediness acquires a progressive, historical development, whose realization always entails a different intelligent transformation of both socially shaped objects and social practices. In Marx, therefore, the anthropological effort in understanding the capacity for action of the human being is always destined to lead to the *critique* of human institutions, such as religion for Feuerbach, but with the more precise

²⁹⁶ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 19.

²⁹⁷ For a further analysis of the relationship between Feuerbach and Marx, and more generally, the theoretical relationships among Left Hegelians, see Cesa, 1972; Löwith, 1995; Quante & Mohseni, 2015.

²⁹⁸ Feuerbach develops indeed a notion of community, rather than a conception of the socially organized human world. See, for instance, § 59-60 of *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*.

²⁹⁹ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 17.

³⁰⁰ See Renault, 2018, p. 22.

understanding that such a critique, to be effective for social subjects, entails the revolutionarily change of the correlated social conditions, both economic and political, that are at the very basis of pathological institutions. Hence, according to Marx, to be criticized, as Feuerbach said, are those social practices or institutions which ideologically declare they satisfy human beings' neediness while really impeding its meaningful sensuous satisfaction. But due to his practical, transformative, and historical understanding of human sensuousness, Marx adds that such a critique is to be correlated with both the identification of all the historical social conditions or structures that are needed for the very satisfaction of human neediness and the consequent revolutionary transformation of the objective social impediments into adequate social conditions for fulfilment.

We can take the example of the critique of religion to better make explicit Marx's position and Honneth and Joas' interest in it. According to Marx, as for Feuerbach, religion prevents human subjects from freely and concretely developing the sensuous needs of their corporeity and sensuous spirituality. Nevertheless, it is not sufficient, according to Marx, to merely overcome religion through a form of humanism. Instead, it is indispensable to rationally understand the ensemble of the interrelated material and social conditions that are necessary for satisfying human needs in their specific historical declinations, consequently transforming human societies in their economic, social, and political structures practically. The ideological oppression exerted by religion is not indeed self-grounded but is strictly interrelated and relies upon the merely formal equality of human rights and unity of the political State and, primarily, upon the capitalistic system of human labour. As he explains from his *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* (1843) to *Zur Judenfrage* (1843) and the *Manuskripte*, to really overcome the pathologies of religion for disclosing to the human being the possibility to develop its creative sensuousness and natural unity with the external world a series of further structural transformations of social conditions are necessary, first of all, in the dimension of work and production.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ Here, *via* Honneth and Joas' analysis of Marx, we don't want to focus or discuss Marx's critique of capitalism, which socio-ontologically grounds all pathological social institutions upon the mechanism of private property and the economic system of capitalism. Marx, indeed, considers the mechanism of private property and wage labour as alienating the man from its very generic activity, i.e., work, and from its objects. According to Marx, the distinctive capacity of subjects to expressively transform natural objects to satisfy their physical and spiritual needs is directly expropriated from social subjects as another individual privately owns both their transformative activity and its products. Such alienating logic of capitalism impedes the workers from freely appropriating their distinguishing activity, whose real aim is not production and capital accumulation but the rational, liberating, and expressive satisfaction of human naturalness. For this reason, in the *Manuscripts*, Marx defines the real communist society as the real re-appropriation by humanity of its core capacity for action, that is the "humanization of nature,"

Nonetheless, according to Honneth and Joas, the advancement of Marx's early historical materialism³⁰² with respect to Feuerbach's central ideas is mitigated, firstly, by:

the price of neutralizing that which is truly critical about them. [...] Thus the question can be asked regarding Marx's transformation of Feuerbach's notion of sensuousness into a concept of sensuous, objectual activity, whether in this transformation the aesthetic and contemplative dignity of 'emancipatory sensuousness' is preserved, and the human being's powerful inner, drive-fraught nature, which is not fully determined by social history, is sufficiently taken into consideration.³⁰³

Therefore, what Honneth and Joas suggest is, firstly, that Marx narrows the transformative significance of human activity *only* to labour or productive activity, without providing a more encompassing and non-essentialist analysis of human activity as transformative. Secondly, they point out that the rigorous historicistic conception of sensuousness provided by Marx, which entails that the sensuous human exchange with the external world is always somehow internal to the potentialities disclosed by existing social situations and objects, is to be also mitigated by the *disrupting* and *creative* potentialities of the

wherein the intrinsically constitutive natural continuity among the external world and men is realized, and the very affirmation of both nature and human spirituality get disclosed, rather than as the brutal suppression of private property. "This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man — the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species" (Marx, 1975, 3, p. 296). Nevertheless, from a critical point of view, Marx's critical strategy grounds all social pathological practices and institutions (such as religion, the State, right) upon the distortion of one single dimension of human activity, work, without the possibility to maintain a critical approach that does not terminate in a mere ontological hierarchy and unilateral pathology of the social world. Human activity, as praxis or practice, has been strictly limited by Marx to productive activity, without the possibility to intend every expression of human activity as a form of transformation and adjustment to the external world, where there is not necessarily the construction of a material object, but the practical interaction of the subject with the external environment to satisfy its sensuousness, such as aesthetic, associative, and political interests. Nonetheless, the essential part of Marx's reflections is the acknowledgement that human needs necessitate, for being satisfied, both the understanding of the objective conditions that arouse and determine them, which can be different and interrelated, and the effective transformation of the social context. As he says, the very point is not to interpret the world: "the point is to change it" (Marx, 1976, 5, p. 5).

³⁰² Honneth and Joas take distance from Marx's critical analysis in the *Capital*. Herein, he abandons his insights on human anthropology and human action within the world, through which it had been feasible for him to criticize bourgeois societies in terms of social contexts alienating the individual from its own capacity for action. Indeed, in his mature thought, he shifts to a scientific analysis of the historical subject of capitalism, in its different phases of oppression of human subjectivity, thus reading human history as governed, like Hegel, from a universal subject teleologically destined to be overcome for its intrinsic pathological mechanisms, rather than for the process of emancipation of human subjects through their own activity.

³⁰³ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 23. See the German edition, 1980, pp. 27-28: "Beide Zentralgedanken Feuerbachs macht Marx nun freilich nur um den Preis zu Grundannahmen seiner Gesellschaftstheorie, dass er ihre eigentlich kritischen Gehalte neutralisiert. [...] So ist an die Marx'sche Überführung des Feuerbach'schen Sinnlichkeitsmotivs in ein Konzept sinnlicher, gegenständlicher Tätigkeit die Frage zu stellen, ob in seiner Folge die ästhetische und kontemplative Würde «emanzipatorischer Sinnlichkeit» bewahrt, die Wucht der in ihre sozialgeschichtlichen Geformtheit nicht aufgehenden inneren, triebmäßigen Natur der Menschen angemessen berücksichtigt ist."

“human heart,” to use Feuerbach’s expression. Namely, the very emancipatory potential of Feuerbach’s concept of the human being is that it is not only a historically social body, but, first of all, an animal organism open to the world. To revindicate the creativity of the human being as a natural organism means to confer an important critical role to the capability of human sensuousness to explosively deviate from the socialized modes of affectivity and sensuous objects characterizing human social contexts. This reserve is fundamental to imaginatively thinking out of the given practical and sensuous scheme potentially disclosed by existing social contexts. Therefore, the exchange between the human being and the external world would be conceived as less strictly linear or historical and more *situational*, acknowledging the subject with a freer range of creative potentialities for deviation from historical frameworks of the social world and human sensuousness.

The second Feuerbachian element that Honneth and Joas deem was lost in Marx’s transposition of anthropological materialism is the centrality of the structural element of intersubjectivity for the *genesis* of the human capacity for action and for the subject’s possibility to *perform* such a capacity for action.

In Marx’s transformation of the Feuerbachian idea of “altruism” into the notion of human relations of co-operation, a remnant of interactionism is, to be sure, preserved [...]. However, not only does Marx make these remarks as it were in passing; he also does not draw from his observations the epistemological and social psychological conclusions which Feuerbach had already formulated with great clarity. For Marx was so little aware of the categorial limits of his concept of labour that he was unable seriously to investigate a domain of social interaction. In consequence, in Marx’s works the anthropological analysis of the labour process is not matched by a comparable account of interhuman relations.³⁰⁴

This textual passage is significant for our reflections. Here the two authors stress that Marx does not sufficiently consider intersubjectivity, intended in terms of relations of ethical recognition, as a fundamental condition of possibility for the subject to *develop* and *perform* its qualitative capacity for action in the external world. Indeed, if we take both the *Manuskripte* and *Aus James Mill* (1844), he regards the other men, or fellow, only in terms of the receiver of the products of the subject’s transformative labour. Thus, the notion of recognition is wholly identified with the one of productive cooperation, since social subjects institute systems of division of labour entailing the cooperative exchange of products finalized to the satisfaction

³⁰⁴ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 23.

of the human species' needs. The other man is implicitly considered in Marx's normative notion of the human capacity for action, for productive activity is to be the medium of recognition of the overall human species, and thus, of its single fellows. The addressee of the other subject's working products receives a fundamental affirmation of both its generic neediness and individuality, while the productive subject gains the retrospective confirmation of its activity through the consummation of its products. Nevertheless, the ethical role of intersubjective recognition is identified by Marx only in the subjects' reciprocal consideration of the other as the reciprocal final end of their transformative action, rather than as the necessary pole of mediation through which the human capacity for action can be genetically developed and performed. Consequently, he narrows recognition only to the relation of cooperation occurring through the division of labour.³⁰⁵ In a nutshell, Marx does not consider intersubjective recognition in the constitutive role that it plays for the development of the human being as an *embodied transformative subject*, as that form of participatory confirmation that Feuerbach had instead placed at the basis both of the human being's self-individuation as an embodied subject and the development and construction of meanings and knowledge of external objects of sensuousness.

Honneth and Joas have not subsequently expanded the stringent considerations we have previously quoted regarding Marx's abandonment of the very emancipatory and critical meaning that Feuerbach confers to the notions of "human sensuousness" and "recognition." After the two sections on Feuerbach and Marx, we do not find a conclusive summary of the reflections they developed so far or a systematic naturalistic theory of human activity suitable to theoretically maintain and integrate the three elements emerged within the text, that is, the organic dimension of human subjectivity, with its situational, disruptive, and emancipatory potential, the practical and transformative significance of human activity, not restricted to productive activity, and the recognitive structure that lies under the genesis and the performativity of human action. Moreover, they do not explicitly point out the multi-layered meaning that recognition acquires through such a sketched theoretical framework.

The rest of the first part of *Social Action and Human Nature* is indeed dedicated to the role of Lucien Sève, György Márkus, and Agnes Heller in revisioning, through Marx's juvenile anthropological scripts, the systemic and scientific theory of Capitalism provided by Marx in the *Capital*, wherein the chances for individual subjects' capacity for creativity and

³⁰⁵ For an analysis of Marx's understanding of recognition, see Quante, 2011, 2013.

emancipation get overlooked. Whereas in the second part, the two authors attempt to summarize the contributions of Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner in providing, thanks to the development of biological studies in the 20th century, the biological foundations of the human being's plasticity of sensuous impulses and symbolic capacities, with the common error, nevertheless, of not including intersubjective relationships into the structural conditions of such human character of experience.³⁰⁶ Finally, the last part is destined to the analysis of three historical anthropologies, those of Norbert Elias, Michelle Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas, concluding that they all attempt to provide, not without exposing to interpretative problems and criticisms, a reconstruction of the human species' historical development according to the progressive logic of disclosure and development of certain anthropological constants of the human being.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Gehlen and Plessner argue that the arousal of human sensuous creativity and capacity for symbolic and meaningful action is to be related to the biological fact that the human being is a defective form of life with respect to other animal organisms. Namely, the biological reason for the human being's historicization of needs and the emergence of symbolic and cognitive capacities is due to its lack of a balanced triangulation among the system of instincts, the corresponding structure of sensuous triggers, and motor reactions. The biological un-specialization of the human species, therefore, is the core reason for which the human being is both more sensuously open to a variety of objects in the external environment and led to compensatory forms of activity such as cognition. Honneth and Joas consider such an explanation unsatisfactory because, first, it does not consider the constitutive role that intersubjectivity or recognitive relationships have for the development of cognitive capacities, thereby carrying on an egological depiction of human subjectivity. Secondly, it provides a unilateral consideration of the instrumental role of cognition without accounting also for the humanistic role of the human subject in nature, like the Feuerbachian and Marxian depictions take care to offer.

³⁰⁷ Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (1978-1982), and Michel Foucault, in the overall course of his production, according to Honneth and Joas, have reconstructed, through different traditions of thought, human history's process in terms of the progressive implementation of inhibition, self-restraint, and control of the body. In turn, Habermas, most of all in the last part of his philosophical production, has interpreted the human species' history in terms of a rationalizing process following the implementation of the three forms of rationality proper of the human being.

VI. 2. Human Action as the “Humanization of Nature and Humanization of Human Nature Itself”: A Criterion for the Critique of the Social World

By bringing together Feuerbach’s and Marx’s reflections, Honneth and Joas attempt to identify a theoretical path for the critique of the social world that proceeds by first rethinking the human subject in its naturalistic conditions, that is, from its primary condition of being a natural and organic body physically and psychically self-developing in relation to the external world, that is, through the interactions with objectivity. Philosophy’s underestimation of this aspect prevented it from disposing of a truthful and critical depiction of human subjectivity. Accordingly, human subjectivity should be conceived primarily in terms of the capacity to act and interact constitutively with its environment, as other natural organisms, but with a distinguishing, humane quality. Indeed, by collecting Feuerbach’s and Marx’s approaches, human action and interaction with the external world does occur in the first instance organically, bodily, affectively, and practically, as the sensuous exchange with outer objects and situations, wherein passivity and activity, objective conditions and organic conditions, and affection and active interaction are intrinsically interrelated from an ontological point of view. The distinctive aspect of the human being’s activity, nonetheless, lies structurally in its capability to *meaningfully* direct such a sensuous and practical exchange, which turns into a process of humanization of nature, with a twofold significance.

Accordingly, it is a process of *humanization of external nature* because the subject is able to process cognitively external situations and sensuous objects while orienting its action for transforming external conditions for the satisfaction of its needs. Conversely, it is a process of *humanization of human nature itself* because human experiential needs can be objectively considered and cognitively processed, disclosed in their meanings, organized, implemented, enriched and fulfilled through cooperative knowledge and coordinated transformative activities. Such a humanization of nature, nonetheless, does not stand for a mere instrumental and egoistic process. Instead, as suggesting Marx’s normative understanding of human activity as a process wherein “fully developed naturalism, equals humanism” and “fully developed humanism, equals naturalism,”³⁰⁸ the capacity for the human being to intelligently disclose the external world and humanly satisfy its physical and spiritual needs stands for the conscious and creative unification of the human being with the rest of nature.

³⁰⁸ Marx, 1975, 3, p. 296.

Moreover, this subjective process of humanization of nature is to be conceived as a historical and social process, according to Honneth and Joas. Indeed, the relation between first nature – external nature and sensuous experience – and second nature – the meaningful and cultural organization of it for the practical purpose of fulfilling human needs and giving significance to sensuous human experience – is to be conceived as an ongoing and adjustive one. All the cultural and institutional categorizations, social practices, and institutions, ontologically devoted to intelligently and cooperatively fulfil human neediness, are to be deemed as always criticisable, transformable, according to both the objective structure of human needs and their development.

Now we can finally draw the two considerations that are of interest to us. The first one concerns the critical potentialities that Honneth and Joas confer to such an anthropological analysis of the human being's activity. The second one regards the theoretical enrichment that such an anthropological analysis might provide for the contemporary paradigm of recognition and its problems, since herein recognition appears as the genetic and performative condition of the specific constitutive exchange occurring among subjectivity and the world of objectivity.

Beginning with the first issue, once the anthropological contents of Honneth and Joas' reflections have been grasped, it is possible to recall, firstly, the critical aim lying under their recovery of a philosophical anthropology, and secondly, this latter's critical potential. We previously saw, indeed, how the two authors, with the analysis of the unchanging preconditions of human changeableness, aim at providing a formal theory of the human capacity for action in order to find a criterion for criticizing the descriptive and normative frameworks of social sciences and their objects of inquiry, i.e., social practices and institutions. We must recollect that according to Honneth and Joas "anthropology is a reflective step in the scrutiny of the suitability of social-scientific frameworks that has become *autonomous*."³⁰⁹ Therefore, the cognitive intent of such a materialistic-historical anthropology is *defetishisation*, namely, "the attempt to explain [...] all forms of action and consciousness that have slipped away from human control and become autonomous by tracing them back to need-guided structures of action."³¹⁰ This means that the critical potential of this analysis of human action professes to be the disclosure of both the ideologically oppressing and reifying or alienating core of social practices, social categories, institutions, and scientific frameworks that coordinate social life.

³⁰⁹ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 8. Italics mine.

³¹⁰ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 18.

This process of “unveiling” is feasible since both the theorist and the social subjects can now dispose of a conception of human subjectivity that re-acknowledges action and practice within and with the external environment as the primary dimension of human subjectivity. The human being, indeed, since it is an *animal organism* is dependent physically and psychically on the ongoing practical interaction with external sensuous objects. Still, since it is an *organic subject*, it is able as well to turn such an interactive exchange into a humanizing process, wherein its needy sensuousness can be intelligently processed, thereby mastering and transforming the external world. Therefore, the philosophical conception of the human subject is entirely revisited in its interacting dimension by:

1. Remark the arousal of human needs from the sensuous interaction with external objects and situations, for they are always “attached” both in their contents and possibilities of fulfillment to external situations
2. Unveil the distinguishing practical quality of the human needs’ satisfaction process, relying upon the cognitive penetration of objects of needs suitable to disclose the adequate practical transformation of external conditions, both natural and social, that are necessary for the intelligent fulfillment of human neediness
3. Consider such a humanizing exchange among subjectivity and objectivity as a dynamic process.

By following such a conception of human subjectivity as practical activity, from *Social Action and Human Nature*, it emerges, first, that ideological social contexts, wherein the dominating and oppressive aim of their social practices, categories, and institutions is masked by rhetorical justifications regarding their naturalness, social necessity, and freedom potential, can be unveiled. This unveiling process is feasible because of their objective impediment of the qualitative exchange that characterizes human activity in its external environment, i.e., the subject’s capacity to humanize external and internal nature. Accordingly, the theorist and the social subjects can trace social categories, institutions, and practices back to the objective and social conditions that substantially give content to the historical subjects’ needs, and whose intelligible analysis is dependent, both in its origin and truthful effectiveness, on the successful and satisfactorily interaction of the human being with its external world. For instance, once a conception of subjectivity as bodily interacting with concrete, objective, and historical objects and situations and as capable of transforming them intelligently was recovered, Feuerbach (from an anthropological perspective) and Marx (from a historical-social perspective)

unveiled the ideological core of religion and capitalistic economic system. These were originally presented as social institutions naturally devoted to the satisfaction of human needs and the very freedom of humanity. Still, Feuerbach and Marx pointed out not only their cognitive inefficiency³¹¹ but above all their incapability and resistance to allowing the subject to really appropriate practically its satisfactory and transforming process within the external world. Hence, the human subject, in such social conditions, was practically impeded or blocked, that is, deprived of a meaningful understanding of its needs suitable to lead it to a humanized and satisfactory unity with external conditions.

Furthermore, through Feuerbach's notion of emancipatory sensuousness, the two authors seek to highlight not only the historical dimension of the sensuous, cognitive, and practical relation of the human being's capacity for action with external objects and situations. Another ontological part of human activity also appears, that of the *situational* and disruptive development of the subject's needs and capacity for action in relation to the external world. The main objects of critique that Honneth and Joas' anthropological reflections attempt to focus on are two specific levels of social power, which do not coincide with the bare and manifest repression of human subjects' positive relation to themselves or with the possibility to act in general. Instead, their anthropological reflections are willing to detect, on the one hand, those social practices, institutions, categories, statuses, and scientific theories that ideologically present themselves as an adequate response to the social subjects' neediness while being both cognitively and practically inefficient and "illusory form[s] of the satisfaction of human needs,"³¹² therefore, standing for objective impediments to the human subject's qualitative capacity for action. On the other hand, they are suitable to detect those social contexts whose symbolic and material frameworks becomes static, rigid, or autonomous, determining and controlling the human subject while failing to adapt to or promote the creative and practical exchange occurring among social subjects and their external world.

The replacement of personal and direct power relations by internalized, psychical mechanism of control, hence phenomena that could be regarded as the self-evident preconditions of an expansion of human freedom, are today increasingly looked upon as individuations of a process

³¹¹ According to Honneth and Joas' interpretation of Feuerbach's critique, religion had an emotional, cognitive, and communicative importance for social subjects. Its ideological core lay on its cognitive *inefficacy*, directly entailing the incapacity of social subjects to act humanly.

³¹² Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 18.

of destruction of possibilities for the realisation of the full humanity of human being, a process that began with the start of the modern era.³¹³

We can now focus on the critical contribution that such a theory of human subjectivity and its activity can bring to the contemporary paradigm of recognition. The two authors do not systematically point it out, mostly since their primary intent in *Social Action and Human Nature* is not to outline a theory of recognition suitable to solve the criticisms of such a category, but rather to provide a different understanding of human subjectivity and its constitutive process. Nevertheless, the issue of intersubjective recognition manifestly runs through *Social Action and Human Nature*, and due to the theory of human action herein developed, we deem it feasible, first, to identify a methodological approach to it that is alternative to the one developed by Honneth in *The Struggle for Recognition*. Second, as a consequence of this first point, it seems possible to carve out a different understanding of the constitutive role and of the genus of recognition for human subjectivity. And third, it seems feasible to further clarify the ontological conditions and the ontological status of ethical or normative recognition, which, as we have previously seen, Honneth's mainstream paradigm struggles to provide.

From a methodological point of view, in Chapter Two, Chapter Three, and Chapter Four, we have seen how Honneth, in the passage from *The Critique of Power*, wherein we can find the theoretical origin of its mature critical theory of recognition, to *The Struggle for Recognition*, with a series of theoretical motivations and urgencies focuses unilaterally on the analysis of the free constitution of human subjectivity through the ethical interactions with other subjects. The subject is considered as a relational and interactional individual. But the only interaction taken into analysis for the free constitution of human subjectivity is the one with other subjects. Accordingly, the individual can self-realize only due to the other subjects' active confirmation of the worth of its personal contents, i.e., needs, interests, values, and capacities. Indeed, only through such a positive intersubjective mediation can the subject develop a positive image of itself, as not individually possessed but objectively and intersubjectively known, thereby acquiring that psychically normative attitude towards itself that is necessary for the subject in order to approach and relate to its identity contents in a positive and free manner.

³¹³ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 2. Here, of course, Honneth and Joas refer to Foucault's analysis of modern power.

From a theoretical point of view, such an analysis of the subject's process of free self-constitution only in relation to the recognition of other subjects entails a specific understanding of human subjectivity's self-realization and a respective description of the constitutive mechanism of recognition and its genus. On the one hand, we have seen how such a methodological strategy leads Honneth to consider those three types of psychically normative relationships to oneself – self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem – as the personal preconditions for the subject's personal integrity and, thus, for the subject's free and positive approach to its identity contents, to be pursued in the social arena. On the other hand, Honneth describes the constitutive mechanism of ethical recognition stressing its psychic component unilaterally, that is, conceiving it as that intersubjective mediation of positive affirmation or confirmation, mediated by care and active participation, that is needed by the subject to acquire those forms of psychic self-relations that are but reachable intersubjectively. It follows that the description of the genus of ethical recognition provided by Honneth is the one of "positive affirmation of the other as a person" or, as expressed by Laitinen and Ikäheimo, of "taking the other as a person."

The critical consequence of such a methodological approach to the issue of human subjectivity's free self-constitution, proceeding solely from the perspective of its normative interactions with other subjects, is that it ends up offering a psychologist understanding of the subject's self-realization and of the constitutive mechanism of ethical recognition for human subjectivity's self-realization. As long as the anthropology of a critical theory of recognition keeps avoiding any consideration of the other interactional pole through which human subjectivity, as an organic and bodily *organism*, constitutes itself both physically and psychically, and through which, as an organic *subject*, develops a specific capacity for action, i.e., the world of objectivity, it remains an evident gap on the level of theory and critique. That is the gap between the subject's development of personal or psychic integrity and the clarification of the objective conditions that regulate the arousal and the material satisfaction of the human being's contents. These contents, if not further investigated in their process of emergence, development, and satisfaction through the practical exchange that the human being undertakes, according to a specific structure or quality, with the external world, are dangerously assumed by theory as "overhead," as merely interior or private contents. In a nutshell, these contents are severed from the objective conditions and situations which substantially define them and, consequently, from the adequate implementation and transformation of the objective

and social conditions on which their really meaningful, humane, material realization, and satisfaction depend.

If not grounded on a philosophical anthropology that attempts to recover a conception of the human being as an organic and practical subject, embedded within a sensuous world suitable to be intelligently unveiled and practically transformed, a theory of recognition does but outline a consequent psychologist understanding of recognition's constitutive mechanism too. Recognition is described indeed as the positive and active confirmation of subjective contents' social worth, suitable to lead the individual to instantiate an integral and undamaged relation to itself. In such an understanding of the constitutive role that recognition plays for human subjectivity and its consequent generic description in the abstract terms of "affirmation of the other as a person" or "taking the other as a person," accompanied by attitudes of active care, the human subject appears as a-critically dependent on any form of positive evaluation received by the social context, and thus as dangerously exposed to social manipulation through recognitive devices. Without the reference to the other constitutive pole of interaction of human subjectivity, that is, this latter's practical exchange with the external world, and the analysis of the structural and qualitative conditions of such an exchange, the ethical core of recognition, as really aiming at the realization of the human subjects and its personal contents, remains, both for empirical subjects and the critical theorist, deprived of further ontological clarifications, and thus, of objective standards for critique.

As a consequence, Honneth's mature paradigm of recognition, relying upon a unilateral consideration of human subjectivity's constitution in relation to recognition, is impeded from offering a less abstract critical framework for critically approaching those inadequate or normatively weak relationships of recognition we previously pointed out. On the one hand, those recognitive relationships devoted to maintaining existing social relations of domination and oppression of social subjects through reliable forms of positive confirmation of subjective contents, suitable to lead subjects to develop positive experiences of themselves while being inadequate for the practical, material, and objective satisfaction of their contents, remain hidden and unexplained in their intrinsically ethical inadequateness. Such an ethical inadequateness cannot be fully grasped and disentangled, as Honneth attempted to do in *Recognition as Ideology*, only by referring to the intrinsic rational coherence that recognition must maintain among its evaluative and practical dimension in order to be ethical. Instead, the clarification of its further ontological conditions is to be grounded on an anthropological consideration of

human subjectivity in its capacity for action in relation to the external world, suitable to normatively tie, define, and *test* the ethical meaning of recognition from without its self-reference logic.

On the other hand, there are those cognitive relationships that can be discerned only by enriching the traditional notion of power, which the mainstream paradigm of recognition refers to, with the category of constitutive power. Indeed, we have previously seen, in the first place, that with the notion of constitutive power it is possible to point out the strong constitutive meaning intrinsically belonging to recognition, as a social relationship through which the cognitive requests and identity contents of human subjects get supra-subjectively defined and integrated within existing symbolic social frameworks. In the second place, we have pointed out that through Saar's ontology of power, it is feasible for a critical theory of recognition to urgently rethink the ontological status that a relationship of recognition must maintain in order to be ethical and non-alienating. Accordingly, "lifeless," "reifying," or "alienating" are those cognitive relationships that are not in themselves oppressive, precluding the subject's ability to act in general. On the contrary, they respond to the individual's cognitive requests but give it a limited and repetitive horizon of emotional, cognitive, and agential possibilities, strongly constituting and delimiting the contents of human subjectivity and preventing it from further developing its action in a creative and transformative way. That is, they prevent human subjectivity from being determined while appropriating creatively the social determinations with which it is descriptively and normatively identified in the social contexts, finding out new potentialities for creative action.

In section V. 2., we have seen how, by means of Saar's ontology of power, it can be feasible to clarify the *type* of relationship that recognition must be in order to be ethical and non-alienating in terms of a "transaction of power to act" occurring among the recognizer (the social contexts, other individuals) and the recognizee, who, in being socially and publicly recognized, must be invested with the respective power to creatively and dynamically transform its defining social determinations. At the same time, we have as well pointed out that an ontology of power as the one of Saar, even if it is suitable to enrich the critical sensitivity of the mainstream paradigm of recognition, leaves theoretically unexplained the ontological reason for the creative and transforming dimension of human activity, and thus, the ontological sources of such capacities for creativity and transformation. It follows, thus, that the definition of the ontological status of ethical recognition still remains undefined. Recognition is to be intended

as a transaction of power to act creatively and transformatively, but to what is this creative and transforming capacity of the human subject due? In the absence of a further anthropological analysis that focuses on the other interactional pole of human subjectivity, the external world, inquiring on the practical exchange occurring among the two and its distinguishing quality, the possibility to understand the human being's potentiality for creativity and transformation of its subjective contents, i.e., social determinations, and, as a consequence, to clarify more deeply the meaning of recognition as a "transaction of power," remain unanswered.

In *Social Action and Human Nature*, we can find that Honneth undertakes with Joas an alternative methodological approach to the issue on social recognition, which allows for the disclosure of a different theoretical understanding of the constitutive role and genus of recognition, thereby potentially providing an enrichment of both the ontological conditions and the ontological status that recognition must possess in order to be an ethical interaction, aiming at the self-realization of human subjectivity. Indeed, the relational category of recognition is not considered independently from a philosophical-anthropological analysis that attempts to critically restore a conception of human subjectivity in its organic and embodied dimension within an external world. As we have pointed out, Honneth and Joas recover the human being, first of all, as an organic and bodily organism, which self-constitutes physically and psychically through the practical interaction with external sensuous objects and situations, but with the distinctive capacity to humanize both external and internal nature. Following Feuerbach's and Marx's suggestions, Honneth and Joas revisit the notion of human subjectivity by first replacing the emergence of human contents, such as its needs, interests, and capacities in the practical interaction that the human subject, as a natural organism, undertakes with external sensuous objects and situations, and secondly, by grasping the quality or structure that distinguishes the human being's sensuous and practical exchange with the external world. That is, the capacity to cognitively process the structures of the outer world, on which its subjective contents are substantially and objectively dependent, for identifying the objective and social conditions that can be transformed to allow the meaningful satisfaction of its needs.

In such a theoretical framework, recognition appears as *one* of the structural elements concurring at the possibility for the human being to develop such a qualitative practical interaction with the world of objectivity. We have seen how the first element that Honneth and Joas analyze is *sensuous openness to the world*. The processes of human cognition, practical anticipation, and transformation of outer conditions are theoretically and practically misplaced

if not related to the sensuous structure of the subject's practical interaction with the external world. These cannot be conceived as capacities belonging to the human subject only theoretically and intellectually. Human capacity for action is the meaningful transformation of the outer world, not narrowed to work production, according to the sensuous and constitutive interactions occurring among subjects and the outer world. Moreover, by revaluing Feuerbach's notion of emancipatory sensuousness against the strictly socio-historical notion of Marx, Honneth and Joas attempt to stress the disruptive and situational process of development of human sensuousness in relation to the external world.

Recognition among subjects appears herein as the second and interrelated structural element concurring at the realization of human activity as an ongoing process of humanization of nature. This is so because, by following Feuerbach's notions of "altruism," Honneth and Joas do not refer to recognition as the unique relational pole for the development of human subjectivity, but rather as the structural element allowing the human being to develop and perform its distinguishing co-constitutive interaction with the external world. Here, from a methodological point of view, Honneth, together with Joas, does not consider recognition as a relationship occurring among subjects for the development of their psychic integrity or normatively positive self-relation. Instead, following Feuerbach, recognition appears as the genetic and performative condition for the human being to develop and perform its constitutive exchange with the outer world. Hence, if we want to render explicit and develop the suggestions of the two authors, recognition herein represents a subjective interaction that is, from an ontological point of view, in continuity with the natural dimension of the human subject, the natural world in general, and the interaction among the two. Due to such an underlying naturalistic understanding of recognition, we want to carve out a consequently different theoretical framework on recognition, whose critical potential appears enriched both for what concerns its ontological conditions and its ontological status.

Through Feuerbach's insights, at the bottom of the human being's distinguishing quality for action there is an "empirical, corporeal community"³¹⁴, that is, the existence of a community of subjects recognizing each other. We have previously seen, indeed, that Feuerbach identifies "love" as the capacity of human beings to physically and affectively take the perspective of the other bodily subject, that is, to participate, while self-distinguishing as an individual, in the sensuous experience of the former in relation to the external world. This reciprocal and

³¹⁴ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 14.

decentralizing involvement of subjects in their sensuous neediness allows them not only to constitute as self-conscious embodied subjects ontologically. It permits them as well to develop, from an epistemic point of view, their cognitive capacities. Indeed, through this first bodily and emotional level of recognition, the affective and sensuous contents of external objects and situations that the human being first experiences on a corporeal and affective dimension become shareable with other subjects, observable and perceptible in their outer objectivity and neediness from an intersubjective and communal point of view. The possibility to communally perceive the needy-structure that binds the subject to external objects and situations, according to Feuerbach, leads the human being to “reconcile with the world”³¹⁵ together with the other subject, that is, to intersubjectively approach the world of neediness with a commonality of bodies and perceptions. Such a communal and intersubjective mediation to the external world, made possible by the ethically reciprocal and affective participation among subjects in their needy experiences, represents the *source*, the constant *mediation* and the *final aim* for the development among subjects of a common knowledge of the external sensuous objects.

First, this reciprocal and affective participation among subjects in their needy experience is the *ontological source* for knowledge. Feuerbach does not only sketch a naturalistic significance of human cognition as “humanizing” the subject’s sensuous experience. Moreover, he acknowledges human processes of cognition and knowledge as intrinsically intersubjective and social mechanisms. In fact, knowledge is a theoretical means not individually constituted and belonging to the human subject, but rather it develops interactively and is socially employed. Therefore, we can understand Feuerbach’s assertion “without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty but meaningless”³¹⁶ as follows. Without the other human being, the subject could not enrich its experience through the pluralistic sensuous perspective of other subjects. And consequently, it could not discover the multilayered intelligible and significant core of its experience through the theoretical development of intersubjective – thus objective – meaningful perspectives on external objects, emerging from the ongoing expressive interactions with other subjects. Therefore, if we want to further develop Feuerbach’s insights, the emotional and affective recognition occurring among individuals as vulnerable, sensuous, and needy subjects, embodied in an external world, entails the development of a second level of recognition, genetically and functionally dependent

³¹⁵ Feuerbach, 2008, p. 47.

³¹⁶ Feuerbach, 2008, p. 47.

on the former. That is, this second level is the reciprocal recognition among individuals as subjects capable of theoretically signifying and cognizing the world, hence participating in a collective learning process of human neediness and external sensuous objects.

Finally, following Feuerbach, this community of bodies represents the *mediation* and the *final aim* of the processes of signification and cognition developing from the recognition among individuals as cognitive and epistemic subjects. It represents their ontological mediation and final aim substantially, therefore, from a content point of view. The primary object of human cognitive processes is the sensuousness of subjects, namely, their ontological vulnerability and dependence upon the external world, to be grasped socially in those structures of outer qualitative objects that materially determine them.

Nevertheless, we have seen how Honneth and Joas stress the necessity to enrich Feuerbach's "contemplative" understanding of human action with Marx's insights. Feuerbach does not acknowledge that the active exchange occurring between the subject and the external world entails a real, practical, material transformation of outer conditions, both natural and social, even if the latter should not be intended in Marxian strict productive terms. Human sensuousness and processes of cognition are not ahistorically and asocially devoted to theoretically knowing the external world for interacting with the outer world abstractly. Instead, they are destined to practically change external situations, both natural and social, for the institution of a successful practical exchange of the social subject with the external world. From Honneth and Joas' analytical (not ontological) specification of this third level of human action, we can infer the existence of a third cognitive level or meaning lying under the capacity of the human being to humanize nature, and that is dependent and constitutive of the two former levels of recognition that we have here identified, that is, affective and cognitive recognition. That is, the third cognitive level is the reciprocal recognition among human beings as practical and transformative social subjects, capable of meaningfully changing external social and objective conditions for the realization and satisfaction of their *subjective* and *objective* contents through coordinated and cooperative social practices and institutions. Indeed, "individual action is then only part of an encompassing societal plexus."³¹⁷ Therefore, recognition is herein presented as the intersubjective relationship allowing, from a descriptive and normative point of view, the human subject to constitutively develop and perform its distinctive capacity for action with the world of objectivity. Indeed, in order to genetically acquire and perform its

³¹⁷ Honneth & Joas, 1988, p. 62.

capacity to signify and cognize the world while changing it, the subject is but dependent upon the recognition with other subjects, which represents the subjective interaction that “reconciles” the human being with the external world, through an emotional, cognitive, and practical manner.

Through such a theoretical framework, it seems possible to conceive of recognition as that intersubjective confirmation that does not only allow the subject to develop a normatively positive relationship to itself and its contents, as having bare social worth. Instead, it is that intersubjective confirmation, three-dimensionally occurring, permitting the subject to perform its distinguishing practical exchange with the external world, that is, its capacity to humanize the outer world by rendering its self-constitutive process through objectivity significant, meaningful, and practically realizable.

Due to such an enlargement of a mere psychologist meaning of recognition with a naturalistic one, which constitutively has to do with the natural subject, the natural world, and the interaction among the two, we can disclose an enriched description of both the self-realization of human subjectivity and the genus of recognition. Firstly, the self-realization of the human subject appears not to be circumscribed to its psychic or personal integrity, i.e., to the development of the normative personal preconditions necessary for approaching its personal contents positively and freely. Rather, it entails also the appropriation by the subject of its sensuous, meaningful, and practical unification with the interacting external world. Secondly, it follows that the genus of ethical recognition can be further enriched. The formal description of ethical recognition as the “positive and active affirmation of the subject as a person,” can be further specified by using, at this point of our argument, Feuerbach’s insight. Accordingly, the genus of recognition can also be conceived in terms of the intersubjective affirmative relationship occurring in the form of “the *reconciliation* of the human being, as an embodied and practical subject, with the external world.” As we have previously seen, within Honneth’s mature theoretical framework, which considers the constitutive process of human subjectivity only in relation to recognition, this latter can be defined in its genus only through the general expression of “affective and active affirmation” of the human subject as a person, that is, as the positive response to its being an intentional, rational, deliberative, and normative individual.³¹⁸ In the absence of a recovery of the human subject in its embodied and practical dimension, relating to an external environment with which it undertakes a co-constitutive process according

³¹⁸ See Laitinen, 2007 for an analysis of the person-making capacities lying under the notion of *Anerkennung*.

to a specific humane structure, a further understanding of what such an affirmative intersubjective mediation is compelled to bring about in order to be fully ethical, concurring at the self-realization of the human subject, remains blurred, unexpressed, closed in the intrapsychic dimension of human subjectivity, and thus open to manipulation. Instead, through a naturalistic understanding of recognition like the one that indirectly emerges in *Social Action and Human Nature*, recognition can be redefined, borrowing Feuerbach's expression momentarily, as that form of affirmation, occurring three-dimensionally, suitable to reconcile the human subject in its distinctive practical exchange with the external world. Given a naturalistic redefinition of the genus of recognition in terms of the reconciliation of the human being with the world of sensuousness, the constitutive ontological conditions and ontological status of ethical recognition could be directly specified in light of the conditions of human action itself.

For what concerns its ontological conditions, we could say that recognition is ethical when it stands for:

- i) the affective and emotional participation in the other subject's corporeal and sensuous interaction with the outer world's objective qualities, which substantially and objectively define its subjective needy contents
- ii) the epistemic effort in disclosing intelligently and meaningfully the structure of the world's sensuous objects and situations (both natural and social) to which the needy experience of subjects is attached and through which it is defined, and constituted
- iii) the practical transformation of the external conditions, both natural and social, that objectively sustain the practical realization, enhancement, and enlargement of subjective contents in relation to the outer world, thereby meaningfully and concretely allowing their ontological unity and practical interdependence.

The empirical corporeal community, which becomes a learning and meaningfulness-searching corporeal community, must then turn into a transformative corporeal community. The ethical truthfulness, reliability, and effectiveness of the socially participated process of satisfaction and disclosure of human neediness and vulnerability thereby reflect in the concrete possibility for the social subjects to meaningfully, materially, and practically satisfy and realize their needs according to the objective conditions that substantially determine them.

For what concerns its ontological status, i.e., the ontological *type* of relationship that recognition must be in order to remain ethical, we can see how in *Social Action and Human*

Nature, although not made explicit by the two authors, such a relation, from a methodological point of view, appears as being part of the natural world. Recognition is an intersubjective relationship occurring in the natural interaction between the human being and the external world. Additionally, we must recall that Honneth and Joas attempt to point out both the *situational* and *historical* dynamism of the relationship between the human subject and the external world by collecting the theoretical advantages of both Feuerbach and Marx. On the one hand, Marx underlines the historical shape of the co-constitutive exchange between the human being and the outer world. On the other hand, they attempt to mitigate the structural and systemic aspect of Marx's historicization of such a constitutive relationship, according to which the sensuous creativity of the human being's interaction with the external world is somehow always narrowed and structured by the sensuous, cognitive, and agentic possibilities for action contained in the historical shape of a specific historical and social world. Indeed, they quickly refer to the critical potential that Feuerbach's notion of emancipatory sensuousness intrinsically maintained with respect to Marx's strictly socio-historical interpretation of human sensuousness. Accordingly, the human being's organic interaction with the world of objectivity, despite always occurring in a social world somewhat structured in its objects and situations, still maintains a potentiality for subversion, emancipation, radical departure, and deviation from the possibilities for action released by the historically and socially shaped environment. In *Social Action and Human Nature*, the authors do not go deeper into developing such an idea of the human being's emancipatory sensuousness or situational action. To further explain the creativity proper of the human being would mean to refer to a naturalistic theory of human subjectivity that inquires more deeply into the continuity and the specificity of the levels of nature, then clarifying the intrinsic co-existence within the historical subject of its organic dimension, with the relentless situationality of its experience, and the consequent situational dynamic of recognition and historical social worlds.

Despite the lack of further conceptual and theoretical tools suitable to more deeply thematize the motives of the human being's relentless and deviating creativity from the possibilities for action of a specific social context into a particular historical phase, Honneth and Joas ontologically describe human action as a humanization of internal and external nature occurring *dynamically* and *progressively*. Recognition, standing for the intersubjective relationship conditionally constituting the possibility for the human being to undertake such a humanizing process, is to be conceived, due to the dynamic and progressive movement of

human activity, in terms of a dynamic relationship. Namely, it must not fossilize the human being's sensuous, meaningful, and transformative constitutive interaction with the external world into static social meanings, categories, statuses, practices, and institutions. Instead, it must define the subject while allowing it to disclose further new and greater sensuous interactions with the external world, and conversely, new meaningful perspectives and practical transformative interactions with it. Therefore, given this, albeit sketched and incomplete, theoretical framework on human activity, it seems possible to contextualize better the previous definition of the ontological status of ethical recognition we previously pinpointed through Saar's ontology of power. The human being is a creative and transformative individual because, due to its natural, organic, and bodily dimension, it dynamically interacts with the context where it lives, thereby progressively enriching its sensuous neediness, and, as an embodied subject, it gradually discloses new meanings and practical unities with outer objects and situations. Recognition, therefore, is a transaction of power to act, to be thematized in terms of the further possibility of the human subject, due to the determining and enriching potentialities disclosed by recognition, to be sensitive and open to the meanings and humanizing transformations springing out from the new, situational sensuous interactions with external objects and situations.

Through the reflections we have drawn so far, we have attempted to demonstrate that in *Social Action and Human Nature*, before the critical programs outlined in *The Critique of Power* and *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth, together with Joas, has developed a different approach to recognition. In Chapter Two and Chapter Three, we have seen how Honneth, in *The Critique of Power*, lays the underpinnings of his mature critical theory of recognition by critically reconstructing the theoretical frameworks at the bottom of the critical theories of the previous generations of the Frankfurt School. He concludes this work by pointing out the necessity for critical theory to consider, besides the constitutive interaction between the human being and the external world, the other fundamental interaction occurring among subjects for their self-realization, namely, recognition. We have concluded that in this work, Honneth rightly underlines the critical inefficacy of Horkheimer and Adorno's anthropology due to their missing consideration of the critical normativity arising from the requests of recognition existing among subjects. Indeed, due to their sole analysis of the creative development of the human subjects' contents through the relation with objectivity, Horkheimer and Adorno miss both the dependence of the human being's self-realization on relationships of affirmation with

other subjects, through which they develop a successful relationship with themselves, and the consequent normative and struggling reactions of historical social subjects in the absence of such confirming attitudes. Nevertheless, in *The Critique of Power*, Honneth maintains dualistically such two constitutive interactions of human subjectivity's self-realization, without inquiring on their ontological and normative interdependence and without considering the possible functionality of intersubjective recognition towards the exchange that the human being undertakes with the external world. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, such a dualistic overview of the various constitutive interactions of the human being has not been overcome, but rather it has been wholly set aside in its further critical potentialities of analysis. Indeed, in his *opus magnum*, Honneth attempted to deeper define the role of recognition for human subjectivity's self-realization by inquiring only on the mechanism for which such an intersubjective relationship is suitable to allow the individual to develop a positive relation to itself, abandoning any anthropological reflection on the form of action and interaction that characterizes the human being in the external world. We have then considered how, from such a methodological strategy, Honneth's mature theoretical framework and paradigm of recognition has been fundamental for several reasons. He has outlined a moral understanding of the social struggles for recognition, a common semantic framework for interpreting their historical forms, and a formal criterion for critique, that of the "good life." This criterion relies upon a genus of recognition, defined as "the intersubjective affirmation of the subject as a person," suitable to disclose to critical social analysis those social contexts wherein the possibility for human subjects to develop a positive personal self-relation is manifestly prevented and obstructed due to the lack of positive relationships of recognition.

Then, we have seen how his mature theoretical framework on recognition remains unsatisfactory for detecting those two forms of inadequate recognition wherein among social subjects reciprocal conferrals of positive evaluations, practically sustained, do occur, but which maintain existing relations of social oppression or lead subjects to be powerfully determined by standardized and fixed processes of identification through existing symbolic and material social frameworks. Due to such problems of critical sensitivity, we have deemed it necessary to understand the *theoretical reason* for which Honneth's mature theoretical framework and paradigm of recognition cannot further specify the ontological conditions and ontological status of ethical recognition. We have identified such a reason in the missing attempt of his mature

works to analyze the interconnection among the various constitutive interactions of human subjectivity he pinpoints, even if dualistically, in *The Critique of Power*.

For this reason, in this chapter, we have referred to a juvenile work of Honneth, often overlooked and unconsidered in the contemporary critical debate on recognition, whose theoretical potentialities for a theory of recognition has not been developed by Honneth nor further integrated into his mature project and theory of recognition. As we have tried to highlight, *Social Action and Human Nature* precisely refers to recognition through a different methodological approach. Honneth and Joas frame the relational category of recognition in the broader theoretical recovery of the human subject as an embodied and practical subject, focusing on the *quality* or structure defining the constitutive exchange occurring between the human subject and the external world. Thus, we have analyzed the theory of subjectivity developed in this work reconstructing, firstly, the underlying naturalistic meaning of its core definition of the human being as an organic, bodily, and practical subject that is capable of humanizing external and internal nature, both natural and social. It turned out that the human subject, since it is an animal organism, self-develops and constitutes, physically and psychically, through the sensuous and practical interaction with the objective qualities of the external world. But with the distinctive possibility, due to its being a subject, to strengthen its interaction with the external world by disclosing the intelligible structures of the outer world's qualities and practically transforming it. Hence, human action with the external world is defined accordingly as a process of *humanization* of the constitutive bond existing between the individual and the external world, which occurs dynamically and, which is essential for our reflections, through a recognitive structure.

The interesting point of this work lies in the critical potential that the two authors identify in such an account of human action for critically disclosing the ideological and fossilized core of those social practices and institutions that are supposed to satisfy human neediness, but that actually prevent the human subject from appropriating its capacity for action, in the form of an impediment or a blockage. They can impede it by rendering the subject's sensuous contents not meaningful and unrelated to the adequate practical transformation of their objective conditions, or they can block it by failing to adjust to the intrinsic dynamism of the human being's sensuous interaction with the outer world. Moreover, Honneth and Joas point out how human activity, in its sensuous, cognitive, and transformative dimension is always

mediated by and occurs through a corporeal community of subjects tied to reciprocal relationships of affirmation occurring on a sensuous, cognitive, and practical level.

From their basing the human capacity for action in the external world on intersubjective recognition, we have attempted to show how it is possible to conceive of recognition as an intersubjective interaction devoted to “reconciling” or “mediating” the human being with its very distinguishing approach to the external world. Here, the two authors do not aim at distinguishing the three fundamental forms of recognition. Their very attempt is to cast doubts upon the scientific frameworks that somehow prevent theorists from considering the creativity and dynamics characterizing the human being in its historical progress. Rather, they unveil the recognitive structure underlying the quality of the human being’s practical interaction with the world. Due to such a descriptive and normative dependence of recognition upon the structure of human action, we have concluded that it seems feasible to enrich the mainstream theoretical framework of recognition by further defining the genus of ethical recognition while specifying its ontological conditions and ontological status. Given the conditions of the human interaction with the world of objectivity, recognition, at this stage of our reflections, can be more concretely defined as the “the *reconciliation* of the human being, as an embodied and practical subject, with the external world.” Besides leading the subject to reach a normatively positive relationship to itself, the ontological conditions of ethical recognition can be further identified in representing the adequate learning and transformative process of human subjects’ sensuous experience, allowing the individual to meaningfully reach its practical unity with the external world. Whereas conversely, the ontological status that recognition should maintain in order to remain ethical, without turning into a lifeless and alienating relationship, can be defined in terms of a living transaction of power. That is, recognition should be a socially defining and determining interaction, which, nonetheless, allows the subject to be sensuously open to the new potential meanings and transformative possibilities stemming from the new, dynamic interactions with external objects and situations.

Thanks to the possible enrichment that a broader naturalistic anthropology can entail for defining the genus of ethical recognition, its ontological conditions, and ontological status, it is feasible to conversely disclose the critical potential that it can provide for the mainstream paradigm of recognition represented by Honneth’s mature theory. Due to such a theoretical enrichment, it is possible to detect as inadequate all those recognitive relationships occurring among subjects, social groups, and institutions that do allow social subjects to develop positive

experiences of themselves through affirmative reactions but while objectively impeding or blocking their capacity to humanize the external world. The ideological and dominating core of those recognitive relationships, which confer public worth to the contents of social subjects but for maintaining them into existing relationships of domination and oppression, can be detected in their ethical inadequacy as follows. They are ideological since they fail to meaningfully process and practically bring about the objective conditions on which the subjects' needy contents are substantially depending, maintaining subjects in situations of unmeaningful, practical blockage and disunity with their practical contexts. For instance, slaves in slave-owing societies, women in patriarchal societies, and workers in late capitalist societies are all cases wherein the needs of the social subjects, i.e., to equally and positively develop their working capacities and social qualities in the social arena, are prevented from being grasped meaningfully and practically, through a social learning and transformative process, in the objective conditions that govern their adequate practical satisfaction and enhancement, entailing a practical blockage of the subjects' capacity for action. Indeed, in the absence of the proper understanding of the juridical, cultural, political, and economic conditions that are to be transformed and introduced in order to render such needs fully meaningful in their intelligible structures and practically satisfied without obstructions in the practical and living unity of the social subject with their contexts of action, social subjects are practically stuck, kept in an objective incapacity to humanize their sensuous experiences and materially transform their external context.

In the case of slaves and women, for instance, the positive evaluation and related practices they receive from the social context, which are sufficient for developing a positive experience of themselves in the social context, do not represent a form of "reconciliation" of the subject with the world. Indeed, their needs for social equality, participation in the cooperative system of the civil society, and realization of their personal capacities are missing the adequate juridical rights, the functional politics of both economic redistribution and public and political participation, and the inclusive and non-discriminatory symbolic and practical frameworks that are necessary, from an objective and not merely subjective point of view, to realize their needs significantly and without practical obstructions in the existing situations wherein they emerge. The positive public evaluation of their personality is accompanied by their practical incapacity and impossibility to really develop their working and social capacities and needs. They are materially deprived of the economic autonomy with which to dispose of

them freely, they are maintained in economic systems of imperialism and physical exploitation, in social, cultural, and political practices that physically, emotionally, and cognitively limit them from developing a practical unity with their external contexts. They are integrated into the social context, hence being allowed to perform certain possibilities for action, but they are concretely and materially devoid of the socially participated comprehension of the objective conditions through which they actively humanize, satisfy, and enhance their practical and sensuous transactions with the external social context.

The case of workers in advanced capitalism represents a case of inadequate recognition as well, for the rhetoric and formal exaltation of the role of the self-entrepreneur and its infinite possibilities to work, which are up to the individual to catch, is accompanied by the progressive erosion of labour rights and guarantees, the implementation of the competitive, excluding, and exploiting logic of the capitalist economic system, the increasing deconstruction of the spaces of social confrontation, and the possibilities for political participation. The very need of the subject to realize its potentialities in work is thereby devoid of the social learning process devoted to elaborating it meaningfully, hence being practically impeded, precarious, blocked. In addition to these cases of ideological recognition to which Honneth referred to in *Recognition and Ideology*, we could cite many other examples. To mention some of them, we can think about the inefficient economic, working, and energy politics through which contemporary states and companies attempt to ideologically respond to the ecological interests and needs of the social counterparts.³¹⁹ Or we can refer to the impossibility for women to be socially recognized in their care work through mere economic or compensatory policies, without an adequate reconsideration of the division of productive and reproductive labour among sexes, without the enrichment of the juridical system in terms of rights for maternity and parity for work, without the transformation of the economic system of capitalism, whose logic is paradigmatically in contradiction with life and care, or without the adequate reconsideration of the cultural categories of women's bodies, mind, and sexuality.³²⁰

³¹⁹ For a critical approach to the various versions of Green New Deal that the USA and Europe programmatically stipulated in their political agenda for dealing with the climate crisis, see Aronoff, Battistoni, Aldana Cohen, & Riofrancos, eds., 2019. Their core idea is that promoting ecologically responsible individual behaviours, providing economic incentives for green policies, enforcing the role of the State in rigidly setting stringent limits on coal emission and changing the productive structure of our economic system will be not sufficient in the absence of a radical democratization of the economy, of a radical overcoming of economic, racial, and gender inequalities, of a dismantling of capitalism and its competitive and exploitative constitutive logic.

³²⁰ For the ideological politics of care work, see Young, 2011; Rössler, 2011; Federici, 2008. See also the beautiful contribution of the economist Amaia Pérez Orozco with its feminist manifesto, wherein the contradiction among capitalism and care work is presented in its dramatic insuperability (Pérez Orozco, 2014, 2020).

The ethical inadequateness of these relationships of recognition is not to be referred, as Honneth does in *Recognition and Ideology*, to their irrational kernel, that is to their intrinsic disconnection between their evaluative and practical dimensions. Rather, this disconnection is to be rendered sensitive and evident due to the objective blockage of the specific capacity for action of social subjects, the one of meaningfully humanizing their proper needs while transforming the objective conditions governing their practical unity with the external world.

Instead, those cognitive relationships that are not *per se* oppressive and unjust but limit lifelessly and mechanically the subject's possibilities for the creative transformation of their socially determined subjective contents are to be critically detected in their ethical inadequacy due to their dismissal of the status of transactions of power, allowing the subject to be sensuously open to the new sensuous, meaningful, and transformative interactions with changing external objects and situations. The descriptive and normative categories through which social subjects are publicly recognized and enabled in the social context, such as "worker," "citizen," "women," "men," "mother," "daughter," "student," "heterosexual," "homosexual," "white," "black," etc., are all categories devoted to responding to specific subjective needs, interests, and qualities. They entail both the partial supra-subjective determination of subjects and the empowerment of a set of possibilities for emotions, actions, beliefs. Still, they are to be involved in a continuous process of growing redefinition through changing situations and conditions, following the sensuous and emotional development of subjects' experiences. Indeed, the relationship to one's own body, the redefinition of the meaning and the best conditions for work, and the definition of social roles and political, juridical, cultural, and social values are all invested in a progressive development due to the subjects' changing sensuous and emotional interactions with the external contexts, to which recognition is compelled to dynamically adjust in order to be ethical. Recognition must stand for the dynamic transaction allowing subjects to extract further potentialities for meanings, knowledge, and practical transformations and enhancements of qualitative values of experience. Therefore, all those social standardizations and normalizations of human subjects that impede being sensuously open to the dynamics of external contexts, rethinking them intelligently, and that block the gradual and progressive transformation of social practices, categories, and institutions are but denying the creativity belonging to the subjects and the very disclosure of intelligibility and transformation.

For instance, we can take the examples of the rigid codification of social roles such as the contemporary good young researcher in academia,³²¹ the binary sexuality and affectivity admitted within western modern and contemporary societies³²² or, remaining into feminist critical theory, the liberal paradigm of feminism, resulting from the feminist social conflicts of the '70s. For several decades, this liberal paradigm has represented the normalized and standardized paradigm to which any feminist woman was supposed to equate to, with the myth of the working woman assuming the competitive, remunerative, liberal, aggressive logic of the paradigm of male work. The unquestionable disclosure to women of new public and social dimensions have been nonetheless accompanied, and still are, by mechanical and supra-subjective determinations of the behavioural paradigm to which women, to succeed in the working sphere and be considered good examples of feminism, must attend to, regardless of the creative emotional, affective, and meaningful development emerging nowadays in the field of care activity in relation to existing economic, working, and ecological conditions.³²³ The empowerment of the liberal paradigm of feminism, as long as it remains mediated by static relationships of recognition destined to locating and defining the potentialities to be women in contemporary societies, turns into a social determination that powerfully defines and objectifies social subjects without allowing them to appropriate existing social and material determinations with the creativity of their dynamic experiences.

These are the theoretical enrichments that a naturalistic anthropology of the human being, which attempts to provide a formal description of the practical and co-constitutive exchange between the human being and the external world and to place recognition as the intersubjective mediation among the two, could provide for critically strengthening the contemporary paradigm of recognition. Nevertheless, the naturalistic anthropology we have

³²¹ The young researcher in academia, for instance, is now supposed to be competitive, attractive, always ready to run around world, catching possibilities for networking and publication regardless of the dynamic social, economic, and political conditions that now are investing, changing, and enriching the social experiences of subjects. Many examples of this type can be found in Jaeggi (2014), such as the good and attractive editor in the competitive world of capitalist work or the 30-year-old man who settles down in his private life through marriage and a defined work.

³²² See Foucault, 1984, for the history of productive social power on sexuality and its different fields (histerization of the woman's body, pedagogization of children's sex, socialization of procreative behaviour, psychiatrization of perverse pleasure), and Butler, 1997, Ch. 5, for the analysis of the melancholia of binary sexuality. See also Allen, 2010, for the identification of the constitutive power underneath educational processes for the empowerment of biologically female and male children with stereotyped categories of sex and gender.

³²³ See the beautiful feminist manifesto of Cinzia Arruzza, Nany Fraser, and Tithi Bhattacharaya, *Feminism for the 99%* (2019), wherein they propose an alternative conception of feminism, alternative to liberal feminism, wherein gender, racial, working, and ecologic issues are conceived as strictly interrelated.

enlightened within *Social Action and Human Nature* remains merely sketched and unsatisfactorily so.

Firstly, as we have previously pointed out, the account of human action or human experience within the objective world that Honneth and Joas point out is scattered and unsystematic. Indeed, this latter can be retrieved by gathering together their reconstructions of Feuerbach's and Marx's positions by underlining their respective crucial insights, the emancipatory sensuousness of Feuerbach and the historical materialism of Marx, but without the reference or the elaboration of a uniform account of human experience suitable to explain and integrate these two aspects theoretically. Indeed, they do not outline a systematic account of human experience with the external world that, due to an expanded and mature naturalistic analysis of the *ontological continuity* and *specificity* of the levels of nature, is suitable, on the one hand, to stress the practical and transformative meaning of human action without limiting it to productive activity. On the other hand, to explain the emancipatory processuality of human interactions with the external world, and thereby of the human social processes of signification and cognition, while integrating it with the historical and cultural character of human societies.

Secondly, Honneth has not subsequently developed the critical potentialities of the naturalistic account of recognition present in *Social Action and Human Nature*, outlining from this anthropology a program of social philosophy which relies upon such an understanding of recognition. Indeed, except for *Reification* and its retrieval of a philosophical anthropology, albeit naturalistically de-potentiated,³²⁴ Honneth abandoned completely such a methodological

³²⁴ *Reification* (2005) is the work Honneth dedicates to the reconstruction of the Lukácsian concept of reification through the category of recognition. Indeed, Lukács, in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), approaches the critique of capitalist societies in terms of “deviations from a kind of human praxis or worldview essentially characteristic of the rationality of our form of life” (Honneth, 2008, p. 21), the one of an “empathic and engaged relationship towards themselves and their surroundings” (Honneth, 2008, p. 27). Indeed, Lukács develops the Marxian insight according to which the expansion of the commodity exchange, the systemic transformation of human work into waged labour, the institution of juridical, institutional, and political fields super-structurally depending on the logic of value extraction for profit and accumulation, lead the human being to substitute its empathic and engaged relation with its surrounding, the other subjects and itself, with a mere contemplative, detached, and instrumental one. Honneth attempts to recover this relational understanding of reification, where “something that doesn't possess thing-like characteristics in itself (i.e., something human) comes to be regarded as a thing” (Honneth, 2008, p. 21), in a threefold manner. First, he formalizes Lukács' essentialist identification of human activity with work (as also Marx did), by considering human action, in all its possible declinations, as an engaged and affective relationship with objects and subjects. Second, he conceives of reification not in Lukácsian pessimistic terms of a radical and habitually enforced abandonment by subjects of their natural approach to the world. Rather, reification is to be understood in terms of a “forgetfulness” of the empathic and affective exchange at the bottom of human emotional life and cognition. Third, he relates the subject's loss of its original involved approach to the external world and its personal experience to the obscuration of a “primordial form” of intersubjective recognition, occurring in the form of an existential sympathy or affective interest in the other subject, which precedes cognition and that allows enriching the values of the external world and the personal experiences of subjects. In this work, therefore, Honneth retrieves the centrality of the human being's affectiveness

approach to recognition, missing the opportunity, on the one hand, to outline a critical program focused on such an understanding of recognition. On the other hand, he missed the opportunity to identify its enriching critical sensitivity we have here pointed out concerning the clarification of the ontological conditions and ontological status of recognition.

For these two reasons, concerning the conceptual incompleteness and a-systematicity of a naturalistic understanding of human action and the missing development of a social-philosophical program relied upon a naturalistic understanding of recognition, *Social Action and Human Nature* cannot be considered as providing a sufficiently grounded and developed naturalistic critical framework for rethinking recognition in its ontological conditions and ontological status and as outlining an account of critical social theory manifestly employing it.

Therefore, for the third and last part of our analysis, we want to reconstruct the critical project of the American pragmatist John Dewey, quoted by Honneth several times but without a systematic consideration of his overall philosophical thought.³²⁵ Firstly, we will analyze Dewey's *Lectures in China* (1919-1920) and the *Syllabus* of 1923. In this collection of lectures in social and political philosophy, it is possible, on the one hand, to find a program for social philosophy relying upon the category of recognition, through which, similarly to *The Struggle for Recognition* of Honneth, he considered human societies' progress in terms of progressive stages of struggles for social recognition. On the other hand, it is feasible to reconstruct in this work a fundamentally alternative understanding of recognition, and thus of social philosophy,

and emotionality towards the outer world, understanding human cognition as functionally devoted to grasping the qualitative side of the world. Moreover, he identifies a primordial form of recognition, an affective sympathy toward other persons that leads to experience their perspectives on the world as having significance, and that precede all the other distinguished forms of cognitive attitudes. Herein Honneth leaves aside the tripartite distinction among the forms of recognition to recall the critical potential of an elementary recognition. "We must feel existential sympathy for the other, before we can learn to orient ourselves toward norms of recognition that compel us to express certain specific forms of concern or benevolence" (Honneth, 2008, p. 152). In this work, nonetheless, Honneth does not maintain nor develop the naturalistic approach of *Social Action and Human Nature*. He refers to the interaction occurring between the subject and the outer world but without considering the organic continuity between the two, the practical dimension of this relation and its transformative significance for both poles. Consequently, the very theoretical focus he maintains concerns the original cognitive relationship occurring among subjects so that the ethical dependence of recognition on the human exchange with the external world ultimately remains in the background of his critical analysis of reification. Therefore, even if in *Reification* some of the issues of *Social Action and Human Nature* are maintained, such as the functionality of cognition towards human affection for the values of the outer world and the reference to a not internally distinguished original and primary genus of recognition, the naturalistic and practical insights of this latter work get lost.

³²⁵ Honneth quotes Dewey respectively in *The Struggle for Recognition*, for what concerns his pragmatist theory of emotions, in *Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation* (2000) and *Freedom's Right* for his theory of democracy as a "way of life," rather than as a mere form of political government, and finally in *Reification* for his affectivity-based theory of human cognition. Honneth's interest in John Dewey's naturalistic social philosophy continues to develop into the present, as is directly shown by the introduction to the German edition of Dewey's *Lectures in China* written together with Arvi Särkelä (Honneth & Särkelä, 2019).

due to the naturalistic theoretical premises on the human subject and its social world that theoretically sustain the entire text, suggesting that Dewey intrinsically conceives recognition in its ontological and normative dependence on the human subject's ontological and living continuity with the external natural world. Indeed, Dewey normatively places recognition precisely at the living conjuncture existing between subjectivity and objectivity, as an interaction genetically and performatively devoted to maintaining both their ontological continuity and the distinctive ethical meaning that human activity acquires in relation to the external world.

Secondly, once referred to the naturalistic premises of the *Lectures in China*, on which Dewey methodologically bases the relationship of recognition, we want then to point out the significance of his *Naturalistic Humanism*, for clarifying the theoretical meaning that Dewey confers to recognition and its constitutive role for human subjectivity. Dewey developed his naturalistic theory of human action in its breadth while clarifying its full meaning and theoretical implications, mostly, in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Experience and Nature* (1925), published a few years after the lectures in social and political philosophy he gave in China, and in later works such as *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Theory of Valuation* (1939). In such a reconstruction, we will highlight how Dewey's theory of human experience is precisely a philosophical anthropology devoted to providing a critical approach to human societies. We will attempt to present it as a theoretical and conceptual framework wherein it is possible to find the systematicity and the completeness for a naturalistic understanding of the human subject that was missing in *Social Action and Human Nature*. Indeed, in the revolutionary trail of Darwin's Evolutionism and the pragmatic redefinition of human subjectivity provided by the nascent American pragmatism of the late 1800s, Dewey clearly describes the human subject, on the one hand, in its relentless, situational, emancipatory, and practical organic transaction with the external environment. On the other hand, he describes the human subject in its distinguishing qualitative approach to external and internal nature. Herein, meanings, knowledge, and cognition are considered as *living and practical functions*, experimentally reached, of human experience, devoted to entailing practically the transformation of external surroundings and the meaningfully strengthening and enhancing of the practical living unity between the subject and the external world. Moreover, we will underline the intersubjective and recognitive structure that Dewey lays under the qualitative experience of the human being, by conceiving the human being's distinguishing

experience within the external world as intrinsically socially performed and shared. The recognitive relationship with other subjects is indeed contained in Dewey's works as the constitutive and performative condition of the former, as ontologically devoted to meaningfully and practically enhancing *life*, that is, the dynamic and processual constitutive dependence and vulnerability existing among subjects and the outer world. Therefore, the final result we aim to reach is to present Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism as a developed and potentiated naturalistic understanding of human activity and social recognition. Thereby, through Dewey, we will be able to overcome Honneth's mature framework of recognition and develop the naturalistic potential meaning of *Social Action and Human Nature*. Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism can represent indeed the theoretical and conceptual framework upon which grounding the different genus, ontological conditions, and ontological status of ethical recognition that we have herein outlined, and thus, a strengthened critical theory of recognition.

***PART 3. DEWEY'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY AND
NATURALISTIC HUMANISM. THEIR CRITICAL
RELEVANCE FOR RECOGNITION THEORY***

Chapter Seven. The Contemporary Rediscovery of Dewey's Social Philosophy and the Case of the Lectures in China. Preliminary Remarks on Work Organization

John Dewey's social and political thinking is now going through a remarkable moment of rediscovery within contemporary social philosophy and critical theory. It can be argued that his philosophic thinking has gone through two different phases of rebirth and rediscovery.

The first one occurred in the 1960s, when in American universities the ban on pragmatism and its co-founders, Peirce and James, and Dewey too (despite belonging to a later generation than Peirce and James), gradually faded. Indeed, after Dewey's death in 1952, the philosophical tradition of pragmatism, which, since the last decades of the 19th century, had represented both a result and an interpretative and critical framework of the nascent industrial and democratic American society, was gradually abandoned. It was considered "past," a non-rigorous form of philosophic inquiry, and an optimistic and justifying philosophy of American democracy, shaken instead by deep social inequalities and political failures. In this context, Dewey, with his vast philosophical production ranging from psychology, ethics, pedagogy, logic, epistemology, aesthetics, to social and political philosophy, was considered an un-systematic thinker, a chaotic writer, and not rigorous in his philosophical references. But above all, he was considered an optimistic social thinker, with his ingenuous faith in democracy, social communication, and social harmony. Pragmatism was thus abandoned in the American academic world for analytical philosophy, which sought to restore to philosophy rigorous methods and empirical objects of investigation, starting with the study of its primary tool: language and its empirical relation with the external world.³²⁶

Gradually, since the 1960s, eminent contemporary philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Richard Bernstein, Joseph Margolis, and Cornel West have revivified the legitimacy of early pragmatism's intuitions and theories in a variety of philosophic fields, from the theory of

³²⁶ See Bernstein, 2010, Preface and Ch. I. In *The Pragmatic Turn*, Bernstein attempts to reconstruct, firstly, the theoretical provincialism that pragmatist thinkers suffered in contemporary American philosophy. Secondly, he reconsiders the role of pragmatist thinkers in their continuity with analytical philosophy, as both forerunners and original thinkers.

language and knowledge to psychology and social psychology, to ethics and social theory.³²⁷ In this first process of revival of the pragmatist tradition, regardless of its founders' profound differences in thinking and theoretical interests, the common conceptual and theoretical core of their philosophical positions and its significance for contemporary philosophy was gradually identified.

Commenters have indeed stressed how the power, significance, and philosophic creativity of early American pragmatism become apparent mostly by referring to the social, cultural, and intellectual situation of the United States in the second half of the 19th century. The lack of a structured and sedimented philosophical tradition, the growing contacts with Europe, the deconstruction of the conservative traditions of Calvinism and Puritanism through American society's accelerated economic and technologic development, and the increase in communicative interactions and exchanges, naturally entailed the formation of philosophic groups with the need for inquiry. Because of such historical events, social problems, and cultural doubts, which arose from the new forming culture and democratic society, it became urgent to address several philosophical issues.³²⁸ For instance, it became necessary to rethink the paradigm of knowledge to clarify the prerequisites for the development of stable and reliable beliefs, and not only regarding scientific beliefs but also for ordinary, social, and cultural ones. Indeed, in front of rapidly changing social customs and the increasing development of technologies, industry, and science, it was fundamental to inquire on the origins of knowledge, the method of inquiry, the genesis of social institutions and their normative grounding. The profound practical significance of thinking for human life became evident, as springing from practical problems to be evaluated and solved. The growth of communicative media, human interactions, migration, and international economy prompted philosophers also to rethink the relationship among individuality and sociality, creativity and cultural customs, social sharing and standardization, and to inquire, from a psychological point of view, about the development of the human subject in relation to the social world, which both shapes and liberates the individual.

³²⁷ See Calcaterra, Maddalena & Marchetti (2015) for the identification of the central contemporary American philosophers who rediscovered early American pragmatism while providing a personal interpretation of its contribution. Calcaterra, Maddalena, and Marchetti reconstruct the continuity existing between the earlier and contemporary phases of pragmatist philosophy, accounting also for its influence on German sociology and social theory.

³²⁸ For a reconstruction of the historical, cultural, and philosophical context of Early American pragmatism, see Misak, 2013, Ch. 1; Westbrook, 1991, Ch. 4.

From the very beginning of the philosophical discussion sessions of the “Transcendental Club” in Boston and the “Metaphysical Club” in Cambridge, with the central figures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Chauncey Wright, Charles Sanders Peirce, and William James, to Peirce and James’ contacts with Dewey, three fundamental common points have been shared and developed personally by the pragmatists. Firstly, the necessity of a broader conception of human experience, not limited to bare empiricism and sense data, that accounts for the holistic interpenetration of experiential qualitiveness, action, and rationality. Secondly, rationality, with meanings and knowledge, is conceived of as a tool through which we give an interpretation of the qualitiveness and relations of experience, leading to a certain practical organization of behavior. Knowledge springs from experience, from interactions with the external world, not from innate ideas. It revisits and interprets the emotional, affective, and qualitative contents of experience, which are not bare data, investing a passive and detached subject. They call for a practical and intelligent redefinition of human behavior and the adequacy of knowledge is practically tested with further experience, according to the evaluation of practical consequences.³²⁹ Consequentialism, experimentalism, and verificationism of concepts and knowledge became fundamental starting points for pragmatist thinkers, allowing them to overcome Descartes’ foundationalism and solipsism, and Empiricism’s dualism among subject and object, knowledge and practice. The third common point is an interactionist conception of human self-consciousness and subjectivity, as growing in the individual’s continuous practical interactions with its external world, including the social and the natural world.³³⁰

Despite the many differences among these thinkers, the personal contributions they brought in, and the reciprocal intricated influences they exerted on each other – which cannot be the subject matter of our current investigations – their common assumptions have been

³²⁹ The interesting aspect of early pragmatist thinkers is their profound exchange of insights and ideas, which makes them, at the same time, individual and communitarian thinkers. In fact, the attempt to indicate one of these thinkers as the father of this philosophical tradition can be misleading. Firstly, they all provide different definitions of pragmatism (see Bernstein, 2010, *Preface*; Westbrook, 2005, p. 1.). Secondly, they all influenced each other. “The Fixation of Beliefs” and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (1877-1978) by Peirce are commonly considered as the grounding essays of the pragmatist tradition. Indeed, in these essays, he revindicates the practical significance of concepts, which we know the meaning of not only by giving an analytic and general definition of them but also by pointing out the practical consequences that they entail for human conduct, as well as the experimental and consequentialist conception of beliefs and their setting or fixation. Nonetheless, as Anna Maria Nieddu and Andrea Parravicini (Calcaterra, Maddalena & Marchetti, 2015) and Cheryl Misak (2013) forcefully point out, Peirce, as he himself admitted, had been deeply influenced by Emerson’s and Wright’s suggestions on experience and on the (non-reductionist) continuity between science and philosophy, thus conceiving thinking as itself experimental.

³³⁰ For an overview of early pragmatists’ common theoretical framework, see Calcaterra, Maddalena & Marchetti, 2015, *Introduzione*; Bernstein, 1971, part III.

gradually reassessed in their philosophical significance. Indeed, they mirrored the theoretical, social, and cultural exigencies of their time, giving birth to a new redefinition of the nature of human subjectivity and the social world, free from philosophical-traditional constraints. In such a revival process, Dewey's thinking came to the fore. His pedagogic theories, aiming at the cultivation of individual creativity and solving problems capacities, his conception of democracy as a "way of life," his naturalistic and holistic theory of human experience, his theory of logic and knowledge, his contribution to social psychology and mind formation theories through the concept of social "habit," became the object of extensive and intense philosophical studies, inaugurated by Richard Rorty, Richard Bernstein, Robert Westbrook, Joseph Margolis, and Robert Brandom.

The second phase of the revival of Dewey's philosophical thinking is occurring in recent years for manifest critical-social interests, arising from the contemporary rediscovery of the original notes of a series of lectures in social and political philosophy that Dewey delivered in Peking in 1919-1920. Indeed, in January 1919, Dewey and his wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, took a trip to the East Asia, which turned into a significant social experience and intellectual opportunity. In fact, Dewey was officially invited, in a first moment, to deliver eight lectures at the Imperial University of Japan in Tokyo, then revised and published as *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920). After the experience in Tokyo, three former students of Dewey and eminent intellectual figures in China, Hu Shih, P. W. Kuo and Chiang Molin, invited him to lecture at the University of Peking.

Since 1915, China had been shaken by an epochal process of political, cultural, and social redefinition. After the Manchu Dynasty's overthrow in 1911 and the unstable proclamation of the Chinese republic, political transformations elicited in Chinese students and intellectuals the need for a broader cultural and social change. With the institution of the republic, they started to consider the entire society as open to being questioned and modified according to the needs that had remained unexpressed for so long due to China's rigid conservatism. The political change was but a chance for further transformations, a result to fortify with increasing changes. Accordingly, the historical, oppressive, and conservative nature of traditional values, inspired by Confucianism, on which Chinese culture relied for centuries, such as the norms for social obedience, the rigidly hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the familiar, educational, intellectual, and working dimensions, were revealed. Thus, it became necessary to find new theoretical sources and tools to recast Chinese society, such as the

massive and socially inclusive publication of philosophical and literary works and the identification of a new philosophical perspective to interpret existing situations and provide a method for social and cultural reconstruction.³³¹ Famous for his pragmatist theory of education, which conceived children's education in terms of learning to intelligently redirect and transform social customs according to individual creativity, Dewey was for the Chinese intellectuals a thinker to take inspiration from.³³²

Conversely, the Chinese situation (it is paradigmatic that Dewey arrived in Shanghai three days before the May Fourth rioting in Peking, the day on which the May Fourth Movement and the subsequent mass uprisings for cultural reconstruction started),³³³ represented for Dewey a compelling and inspiring situation. On the occasion of the invitation to lecture at the University of Peking, he decided to deliver, at first, a series of lectures on education, in the same vein of his famous work, *Democracy and Education*, previously published in 1916. In a second moment, given the social ferment that was shaking China and the enthusiastic reception of the Chinese public, he outlined, for the first time in a systematic manner, a program in social philosophy to provide a method and a criterion to criticize the social world and fruitfully develop the existing frictions occurring among social groups. As Hu Shih underlined, this topic was far from trivial since “only in the field of political philosophy has there not yet appeared any single systematic work which treats the subject from the viewpoint of pragmatism. [...] Until now, a formal, coherent statement of a pragmatic philosophy of politics has been lacking.”³³⁴ Therefore, Dewey's decision to provide an account of social philosophy was an extremely important theoretical contribution. He filled a gap in the philosophical fields of pragmatist philosophy and systematically expressed the fragmentary insights on the critique of the social world present in some of his other writings.³³⁵

³³¹ For a reconstruction of China's social and cultural situation after the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty, see Clopton & Ou, 1973, pp. 4-9.

³³² Dewey outlines the most significant formulations of his conception of education in two of his famous works, *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922). In our next reflections, we will use the edition of Dewey's collected works edited by Jo Ann Boydston, for Southern Illinois University Press, which organized Dewey's extensive production in *The Early Works*, *The Middle Works*, and *The Later Works*. Following the current method of quotation of the *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, we will use the abbreviations EW for *The Early Works*, MW for *The Middle Works*, and LW for *The Later Works*, followed by the number of the volume.

³³³ For an analysis of Dewey's experience in Peking and the detailed reconstruction of the “case” and vicissitudes of Dewey's *Lectures in China*, which we are about to report in the following pages, see Gregoratto, 2017a. On the May Fourth movement, see Schwarcz, 1986.

³³⁴ Shih, 1973, p. 43.

³³⁵ We could say, as we will further highlight, that the reference to the issue of social criticism is an all-embracing topic in Dewey's works, even if Dewey often approaches it as a final consideration of other central concepts or arguments of discussion, e.g., education, social psychology, the role of philosophy, human experience, the public,

Dewey's sixteen lectures in social philosophy were delivered in English and simultaneously interpreted in Chinese by Hu Shih. Despite Dewey's original intention to revise and develop into a book the notes on which he organized and delivered the lectures, he could never do it since the notes were lost.³³⁶ Nonetheless, according to "a process of delivery, interpretation and recording,"³³⁷ the recordings that I-han Kao and Sun Fu-yuan made of Hu Shih's simultaneous translation of Dewey's lectures were then published in Chinese by Hu Shi in the "Peking Morning Post" in 1920.

In China during the following twenty years, there was a subsequent reaction of rejection of Dewey's thinking, both in the conservative and in the liberal context, due to his opposition to political uniformism and radical social transformations.³³⁸ Thus, the philosophical importance of such lectures waned, and the intention to provide an English translation of the Chinese manuscript vanished until the latter was rediscovered by Chung-ming Lu, a student in philosophy of education at the University of Hawaii. He addressed his advisor, Robert W. Clopton, for an English translation of the recorded lectures, giving birth to Clopton's project to translate them in English with the help of another Dewey scholar, Tsuin-chen Ou. *Lectures in China, 1919-1920* was published in 1973. It was the result of an enormous effort as the two editors tried to reconstruct as authentically as possible the original meaning of the lectures transcribed in Chinese, aware of the possible interpolations of the Chinese transcriptions, and

etc. See, for instance, *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Syllabus: Social Institutions and the Study of Morals* (1923), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928), *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), *Individualism, Old and New* (1930), *Art as Experience* (1934), *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), *Theory of Valuation* (1939).

³³⁶ Hu Shih reports Dewey's intention to publish a book on the lectures in social and political philosophy (Shih, 1973, p. 44). But the reason why Dewey did not realize it because of the loss of his original notes has been contested by Arvi Särkelä. In the preface to the German edition of the *Lectures in China 1919/1920* (Honneth & Särkelä, 2019, pp. 8-9), he points out that Dewey, returning to America, kept delivering lessons in social philosophy at Columbia University. Thus, he could have used the syllabus for the New York lectures, published in 1923 as *Syllabus: Social Institutions and The Study of Morals*, to reformulate his standpoint on social philosophy. According to Särkelä, Dewey's choice to abandon the book project was due to his later incorporation and reformulation of his social-philosophical project into a broader philosophical reflection on the anthropology of the human being and metaphysics of life. Namely, in the later phase of his philosophical production, Dewey started to consider philosophy as such a tool for social criticism, for then considering all the other philosophical fields, from morals to aesthetic and to the theory of valuation, as specific approaches to the general aim and scope of philosophy itself: the critique of the social world and the relationships of oppression among its social groups. The thesis that Särkelä seems to support is that Dewey did not abandon the study of social philosophy, but rather that philosophy at large – the topic of many of his later works – became essentially social philosophy, namely, critique of the social world. Moreover, Dewey shifted his political focus from the general definition of the political world more towards American society's specific problems.

³³⁷ Clopton & Ou, 1973, p. 9.

³³⁸ For a reconstruction of the political reasons for the decline of Dewey's thought in China, see Clopton and Ou, 1973.

to find the right Deweyan vocabulary to translate them. However, with the help of Tsuin-chen Ou's profound knowledge of Dewey, they tried to maintain the highest accuracy and fidelity to Dewey's thought. Because of the possible interpolations and manipulations of Dewey's original lectures, the *Lectures in China 1919-1920* have not been included in the edition of Dewey's collected works and the reliability of the program in social philosophy therein contained always raised some doubts.

The situation changed when Dewey's original notes were casually rediscovered by Yung-chen Chiang in the Hu Shih Archive, by the Modern History Institute of the Social Sciences Academy in Peking.³³⁹ Dewey's original typewritten notes of nine of the sixteen delivered lectures, published in 2015 by Roberto Frega and Roberto Gronda in the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* as "John Dewey's Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy," reopened the case on his lectures in social philosophy. The interest in Dewey's social philosophy increased. Indeed, the original notes could prove the theoretical reliability of the account of social philosophy outlined in Clopton and Ou's English translation of the recorded lectures, thus representing an integrative and unedited part of Dewey's thinking on social criticism.³⁴⁰ Moreover, there are two additional reasons for the actual interest of contemporary critical social theory for Dewey's social philosophy.

The first reason lies in the fact that the program and the account of social philosophy he outlined therein contain some consistent similarities, from a general perspective, with the methodological underpinnings of the critical approach of Frankfurt critical theorists concerning the immanent and transformative proceeding of social criticism, and from a specific

³³⁹ The historian Yung-chen Yang was researching in the Archive to write a biography of Hu Shih.

³⁴⁰ The philosophical reliability of the English translation of the transcribed lectures, which are lengthier and theoretically denser than the original notes, has not been asserted without controversies. Indeed, Roberto Frega (Frega, 2015) and Yung-Chen Chang (Chang, 2011) have underlined the conceptual and philological discrepancies between the two texts and, thus, the unreliability of the lectures published by Clopton and Ou. But arguments in favor of the philosophical authenticity of the lectures and the legitimacy to integrate them with the notes, as completing reciprocally, have been developed in the last years. Federica Gregoratto points out, firstly, that the discrepancies among the two texts are probably due to the nature of the original notes: "the original notes were conceived as mere preparatory notes or theoretical scaffold for the public lectures, in which Dewey evidently talked with a great amount of improvisation" (Gregoratto, 2017, p. 11. Translation mine.). Secondly, she concludes that the lectures and the notes are compatible concerning themes, concepts, and final intention, and they complete each other. Moreover, Arvi Särkelä remarks that it is hard to think that Hu Shih was used to simultaneously translating Dewey's lectures to a non-English-speaking public without knowing in advance their subject matter and finding out the right Chinese vocabulary to translate it. "It is more likely that Dewey used to give his notes to the interpreter Hu in advance to tell him what the topics and problems of the next lecture would be, allowing him to find the right vocabulary to use while Dewey spoke freely in class" (Honneth & Särkelä, 2019, p. 7. Translation mine). Therefore, the transcription in Chinese of Dewey's lectures and the subsequent translation in English by an expert of Dewey, Ou, seems suitable to be considered as a reliable, even if mediated, systematization of Dewey's original lectures.

perspective, with the critical theory of Axel Honneth. Indeed, like Honneth, Dewey provides, on the one hand, a conception of the social world as progressing and self-transforming according to the cognitive requests of misrecognized, thus oppressed, social groups and their social struggles for social recognition. On the other hand, he outlines an understanding of social philosophy as devoted to critically participating in the transformation of the social world to overcome existing social oppressions, which occur in terms of a lack of recognition suffered by some social groups. Instead, the second reason for the increased interest of contemporary social philosophy and critical theory for Dewey's account of social philosophy is due to the presence in Dewey's social philosophy of elements of originality and discontinuity both with respect to Frankfurt Critical Theory's tradition and, fundamental for our present inquiry, with Honneth's mature theory of recognition. Therefore, an extensive literature of contemporary critical social theory is now focusing on Dewey's elements of originality in the criticism of the social world and on his significant contributions to the topics of social criticism discussed today.³⁴¹

Nonetheless, the contemporary interpretation of the *Lectures in China*³⁴² and the analysis of their originality for critical social theory is not an easy task. Indeed, since Dewey did not write an enlarged and revisited version of his lectures in social and political philosophy, the specialist reader is compelled to reconstruct many of the concepts therein present by integrating them with other contemporary or later writings of Dewey, wherein many of the *Lectures'* insights are expressed and developed. It is essential to underline that the delivery of the Chinese lectures in social and political philosophy chronologically occurred during an important transitional phase of Dewey's thinking. This transitional phase is testified not only by the intense philosophical productivity following the two years in China, but mainly by the fact that his contemporary and later writings, such as *Reconstruction in Philosophy*

³⁴¹ The contemporary debate on the similarity and dissimilarity of Dewey's (and pragmatism generally) social philosophy with Frankfurt critical theory (and specifically Honneth) is extensive. However, it is feasible to refer to the main group of contributors, such as Roberto Frega (2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2017), Federica Gregoratto (2017a, 2017b, 2018), Rahel Jaeggi (2018), Emmanuel Renault (2010, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2019), Arvi Särkelä (2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b), Italo Testa (2017a, 2017b, 2017d), whose contributions will be highlighted in the following pages.

³⁴² From now on, with *Lectures in China*, we will refer to both the recorded lectures translated by Clopton and Ou and the original notes published by the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, which the new Italian and German editions of Dewey's Chinese lectures in social and political philosophy have published together for the first time. We have previously mentioned that the original notes of only nine of the sixteen lectures that Dewey delivered in Peking have been discovered (lectures I, II, III, IV, VI, X, XI, XII, XVI). Therefore, the Italian (2017) and the German (2018) editions have translated Clopton and Ou's manuscript, then adding the original notes to nine of the recorded lectures. Instead, to distinguish the two texts, with "original notes" we will refer to Dewey's preliminary original notes, whereas with "recorded lectures" to the recorded lectures translated by Clopton and Ou.

(1920), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Syllabus: Social Institutions and the Study of Morals* (1923), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Theory of Valuation* (1939), evidently develop a strong interest in the critique of the social world, wherein the insights and concepts already present in the lectures are developed and explicated. Hence, the Japanese lectures – subsequently published as *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) – and the Chinese lectures in social and political philosophy inaugurated a fundamental philosophical phase for Dewey. In the later phase of his thinking, from the previous studies on education and democracy,³⁴³ he focused on providing the anthropological, sociological, and metaphysical directives to undertake the criticism of the social world, according to a specific methodological and theoretical approach that we will discuss. If the lectures in China started and gave direction to Dewey's later philosophical thinking, the writings published in the subsequent years explicated and integrated the insights therein contained. Therefore, to understand Dewey's personal contribution to the criticism of the social world, it is necessary to start from the *Lectures in China*, while disclosing the critical meaning of their conceptual framework by referring to Dewey's in-depth examination of it in his following writings.

In this third and last part of our reflections, we will thus start from the analysis of Dewey's *Lectures in China*, mainly focusing on the first six lectures. First, we aim at pointing out how, besides the similarities with Honneth's mature critical theory, it is feasible to identify specific original points in Dewey's project of social philosophy and understanding of recognition, due to an underlying naturalistic framework that sustains the lectures. Second, in order to account for the meaning of such a naturalistic account of the human being and the

³⁴³ Dewey's philosophical production was so extensive that the Southern Illinois University Press' editorial project to collect all his writings, from the early to the late ones, has divided his *opera omnia* into three parts. *The Early Works*, which include all Dewey's writings from 1882 to 1898, *The Middle Works*, from 1899 to 1924, and *The Later Works*, from 1925 to 1953, for a total of 37 volumes. The difficulty of approaching an author with such a massive production is evident, mainly because of the elements of continuity and discontinuity running through his thinking and the influences that so many other thinkers exerted upon him. His living and career dynamism, which took him to teach at John Hopkins University, the University of Michigan, Chicago University, and Columbia University, entailed that Dewey was continuously invested in new theoretical suggestions, from the former Hegelian ones to the subsequent biological, psychological, anthropological, and social ones occurring since his moving to Chicago in 1894. Despite these evident difficulties in dealing with Dewey's rich and various production, it is feasible, nonetheless, to identify essential elements of continuity among his writings. His interest in social problems, education, and the need for democracy were primary objects of inquiry of the early and middle phases of his thinking. Those topics remained core objects of investigation of his later works, but Dewey reformulated their critical meaning in his later attempt to ground social critique with a systematic naturalistic interpretation of the human being and the social world. For a capillary and impressive reconstruction of Dewey's philosophical history see Westbrook, 1991.

social world, and Dewey's consequent understanding of recognition, we want to refer to other later works of his. Here, Dewey makes explicit his specific conception of human experience, or action, in the external world, and, hence, his critical approach to the social world and normative understanding of recognition among social subjects become apparent. Finally, we will argue that Dewey's naturalistic theoretical framework on the human being and the social world overcomes the theoretical limits, previously pointed out, of Honneth's abandoned project of *Social Action and Human Nature*.

In Chapter Six, we saw how Honneth, with Joas, attempted to outline a naturalistic philosophical anthropology for the criticism of the social world. We stressed the possibility to carve out from the text a methodological approach to the issue of recognition different from the one of *The Struggle for Recognition*. Such a methodological approach descriptively and normatively considers recognition from within the subject's constitutive relationship with the external world. According to us, this distinguishing approach discloses a specific theoretical understanding of this normative relationship concerning its constitutive role for human subjectivity, its genus, and its ontological conditions and ontological status. We pointed out that the recovery of the human being as a natural and embodied subject allowed the two theorists to identify the specific quality of its activity with and within the external world, whose distinctive ontological constituents can stand for normative ties to ethical relationships of recognition. Indeed, Honneth and Joas consider recognition among subjects as the genetic and performative condition of the human being's capacity for action. Given this alternative understanding of recognition as the constitutive relationship of the subject's interaction with the world of objectivity, we concluded that it is feasible to further clarify the ontological conditions and ontological status of recognition only outside the internal ethical logic of intersubjective relationships, according to its capacity to empower or disempower the quality of the human capacity for action in the external environment. We subsequently provided an additional definition of the genus of recognition and we identified both the three-dimensionality that must belong to recognition in order to be non-ideological and the ontological dynamism that it should maintain to allow the human subject to creatively develop its capacity for action without being powerfully determined by the social context. Despite the theoretical path that *Social Action and Human Nature* discloses for expanding the normative grammar of recognition, we pointed out as well the internal limits of its theoretical framework due to the sketched, non-systematic, and un-integrated account of human action that the two authors outline by juxtaposing Feuerbach's

and Marx's philosophical-anthropological traditions. Indeed, Feuerbach's insight on the situationality and emancipatory potential of the human organic dimension and Marx's essential unveiling of the socio-historical, practical, and transformative elements of human action, although not to be conceived in strict productive terms, have not been theoretically explained nor integrated through a systematic naturalistic framework of human action.

Thus, we concluded that in order to expand the contemporary theory of recognition through a naturalistic approach to it, it is necessary to identify a naturalistic framework of the human being suitable, first, to deepen and integrate such elements of human action, and second, to identify recognition as the structural and constitutive condition for the human being's activity. Accordingly, it would be feasible to theoretically ground the further ontological conditions and ontological status of recognition we have previously identified. In the reconstruction of Dewey's social philosophy and naturalism, we aim to highlight how he provides an integrated and systematic naturalistic account of the human being, wherein the practical, creative, and transformative elements of human activity are justified, interrelated, and based on a recognitive structure. Thereby, recognition takes on a specific normative meaning, disclosing the critical significance we were looking for to ground the ontological conditions and the ontological status of recognition we have previously carved out from *Social Action and Human Nature* and identified as necessary for the contemporary critical theory of recognition to maintain its critical legitimacy.

Chapter Eight. Dewey's Social Philosophy: Similitudes and Differences from Honneth's Theory of Recognition

VIII. 1. Recognition, Social Conflict, and Social Philosophy in the *Lectures in China*

In his original notes to lecture I, which Clopton and Ou entitled in their translation of the recorded lectures “The Function of Theory,”³⁴⁴ Dewey begins his reflections on social philosophy clarifying that its function and object of investigation can be grasped only by first acknowledging it as a specific type of the more general human theorizing. Without a broader clarification of the origin and the place of human theorizing through the observation of the human being’s behavior, the social theorist is prevented from identifying properly his/her task, his/her subject matter, and the legitimate procedure to provide normative judgments on the social world.

The direct use of language for definite purposes according to the needs of the moment long preceded grammar, rhetoric and the dictionary. Breathing, eating, digesting, seeing and hearing long preceded anatomy and physiology. We first act to meet special needs and particular occasions. Only afterwards do we reflect upon what we do and how and why we do it, and try to frame general principles, a philosophy of the matter. So with social, collective action. [...] *Men think when forced to do so by trouble by something the matter which makes it necessary to find some way out not provided by habit and inclination. After theory had once arisen life does not go on just the same. Men do not breathe and eat because of their knowledge of anatomy and physiology. These acts still depend upon deeper forces. But they may eat and breathe somewhat differently, especially in emergencies, because of their knowledge.*³⁴⁵

In this brief statement, Dewey clearly points out three general characteristics of theorizing: theory is secondary to practice; it emerges as some trouble in practice occurs; it entails a modification of prior practice.

From the very beginning of his lectures in social philosophy, Dewey describes the human being as an individual who acts in order to satisfy some impelling needs, which, thus,

³⁴⁴ For the English edition of the recorded lectures, Clopton and Ou entitled each of the sixteen lectures according to their main topic of discussion.

³⁴⁵ Dewey, 2015, I.1.

should be conceived in terms of the “deeper forces” of human action. The priority of needs does not entail that human action should be considered as determined only by needs, i.e., that the impulsive and needy dimension of the human being is its only constitutive component. Instead, it means that human action is ontologically tied in its origin by a pre-reflexive, even if not irrational, need that urges to be satisfied through a practical scheme. The human subject is a practical being, and the first dimension of its activity is the constitution of a behavior functional to the satisfaction of a pressing need. “We first act to meet special needs and particular occasions.”³⁴⁶ If successful, the behavioral scheme becomes a habit, that is, an acquired and “regulated pattern of individual behaviour derived from prior experience” that becomes habitual and pre-intentionally performed to deal with other and new needs and situations.³⁴⁷ The development and implementation of habits to deal practically with existing situations of needs do occur on a pre-reflexive and pre-propositional dimension. Nonetheless, they are governed reasonably, according to a principle of functionality. Habits are means to “reasonably and adequately [...] meet situations which we encounter and to reduce tensions,” so that “people can and do get along well enough without giving conscious thought to their behaviour.”³⁴⁸ Two years later, in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey clearly defines habits as “ways of using and incorporating the environment.”³⁴⁹ They are successful patterns of behavior acquired through repetition, which allow the human being to incorporate external situations so as to reach a harmonious, tensionless, and energy-saving interaction with external situations, where its needs can be materially satisfied.

According to Dewey, thinking arises when some practical problem disrupts the efficiency of a habitualized behavioral pattern by which a certain need was satisfied and handled. In a nutshell, thinking and theorizing occur when the emergence of a new emotional and practical situation of tension cannot be appropriately managed by the subject with existing habits, thus requiring inquiry and redirection of behavior. Therefore, thinking and theory do not precede action, either from an ontological and epistemic point of view.

From an ontological point of view, “*ideas, theories are originally products, causes of non-intellectual forces*. Thinking arises so to speak only in the *thin cracks* of solid habits, and

³⁴⁶ Dewey, 2015, I.1.

³⁴⁷ Dewey, 1973, p. 85.

³⁴⁸ Dewey, 1973, p. 46.

³⁴⁹ MW 14, p. 15. On Dewey’s concept of habit, see Testa, 2017b. In Chapter Ten, we will more deeply analyze this concept and its interrelation with human thinking and theorizing.

only with great difficulty penetrates the resistant mass.”³⁵⁰ Ideas and theories are instruments required to overcome an unresolved situation of disharmony occurring among settled habits, a need to be met, and an external situation that discloses new potentialities to be developed for satisfying that need. From an epistemic point of view, they are required to start from actual situations and matter of facts – the sensuous and affective dimension of the new need, the unstable external condition that arouses the former, and the series of habits that have pre-reflexively regulated and structured the subject’s behavior so far – in order to “*to shape and direct the changes that are bound to occur.*”³⁵¹ Therefore, thinking and theory have a practical significance, which cannot be conceived either in terms of an arbitrary and external determination of human action, either in terms of a by-product of a prior practice. They are instrumental tools devoted to overcoming problems and frictions going on in practice through the planning and direction of change according to the unexpressed potentialities of existing situations: “*thinking means the introduction of a novel and in so far incalculable factor – a deviation or departure, and an invention.*”³⁵²

Far from trivial, this preliminary clarification of the origin and role of thinking is essential, according to Dewey, to consider any ordinary or scientific form of theory, including social philosophy, as having a secondary occurrence with respect to a problematic practical situation, wherein an unexpressed and practically unchanneled need requires a redirection and reconstruction of human behavior and external situations. This general clarification is the starting point for Dewey, firstly, to identify the specific and distinguishing function of social philosophy, as dealing with a certain category of problematic situations, namely, existing social conflicts among social groups. Secondly, to clarify its method of investigation and procedure of evaluation of the social world.

VIII. 1. 1. Social Domination, Inadequate Recognition, and the Struggle for Recognition

Dewey presents social philosophy in terms of the philosophical branch that, like other social sciences, “deal[s] with associated human life,”³⁵³ i.e., it has the social world as its object of study, but with a distinctive perspective of inquiry on it. The social sciences focus on specific

³⁵⁰ Dewey 2015, I. 4-5.

³⁵¹ Dewey 2015, I. 11.

³⁵² Dewey 2015, I. 8.

³⁵³ Dewey, 1973, p. 54.

social institutions, e.g., the economic system, the state, etc. Instead, social philosophy is supposed “to resolve conflicts which occur among the component elements of the society,”³⁵⁴ being concerned with the evaluative judgment of social life in its complexity, namely, in its constitutive parts and the relationships in which these parts interact. In a nutshell, it evaluatively deals with the problematic interactions occurring among the different social groups that constitute the social world.

In the *Lectures*, Dewey outlines a functional ontology of the social world, relying upon the category of “group.” He links the origin of social life to the constitution of social groupings among individuals. Indeed, the latter, having common fundamental needs, institute social and cooperative forms of behavior, habitualized and regulated through collective habits and institutions, to intelligently satisfy their basic needs, which are channeled or declined into specific interests.

Human nature has a variety of interests to be served, a number of types of impulses that have to be expressed, or instincts that form needs to be satisfied, and about each one of the more fundamental of these some form of association, of *living* together or of acting together continuously or repeatedly and regularly (as distinct from mere chance and transient contacts).³⁵⁵

For instance, Dewey gives the examples of sexual need, the need for support and sustenance, the need for security and protection, for investigation and discovery. They all represent the common bases on which individuals associate, interpreting and channelling their pressing needs into specific shared interests, from the interest in the constitution of family units devoted to emotional and affective care, to the interest in work, industry, and business, to the interest in religion, arts, sciences, and politics. Three years later, in the *Syllabus* (1923), Dewey provides a list of the fundamental human needs leading to different forms of association, without pretending either to exhaust them or to order them into an absolute hierarchy.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ Dewey, 1973, p. 64.

³⁵⁵ Dewey, 2015, III.2.

³⁵⁶ In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Ch. 11, Dewey explains his refusal of any attempt to outline a fixed and ultimate classification of human native impulses and the corresponding need associated with it, for “it is unscientific to try to restrict original activities to a definite number of sharply demarcated classes of instincts. We are guilty of a presumption which nature promptly punishes. We are rendered incompetent to deal effectively with the delicacies and novelties of nature and life” (MW 14, p. 92). Of course, he does not deny the theorist’s usefulness and necessity to have a general classification of human impulses and needs. Nonetheless, he states that such classifications should be conceived as theoretical tools, rather than as fixed depictions of human nature. They should allow the theorist to deal with specific situations, which can disclose both different occurrences of a need, new needs, or needs that, even if previously considered secondary or accessory, become primary in a particular situation compared to others. “To classify is, indeed, as useful as it is natural. [...] Speaking generally, the purpose is to

Persons living in association form a Group, which may be taken as the fundamental concept. A group is a conjunction of persons tending to individuality or unitary action and possessed of duration or relative permanence. As unitary and enduring, it has (1) characteristic habits or general modes of action, customs and traditions; (2) some degree of coherent structure or organization, an institutional phase; and (3) interests or goods to be sustained and secured. [...] Fundamental human needs are the basis of association of group formation and *characteristic interests reflect these needs*.

1. Support, sustenance: Industrial Groups.
2. Protection, security: Ecclesiastical, military and political groups.
3. Reproduction: Family.
4. Recreation, use of leisure: Clubs, etc.
5. Language, Sociability: Schools, Academies, scientific organizations.³⁵⁷

Therefore, Dewey underlines that the pressing needs common to individuals entail the constitution of social groups that channel these needs into specific interests, which, to be satisfied and fulfilled entail the organization and planning between the group members of reasonable and efficient forms of cooperative action. If successful, these consolidate into social habits or customs and institutions, individually and cooperatively followed by all the members of the group.

When customs become consciously recognized and regarded as good, they become systemized, and we have such things as the family system, the property system, the marriage system, and so on. Such consciously recognized customs can have great utility. People generally accept traditions as standards to which their behaviour should conform. Conventions embodied in custom and tradition afford a common power which regulates conduct among individuals and reduces the incidence of conflict which would prevail if each person followed his own whims.³⁵⁸

facilitate our dealings with unique individuals and changing events” (MW 14, p. 92). We will further analyze this aspect in Chapter Ten.

³⁵⁷ MW 15, pp. 236-237. Italics mine.

³⁵⁸ Dewey, 1973, p. 86. In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), as we will analyze later, Dewey further developed the concept of habit as a fundamental socio-psychological category for understanding the human activity’s functioning, the social constitution of the individual, and the constitution of the social world through individuals. Indeed, the theoretical grasping of such a constitutive practical category of human beings and social contexts becomes fundamental to provide an account of morality as the intelligent redirection of individual and social habits. Habit is indeed presented as a routinized general pattern of action, destined to functionally integrate, without intentional, cognitive, and practical efforts, human beings’ organic structures and the external environment for a successful adaptation of the human being to the external environment and of the environment to the human beings’ impulses and needs. Habit does not entail the mere repetition of a single deed, but the repetition of a general pattern of action for performing different deeds in different situations. Moreover, mechanicity and repetition are fundamental aspects of habit, as allowing subjects to develop skills and power in certain situations, but they are not the only ones. Habit, to be functional, should also be elastic, i.e., open to be intelligently reconstructed and redirected according to the impulsive and needy dimension of human beings, which deserve new channels to express and find completion. “Mechanism is indispensable” (MW 14, p. 51), but it should not turn into mere automatism. “For what makes a habit bad is enslavement to old ruts” (MW 14, p. 48). Moreover, in *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey clarifies more deeply the antecedence of the social world or the social group over the single individual, since the human infant is born into a social world structured and regulated by priorly established set of

Nonetheless, according to Dewey, the development and effective realization of an interest, i.e., the institution of a need's shared interpretation and the organization of efficacious cooperative behavior among the members of a specific group for the realization of the interest, are far from an obvious result. In the recorded text of lecture III, "The Social Conflict," Dewey specifies that:

Social grouping is a complicated and overlapping phenomenon. No group is independent and isolated, and no person is ever a member of only one group. A single individual, for example, is a member of his total society; at the same time he is a citizen of his nation, his province, and his city village.³⁵⁹

In this brief statement, in the first instance, Dewey points out that, due to the various needs and interests of human beings, the social world is composed of a *plurality* of social groups. Therefore, any social group is not isolated but embedded into a context of different groups pursuing different interests. Second, he underlines that each of these groups is somehow dependent on other groups to realize its interests and fulfill its needs. Thirdly, he specifies that a single individual can be part of different groups with different interests at the same time, adding to the plural character of social interests the *multiplicity* of the interests of social individuals themselves. Through such a specification, Dewey aims at underlining the intersections among social groups, and thus the internal complexity within each of them. Each group, indeed, can contain a sub-group of individuals pursuing a different interest simultaneously. For instance, the citizens of a state, with the interest in protection and security, are simultaneously workers or family members, or persons dedicated to religion or science.

habits collectively followed, which structure, give direction, and interpret the docile needs and impulse of the infant. "The activities of the group are already there, and some assimilation of his own acts to their pattern is a prerequisite of a share therein, and hence of having any part in what is going on" (MW 14, p. 44). Therefore, the social world is indispensable for the human infant to acquire abilities and power over existing situations, to be integrated into the cooperative social forms of agency. "Customs supply the standards for personal activities. They are the pattern into which individual activity must weave itself. [...] The problem, however, of how those established and more or less deeply grooved systems of interaction which we call social groups, big and small, modify the activities of individuals who perforce are caught-up within them, and how the activities of component individuals remake and redirect previously established customs is a deeply significant one" (MW 14, p. 44).

³⁵⁹ Dewey, 1973, p. 66. Also in *Syllabus: Social Institutions and the Study of Morals* (1923), we find the statement concerning the belonging of the same individual to different groups, pointing out the intersectional nature of social groups: "The same individual is member of many groups" (MW 15, p. 237).

According to Dewey, these three aspects of social grouping – the plurality of group interests, the reciprocal dependence among social groups, and the multiplicity of individuals’ social interests – entail that the social world is naturally characterized by an unsurpassed state of agonism among social groups, either within the same group (i.e., in the intra-group dimension), or between different groups (i.e., in the extra-group dimension), as pursuing competing interests. When the social adjustment among these interests fails, that is the possibility for each group to develop its interest in the social world, this latter is in a state of imbalance, of friction. “Society is in a state of imbalance because many groups do not and cannot develop equably. Sometimes a group oppresses another.”³⁶⁰

Hence, the social world falls into a state of latent or manifest conflict as a social group is prevented from reasonably fulfilling its pressing need through the practical realization of the interest in which the latter is channeled because one specific interest of the social world becomes hegemonic. That is, when the interest of a specific group is recognized as *the* interest of the entire society, becoming monopolistic of “human *energy* and *attention*.”³⁶¹ Therefore, problems in the social world occur whenever a specific interest gets erroneously recognized on a social and institutional level as *the* real and unique interest of social world, rather than of a single group, thus reaching an uncontrolled development at the expense of the plural and multiple interests of other social subjects.

In the original notes to lecture III on “Social Conflict,” Dewey explains the process through which one interest becomes dominant in the social context as follows:

Men’s various interests do not march four abreast, evenly and uniformly. Some interest with the form of association in which it is embodied gets a particularly intense and widespread start; it then lords it over other interests and associations and makes them tributary so far as may be to itself. It insists upon dominating activity, monopolizing attention and interest. Free give and take, mutual enrichment, reciprocal stimulation is prevented.³⁶²

Dewey considers social interests as not developing uniformly, i.e., in perfect quantitative symmetry. He suggests that, due to the plurality and multiplicity of social interests, in a specific situation, the development of a particular interest can become prerogative since it allows the entire social world to progress. This is the case of the economic interest in the

³⁶⁰ Dewey, 1973, p. 66. For an analysis of Dewey’s intersectional and agonistic understanding of social groups and theory of domination, see Gregoratto, 2017b, 2018.

³⁶¹ Dewey, 2015, III.5. Italics mine.

³⁶² Dewey, 2015, III.5.

production of wealth (rather than in possession of wealth), which occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries within nascent capitalist societies. According to Dewey, this interest allowed individuals to be freed from the static and hierarchical estates of pre-modern societies and to experiment with new modes of production, employment, knowledge, rights, and political organization. The centrality of the economic interest, occurring in the form of the “laissez-fair,” was indeed successful “in meeting a particular need at a given time.”

It was workable and effective [...] at a time when modern capitalism was coming into being. But it was by no means a universal truth; and when people did take it to be universal and immutable, it metamorphosed into a tough individualism that was ruthlessly invoked to suppress the powerless, to keep wages down, and to serve the aggrandizement of men of power and wealth.³⁶³

Dominant interests, according to Dewey, are thus pathological evolutions of a prior interest that intensely developed in the social context, through its interpretation and pattern of action for the fulfillment of a certain need, due to some principle of reasonableness, rather than arbitrarily or with the mere use of force and violence. With dominant interest, Dewey does not refer to an interest that prevailed in the social context irrationally, contingently, and with the blind suppression of all other social interests. He refers to an interest that, given the betterment that its expansion entailed for the social world and many of its groups in a specific situation, succeeded in being socially affirmed no longer as *one* of the interests of the social arena, having a primary role in social progress in particular circumstances, but rather as *the* real and only common interest of the social world.

The compelling aspect of Dewey’s notion of domination is that both its origin and persistence rely upon a general justification and reproduction of it by other social counterparts. The social domination perpetrated by a social group cannot occur and be maintained unless

³⁶³ Dewey, 1973, p. 62. See also *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935). Here, Dewey deepens the explanation of the rise and crisis of liberalism, historically occurring, firstly, as a political movement for individuals’ negative rights, and secondly, as an economic movement aiming at the structural and economic modification of pre-modern societies. He points out that liberalism was fundamental to bring to the fore social concepts and institutions such as the juridical person, individual freedom, social and political equality, creative production, but then becoming itself the dominant force that it was supposed to destroy. Indeed, it first transformed individual freedom in mere economic, selfish, and anti-social advantage. Secondly, it oppressed all other social interests and conceived the entire social world as devoted only to powerful individuals and groups’ economic profit. “When their ideas and plans [of liberals] were projected they were an attack upon the interests that were invested in established institutions and that had the sanction of customs. The new forces for which liberals sought an entrance were incipient; the *status quo* was arrayed against their release. By the middle of the nineteenth century the contemporary scene had radically altered. The economic and political changes for which they strove were largely accomplished that they become in turn vested interest, and their doctrines, especially in the form of *laissez faire* liberalism, now provided the intellectual justification of the *status quo*” (LW 11, p. 26).

some social forms of justification and legitimization by the social context does occur. Moreover, these social justification and legitimization are not entirely irrational or arbitrary. They are due to the past functionality that the dominant interest had for the social world's progress and the satisfaction of certain needs, and to the progressive monopolization of social activities that the exclusive institutionalization of this interest as *the* social interest par excellence entails. “[Dominant interests] become institutionalized, and standardized, vested interests, and they become influential, that is to say actually bound up with all forms of social intercourse and relationships, affecting all ceremonies and the trend of thought and action, those interests take on *social justification, glory, prestige.*”³⁶⁴

Therefore, the origin and reproductive source of social domination entail a general legitimization and justification from the social context, occurring precisely through reciprocal relationships of recognition among the dominant group and the other groups of the social context. Indeed, if a social group, which was socially functional and primary in a specific historical situation, maintains a social primacy regardless of changing situations and gets institutionally identified with the social world in its entirety, two processes of recognition are at stake. First, other social groups are those who confer this social recognition to the dominant interest due to its past functionality and its progressive monopolization of the social world's activities through the need that it channels into a specific interest, i.e., into a specific interpretation and pattern of social action to fulfill the need. Second, the dominant interest, to be erroneously identified as *the* interest of the social world, should accord some form of recognition to many other interests in the social arena. The social oppression perpetrated by the dominant interest, to be reproduced, cannot occur with the *complete* suppression of *all* other social interests. Whereas some social interests can be completely suppressed, without the possibility to be considered by the social context as *existing* social interests, other social interests are recognized as legitimately social but in a tributary and secondary role to the dominant interest. In a nutshell, they are integrated into the social context, and they make part of the social world through general acceptance, but in a situation of blockage, arrest, without the real possibility to be materially fulfilled. These interests are not completely suppressed, but rather they are “choked, dwarfed, or deflected into one-sided channels.”³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Dewey, 2015, IV.4-5.

³⁶⁵ Dewey, 2015, III.4. For an analysis of Dewey's theory of domination as “dominant patterns” of social habits, see Testa, 2017d. In *Dominant Patterns in Associated Living: Hegemony, Domination, and Ideological Recognition in Dewey's Lectures in China*, Testa deeply analyzes Dewey's understanding of social domination by

Dewey makes, for instance, the example of the church in European history. “The church was a *social* organization that exercised positive *social functions* of instruction and control.”³⁶⁶ It represented an institutional group that took charge of social members’ need for protection and security in a dramatic situation of absence of stable political power. The church fulfilled this primary social need of individuals. It provided a specific interpretation and way of conduct for fulfilling this prominent, urgent need, i.e., a particular interest, and then supplied a secondary or tributary interpretation and regulated organization of all the other, less prominent, needs of the social context. Once the political and social situation changed, and the church’s primary role, with its interpretative framework of religious interest and the entire public world, ceased to be functional for individuals’ new needs, the church, nonetheless, kept maintaining its predominant social role. In a nutshell, its functional priority turned into a dysfunctional one, that is, into a form of social domination, where the new needs and other interests of the social world were suppressed or lacked the adequate conditions for free development and real satisfaction.

European history for example was marked for centuries by such a predominance of association for religious purposes, by the church, that other modes of life were more or less suppressed, choked, dwarfed, or deflected into one-sided channels. Family life [was] affected because chastity was supposed to involve abstinence from marriage, the celibate life [was supposed to be] superior; industry [was affected] because wealth and material production was a distraction from the spiritual life; science [was affected] because the results of free inquiry might be dangerous to theological doctrines of the church; art [was affected because it] might instill a love for the things of the eye and the flesh at the expense of divine things. So these were allowed and cultivated only as they took a form subordinate to the dominant religious interest; they had to be made to contribute in a one sided way to the supremacy of the church – architecture, music, painting, philosophy etc.³⁶⁷

From this quotation and this example in Dewey’s original notes, to which he also adds the examples of the economic interest of capitalists in contemporary societies and the

pointing out that, first, in contrast with Roberto Frega’s suggestion (Frega, 2015), in Dewey, social domination does not consist of a struggle among basic needs wherein some needs are wholly suppressed and unchanneled in favor of dominant ones. Instead, Testa argues that, in Dewey, social domination is presented as a conflict among social groups and their interpretation of the social world’s needs. Thus, he conceives social domination in terms of the institution of “dominant patterns” of social habits that provide a dysfunctional and tributary interpretation and practical organization of the social world’s other needs. Domination, therefore, always maintains for Dewey an ideological core, implying a hegemonic and heteronormative definition of existing social groups’ needs. Moreover, he points out how Dewey’s theory of the pre-reflexive and mechanical mechanism of habit, in conjunction with the monopolistic and hegemonic character of dominant groups’ dominant patterns, provides an explanation of the smooth reproduction of social domination for decades and centuries.

³⁶⁶ Dewey, 2015, IV.3

³⁶⁷ Dewey, 2015, III.3-4.

reproductive interest of patriarchal families, one fundamental aspect is evident. To be effective and self-reproduce, social domination needs a legitimization by the social context, provided through recognitive relationships. On the one hand, the dominant interest is to be accepted in its unjustified social priority, and this is feasible because of its past functionality and the widespread hegemony it obtained in all the aspects of social life. On the other hand, the oppressed social groups, with their interests, to be effectively dominated and voluntarily accept the domination, require some form of acknowledgment and integration in the social context. During the social domination of the church, artistic interest, family interest, and scientific interest were not suppressed or deprived of any form of social recognition or legitimization, since they were acknowledged as social interests, and, what's more, cultivated in the social context. Nonetheless, they were *choked* and *blocked* in their very realization, since the social world's interpretation and structural organization of social behavior (e.g., social institutions and social practices) provided by the church, instituted social conditions inadequate for their real expression, fulfillment, and further development. "Even as these forms of association grow up, they are not free to grow; they have to accommodate themselves to habits carried over from a prior dominate association."³⁶⁸

However, Dewey analyzes the effects of social domination not only from the perspective of dominated social groups but also from that of the dominant group. Indeed, by maintaining untouched the sectarian priority of its need and by keeping rigid this latter's customary interpretation and practical organization into a specific interest, the dominant subject leads its interest to become "petrified," "rigid," "fossilized."

It [the dominant interest] ceases to be fed by natural sources; it becomes rigid, petrified, fossilized, and unless its pretensions are broken down and interaction and balance restored, it decays, there is general relapse and stagnation, corruption. [...] It lacks the contacts which will give it fullness and an all-around character. It becomes at once harsh and relatively empty, barren.³⁶⁹

Therefore, Dewey suggests that the dominant group rigidly and mechanically reproduces on the level of social costumes and institutions the regulated interpretation and behavioral pattern that once was functional to fulfill its primary need and enrich all the other tributary social interests, but which, due to changing situations, becomes twofold pathological. On the one hand, the dominant interest fails to be functional for other social interests. On the

³⁶⁸ Dewey, 2015, III.11.

³⁶⁹ Dewey, 2015, III.6.

other hand, it becomes progressively “dead.” Indeed, since it is conservatively maintained through a socially rigid and mechanical pattern of interpretation and ways of conduct, it ceases to be “fed by natural sources.” That is, it is severed from individuals’ contexts of practice, being prevented from being revitalized through the new urgencies and pressures of individuals’ needy dimension in their practical interaction with external situations. Therefore, in Dewey’s framework, it seems that domination occurs on two levels and according to two different ontological modalities. It gathers, on the one place, social oppression and failed practical realization of other interests. On the second place, lifeless standardization and social normalization of the dominant interest.

It seems feasible to conclude that, for Dewey, the situation of social domination does not coincide with the complete absence of social recognition. But instead, it coincides with a normatively or ethically weak context of relationships of recognition, determined by a *social imbalance of public attention and social energy*, and by lifeless standardization. Oppressed interests can be either wholly suppressed and thus completely deprived of social acceptance, i.e., social attention, as legitimate interests of the social world. Or they can be “choked, dwarfed,” namely, socially integrated and accepted in the social context, but missing the *adequate* social energies, i.e., the necessary material conditions and cooperative patterns of behavior, to be effectively fulfilled and satisfied. In this case, we do not deal with situations of complete lack of social recognition, but instead of inadequate recognition. Recognition, to be really ethical and to realize the interests of the social world, should be a matter of public affirmation or symbolic confirmation of interests, as socially valid, interdependent and simultaneous with the reconstruction of social conditions, namely, social practices, customs, and institutions, adequate for the effective, practical realization of their interests. Moreover, social domination gathers not only a situation of heteronormative oppression perpetrated by a group at the expense of other social members but also a situation of lifeless standardization among the dominant subjects. Indeed, the dominant subjects, which are recognized by the entire social context and acknowledge themselves as the bearers of *the* social world’s interest, do not benefit from ethical relationships of recognition aiming at their self-realization. Indeed, even if not suppressed nor oppressed, the dominant subjects are embedded into a recognitive social context whose institutional and customary social structures led them to mechanically reproduce their interest, which becomes rigid, standardized, repetitive, petrified, and empty. In a nutshell,

they are embedded in intra- and extra-group relationships of recognition that prevent them from revitalizing their needs and interests and strongly determine them.

Proceeding in his reflections, in lecture IV, dedicated to “Social Reform,” Dewey considers that, even if situations of social domination can persist and reproduce themselves for a long time, as the examples of social domination perpetrated by the church, capitalists, and patriarchal families suggest, at some point a moment of *disruption* does occur, that of the social struggle for recognition.

As decades and centuries pass, things may appear to run smoothly, and the subordinated group may, on the surface, appear complaisant and acquiescent. But history is replete with instances of revolts of apparently complacent groups – revolts which often revealed submerged antipathies and suppressed hatreds.³⁷⁰

According to Dewey, after decades or centuries of tacit permissiveness and voluntary acceptance of social domination, something changes within oppressed social groups. “For at some point the suppressed side of human interest, the instincts that have not got expression and satisfaction come to consciousness, and they claim the right to operate.”³⁷¹ The social conflict does not start accidentally or due to a mere interior awareness that social members acquire overnight. Instead, “only when conditions are such as to stimulate a *consciousness of powers which are not expressed and satisfied* is there definite revolt and effort at change.”³⁷² Dewey suggests that the pivotal moment for oppressed subjects to take consciousness of their social subordination and lack of social integration or adequate recognition is related to some sort of revealing situations. A specific situation allows the subjects to vividly and consciously perceive their state of oppression. This situation can lead them both to a vivid perception of their practical and socially imposed impediment in actually satisfying their interests, or to an experience that unexpectedly anticipates new social conditions in which subjects, for the first time, have the opportunity to express and realize their interest.

Dewey calls this social phase the one of “challenge” or “restlessness, discontent,” to distinguish it from the previous phase of “tacit acceptance of the *status quo*.”³⁷³ A new event or situation breaches the apparent naturalness and social functionality of existing social settings.

³⁷⁰ Dewey, 1973, p. 66.

³⁷¹ Dewey, 2015, IV.I.

³⁷² Dewey, 2015, IV.8.

³⁷³ Dewey, 1973, p. 77.

Firstly, oppressed subjects develop, from an emotional and practical point of view, an awareness of personal dissatisfaction and figure out the possibility to “see themselves in a different light.”³⁷⁴ Secondly, they process these pre-reflexive insights on a propositional level, in terms of unexpressed or dwarfed needs and interests that might be expressed and fulfilled differently. “These changes create new demands. New knowledge comes to light, and people begin to think in ways different from those to which they have been accustomed.”³⁷⁵ Therefore, in the initial stage of this second phase, accepted customs and social settings, determined by hegemonic interests, start to lose their natural integrity and solidity, and oppressed subjects begin to develop a new self-awareness and social perception. Nonetheless, this initial stage still lies on individualistic premises and on an erroneous interpretation of the conflict, by both oppressed subjects and dominant subjects, in terms of a conflict among the individual and the entire social context.

The *second* stage is than that of *restlessness, discontent*, because social conditions have changed enough to arouse *a sense of powers which do not function, which have no definite social channel provided for their utilization*. This is the period of marked “*individualism*” of revolt against authority and established institutions, a feeling that they are [either] merely conventional, or else positively oppressive and to be destroyed in the interests of individual freedom, which is negatively viewed [as] *absence of restraint* doing as one pleases etc. (3) But as social organization proceeds and the capacities of the submerged group are not merely stimulated and brought to consciousness in an emotional way, but *get some definite channel of exercise, the demand ceases to be for individualistic expression, and becomes a demand for a chance to perform a badly needed social function. The claim shifts from a right to a neglected social duty.*³⁷⁶

Therefore, on the one hand, oppressed individuals develop a sense of individual power, which is unexpressed because of actual social conditions. Thus, they conceive their demands as entirely opposed to the social context and as a matter of individual freedom to be fulfilled radically and regardless of the social world, which is perceived as merely oppressive and constraining. At the same time, the social context and the dominant social members see these

³⁷⁴ Dewey, 1973, p. 77. In Clopton and Ou’s edition of the recorded lectures, the second phase is named “the phase of challenge” (Dewey, 1973, p. 70), whereas, in the original notes, the “phase of restlessness and discontent” (Dewey, 2015, IV.9). The original notes, concerning this second phase, focus more than the recorded lectures on the initially individualistic and radical emotivity of oppressed social subjects. In the absence of the intentional constitution of an oppressed common group, oppressed individuals keep conceiving their demand individually, developing a blind resentment for the social world and desiring its mere disruption. Only within the group-context, do they start to perceive their interest as “social,” that is, as contents not demanding a blind consummation but a rationally regulated fulfillment through the social context and entailing a betterment for social life in its entirety. They ask to be socially recognized. For a further analysis of this point, see Santarelli, 2019.

³⁷⁵ Dewey, 1973, p. 77.

³⁷⁶ Dewey, 2015, IV.9-10.

emancipatory demands as merely egoistic, anti-social, and disruptive for social well-being and public life, due to their radical discontent and opposition towards social life as such.

Only in a second moment, when the individualistically perceived feelings of unexpressed power turn out to be shared by a considerable number of subjects, do oppressed individuals become aware of the social significance of their demands and their necessary public mediation. “A movement gains converts, [...] participants in the movement itself begin more and more to conceive of themselves as a social group, fighting for freedom and right against the larger society which still does not accord it public recognition.”³⁷⁷ That is, oppressed social members become conscious of the *social* validity and worth of their demands for the entire public life, as harbingers of interests whose imaginary satisfaction potentially discloses a betterment for the entire social world and its groups. Secondly, they become aware of the social mediation that their demands necessitate to be consistently and significantly satisfied, rather than accidentally, contingently, and blindly unleashed. In a nutshell, oppressed individuals, by sharing their experiences while semantically re-elaborating them, develop a new form of identity, a social and a public one, not demanding the destruction of the social world, but the redefinition of its public space.³⁷⁸ Hence, this redefinition of the public space entails a re-elaboration of existing relationships of recognition in terms of balancing of both *social attention* and *energies*.

The innovator has a case to prove. *He is the propounder of a hypothesis that the welfare of society would be promoted by the adoption of a certain change, that if this harms a special class for a time, this loss to the class is in the interests of the community of the whole, and is the measure of justice to some other class now suffering from inadequate social recognition.* He does not present himself as a mere *rebel*, hostile to the authority as such, willing to tear down recklessly in a blind hope something better may appear. His claim that certain defects exist, and that they may be remedied by the adoption of *certain proposed measures of change* are propositions to be examined in the light of facts – first *facts of history, existing facts and conditions*, second *new facts*, facts to be brought in.³⁷⁹

From Dewey’s analysis of inadequate recognition that we have previously pointed out, it follows that social groups demand to be fully recognized by the social context in their

³⁷⁷ Dewey, 1973, p. 78.

³⁷⁸ For an analysis of Dewey’s theory of social movement, see Serrano, 2017. Here, Serrano reconstructs through Dewey’s aesthetic category of “expressive act,” developed in *Art as Experience* (1934), the underlying meaning of his expressivist theory of subjugated and struggling social groups, as developing social power for change through the meaningful re-elaboration of their shared experiences of oppression.

³⁷⁹ Dewey, 2015, IV.13.

interests. That is, they demand both a non-secondary and symmetrical public acknowledgment of their interests as socially valid, i.e., legitimate due to their social worth for the public context, and a reconstruction of the social world, in its customs and institutions, adequate for the practically effective and significant fulfillment of their social interests. Therefore, the redefinition of the public context implies both the social world's re-acknowledgment of its social forces and groups and the reconstruction and reformation of the customary social practices and institutions that regulate public life in its self-interpretation and practical organization.

Lastly, the third phase of the social conflict is the one of "fruition," where the struggling social group is numerically so extensive and the social value of their demands so developed that the latter are not only symbolically regarded as social, but also *met* through adequate reforms, by adopting new measures of change.

there is general recognition that the demands made by the movement are actually members of social interest, not the vagaries of quixotic individuals. The leaders of the movement, demanding opportunities for its members to meet and fulfil their obligations, begin to be able to demonstrate that society's failure to grant these opportunities is to its own disadvantage. Society, in turn, recognizes the social validity of the demand. The interest which was initially characterized as antisocial comes to be regarded as social, and – usually not all at once, but nevertheless inexorably – the demands of the movement are met and reform is achieved.³⁸⁰

In conclusion, in Dewey's framework, social domination, as both oppression of social groups and standardization of dominant interests, comes to an end through a three phase-conflict for social recognition.³⁸¹ The social conflict has, thus, a fundamental socio-ontological role. It allows the social context to be consciously and reflexively legitimized by the social members, to be redefined in and by its public groups and reformed in its structural organization. The ideal aim or final result which the social struggle for recognition aspires to, is, according to Dewey, the institution of *associated life*, "a picture in which there is equal proportionate development of all these forms of associated life, where they interact freely with one another, and where the results of each one contribute to the richness and significance of every other."³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Dewey, 1973, p. 78.

³⁸¹ For an analysis of the tripartite logic of the struggle for social recognition that both Hegel and Dewey theorize, see Särkelä, 2013.

³⁸² Dewey, 2015, III.3.

VIII. 1. 2. Social Philosophy as Applied Science

In the previous section, we have attempted to stress how Dewey, in the lectures in social and political philosophy he delivered in Peking, approaches the issue of social philosophy, first of all, acknowledging it as a specific kind of the more general theorizing activity of the human being. Indeed, according to Dewey, the observation of human behavior demonstrates that, from a general perspective, thinking and theorizing are secondarily occurring activities for human subjects. They are destined to solve, through specific transformations of conditions and reconstructions of behavior, existing problems and disharmonies that emerge in the practical interaction that individuals have with external situations for the satisfaction of their needs. Therefore, social philosophy, like other forms of theories and thinking, deals with problematic situations according to both a descriptive and transformative logic. From a description of facts and existing conditions, thinking and theory must bring an element of novelty and transformation in human behavior and external situations.

In a second moment, Dewey distinguishes social philosophy according to its specific object of investigation, social life, and the general category of problematic situations it must deal with, social disorder. Society is disordered when social conflicts between groups occur due to the inadequate social recognition of pressing social needs and interests, namely, due to an imbalance of public attention and social energy. The evident occurrence of social conflicts in the social world entails then the necessity, for Dewey, to clarify some socio-ontological aspects of social life. As we have previously seen, these are:

- (i) The functional origin of the social world to cooperatively satisfy shared needs.
- (ii) The arising of a plurality of social groups that aim at satisfying different needs by channelling them into specific interests, which embody a certain interpretation of the need and a shared behavioral organization for its fulfillment.
- (iii) The natural agonism and competition among social interests, due to their plurality and multiplicity.
- (iv) The primary social role that one interest can acquire in a specific historical situation, and the hegemonic and dominant power that it can ideologically develop due to its past functionality for social life, its “parasitic” influence on social customs and institutions, and its instrumental reliance on relationships of recognition with the oppressed social counterparts. Many of the

oppressed social groups suffer, in fact, from inadequate social recognition, for existing recognitive contexts are unable to bring forward the social conditions necessary for their interests to be materially fulfilled.

(v) The occurrence for oppressed individuals of a revealing social experience, which represents the trigger for the conscious development and common organization of a social group that suffers social oppression and *struggles* to be adequately recognized by the social context. Adequate recognition is not only a matter of positive acceptance and legitimization but also of meeting the demands of oppressed groups through the adoption of “*certain proposed measures of change*.”³⁸³

Once the essential nature of human theorizing, the category of the problems with which social philosophy deals, and the ontological aspects of the social world have been clarified, it is feasible to grasp Dewey’s personal conception of social philosophy’s task, method of investigation, and source of normativity for the criticism of the social world. According to Dewey, social philosophy should indeed deal with the disturbances of social life, i.e., social conflicts, but according to a specific method of investigation and a general criterion to orient social criticism that are distinct from the ones of the traditional accounts of social theory. In fact, in lectures I and II, “The Function of Theory” and “Science and Social Philosophy,” Dewey identifies broadly two competing traditional accounts of social philosophy that attempt to solve social disorders and overcome social conflicts by influencing social practice with theory: radicalism and conservatism.

The first one “emphasizes the ideal of individuality, and finds in the human person the measure of right and wrong.”³⁸⁴ Therefore, radicalism deems that the only legitimate and absolute source of social normativity and social change is human individuality. It interprets situations of social disorder and conflict in terms of individuals’ emancipatory reactions to the oppression not of specific social groups, but of the social world in its entirety, given this latter’s natural and intrinsic attitude to suppress the free creativity of individuals’ emotional and practical life. Thus, the radical approach to social criticism argues that theory must accompany individuals in the revolutionary change of its antagonistic force, the social world. Following individuals’ disruptive emotivity, radical social theories attempt to radically change the social

³⁸³ Dewey, 2015, IV.13.

³⁸⁴ Dewey, 1973, p. 52.

world according to an ideal of social life that is drastically opposed to, and therefore disconnected from, the existing one. Dewey describes radicals as:

those which are aware primarily of the defects in existing institutions and which criticize and condemn them. They conceive of a different ideal state, so different as to be opposed in a wholesale way and capable of realization only in some revolutionary way. They are *idealistic*, if not *romantic, utopian*, in tone. They find the true *standards* and *models* of life in something *apart from and beyond* existing affairs. [...] It [radical change] is thus *sudden, abrupt* in its conceptions, and appeals to *self-reliance*, to *inspiration from within*, combined with *contempt for the existing state of things* and its corrupting influence. ³⁸⁵

According to Dewey, this first socio-philosophical approach to social life disorders is revealing in some respects but, in conclusion, destined to “negative and destructive action.”³⁸⁶ Its strength lies in the role that it assigns to human individuality in the evaluation of the social world, since it considers the human subject, firstly, in its inner creativity and potential of social transformation, secondly, in its legitimate task to transform and enrich social life. Its weakness and harmfulness consist in its anthropological assumption that the individual is ontologically prior and in antagonism with the social context, missing the deep interdependence existing between individual action and social action.³⁸⁷ As Dewey later clarifies in *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), radicals, or the liberal socio-philosophical school, consider human individuals

³⁸⁵ Dewey, 2015, I.9.

³⁸⁶ Dewey, 2015, I.12.

³⁸⁷ For Dewey, radicalism is the socio-philosophical approach of liberalism. Even if Dewey deeply explains the connection between radicalism and liberalism in other works rather than in the *Lectures*, for instance in the *Syllabus* (1923), *Individualism Old and New* (1930), and *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), it is evident how, in the *Lectures*, the critique to radicalism lies on his deeper criticism of the liberal anthropologies of the 19th century. In fact, liberalism represents, for Dewey, the revolutionary anthropology and theory of the social world that led human societies to a pivotal self-interpretative change through the re-assessment of human individuality as the source of creativity, independence, and uniqueness, but with an intrinsic misleading idea. As Dewey clearly states in *Liberalism and Social Action*, where he reconstructs the origin of liberalism from Locke to the liberalistic theories of individuals’ economic self-interest, the problem of liberalism is its methodological individualism. “The whole temper of this philosophy is individualistic in the sense in which individualism is opposed to social action. It held the primacy of the individual over the state not only in time but in moral authority. It defined the individual in terms of liberties of thought and action already possessed by him in some mysterious ready-made fashion, and which it was the sole business of the state to safeguard. Reason was also made an inherent endowment of the individual, expressed in men’s moral relations to one another, but not sustained and developed because of these relations. It followed that the great enemy of individual liberty was thought to be government because of its tendency to encroach upon the innate liberties of individuals. Later liberalism inherited this conception of a natural antagonism between the ruler and ruled, interpreted as a natural opposition between the individual and organized society. [...] The net effect of the struggle of early liberals to emancipate individuals from restriction imposed upon them by the inherited type of social organization was to pose a problem, the one of a new social organization. The ideas of liberalism set forth for the first time in the first third part of the nineteenth century were potent in criticism and in analysis. They released forces that had been held in check. But analysis is not construction, and release of force does not of itself give direction to the force that is set free. [...] The beliefs and methods of earlier liberalism were ineffective when faced with the problems of social organization and integration” (LW 11, pp. 7-22).

as autonomous, both in reason and action, from the surrounding social contexts, thus wholly missing the matter of fact that subjects are always born into pre-given social contexts and can realize their own needs and creativity only within a social world constituted of social practices, customs, and institutions that channel and empower the expressiveness of individuality to develop properly.

[Radicalism] defined the individual in terms of liberties of thought and action already possessed by him in some mysterious ready-made fashion, and which it was the sole business of the state to safeguard. Reason was also made an inherent endowment of the individual, expressed in men's moral relations to one another, but not sustained and developed because of these relations.³⁸⁸

Radicalism's more significant mistake, therefore, is, for Dewey, the missing acknowledgment that the social world is far from being the enemy or antagonist of individuals, as standing for its very context of freedom and expression. There are good and bad social contexts, and the task of social theory is to transform existing social worlds into better ones, without pretending to erase them radically and according to the sole insights and intuition of atomistic individuals. The social world should be transformed, and individuals' emotional insights redefined, through the group- and social context's mediations, into social demands and projects of transformation. Otherwise, emancipatory action will be merely destructive, "*waiting for the ideal to be realized by some miracle of change.*"³⁸⁹ In conclusion, radicalism does methodologically start from existing individuals, and immanently gives back to individual subjects, from a substantial point of view, the emancipatory role to change the social world creatively. But it does not consider that for the effective liberation and expression of individual creativity, this latter's potential of transformation should be governed through an immanent consideration also of the social conditions to be maintained and transformed, rather than unleashed according to a utopic and romantic ideal relying upon mere subjective emotivity. Even if it starts from individual subjects, because of its deprecation of the social world, radicalism ends up critically evaluating and reforming the social world according to a transcendental ideal, which, as Dewey further clarifies in the *Syllabus*, is "a standard or a norm outside the social phenomena themselves," without any "assurance [...] that it is not utopian and futile."³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ LW 11, p. 7.

³⁸⁹ Dewey, 2015, I.12.

³⁹⁰ MW 15, p. 231.

In the *Lectures*, Dewey identifies the second traditional school of social philosophy that deals with social disorders, i.e., social conflicts, in order to overcome them through the influence of theory, in conservatism.

The second position—conservatism—places less trust in individuals, noting that individual judgment is fallible, and holding that the wisdom of the past affords the only reliable basis for action. [...] [It] postulates a fundamental validity for existing institutions and concentrates on clarification of their purpose, or discovery of their original meaning.³⁹¹

Therefore, conservatism assumes a positivistic stance regarding disordered societies since, on the one hand, it focuses on social structures, customs, and institutions without considering the subjective element of human societies, i.e., individuals' emotional, reflective, and moral judgment. On the other hand, it considers the social world's customs and institutions as having *per se* a fixed and original meaning and necessary structures or relationships that the social theorist must find out and preserve.

The conservative theorists, in whose ranks Dewey identifies Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel, have blind faith in social institutions. Indeed, as Dewey specifies later in the *Syllabus*, this faith lies upon a kind of “metaphysical realism,” according to which individuals are constitutive parts of a whole and universal subject, i.e., the social world, with which they maintain a harmonious relationship of ontological interdependence. “Metaphysical realism [...] may be classed for practical purpose ‘organic idealism’. The doctrine that the whole and universal are alone truly real, and that individuals are ‘particulars’ or parts of the whole having no substantial being on their own.”³⁹² Since individuals are dependent on the whole and the whole on the parts, they are ontologically tied by an intrinsic and pre-given harmony, which is similar to the one of the body with its constitutive parts. This organicist conception of social life entails that in the social world are preserved immutable principles and meanings through which the perfect balance among parts and whole is given as such, and the task of the theorist is, first, registering such immutable principles in social conditions. Second, he/she should preserve social life “on track,” considering social disorders in terms of individuals and social life's dangerous departure from the original meanings of practices and institutions, and discouraging social change unless it takes the form of returning to the original state of things. In a nutshell, according to

³⁹¹ Dewey, 1973, p. 52.

³⁹² MW 15, p. 245.

conservatism, due to the ready-made harmony of the whole with the parts, the parts should always conform to the social world's intrinsic and original structures.

[Conservatism] aims at justifying the *spirit* of existing institutions. It finds the true patterns and standards *within* affairs. It looks askance upon change, especially abrupt change, because *evil is due to departure from necessary meanings and fixed relationships embedded in things*. Reform is restoration, recovery of these true patterns. This one is *complacent or optimistic*. *Essentially if not incidentally things are right and reasonable*. Evil is rather in the mind that has departed from them. Instead then of appealing to the mind itself to find within itself intuitively and innately ideals for change, it holds that the *mind must be instructed and rectified by careful study of the things, forms and relations that are external to it*. Its temper is realistic not idealistic. *It aims at reform of character and mind to bring them into conformity with the true meanings of established institutions and relationships, not at reform of institutions by appeal to the inner ideals of the illuminated mind.*³⁹³

In conclusion, conservatism as well proceeds immanently in the critical evaluation of social disorders but focuses, rather than on individuals as radicalism, on social institutions and social customs. Unlike the radical, the conservative carefully registers existing social conditions. But because of his/her whole overlooking of individuals and their emancipatory potential of the social world, he/she conceives of social reform only in terms of maintenance or returning to unchanged and timeless social meanings, entailing, both for himself/herself and social individuals, the adoption of a critical attitude that is entirely actionless, passive, inert. Therefore, the socially immanent methodology of conservative criticism is accompanied by a socially immanent substantialism, for the standards of critique and reform are found in the social world's original ideals. "The net result [...] is inaction, passivity,"³⁹⁴ blind justification of what is contingently existent in the social world, in front of which individuals' pretense and demands should be entirely silenced or accorded to.

Radicalism and conservatism turn out to be accounts of social philosophy, according to Dewey, entirely inefficient for the criticism and transformation of the social world:

Now both of these types of theory in spite of their profound antagonism to each other agree in being wholesale – in taking a general attitude [of] either condemnation or justification toward things as they are. Both of them then lack the kind of practical power or efficacy most needed – power to project and direct the changes that are required. The first expects some sudden and revolutionary change to bring in an ideal condition; the second resists all change. But what humanity needs is ability to shape and direct the changes that are bound to occur. The conservative [type] lacks leverage for guiding change because it consecrates and justifies things as they

³⁹³ Dewey, 2015, I.10-11.

³⁹⁴ Dewey, 2015, I.12.

essentially are. The radical and idealistic type lacks leverage with things as they are because it opposes the inner ideal to the outer affair and institution in a wholesale way.³⁹⁵

Due to the critical and transformative inefficiency of these two traditional accounts of social philosophy, Dewey presents his account of social philosophy as a third and competing option. This third option or account of social philosophy cannot be regarded as a mere synthesis of the positive aspects of the first two since it basically relies upon a different approach, both methodologically and theoretically, to the problems of the social world.

In the first instance, as we have previously seen, Dewey starts from a general reconsideration of human thinking and theory. Human thinking and theorizing, and thus social philosophy as well, should be conceived as tools or instruments with which problems that occur in human practice with and within the external world and its specific situations can be solved. Thinking or theory, reconsidered in their practical and secondary stance, are but destined, first, to start from matters of facts, namely, unsatisfactory contexts of practice, where individuals are prevented from satisfying certain needs because they lack efficient behavioral patterns. Therefore, thinking does register matters of facts like radicalism and conservatism do regarding individuals' emotional discontent or external objective conditions, but it overcomes their unilaterality and intrinsic dualism. Dealing with unsatisfactory contexts of practice, indeed, means neither blindly unleashing individual emotivity and romantic dreams, regardless of existing objective conditions, nor searching for the ultimate and original state of things, regardless of subjects' experiences, needs, and demands. Instead, it means intelligently considering the objective conditions which prevent individuals from successfully satisfying their needs, thus entailing their emotional discontent and impossibility of consummation, while finding out a *hypothesis*, carved out from existing situations, regarding the specific objective conditions to be brought about for the satisfaction of that need. Thus, the phase of registering problematic situations, both in their subjective and objective conditions, entails the construction of a theoretical hypothesis, which suggests a reconstruction of practical human behavior and external conditions to be realized. Theory, knowledge, and thinking should ensure to individuals the "*practical power or efficacy most needed – power to project and direct the changes that are required.*"³⁹⁶ Therefore, theory and thinking, as their pre-scientific functioning

³⁹⁵ Dewey, 2015, I.11-12.

³⁹⁶ Dewey, 2015, I.11.

suggests, have for Dewey not only a practical source but also a practical relevance and mediation. They are destined to solve the problematic contexts of practice through an immanent and transformative redefinition of practical contexts, both in their subjective and objective elements. And their hypotheses can be considered correct according to their practical consequences, in their ability to imply or not reasonable and non-problematic conduct.

In lecture II, “Science and Philosophy,” Dewey acknowledges applied sciences and their scientific method, such as medicine or engineering, in terms of the highest and empowered manifestations of the natural functioning of human thinking and theorizing:

In the so-called pure sciences we take the position of *merely looking* at things to note what is going on. We are outside of them. Our own hopes, fears, desires and observations have nothing to do with the future changes of the moon. The scene so far as we are concerned is a *closed and finished* one. Our own activities do not enter into its making or remaking. It is only in the “*applied*” science, like agriculture, medicine, engineering (civil, mechanical, electrical) that we use our knowledge to enter as active partners into what is going on to make it different from what it would be if we do not act and act upon our own knowledge.³⁹⁷

Here, Dewey distinguishes between “pure” and “applied” sciences, as diverging not for the method of inquiry, but for their ultimate task and context of application. Pure sciences, like mathematics or physics, are spectators of natural facts. They observe natural facts to grasp their functioning and processes, without caring for human desires or preferences and without manipulating such processes. Instead, applied sciences aim at employing the results of pure sciences in order to change existing situations to satisfy human desires and needs. Pure sciences do deal with life, but with the mere attitude of the spectator. In contrast, applied sciences proceed with “a bias in favor of life,”³⁹⁸ according to Dewey, since they aim at bettering human existence, human life, with theories destined to fulfill the needy human dimension significantly and without tensions. “Theory is not established, and the end of applied science is not reached, until human desire and will are satisfied.”³⁹⁹ Applied sciences, therefore, are specific forms of human theorizing that focus on human life so as to enhance it by dealing intelligently with its pressing needs, such as the need for food and water, physical health, protection, and security. Nonetheless, to succeed in this aim, applied sciences proceed according to a specific method of investigation, relying upon:

³⁹⁷ Dewey, 2015, II.5.

³⁹⁸ Dewey, 2015, II.6.

³⁹⁹ Dewey, 1973, p. 59.

(i) “the reduction if not elimination of the dogmatic and authoritarian habit of mind,”⁴⁰⁰ by putting direct observation of existing facts first, above common sense or acquired knowledge.

(ii) “the willingness to take things in detail rather [than] in sweeping generalities, retail rather than wholesale.”⁴⁰¹ Applied sciences deal with specific problems occurring in particular situations. Dewey makes, for instance, the example of an engineer who wants to build a railroad. His/her method of inquiry and plan for construction are indeed guided by the need of a certain state or city to institute new forms of connections and transports, so as to favor interactions, trades, and exchanges. However, the engineer does not proceed entirely idealistically nor merely realistically, namely, he/she does not follow the utopic ideas springing from mere subjective emotions, nor attempts to reproduce a pre-given, ready-made, and ultimate ideal of what the perfect railroad should be. Instead, he/she outlines a theory, or a project, measured both on a specific locality, according to its geographical features – such as towns, mountains, rivers – and on the population’s density, distribution, and the service required not for fulfilling the general need for transports, but a certain need for transports within specific cultural, economic, social, and political conditions. “In other words, the project is based upon a study of a special concrete situation, the needs that have to be met, the resources at hand and potential, the obstacles to be overcome, the definite aims in view, consequences to accrue, political, industrial, financial etc. The problem is one of ends and means in a particular situation.”⁴⁰² Applied science, therefore, considers a need or a lack of human beings while attempting to elaborate it into a specific end, which simultaneously is defined by and defines the specific situational means necessary to its satisfaction. Engineering, medicine, and agriculture are all theories dedicated to outlining programs for the intelligent transformation of existing conditions

⁴⁰⁰ Dewey, 2015, II.4.

⁴⁰¹ Dewey, 2015, II.4.

⁴⁰² See Dewey, 2015, II.7-8. Another Deweyan recurrent example of an applied science and its scientific method of investigation, as relying upon existent diseases, particular diagnoses, and methods of treatment, is the art of medicine, which is devoted to the “restoration of the body to its former condition of well-being” (Dewey, 1973, p. 47). “Analogy with the human body is instructive. Not only do we think when the body fails to function as it should, but the thinking done by qualified observers is ultimately combined to form theory, and we have first the art, then the science of medicine” (Dewey, 1973, p. 47). In *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), Dewey further specifies the method of the art of medicine: “A physician, for example, is called by a patient. His original material of experience is thereby provided. [...] This experienced object sets the problem of inquiry. Certain clinical operations are performed, sounding, tapping, getting registrations of pulse, temperature, respiration, etc. these constitute the symptoms; they supply the evidence to be interpreted. [...] The results are not all that is or can be observed, but are those phases and portions of the experienced whole that are judged to be relevant to making an inference as to the nature of the ailment. The observations mean something not in and of themselves, but are given meaning in the light of the systematized knowledge of medicine as far as that is at the command of the practitioner. He calls upon the store of knowledge to suggest ideas that may aid him in reaching a judgment as to the nature of the trouble and its proper treatment” (LW 4, p. 139).

with the aim to enhance life. This intelligent transformation occurs only through the evaluation of needs in their specific subjective and objective – both natural and social – conditions.

(iii) “the willingness to treat alleged principles and laws as *only provisional hypotheses* and the creation of a demand for experimental verification.”⁴⁰³ Applied sciences follow a method of investigation and theorizing that is not only tied to the empirical observation of particular situations and the institution of theories or projects outlining programs for intelligent and situational transformations. Moreover, their inquiry is *experimental* and *cumulative*. Their theories maintain the status of mere *hypothesis*, whose adequacy and reliability are confirmed only in and by practice and observed consequences. And if this is the case, theories keep remaining instruments for dealing with new situations but are always open to be further enriched and redefined or consistently revised according to new, changing, and specific situations.⁴⁰⁴

Since the scientific method of applied sciences embeds the human thinking’s highest self-acknowledgment and self-realization as intrinsically practical, experimental, and cumulative, Dewey deems that his third type of social philosophy is critically effective and able to overcome the shortcomings of other traditional socio-philosophical accounts because it methodologically adopts the scientific method of investigation and spirit of applied sciences. Indeed, “it was only comparatively recently that it dawned on us that the problems of associated living were susceptible to investigation and ordering by the same methods which had proved so useful in dealing with the objective world.”⁴⁰⁵ Social philosophy, indeed, if it relies upon a scientific method of investigation to deal with existing social disorders, i.e., social conflicts, distinguishes itself from conservatism and radicalism, first, according to a methodological point of view in dealing with social transformations. Dewey identifies three essential aspects: “emphasis on the study of individuals events,” “emphasis on application of knowledge and intelligence to social change,” and “emphasis on experimentation.”⁴⁰⁶

In the first instance, social philosophy must start immanently from existing situations, which, unlike in the radical and conservatist approaches, are considered unique problematic

⁴⁰³ See Dewey, 2015, II.4.

⁴⁰⁴ In other works, for instance, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), Dewey defines medicine, engineering, etc., in terms of “arts” since, like the artist or the craftsman, the scientist deals with concrete objects because of subjective interests, approaching them by following theoretical guiding principles or rules, which nonetheless should be experimentally and cumulatively revised and declined according to existing experiences and situations, rather than applied mechanically and blindly (see MW 12, p. 176).

⁴⁰⁵ Dewey, 1973, p. 54.

⁴⁰⁶ Dewey, 1973, p. 58.

cases that deserve different forms of solutions or social transformations. “Classical philosophers have either advocated the replacement of existing institutions on the one hand, or sought to conserve them in their entirety on the other. The third philosophy does not resort to such sweeping generalizations.”⁴⁰⁷ The third philosophy outlines theories for overcoming specific problems occurring in specific situations. Thus, it starts from the observation of existent conditions, i.e., subjective and objective conditions, to find out the specific change or transformation, or chain of means, needed to fulfill the particular end resulting from the careful consideration of subjects’ un-satisfactions and actual and potential objective conditions.

In the second instance, it follows that “the third philosophy advocates neither the total reconstruction nor the absolute conservation of existing institutions. Its purpose is to cultivate knowledge and intelligence by use of which men may remedy particular disorders and solve particular problems.”⁴⁰⁸ Medicine and engineering employ the results of anatomy, biochemistry, physics, and mathematics to deal with specific diseases or needs, stating a problem, and outlining a theory for change. In the same way, social philosophy is called to rely upon social sciences, such as anthropology, economics, politics, history, etc., which Dewey defines in terms of “technologies” for social philosophy, to diagnose the sources of social problems and find out a theory suitable to overcome specific impediments.

Here in China a number of people have asked me, “Where should we start in reforming our society?” My answer is that we must start by reforming the component institutions of the society. Families, schools, local governments, the central government—all these must be reformed, but they must be reformed by the people who constitute them, working as individuals—in collaboration with other individuals, of course, but still as individuals, each accepting his own responsibility. Any claim of the total reconstruction of a society is almost certain to be misleading. The institutions which make up the society are not “right” or “wrong,” but each is susceptible to some degree of improvement. Social progress is neither an accident nor a miracle; it is the sum of efforts made by individuals whose actions are guided by intelligence.⁴⁰⁹

Thus, social transformation or change is, for Dewey, a *betterment* of existing societies through individuals, rather than a radical upheaval of their entire structures according to unintelligent romantic utopia or a static and desire-detached acceptance of the *status quo*. It is progress based upon “the *supremacy of human aims and desires*.”⁴¹⁰ It pursues the observation

⁴⁰⁷ Dewey, 1973, p. 58.

⁴⁰⁸ Dewey, 1973, p. 58.

⁴⁰⁹ Dewey, 1973, pp. 62-63.

⁴¹⁰ Dewey, 2015, II.7.

of specific, problematic social practices, customs, and institutions to alter their interrelated and dis-functional aspects and cracks for the significant expression and satisfaction of social members' needs.

In the third instance, social philosophy is experimental since the validity, the efficacy, and the reliability of its *ad hoc* solutions are but testified by practice or further experience, namely, by the real betterment of existing situations. "This third philosophy holds that ideas and theories must be tested by practical application. The truth or falsity of an idea has to be determined by experimentation. If experimentation demonstrates that an idea is valid, it can then be applied as a guide to human conduct."⁴¹¹

In conclusion, according to Dewey, this third approach to social philosophy, since it considers itself a form of "applied science," distinguishes itself from conservatism and radicalism, at first, according to a methodological point of view. Its immanence in social disorders does not focus unidirectionally on subjective or objective conditions but on the situational interpenetration and interconnection between them. Thus, this immanence entails neither a radical transformation of the social world according to transcendental ideals nor the maintenance or returning to pre-given and ultimate social institutions and conditions. Moreover, its immanent and transformative approach entails the ongoing observation and valuation of consequences and new emerging situations, and therefore, the abandonment of universal theories in favor of specific theories to be tested and progressively enriched.

Hence, we have grasped the *methodological* or *procedural* diversity between the two traditional accounts of social philosophy and Dewey's "third philosophy" concerning the approach to social disorders and the procedure for social change. This methodological difference is mainly due to his underlying reconsideration of human thinking and theorizing in their practical significance, and consequently to his argument in favor of social philosophy's adoption of the scientific spirit pursued by applied sciences for the investigation and evaluation of its object of inquiry, i.e., the social world.

Now, we also want to consider the *evaluative* distinction existing among Dewey's third philosophy and the traditional accounts of social philosophy, namely, the leading criterion that, according to Dewey, should guide social philosophy in the criticism of disordered social contexts.

⁴¹¹ Dewey, 1973, p. 58.

The function of theory, in this view, is to correct errors and satisfy deficiencies which are perceived as man deals with social situations, as well as to resolve conflicts which occur among the component elements of the society. In such cases, emphasis on concrete problems, while essential, is not sufficient; we must also have a framework of general conceptions to guide us in our consideration of the total situation.⁴¹²

Therefore, Dewey acknowledges that the mere consideration of the procedure proper for social philosophy to be truly transformative is not sufficient for the social theorist to evaluate social contexts and outline programs for social reconstructions. He/she also needs to identify a general evaluative and normative criterion for the criticism of social contexts. To approach problematically social contexts and find out specific solutions, he/she cannot be exempt from general directives for identifying a social situation as problematic.

A sailor, for example, must have at least a map and a compass, the former to help him set his destination, the latter to provide a sense of direction. By analogy the social philosopher must also have general guiding principles to serve him as map and compass as he observes and seeks the causes of conflicts and instabilities in the social scene, and then contrives approaches which promise to resolve or alleviate the difficulties which the concrete problems present. However, a “general guiding concept” as I use the term here is not by any means the same sort of thing as sweeping generalizations, serving as virtual absolutes, about which I made comments in earlier lectures. The general guiding concept is, in fact, a general concept, and in each case it derives from concrete events of the sort to which it is to be applied.⁴¹³

This criterion, thus, is *general*. Nonetheless, it does not represent a *substantial* or *material* ideal of the society to be brought about according to a romantic fancy or to social essences and principles embedded in existing institutions. Instead, it is to be conceived in terms of “a map and a compass” to orient the critical look on social contexts, identify the source of social disorders and conflicts, and organize theories for the intelligently regulated transformation of existing societies. Therefore, for Dewey, this general criterion should be entirely formal, exempt from substantial considerations concerning the specific organization and structure of social contexts. This formality does not mean that the criterion should be transcendental, exterior to social life, and applied from outside existing social worlds. Instead, it should be derived immanently from “our experience of human nature [...], objective study of observable human behavior and scientifically derived hypotheses about its changing trends.”⁴¹⁴ Dewey identifies the criterion for orienting the criticism and transformation of the

⁴¹² Dewey, 1973, p. 64.

⁴¹³ Dewey, 1973, p. 64-65.

⁴¹⁴ Dewey, 1973, p. 85.

social world through specific and circumstantial theories by first referring to a formal anthropology and social ontology, which provide general observations on human behavior freed from any historical, social, and cultural reference to specific societies.

VIII. 1. 3. The Naturalistic Anthropology Underlying the *Lectures in China*, the Place of Recognition and the Critical Criterion of “Associated Life”

Concerning Dewey’s identification of the criterion to evaluate human societies, his simultaneous and interconnected reflections on the human being and the social world’s constitution become fundamental. We have previously seen how, for Dewey, the human being should be conceived, first, in terms of a practical individual endowed with needs, emerging from its interactions with external situations and suitable to be satisfied in light of an intelligent reconstruction of behavior and transformation of external conditions. It is necessary to acknowledge, Dewey says, that “we *want* to live,”⁴¹⁵ namely that human beings are living creatures with needs that require fulfillment, deserving consummation. And it is essential to consider that this fulfillment can occur intelligently or reasonably, rather than blindly or instinctively. For human beings, life or living, i.e., self-reproduction through the satisfaction of vital needs, can occur “*somewhat differently, especially in emergencies*, because of their knowledge.”⁴¹⁶ Indeed, because of thinking and knowledge, pressing needs can be channeled into specific interests that entail the organization of a behavioral pattern or a way of conduct suitable to bring about the objective conditions deserved for a significant, functional, and energy-saving satisfaction of that need.

Therefore, in the *Lectures*, without going into details and only providing general directives, Dewey refers to an anthropology of the human being that considers the latter, first of all, as a living being interacting with an objective world. First, the human being appears to have a practical exchange with the external world. Second, this exchange seems to entail the transformation of the subject by the external environment and the transformation of the external environment by the subject simultaneously. On the one hand, the subjects’ needs materially emerge with, are defined by, and depend for their fulfillment on external situations and conditions. On the other hand, the human being is able to organize its behavior intelligently,

⁴¹⁵ Dewey, 2015, II.6.

⁴¹⁶ Dewey, 2015, I.2.

according to a logic of means-ends-consequences, to transform external conditions functionally. It fulfills its needs significantly, rather than blindly or accidentally, channelling them into specific interests, namely, into a specific interpretation of the need to be met and the organization of behavior necessary to realize it, reaching a harmonious interaction with existing situations. Moreover, from Dewey's definition of human interests as situational and to be dynamically fed by natural sources, it seems to follow that the human being's practical and transformative interaction with external situations and conditions is restless and continuous. Therefore, the anthropology that Dewey puts at the base of social philosophy's evaluative criticisms of social contexts suggests the recovery of the human being as a natural and living being, which, as such, has a practical and ongoing interaction with the objective world, which, nonetheless, takes a specific form. That of an intelligent and practical transformation of subjective behavior and objective conditions and, consequently, the harmonious and significant fulfillment of its needs, channeled into specific interests.

The second anthropological element that Dewey offers to us in the *Lectures*, both in the original notes and the recorded lectures, and that represents the gateway element to his ontology of the social world, is the social and recognitive structure of human practice or action. For the *humane* satisfaction of its needs through specific interests, the individual is somehow dependent on other individuals, as the constitution of social groupings and the struggles for the social recognition by other groups clearly demonstrate. It can be useful to recover two previous quotations. The first one is from the original notes to lecture III: "Human nature has a variety of interests to be served [...] and [has] about each one of the more fundamental of these some form of association, of *living* together or of acting together continuously or repeatedly and regularly."⁴¹⁷ The second one, from the recorded version of the same lecture: "No group is independent and isolated."⁴¹⁸ From these quotations, a general consideration is at hand. The *humane* satisfaction of the individuals' needs cannot occur in isolation, but only through social interactions among individuals. In his following reflections, Dewey names specifically these social interactions of interdependence in terms of relationships of social recognition and identifies the absence of social recognition as the source of social conflicts among groups. The significance of these relationships of recognition becomes apparent in their negation or inadequateness. But from the analysis of the *Lectures*, and specifically, of the theory of social

⁴¹⁷ Dewey, 2015, III.2.

⁴¹⁸ Dewey, 1973, p. 66.

domination that Dewey outlines in his original notes to lecture III, “Social Conflict,” how should we interpret this constitutive dependence of the human being upon recognition? How the ontological and theoretical relation that Dewey establishes between his naturalistic interpretation of the human being and the role of recognition can be considered?

One possibility is Roberto Frega’s argument in *John Dewey’s Social Philosophy: A Restatement* (2015). Here, Frega provides a critical and interpretative comment of the *Lectures*, wherein he claims, firstly, that only in the recorded lectures is it feasible to point out a consistent use by Dewey of the notion of recognition, since in the original notes the term “recognition” appears only six times. Secondly, he argues that, in the recorded lectures, Dewey’s understanding of this relationship is similar to the one of the contemporary theories of recognition, such as the one that Honneth provides in *The Struggle for Recognition*. From the recorded lectures, he argues, it seems that Dewey considers recognition in terms of a positive legitimization and public affirmation of the social worth of the interests of social groups, in the absence of which social subjects are prevented from freely developing their interests. This Deweyan similarity to Honneth’s mature theory of recognition, we add, seems to be further demonstrated by Dewey’s analysis of the psychological effects suffered by subjects due to the lack of social and public recognition, namely, “the effects upon human personality [...] on the subordinated or ‘inferior’ members of such a society.”⁴¹⁹ In the recorded version of lecture VI, “Associated Life,” we find the following statement indeed:

The first and most noticeable effect upon the inferior members of a society [...] are psychological in nature – feelings of dissatisfaction, dislike, hatred, and deprivation – frequently approaching the level of neurosis, often of psychosis. When a person is relegated to a permanently inferior position in a social hierarchy and suffers chronic frustration in his effort to satisfy his normal needs and desires, his mental health is almost bound to suffer. The second evil effect [...] is the inhibition of individual potentialities.⁴²⁰

From this quotation, it seems indeed that, according to Dewey, the first constitutive function or role of social recognition for human subjectivity is the one of allowing subjects to develop a sort of un-injured relation to themselves and to positively and freely express their personal potentialities. This quotation is far from Honneth’s systematic and scientific explanation of the constitutive bond among social recognition and the subjects’ personal

⁴¹⁹ Dewey, 1973, p. 96.

⁴²⁰ Dewey, 1973, p. 69.

integrity. Dewey does not clearly theorize recognition as constitutive of the subjects' development of normative self-dispositions. He does not even attempt to distinguish their different forms. Moreover, we cannot find in the *Lectures* any systematic classification of the various moral feelings of personal disrespect that dominated subjects develop within misrecognizing social contexts. However, it would seem feasible to argue that Dewey figures social recognition as essential for the human subject to achieve an un-injured relationship to its personal contents, allowing the individual to develop its personal potentialities without inhibitions.

Thirdly, Roberto Frega argues that in the *Lectures*' critical framework, recognition maintains a secondary and subordinate stance, since Dewey primarily focuses on subjects as individuals with pressing needs that they want to fulfill. That is, according to Frega, social conflict primarily occurs when there is unequal access to given resources for the satisfaction of primary and fundamental needs. In this conflict, recognition represents only one stage or phase, since struggling individuals understand that for having the opportunity to satisfy their needs is necessary, first, to be symbolically acknowledged as legitimate participants in the social context, with interests having worth for the social context in its entirety. Social recognition, therefore, would be for Dewey a matter of social integration and legitimization, that is, a necessary but not sufficient condition for the realization of their interests. Besides symbolic recognition, therefore, Dewey would maintain, as distinguished from recognition, the capacity of a social form of life to fulfill and realize a certain need:

Only at a theoretically subordinate level does Dewey acknowledge that problems of recognition or domination may occur when access to a given resource is unequally conceded, so that part of the population is devoid of concrete opportunities to develop their own personality and to fulfill their own needs and aspirations.⁴²¹

According to this interpretation, also supported by Matteo Santarelli in “La vita interessata. Una proposta teorica a partire da John Dewey” (2019), Dewey maintains two parallel dimensions framed within an ontological and theoretical hierarchy. On the one hand, the one of fulfillment, consummation, and realization of pressing needs, channelled into specific interests. On the other hand, the one of public legitimization of social interests as endowed with social worth, that is, the expression and social integration of existing interests in the normative framework of the social context, which are necessary for the individual to develop an un-injured

⁴²¹ Frega, 2015a, p. 23.

relation to its personality and freely relate to its interests. A social context can be criticized according to the asymmetrical relationships of recognition that impede social members' from having an equal symbolic stance in the social world, thus being devoid of the same opportunities to freely develop their interests. But the final consideration for the evaluation of a social world and its social members' well-being depends on the material possibility for them to adequately realize their interests and pressing needs. In conclusion, Frega and Santarelli argue that in Dewey's framework, recognition would appear as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the realization of human interests. "Interest is something deserving not only expression but also fulfillment. Interests include a dimension of realization – relying upon underlying pressing needs – and a dimension of recognition. Recognition is, therefore, a necessary but not sufficient condition for the interest to be realized."⁴²²

Apart from this first interpretation of Dewey's understanding of the constitutive role of recognition for human subjectivity and its place in his theoretical framework, we deem that it is feasible to argue for a different interpretation, relying upon Dewey's original notes for the lecture on "Social Conflict" that we have previously analyzed. As Testa rightly claims in *Dominant Patterns as Associated Living: Hegemony, Domination, and Ideological Recognition in Dewey's Lectures in China* (2017), Frega's downplaying consideration of Dewey's original notes for the issue of recognition, especially the ones of the lecture on "Social Conflict," is not only weakly argued by the premise that in this text the notion of recognition occurs only six times. Moreover, Frega's overview of Dewey's understanding of recognition suffers from the missing attention to the theoretical and conceptual integrations present in the original notes in comparison with the recorded text. Indeed, as we have previously seen, in the original notes, Dewey provides a very personal theory of social domination. This theory is extremely useful to highlight that the issue at stake in the analysis of Dewey's understanding of recognition is not that he conceives of recognition in a similar way to Honneth's mature theory of recognition, namely, in terms of social integration and acceptance. This interpretation cannot but entail that

⁴²² Santarelli, 2019, p. 237. (Translation mine). It is important to underline how Santarelli does support Frega's conception of Dewey's understanding of the function and place of recognition, but he provides a different interpretation concerning the relationship between needs and interests. While Frega does not specifically focus on the difference between the two terms, Santarelli, referring to Italo Testa's essays *Dominant Patterns in Associated Living: Hegemony, Domination, and Ideological Recognition in Dewey's Lectures in China* (2017d), points out how interests are specific interpretations and organizations of pressing needs. Therefore, in Dewey, the conflict among social groups cannot be conceived in terms of a struggle of competing needs that must be fulfilled – some of them are impeded from having any form of consummation – but of different interpretations and significant modes of satisfaction of these pressing needs.

since Dewey also starkly considers the human being as endowed with needs to be materially satisfied apart from being symbolically considered socially relevant, recognition is nothing more for him than a secondary and subordinate relationship and category for the criticism of social contexts. Instead, from his theory of domination, which Dewey presents as an inadequate and pathological context of social recognition, it seems that recognition is not only a matter of social integration and positive acceptance. Indeed, in our previous analysis, we have attempted to highlight how Dewey does not provide a conception of social domination as entirely deprived of relationships of recognition, since domination, to be maintained for decades or centuries, should rely on reciprocal relationships of recognition among dominant subjects and oppressed social groups.

In the case of oppressed subjects, we have highlighted how Dewey explains their being complaisant to one interest's hegemony of social attention and social energy with the fact that most of the oppressed interests are not entirely suppressed but are "allowed and cultivated."⁴²³ That is, they are somehow integrated and accepted in the social context, but being prevented from their effective realization due to the block and impediment exerted by social structures, which organize social behavior by preferring the functional satisfaction of one interests and maintaining other interests into a mere tributary and secondary position. Therefore, from Dewey's theory of domination, the issue at stake is that oppressed interests are *inadequately* recognized by the social contexts. This inadequateness of recognition, which is sufficient to let oppressed subjects reproduce social relationships of domination, entails that ethical recognition is not only a matter of social attention or symbolic acceptance. But also, one of transformation of existing social structures into the objective conditions, e.g., social practices, customs, and institutions, which are functional, reasonable, and effective for the human being's realization of its interests. Inadequate recognition, thus, seems to be involved in the impossibility for human beings to perform their specific capacity for action in the external environment. This capacity for action is not the blind, accidental, and contingent satisfaction of its pressing needs. But rather the capacity to significantly, stably, and harmoniously fulfilling its needs through specific interests, namely, through organized patterns of behavior and transformation of objective conditions.

Moreover, in the case of dominant or oppressing social subjects, Dewey says something additional concerning recognition in general. Dominant subjects, indeed, at first sight, are in a

⁴²³ Dewey, 2015, III.4.

privileged position, for they receive intra-group and extra-group recognition. They are recognized by the social context, and they reciprocally recognize themselves, being both acknowledged as having a primary social worth in social life and having the social organization needed to realize their need, reasonably channelled into a specific interest. Nonetheless, also this context of social recognition – where there is neither the suppression nor the ideological recognition of the dominant interest, as it receives the material conditions needed by its rational organization – entails, for Dewey, a “one-sidedness and distortion of human nature.”⁴²⁴ For, in this case, social recognition entails dominant subjects’ standardization, mechanical and lifeless repetition of the institutionalized behavioral organization in which their need was interpreted and channelled. In such a context of recognition, “it [the dominant interest] ceases to be fed by natural sources; it becomes rigid, petrified, fossilized [...]. [...] It becomes at once harsh and relatively empty, barren.”⁴²⁵ In this case, therefore, social recognition entails the rigid determination and standardization of dominant subjects’ interests, which sever them from an aspect of their human form of activity and practice. Besides their capacity for the significant transformation of behavior and external circumstances, human beings, as living individuals, are endowed with needs that change and develop in the interaction with external situations and circumstances. Therefore, we can infer that, as a living entity, the human being is characterized by an experiential and practical dynamism that must be preserved in the social context and in relationships of recognition.

Therefore, relationships of recognition are fundamental to socially integrate the social members’ interests while providing the objective conditions, i.e., customary social practices and institutions, that are necessary for the habitual and stable realization of their interests. Moreover, Dewey also seems to suggest that institutional and social relationships of recognition, which socially stabilize and empower the subjects’ activity, should not entail the bare standardization and mechanical reproduction of the subjects’ personal contents, strictly delimiting and determining their practical potentialities into empty and barren ruts. Instead, their habitual character should maintain an ontological plasticity, allowing the subject to be opened to the needy human dimension’s dynamism in its interaction with external situations. In Dewey, therefore, we find the idea that relationships of recognition can be inadequate also because they are “lifeless” in the very sense of the word, namely, having an ontological status

⁴²⁴ Dewey, 2015, III.10.

⁴²⁵ Dewey, 2015, III.6.

that prevents the subject from the living dynamism that belongs to it as a natural and living being. In conclusion, recognition should be a social relationship whose socially habitual component should maintain a living dynamism, allowing and adjusting to human naturalness' novelties and its further significant transformations.

Therefore, from the original notes of the lecture on "Social Conflict," it becomes apparent that the naturalistic anthropology that Dewey presents in the *Lectures*, albeit not explained in an exhaustive manner, is not an autonomous and nonreducible dimension with respect to social recognition, as Frega's interpretation suggests. Frega, indeed, considers the natural and material dimension of human needs as exceeding the mere relationship of recognition among social subjects, standing for a matter of fulfillment rather than mere symbolic acceptance. Nonetheless, we deem that this interpretation of Dewey's use of the notion of recognition in terms of mere "social acceptance" is primarily due to Frega and other similar theories' assumption that Dewey uses and interprets the relational category of recognition in the same way as contemporary theories of recognition. They do not take into account the possibility that Dewey is not merely flanking, additionally and dualistically, a naturalistic anthropology to the relationships of recognition among social members. Rather, Dewey considers recognition as the constitutive condition for natural subjects to perform their specific capacity for action in the external world, the one of intelligent and practical transformation of behavior and objective conditions for the significant fulfillment of needs, with its creative and living dynamism. Indeed, from his theory of domination, where it is feasible to find both a theory of social oppression and social standardization, the inadequate relationships of recognition appear as the final reasons and motives for the impossibility of subjects to perform their specific capacity for action, being practically and objectively blocked in the adequate transformations of objective conditions and in the progressive dynamism belonging to them due to their dimension of living individuals.

From this negative consideration of inadequate relationships of recognition and the subsequent conflict for adequate recognition undertaken by oppressed social members, it seems feasible to conclude that Dewey theorizes a conception and understanding of adequate recognition where relationships of recognition among subjects are not a mere matter of positive acceptance and social integration. Instead, they really mediate the possibility for subjects to perform their capacity for action. According to this interpretation, social recognition would not be a normatively independent and self-enclosed category, as in Honneth's mature theory of

recognition, wherein it stands for the only constitutive interaction for human subjectivity's well-being, without objective parameters for its adequacy and ethicality. Neither would it be a secondary constitutive interaction for human subjectivity that is parallel to the one of fulfillment, intelligent transformation, and living dynamism that the human being undertakes with the external world. Rather, according to this interpretation that emerges from Dewey's original notes, it would stand for the intersubjective and social interaction that is necessary for subjects to concretely perform their capacity for action as *living* subjects. In Dewey, recognition has to do with human *life*, in its naturalness and specific occurrence, wherein natural life is somehow enhanced or enriched by the human being through reason and knowledge. Accordingly, recognition is neither a normatively autonomous nor a secondary relationship. But rather, it is an interaction, a relationship that is ontologically and theoretically *interdependent* with the living relationship that the human being has with the external environment. On the one hand, it represents the condition for human beings to perform their specific natural interaction with the external world. On the other hand, recognition's ethical meaning, both for what concerns the ontological conditions and the ontological status that it should embed to be devoted to the human subject's self-realization as a natural subject, is related to the ontological aspects proper of the human being's specific interaction with the external world, whose naturalistic meaning is just mentioned and not deeply explained by Dewey in the *Lectures*.

Therefore, the *Lectures in China* manifest the closeness of Dewey's social criticism with Honneth's theory of recognition, for he considers "recognition" as a normative category for the critique of social contexts. Notwithstanding, from the analysis of the original notes on the social conflict and social domination, it becomes apparent that, unlike Honneth, Dewey considers ethical recognition, both from an ontological and theoretical point of view, as interdependent with a naturalistic anthropology of the human being, which analyzes the specific constitutive interaction that the human subject, as a natural subject, undertakes with the external world. Due to this integration and framing of recognition within a broader naturalistic anthropology of the human being, it follows that Dewey, in comparison to Honneth's mature theory of recognition, has a different and broader understanding of the constitutive role of recognition for human subjectivity. This different understanding of the constitutive role of recognition entails that Dewey, unlike Honneth, is able, in the *Lectures*, to critically distinguish

between adequate and inadequate relationships of recognition, between normatively strong and weak relationships of recognition, both in their oppressive and standardizing occurrences.

We can find a further demonstration that Dewey, in the Chinese lectures in social and political philosophy, advocates for a very personal understanding of recognition, as not narrowed to that positive affirmation suitable to allow individuals to develop an un-injured relationship to themselves, in the general criterion that he deems should orient social philosophy. Through the criterion of “associated life,” derived from the immanent observation of human behavior, in its specific capacity for action and recognitive or social mediation, Dewey outlines an ideal social context where, in opposition to social domination, social members are not only positively integrated and accepted in the social context. Instead, they self-realize in their specific form of living due to relationships of reciprocal cooperation, engagement, *enrichment* with other individuals, occurring in the form of exchange of emotions, insights, knowledge, and redefinition of existing social practices and institutions.

I will say only that associated living is characterized by cooperation, and that it is to the mutual advantage of everyone concerned in it. It is like friendship. Friends help each other, exchange knowledge and insights, with the result that their lives are richer and more meaningful. Associated living is the highest ideal of social development, and all societies should strive toward this ideal.⁴²⁶

From his anthropological reflections, we have seen that Dewey considers the human subject, first, as a natural being with a specific capacity for action within the external environment, that of dynamic and intelligent transformation of behavior and objective conditions for the satisfaction of its needs. Whereas from his critical criterion, it seems that this form of self-realization that the human being can reach in its interaction with the external environment is socially mediated since it cannot occur if it is not *shared, mediated* by the joint effort, and cooperation of other individuals. This cooperation occurs in the form of an “exchange of *feelings* and *ideas* that makes experiences common (common, communication, community),”⁴²⁷ enriching and making the lives of the individuals more significant. Therefore, what Dewey seems to suggest with his criterion of “associated life” is that the enrichment in meaningfulness, significance, and dynamic transformation that the human being is able to bring to *natural life* through cognition and knowledge cannot occur individually or privately, but only through the cooperation of other individuals, through their emotions, insights, and knowledge.

⁴²⁶ Dewey, 1973, p. 89.

⁴²⁷ Dewey, 2015, VI.1.

He is suggesting that human beings can make their experience emotionally common and shared and that cognition and knowledge, in their practical task of enrichment of natural life, are but social processes reachable only through the cooperation of other individuals. In this context, associated life, in opposition to social domination, appears as the adequate context of social recognition, which is not limited to the positive acceptance and legitimization of other social members' social worth. Instead, it represents that social mediation that makes the activity of enrichment and significance of natural life belonging to the human being effectively possible, through a common and shared effort, since the intelligent redefinition and transformation of nature seem, from these quotations, intrinsically social processes.

In conclusion, from the suggestions of the *Lectures* concerning the naturalistic anthropology of the human being, the functioning and the effects of inadequate recognition, and the social nature of human emotions, cognition, and knowledge, it seems feasible to argue that, in Dewey, recognition represents the condition of possibility for human beings to perform their kind of living activity in the external environment. Moreover, from this understanding of recognition's constitutive role, it follows that the normative grammar of recognition, in comparison to the one of the mainstream contemporary theory of recognition, represented by Honneth's theory, can be enriched. For what concerns its genus, recognition is no longer conceived only in terms of the *positive affirmation* of personhood that is necessary for human subjects to develop a normative relationship to itself, but rather as that relationship allowing the human subject to self-realize as a specific natural being. For what concerns its normative or ethical ontological conditions, ethical recognition can be conceived not only in terms of that positive affirmation occurring through active and practical care but in terms of the adequate redefinition of the subject's experience through social cognition and the practical transformation of the habitual structures of social behavior. The ethical adequacy of recognition does not rely upon merely subjective standards of personal un-injury but is confirmed by subjects' objective possibility to reach a harmonious and enriched practical interaction with external situations. Finally, for what concerns the ontological status of recognition, due to the dynamism proper of the human being's natural life, recognition would be conceived in terms of a *living transaction*, a dynamic relationship that, even if it systematizes the subjects' personal contents and regulates them through habitual social practices and institutions, should adjust to and allow, through participation, the living dynamism of human life in the external environment.

Therefore, “associated living” is the normative ideal resulting from the immanent observation of the human being’s behavior, as performing a certain form of living activity with the mediation of reciprocal recognition between social members. Hence, it is the adequate context of recognition wherein each individual and group cooperate with others to render their *lives* more significant, i.e., “richer and more meaningful.”

However, in the *Lectures*, Dewey does not further clarify the naturalistic meaning of human action and its cognitive premises. Besides the stringent definition of human subjects as natural beings interacting with the external world intelligently, transformatively, and dynamically, and requiring social recognition to really perform this objective kind of practical interaction, he does not offer to the reader further anthropological considerations. The descriptive and normative meaning of his naturalistic account of the human being’s activity as a natural subject remains unclear. The human subject is presented as a living form, a living being, which, nonetheless, has a relationship both of maintenance and enrichment of its natural, bodily, and needy interaction with the external world. Nonetheless, in the first instance, we cannot find in the *Lectures* a better clarification of the place and function of the human being in the natural world and the mechanism of its specific capacity for action. In the second instance, there is not a deep explanation of why human action, in its emotional, cognitive, and transformative processes, is intrinsically social and relies upon relationship of recognition, i.e., social engagement and cooperation. Finally, it follows that in the absence of a better explanation, on the one hand, of the descriptive and normative aspects of human action in the external environment, and on the other one, of other subjects’ cognitive mediation for the human individual’s possibility to perform it, it is not feasible to give theoretical consistency to the different ontological grammar of ethical recognition that the *Lectures in China*’s theoretical framework seems to suggest. To make explicit and integrate the naturalistic premises on human action and recognition that we find in the *Lectures* it is necessary to refer to other works that Dewey published a few years after his sojourn in China. That is, the anthropological writings where he outlines what he defines his “Naturalistic Humanism,” namely, his systematic naturalistic anthropology.

But before exploring in detail the naturalistic premises of the *Lectures in China* through Dewey’s Naturalistic Humanism, analyzing both his naturalistic anthropology and this latter’s cognitive conditions, we want to conclude with specifying how, according to Dewey, the social theorist should use the criterion of “associated life.” The social theorist should orient

his/her critical look to that particular society which “not only fails to develop associated human living, but imposes actual blockages to its development.”⁴²⁸ According to Dewey, the social theorist should approach those social contexts in which the kind of living activity that belongs to human beings is blocked. That is, where subjects are materially impeded in the possibility of performing it due to missing or inadequate contexts of social recognition, both if the latter are consciously perceived by oppressed social members, which have thus already organized the social conflict, or if they occur pre-reflexively, latently, and silently in the social context.

The time has come, however, when we can no longer afford to wait for our society to become disjointed and then seek means of putting it back together again; we must rather devise methods and instruments to forestall disaster, to prevent infection rather than waiting to try to cure it when it occurs. We need to observe, first of all, the causes of social conflict, to find out what groups have become too dominating and have come to exercise disproportionate power, as well as to identify the groups that have been oppressed, denied privilege and opportunity. Only by making such an accurate diagnosis can we hope to prevent social infection and build a healthier society. We must devise means for bringing the interests of all the groups of a society into adjustment, providing all of them with opportunity to develop, so that each can help the others instead of being in conflict with them.⁴²⁹

Hence, the social theorist, through the criterion of “associated life” and its anthropological premises, should critically intervene either when the social conflict is already developing, therefore scientifically and theoretically aiding oppressed social subjects to intelligently transform existing social contexts. Or the social theorist should intervene in a preventive form, when the social conflict has not yet taken hold due to ideological relationships and the routinized hegemonic stance of the dominant group’s interest, but the social world’s malady is already forming through the progressive blocking of social members’ dynamic and transformative living activity. Then, after having identified a problematic situation, the social theorist must *diagnose* the problem, namely, provide a hypothesis concerning the source of the social disorder or the infection that weakens and distorts human living activity. In this first moment of diagnosis, the social theorist should reflect on which “pattern of human association tends to be central and regulative; what are the one-sidednesses and arrests, fixation [and] rigidities thereby produced; where are the suppressions from which society is suffering in consequence; what are the points of conflict, strife, antagonism of interest.”⁴³⁰ Namely, he/she

⁴²⁸ Dewey, 1973, p. 90.

⁴²⁹ Dewey, 1973, p. 71.

⁴³⁰ Dewey, 2015, III. 8.

must consider which social interests are suffering from misrecognition, which interest is hegemonic and monopolistic, how the latter affects and parasitizes the social contexts, through which customs, institutions, or social practices this situation of domination and distortion of human nature is unconsciously and pre-reflexively reproduced. According to this diagnosis, the social theorist provides a specific and situational *cure* to be experimentally tested and revised according to new and changing situations. Therefore, social philosophy should make social critique and the planning or projects of policies functional, scientific, and testable.⁴³¹

The specific theories that the social theorist points out are never arbitrary, paternalistic, and absolute. They must be drawn immanently to existing social situations, not only according to existing subjective and social feelings of discontent but also to the objective frictions, emotional and practical blockages that impede effective transformations, to the compartmental divisions and standardizations that “ossify” and “rigidify” social life. But importantly, these theories should be “tested” and “revised” with the occurrence of new situations. “*Ideas that are framed from study of special conditions will be valuable and valid just in the degree in which they help solve problems,*”⁴³² and have positive consequences on social life. Social theory changes the social world. As Dewey later specifies in the *Syllabus*, “the knowledge and judgment of social inquiry thus become an integral factor in the phenomena themselves” and due to the historical character of social phenomena and “the generations by social conditions of beliefs and choice that modify the subsequent course of society,”⁴³³ the social theories of social philosophy should be specific, revised, and readapted to changing situations. Change is

⁴³¹ See the *Syllabus: Social Institutions and the Study of Morals*, where Dewey provides a similar statement concerning the function of social philosophy: “It follows that social philosophy is a technique for clarifying the judgments which are constantly passed of necessity upon social customs, institutions, laws, arrangements, actual and projected. Its subject-matter involves a study (I) of the influence of distinct types of social grouping upon the generation of beliefs and standards as right or wrong, good and bad; and (II) of the reflex reaction of these beliefs and standards, upon other social forces with special regard to their effect upon the production of goods and bads by these social forces. Its purpose is to render the social criticism and projection of policies which is always going on more enlightened and effective” (MW 15, p. 233). Moreover, in the *Lectures*, Dewey compares medical science to social philosophy: “Even when we grant that social and political theory comes into being only when a society is out of kilter, the question remains whether the theory can merely describe the symptoms, or whether it can be a means toward the cure of the disease. Analogously, is medical science limited to diagnosis, or does it include prescriptions for cures?” (Dewey, 1973, p. 48). The scientist and the social theorist both deal with maladies of life, the first with the ones of the organic body, the second with the ones of associated living, which, even if different and superior to organic life, is still a kind of living, with different ontological aspects. Moreover, to deal with these maladies, they both proceed, first, with an accurate diagnosis, merely oriented by a general criterion of “health,” of the specific symptoms of the existent infection. Secondly, they proceed with the prescription of a *cure* according to the specific symptoms detected. For an illuminating analysis of the methodological and ontological continuity among medicine-social philosophy and organic life and social life in Dewey, see Särkelä, 2017.

⁴³² Dewey, 2015, II.13.

⁴³³ MW 15, p. 235.

progressive, and it does not always occur in the same way. Moreover, due to the multiplicity and plurality of individual and group interests, social life does always maintain an agonistic and potentially conflictual element. The task of social philosophy, therefore, is not to erase social agonism and social conflict. “To be sure, conflict will not be eliminated, but it can be ameliorated.”⁴³⁴

Concerning the specificity of social philosophy’s theories, judgments, and solutions, it is fundamental to point out that, according to Dewey, a linear qualitative betterment of social contexts through the social transformations brought about by social conflicts for recognition is far from a reasonable assumption. Quite the contrary, as his theory of domination manifestly shows, interests that were oppressed and proved to contribute to the well-being of the entire social world can turn into oppressive or standardized interests. Hence, Dewey does have a theory of social progress since the actual and factual potentiality of human societies is to be progressive, transforming, changing for the better. Nonetheless, this progress is far from a linear, cumulative, and teleological one. What can represent a “progressive” and “transformative” contribution in a specific social context can be opposed to the progress or betterment of social life both in other social situations or societies.

VIII. 2. Similitudes and Differences with Honneth’s Mature Theory of Recognition

From the analysis of the *Lectures in China*, it is feasible to see how Dewey’s theory of the social world and account of social philosophy are close to Honneth’s mature critical theory of recognition, at least in four aspects. In the first instance, from a socio-ontological point of view, also according to Dewey, the social world is constituted of different groups and is in a state of imbalance and internal friction as some social group is oppressed by another group. Furthermore, social oppression is conceived in terms of a lack of social recognition suffered by a social group.

In the second instance, from an anthropological point of view, Dewey also seems to ethically link recognition to social individuals’ psychic integrity. We have seen how, in the

⁴³⁴ Dewey, 1973, p. 80.

recorded text of lecture VI, there are a series of considerations concerning the injuring effects that the lack of social recognition entails for the development of dominated subject's psychic integrity and personality:

The first and most noticeable effect upon the inferior members of a society [...] are psychological in nature – feelings of dissatisfaction, dislike, hatred, and deprivation – frequently approaching the level of neurosis, often of psychosis. When a person is relegated to a permanently inferior position in a social hierarchy and suffers chronic frustration in his effort to satisfy his normal needs and desired, his mental health is almost bound to suffer. The second evil effect [...] is the inhibition of individual potentialities.⁴³⁵

This quotation is far from Honneth's systematic and scientific explanation of the constitutive bond among social recognition and the subjects' psychic integrity. Dewey does not clearly theorize recognition as constitutive for the subjects' development of normative self-dispositions. He does not even attempt to distinguish their different forms. Moreover, we cannot find in the *Lectures* any systematic classification of the various moral feelings of personal disrespect that dominated subjects develop within disrespectful social contexts. However, we can argue that Dewey quickly refers to social recognition as being essential for the human subject also to develop an un-injured relationship to its personal contents, relating it to the subject's possibility to pursue its personal potentialities without inhibitions.

Moreover, Dewey's reference to the metaphor of the master-slave dialectic to define a situation of asymmetrical recognition⁴³⁶ is a clear reference to Hegel and a sign of his Hegelian background. Since 1882, when Dewey began his academic career at John Hopkins University under the influence of the neo-Hegelian George Sylvester Morris, Hegel became for the young researcher a central and controversial figure. Indeed, as Robert Westbrook clearly points out in *John Dewey and American Democracy* (1991), Dewey defines his entire philosophical project

⁴³⁵ Dewey, 1973, pp. 96. The reference to the psychic and personal effects due to the lack of social recognition is not present in the original notes to lecture VI. Nonetheless, two years later, in the *Syllabus*, Dewey retrieves this theme and enlists a series of psychological traits developed because of social domination and oppression, stressing the distortions in personality they lead to. Dominated subjects are prevented from developing a human and moral stance to their needs, which, as oppressed needs, are left to blind, merely emotional, accidental, and unconscious expressions. "Subjects become irresponsible, thoughtless, fickle, susceptible to emotional appeal from demagogues, short-sighted, prizing immediate goods of sex, food, having a good time, amusement, more than distant and comprehensive goods and shiftless, etc. In short, they come to possess the traits that form the standing arguments against giving the masses, the populace, a responsible share in the conduct of affairs (MW 15, pp. 241-242).

⁴³⁶ "This master-slave relationship is not limited to situations in which one person "owns" another, as was true in parts of America at the time of my birth. It refers to any system of relationship which effectively places one person in subjugation to another – children subject to their parents, wives to their husbands, subjects to their rulers, laborers to their employers" (Dewey, 1973, p. 92).

starting from Hegel's idealism to theoretically progress through Hegel, rather than to go beyond him.⁴³⁷ As Dewey himself admitted in his brief intellectual biography, *From Absolutism to Experimentalism* (1930), his mature philosophical project took form as an attempt to maintain Hegel's holistic and intersubjective understanding of social life while overcoming his metaphysical presuppositions.⁴³⁸ These metaphysical presuppositions gather the reference to a universal subject or Reason that ontologically explains the continuity among nature and society and the unity between individuals, and the conception of social history as the teleological self-expression of this universal subject. Nonetheless, the Hegelian idea of an intersubjective and recognition-based constitution of human subjectivity remained for Dewey, from his earlier works to the later ones, a constant theoretical starting point. In the *Lectures*, Dewey's reference to *Phenomenology's* fortunate figure of the master-slave dialectics does but confirm his theoretical debt to Hegel for a conception of human subjectivity as mediated by the social context to develop its freedom and self-realization. And, thus, it testifies how Dewey and Honneth both take from Hegel a conception of social freedom, according to which the human being's self-realization is feasible only through and within the social context.

In the third instance, like Honneth, Dewey provides a theory of the social world based on the category of "conflict" or "struggle" for social recognition. "History is replete with instances of revolts of apparently complacent groups."⁴³⁹ In lecture IV, dedicated to "Social Reform," we find an expressivist and moral theory of the social conflict, with different points

⁴³⁷ See Westbrook, 1991, Ch. 1 and 2. Here, Westbrook reconstructs the theoretical influences that Hegel exerted on Dewey's entire philosophical project, both for what concerns the refusal of any ontological and conceptual dualisms – among mind and body, spirit and nature, individual and the social world (we will see this aspect of Dewey's thinking in the following chapters) – and the intersubjective conception of the human being. Indeed, recognition and the social constitution of human subjectivity are theoretical elements crossing through the entire Deweyan production, from the early works, such as *Psychology* (1887), *The Ethics of Democracy* (1888), and *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (1891), to the later ones, such as the *Lectures*, the *Syllabus*, *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Public and its Problems* (1927), and *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928), even if framed within changing theoretical frameworks. The topic of Dewey's closeness with and departure from Hegel, concerning concepts such as recognition, social struggle, natural life and ethical life, and social freedom is far from simple. It is tangled, extremely rich, and requires an enormous effort since Dewey rarely quoted Hegel expressively in his texts and never dedicated a systematic work to his intellectual relationship with the German author. We can find extensive, reconstructive literature on the topic, which we cannot explore in detail. What is relevant for our reflections is to mention Dewey's Hegelian background for explaining the origin of his intersubjective and social conception of the human being and its freedom, and to relate Honneth's and Dewey's common interest in recognition and, under certain aspects, similar social world theories, to their shared reference to Hegel. For further elements on the theoretical relationship and closeness between Hegel and Dewey, see Westbrook, 1991, Ch. 1 and 2; Jaeggi, 2018; Renault, 2013; Särkelä, 2013, 2014, 2017b; Testa, 2017b.

⁴³⁸ In our subsequent analyses, we will see the central reference for the development of Dewey's thought, namely Darwin's Evolutionism, which opened the path for a philosophical redefinition of human subjectivity in naturalistic rather than metaphysical terms.

⁴³⁹ Dewey, 1973, p. 66.

of contact with Honneth's. Indeed, Dewey considers the moment of social struggle as a formative process for excluded subjects and the social context as well. The excluded or misrecognized individuals, who at first experience their social exclusion individualistically, i.e., as mere individual experiences, progressively acknowledge their individual instances as social requests, suitable to positively contribute to the social welfare. Through conflict, oppressed subjects apprehend themselves as fully-fledged social members. They semantically turn an individualistically felt and antagonistic dissatisfaction with the social world in its entirety into a social and political demand, whose aim is not to destroy the social world but to ameliorate it through intelligent transformation. And the social world's betterment is justified by means of an imaginative anticipation of a future society wherein the acceptance of the oppressed shared interest entails a qualitative betterment of the social world in its entirety.

On the other hand, it follows that, according to Dewey, the social world ontologically develops through oppressed social groups' struggles for recognition. Unlike Honneth, Dewey provides an ontology of the social world that acknowledges how social contexts can be legitimized and reproduced both through pre-reflexive and reflexive processes. Indeed, he conceives the social context, with its social institutions and customs, as being mostly reproduced under the routinized and pre-reflexive mechanism of habit, thus without ongoing reflexive processes of social legitimization. Nonetheless, when social customs and institutions cease to be functional and work properly, the social context relies upon an ultimate justificatory principle. It should be reflexively legitimized by the social members according to its capacity to create the recognitive context suitable to give both social expression and material fulfillment to the personal development of all the social counterparts and their interests. The social struggle for recognition, thus, represents, from a socio-ontological point of view, the reconstructive tool for the social world's reflexive legitimization, reproduction, and transformation by the social members, and for the substantial redefinition of the public space and its constitutive social groups. Indeed, the social conflict and its recognitive result entail a re-organization of the social space and a reconstruction of the social world. A new public interest legitimately enters the agonistic equilibrium of the social arena, and a new *material* adjustment and institutional organization of social needs and interests brings a new self-understanding of social life and its well-being. Dewey specifically develops this insight on the recreation and reconstruction of a mobile public space, even if with less consideration of its conflictual mediation, in one of his

most famous later works in political philosophy, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927).⁴⁴⁰ Here, Dewey deems that the public and the political space should not be conceived as something instinctively produced or naturally given, but as a construction, a redefinition of existent social relationships among existing social groups. That is to say, it is the conscious objectification and political organization of the social groups that exist and compose the social arena. The public is the social world gaining self-awareness and self-organization. For this reason, it is neither an immediate datum nor something brought from outside the relationships among social individuals. Instead, it is the acknowledgment, political re-organization, and adjustment of the consequences that existing groups and their interests have upon each other.

We take our point of departure from the objective fact that human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others. The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for.⁴⁴¹

Another essential aspect of Dewey's socio-ontological understanding of the social conflict, similar to Honneth's, is his insistence on the social validity and advantages that new

⁴⁴⁰ *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) represented the chance for Dewey to advocate for the reliability of an inclusive and participatory democracy, in opposition to the theoretical conclusions and political considerations of Walter Lippman and other American democratic realists. Indeed, in *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925), Lipman starts from realist considerations on American democracy, such as modern public spaces' expansiveness and the citizens' indirect theoretical access to it. Lipman critically sheds light on the citizens' biased perceptions and conceptions of the public and political environment, due to their limited access to public facts, the influence of cultural standards and stereotypes, and the manipulation of social media. From these descriptive considerations regarding the subjects' misleading representations of the public and the political environment, he advocates for an elitist conception of political government, for only a restricted and *super partes* specialized class of social scientists, he argues, is entitled to express the real interests of the social world substantially. Instead, popular participation should be limited only to ensure the existence of rules in the social context. Despite being sympathetic to Lipman's criticisms of American democracy, Dewey refuses any elitist theory of democracy. The normative directives for democracy should be sought in a different understanding of the public. This new conception of the public discloses the path to advocate for the democratic participation of social members in the constitution and expression of their interests, identify the political measures for socializing knowledge, and clarify the government's technical and organizational function. *The Public and its Problems* and *Individualism, Old and New* (1930) represent the higher Deweyan attempts to disclose such a theoretical and political framework. First, through a redefinition of what the public is. The public consists of the perceived consequences that a social group undergoes, suffers, or enjoys in relation to specific social situations resulting from other acting social groups. Therefore, the public is, in a first moment, a pre-institutional existence occurring with the emergence of an interest shared by a group of individuals due to the effects of social action, and which deserves social regulation. This pre-institutional interest needs then to be institutionally acknowledged as social and politically organized and developed in combination with other acknowledged public interests. Therefore, individuals remain the protagonists of their social requests, whereas political representatives and the government are but called to represent and regulate such interests in the public and institutional dimension. For an in-depth examination of Lipman and Dewey's theoretical debate, see Westbrook, 1991, Ch. 9.

⁴⁴¹ LW 2, pp. 246-247.

emerging and conflictual interests can potentially disclose if socially recognized. This insistence implies a clear moral understanding of the social struggle for recognition. If considered in its very recreation of the public, the social conflict is not destined to unleash egoistic interests and selfish needs. Apart from the descriptive social character of groups' needs and interests, due to the fact that "no group is independent and isolated"⁴⁴² and relies in any case upon its social context both for its emergence and realization, it is feasible to see an ethical meaning of the social nature of group interests. This ethical sociality refers to the contribution that these interests can bring qualitatively to the social world in its entirety, in the redefinition of the public in all its interests. "Meeting the demands of the movement not only enhances the welfare of the individuals involved, but promotes the welfare of the total society,"⁴⁴³ by bringing the other plural interests of the social context to further expression and development. Once again, Dewey's Hegelian background, with the moral and ethical understanding of social conflict, the idea of ethical social life, and the concept of social freedom, remains evident in the *Lectures*. Subjective freedom is social since it is real and effective only when *shared* and *mediated* in the social context.

In the fourth instance, there is another element of similarity among Dewey's and Honneth's social philosophies, which concerns the interpretation of the *field* of investigation of social philosophy, as distinguished from social sciences and other philosophical branches. For Dewey, as well as for Honneth, social philosophy is a critical inquiry on the relationships occurring among social groups, devoted to unveiling situations of social oppression, where the good life of social individuals is prevented due to the lack of public recognition in the social context. The object of social philosophy, i.e., society that becomes "disordered" due to conflicts for social recognition among social groups, entails that social philosophy is an immanent form of inquiry. It starts its criticism of the social world "negatively," due to existing "disturbance, confusion, friction"⁴⁴⁴ crossing the social world, rather than arbitrarily, and its main task is to theoretically sustain the recognitive requests of oppressed social groups, as the "attempt to find out what causes the trouble."⁴⁴⁵ The immanence of social philosophy in social life's frictions among misrecognized and misrecognizing social groups does not entail, according to Dewey,

⁴⁴² Dewey, 1973, p. 66.

⁴⁴³ Dewey, 1973, p. 79.

⁴⁴⁴ Dewey, 2015, III.1.

⁴⁴⁵ Dewey, 1973, p. 47.

that social philosophy maintains “the attitude of spectator.”⁴⁴⁶ On the contrary, its immanent inquiry has a transformative aim, one of helping social conflicts to change existing social contexts. “Thus, it is not sufficient for social philosophy merely to describe the phenomena of experience – it must also contribute to the realization of the ends which men desire.”⁴⁴⁷

Hence, Dewey outlines a definition of the task of social philosophy that is consistent both with Frankfurt Critical Theory’s definition of critique and with Honneth’s “negativistic” immanence of social philosophy. Like in Horkheimer’s definition of critical theory in opposition to traditional theory,⁴⁴⁸ in Dewey, the criticism of the social world proceeds immanently, not from an arbitrary and paternalistic point of view, and seeks to change the social context, rather than to merely describe it, helping the pre-theoretical critical activity of oppressed social subjects to become effective.⁴⁴⁹ Moreover, as well as for Honneth’s critical theory, social frictions due to the lack of social recognition are the immanent and negativistic sources from which social philosophy’s critical evaluation of the social world begins. The latter is indeed destined to be an ally of oppressed social groups, leading to an ethical progress of the social world in its entirety. Furthermore, in this theoretical effort, social philosophy is not isolated, according to Dewey. As well as for Critical Theory, Dewey conceives social criticism as interdependent with social sciences. Its field of inquiry is specific and broader than that of social sciences and political theories, for it focuses qualitatively on the interactions occurring among the social context and social individuals, according to an ethical perspective of individuals’ self-realization, moving “towards peace and happiness.”⁴⁵⁰ However, for its theories, social philosophy relies upon the scientific and empirical results of these scientific branches: “the social sciences such as economics, political science, and the others, are in actuality technologies, the application and assessment of which are functions of social

⁴⁴⁶ Dewey, 1973, p. 59.

⁴⁴⁷ Dewey, 1973, p. 59.

⁴⁴⁸ See Chapter Two, where we have analyzed Horkheimer’s account of critical theory and its influence on Honneth.

⁴⁴⁹ In the *Syllabus*, we can find a further systematization of the place and role of social critique concerning existing social conflicts. “Social philosophy is concerned with the evaluation of social phenomena. [...] Concerned with the valuation of these phenomena, the aim of social philosophy is ethical. [...] The hypothesis of the course is that the standard of valuation is derived from the positive phenomena and yet is not a mere record of given valuations. [...] It follows that social philosophy only carries further the process of reflective behaviour which is found as an integral part of social phenomena, apart from general theorizing” (MW 15, p. 231-232).

⁴⁵⁰ Dewey, 1973, p. 59.

philosophy. The relationship between the social sciences and social philosophy is thus one of interpenetration.”⁴⁵¹

The elements of similarity between Dewey’s social philosophy and the Frankfurt School’s account of social critique and, specifically, with Honneth’s critical theory of recognition, are evident. And they plenty justify the renovated interest of the contemporary debate in social philosophy and critical theory for Dewey’s critical thinking. Indeed, the latter joins the common effort of Critical Theory to outline a specific account of social criticism. Moreover, it resembles the mature critical project of Honneth, who, as we have seen in Chapter Two and Three, focuses on the category of social recognition and social conflict to recover the pre-theoretical criticism of social subjects and their ethical and moral effort in changing human societies. Therefore, at first sight, Dewey’s account of social philosophy and social theory would seem to support Honneth’s mature critical theory, advocating similar methodological and theoretical assumptions. It may seem that Dewey’s social philosophy merely supports the more systematic critical theory of recognition of Honneth. On the contrary, from our previous reconstruction of the *Lectures in China*, further supported by the *Syllabus*, it should be evident how Dewey’s account of social philosophy has, apart from some similarities, relevant elements of dissimilarity and distinction from Honneth’s critical theory of recognition, both from a methodological and theoretical point of view.

To start with the methodological issues, first, as Roberto Frega and Arvi Särkelä point out,⁴⁵² Dewey, unlike Honneth, outlines a *situational* and *experimental* account of social philosophy’s theories for the critique and transformation of social contexts, intrinsically due to his methodological naturalism. According to this methodological naturalism, the scientific

⁴⁵¹ Dewey, 1973, p. 59. On the relationship between social sciences and social philosophy, see also the *Syllabus*, MW 15, p. 235. For an analysis of the closeness of Frankfurt Critical Theory and Dewey’s Pragmatism, see Frega, 2014 and 2017. In these two essays, Frega attempts to describe pragmatism’s social philosophy as an interpenetration of two programmatic social philosophies, British reformist social philosophy, and Frankfurt Critical Theory. For what concerns the similarities with the latter, Frega stresses how pragmatism, specifically Dewey, and Critical Theory share various common theoretical standpoints. These include the intrinsic continuity among theory and practice, the non-ideal understanding of social criticism, the interdependence among social criticism and social sciences, the emancipatory and transformative aim of social criticism, the derivation of a normative criterion for social criticism through an ontology of the social world, and the refusal of a methodological individualism. See also Särkelä, 2020. In *American Pragmatism and Frankfurt Critical Theory: A Family Drama*, Särkelä analyzes the “family drama” occurring in Frankfurt Critical Theory’s reception of American Pragmatism, and specifically of Dewey. He points out how, after the criticism of pragmatism by the first generation of the Frankfurt School, mainly due to the critique of pragmatism’s instrumentalism as a form of capitalist ideology, the awareness of a theoretical interpenetration, of a commonality of intent and methodology, and of a potential mutual enrichment between American pragmatism and the Frankfurt Critical Theory in the criticism of the social world has progressively developed in subsequent generations of Critical Theory.

⁴⁵² See Frega, 2014 and 2017; Särkelä, 2017b.

spirit and method of applied science represent the empowered procedure of ordinary thinking and should be thus legitimately and normatively adopted by socio-philosophical inquiry as well. It follows that, according to Dewey, social philosophy should be, like engineering, medicine, etc., critical and transformative in relation to specific problematic situations, rather than focusing on epochal periods having structural similarities. Due to the dynamic development and situational uniqueness of social facts and interactions, social philosophy should approach any disordered social situation according to its problematic singleness, providing a diagnosis and a cure calibrated on the subjective and objective conditions of that particular situational problem. “[Dewey] sees normative conclusions as temporary solutions to the specific problems that affect specific social historical situations and in the determinate configuration that they display. It is liable, therefore, to become obsolete as a consequence of social changes.”⁴⁵³

Moreover, any social theory destined to solving specific problematic situations is, like a medical diagnosis and prescription, a hypothesis to be tested in its efficacy, according to social members’ further experiences and the objective consequences. Therefore, social philosophy’s normative judgments on the social world are marked by a “strong corrigibilism” and “radical fallibilism.”⁴⁵⁴ Accordingly, they do not represent normative prescriptions that are definitely completed and directly followed and adopted by pre-theoretical subjects. Social philosophy’s normative judgments are *cumulative*, progressively correct under this or that aspect according to the self-correcting process of experience. And the legitimacy and validity of its normative judgments can be justified only by social actors’ further experiences, where subjective and objective conditions are intrinsically unified, and critical intelligence. Whereas in Honneth’s critical theory, the critical theorist provides a model or a critical and transformative theory for “the presumably less critical practice of, say, empirical researchers and social movements, who are expected to follow the instructions,”⁴⁵⁵ in Dewey, social philosophy’s theories of social criticism and transformation should be tested, revised, refused or ameliorated by critical social subjects. As we have previously seen in Chapter Four, according to Honneth, the critical theorist should proceed immanently, from social members’ pre-theoretical criticism, but, nonetheless,

⁴⁵³ Frega, 2014, p. 67. See also Särkelä, 2017b, where he stresses how according to Dewey, social philosophy’s object of inquiry “transforms during critique,” entailing that “there is no reason to believe that the object at the end [of critique] still corresponds” (Särkelä, 2017b, p. 220).

⁴⁵⁴ Särkelä, 2017b, p. 222.

⁴⁵⁵ Särkelä, 2017b, p. 221.

his/her theories, devoted to sustaining existing emancipatory social processes, are assumed as true and effective in themselves, as an authority to be applied without the further test and criticism of empirical critical practice, and to be adjusted only in the case of new emerging demands for emancipation. Instead, as Särkelä points out, Dewey considers, in the first instance, social criticism as an attitude proper of ordinary human thinking, i.e., as a practice of human life rather than a specifically philosophical practice. In the second instance, he conceives social philosophy, in providing scientific theories for criticism and transformation, in terms of a “self-transformative practice,” whose critical legitimacy, both concerning its beliefs and processes of problematic situations’ reconstruction, depends on the ongoing critical practice of empirical social members.

The second methodological element that distinguishes Dewey’s account of social philosophy from Honneth’s concerns the nature of the normative criterion that should guide the criticism of the social world. In Chapter Four, we have seen how Honneth, through his formal criterion of the “good life,” opts for a form of *strong normativism*, whose intent is to provide a universal criterion, applicable to any social context, which, at the same time, enlists sufficiently rich social conditions for the human subjects’ self-realization. We have then seen how, to accomplish this aim, Honneth attempts to provide such conditions, i.e., the three forms of recognition (love, respect, and social esteem), through a systematic anthropology of the practical dimensions of human subjects within social contexts, thus accompanying this universal anthropology to a theory of the social world’s different dimensions of social life and recognition. Then, we have outlined how, in this attempt of Honneth, there lies an intrinsic theoretical contradiction, which weakens the critical significance of his criterion of the good life. His willingness to provide a sufficiently rich normative criterion for modeling social critique makes him consider forms of recognition that he himself explained as historically emerging, both in their socio-ontological distinction and general definition, into universal anthropological and social constants. This fact not only negatively affects his pretense of critical universalism and formalism. It also entails the risk for his tripartite criterion of the “good life” to sustain and reproduce normative principles that have exhausted their ethical significance for social life, turning into instruments for social power and oppression.⁴⁵⁶ Honneth’s strong normativism, therefore, relying upon the need to provide a systematic and structured model for social criticism, leads the alleged universalism of his recognitive anthropology to turn into a

⁴⁵⁶ See Chapter Four for the feminist critique of the normative principle of social esteem.

theory of the social world with historical premises. Due to this contradiction intrinsic to Honneth's critical framework, we have emphasized how, to be coherent, he would have had to maintain the genus of recognition as the universal directive for social criticism, while considering the species of recognition, namely, love, respect, and social esteem, as normative principles to be tested and verified in their critical, emancipatory, and transformative potential due to existing social situations. Indeed, Honneth does systematically identify three normative principles that had a fundamental ethical and critical relevance in modern and contemporary social contexts, but without considering that such an effective relevance and usefulness for social criticism and emancipation require further genealogical analysis of their normative transformations and a test of their possible ethical consequences.⁴⁵⁷ Särkelä defines Honneth's approach to social critique in terms of "a modeling activity," whose need for a systematic, diversified, and structured criterion for social critique entails the construction of "a model not for critique but of critique in the genitive sense,"⁴⁵⁸ which risks supporting social power and domination rather than accompanying social subjects' transformation, social emancipation, and critical experience.

Dewey's approach to the normative criterion for social criticism is different from Honneth's mature one and suitable to avoid its internal contradiction and problem on the level of critique. As we have previously seen in this chapter, Dewey does not deny the necessity for social philosophy, even if situational and experimental in its theories to solve social problems, to rely upon a guiding criterion for detecting socially problematic situations and orienting their subsequent particular and specific diagnosis. Nonetheless, he conceives his criterion of "associated life" only in terms of a "map and a compass." That is, "associated life" is a general criterion that is not destined to be systematic and intrinsically diversified in providing the different social conditions necessary for human beings' self-realization, thus "modeling" the subsequent diagnosis of social problems. Instead, it should stand for a leading normative ideal that isolates only the specific quality of human behavior, namely, its creative and dynamic capacity of transformation through adequate relationships of recognition, without pretending to conclusively label the different species of recognition and providing an ultimate theory of the social world's dimensions. Due to the ongoing transformation of social conditions, social

⁴⁵⁷ See Frega, 2015, pp. 36-37: "[Honneth's project for a theory of recognition] risks to fall under the critique of the myth of the given, as it neglects important aspects by which our individual constitution, desires, expectations and affective structure are socially construed, and are therefore in no way pre-theoretical."

⁴⁵⁸ Särkelä, 2017b, p. 220.

subjects, and human societies, the general criterion of social philosophy should only be a method to locate the field of social problems, then leading to specific and particular inquiries on the existing situation to provide a normative diagnosis and experimentally test it. Therefore, Dewey also attempts to provide a universal criterion for social criticism through an anthropological analysis of the human being, as relying upon the relationship of recognition. Unlike Honneth, Dewey is coherent with his pretense of universalism and formality, since his guiding criterion is not supposed to provide differentiated normative principles to model critical activity systematically. Instead, it is supposed to supply a method or an orientation only to detect problematic social situations, leading then to particular and specific social theories to define the problem and find out specific evaluative and normative principles for the transformation of the social context and the emancipation of its social members, which finally test their actual efficacy and legitimacy. Accordingly, Dewey avoids the risk of unintentionally embodying in his general criterion of “associated life” normative aspects of specific historical human societies or epochs that can end up acquiring an ideological stance in different social situations. It is up to specific theories and inquiries to provide particular and systematic normative principles to deal with existing social problems. These normative principles must then be progressively enriched and tested experimentally with and through social members’ further experiences. In conclusion, Dewey considers social criticism not as a scientific prerogative of the social philosopher but as a joint and cooperative social effort. Social philosophy has a task of orientation but is substantially defined and legitimized by existing situations and the critical practice of social subjects.

From a theoretical point of view, we can find at least two fundamental differences between Honneth’s and Dewey’s social philosophies. The first one concerns the different philosophies of history on which the two authors rely for their critical approaches to human societies. In Chapter Three, we have seen how Honneth provides an interpretation of human societies’ history according to which human societies’ moral progress can be conceived in teleological and cumulative terms. That is, for Honneth, the various social struggles for recognition running through human history have been leading to an increasing moral development of human sociality, teleologically destined to increase through future social conflicts for recognition. Due to the progressive embeddedness into social institutions and customs of the historical morality springing from the struggles for social recognition, Honneth considers existing different social contexts as ethically valuable in terms of moral “regressions”

or “progresses” according to the highest social context of recognition identified by the social theorist. Therefore, Honneth has a strong faith in the moral outcome of both previous and future struggles for social recognition, as the first ones should be embodied in their historical normativity into human societies’ structures, whereas the second ones should further lead to more inclusive and extensive relationships of recognition. Instead, Dewey, as we have pointed out in this chapter through his analysis of social domination and his interpretation of social situations as dynamic and unique, points out that the moral development of the social world resulting from the struggle for recognition of an oppressed social interest can, at a later stage, lead to a situation of social oppression. In this way, he keeps a critical eye on the possible moral *distortion*, rather than *regression*, in which a normative principle achieved through social conflict can fall in new social conditions and situations. Consequently, Dewey has a different philosophy of human societies’ history, i.e., a different understanding of society’s moral progress. Moral progress, for him, is the proper descriptive and normative character of human societies, but it is far from cumulative and teleological. Every social context is open to qualitative moral betterment, but, due to its own specific objective and subjective conditions, this betterment cannot be merely taken as a social model or normatively adjusted to the existing morally higher social order. Any social situation should be considered a specific moral and ethical situation in itself, requiring a specific qualitative betterment, occurring according to particular means and ends, rather than a stage of a uniform historical process becoming increasingly ethical. Dewey has faith in social progress, so much that he is generally considered ingenuous for his belief in social adjustment and communication.⁴⁵⁹ Nonetheless, he refuses to regard human history as an increasing and unified process of moral development, thus maintaining a certain skepticism as regards the givenness and uniformity of the “future” betterment.

Finally, the second theoretical difference between Dewey’s and Honneth’s social philosophies concerns again the general critical criteria that they employ for social criticism but under a further aspect than their strong or weak normative status for social critique. It regards their different anthropological premises, which entail, for the two authors, different conceptions of the relationship of recognition. From our previous reconstruction of Honneth’s mature theory of recognition, we have pointed out that the German philosopher attempts to outline a universal

⁴⁵⁹ For a confutation of the mainstream interpretation of Dewey as a “naïve” philosopher, see, for instance, Hildreth, 2009.

anthropology that accounts for the different practical dimensions of subjectivity in human societies and considers recognition as the *unique* constitutive interaction for human subjectivity to attain its practical self-realization. Indeed, Honneth conceives the subject's self-realization in terms of acquiring an uninjured relationship to oneself, namely, in terms of the development of that normative relationship to one's personal contents that allows the subject to gain a positive objective self-image and freely develop and pursue its contents within the social context. Recognition is thus presented as the social relationship of affirmation, mediated by active and practical care, which permits the subject to acquire this personal normative precondition for self-realization, since the subject learns to normatively perceive itself only from the affirmative standpoint of other subjects. We have then pointed out how Honneth, due to his consideration of human subjectivity as unilaterally self-realizing and constituting through the relationships with other subjects, ends up leading to a conception of human subjectivity as wholly dependent on whatever form of positive affirmation is received from the social context, as being deprived, thus, of external instruments of critique and evaluation of the strong or weak ethical meaning of existing recognitive social contexts. In Honneth's mature critical theory, recognition stands for a normatively autonomous category for the critique of social contexts. Since it represents the only constitutive relation for the human subject's self-realization, it acquires an absolute power over human individuals while lacking external parameters to evaluate its very normative meaning, i.e., its capacity to ensure the effective realization and development of the subjects' personal contents. It follows that social subjects and the social theorist are but led to consider as truly normative or ethical any social relationship of emotional and practical affirmation that entails in subjects the development of a positive relationship to themselves, without being able to specify further the ontological conditions and the status that an affirmative relationship should have to *concretely* ensure the development and *material* fulfillment of the social subjects' personal contents. We have seen that, due to his human anthropology that univocally considers recognition as the constitutive relationship for human subjectivity, the normative grammar of his theory of recognition is unable to critically detect all those inadequate or normatively weak relationships of social recognition. That is, those relationships of recognition that do integrate the subjects in the social context but impede the very realization and growth of their personal contents because they are ideological or lifeless, alienating. It follows that his criterion of the "good life" only abstractly considers the social conditions for the human subject's effective self-realization.

Instead, in the theoretical framework presented by Dewey in the *Lectures in China*, it is feasible to find a broader anthropology, even if not deepened and fully explained in its theoretical premises. Indeed, the anthropology upon which Dewey relies for his critical criterion of “associated life” considers, first, the constitutive relationship that the subject, as a natural and living being, practically entertains with objectivity, i.e., with its external environment. Second, he mentions that the human being has a qualitatively specific approach to his living and needy dimension and interaction with the outer world. This qualitative approach entails the human being’s capacity, due to rationality and knowledge, to intelligently and enrichingly transform its practical behavior and external objective conditions for the harmonious, rather than blind and accidental, fulfillment of its needs. Therefore, Dewey reconsiders the human being as having to do with *life*, namely, with its needy and living dimension and the external world on which it is dependent, and according to a specific practical interaction, that is, the one of dynamic and significant transformation, leading to a harmonious and enriched unity with external situations. As we have previously seen, Dewey places the relationship of recognition within this naturalistic conception of the human being, suggesting an ontological and theoretical interdependency and interpenetration among these two levels of human interaction, i.e., the one with the objective world and the one with other subjects. He does not consider recognition as being a secondary and parallel relationship to the one that the subject undertakes with the external world. Instead, he presents recognition as the constitutive relationship for the human subject to effectively perform its qualitative practical interaction with the external world, and, therefore, his relationship with life. And the reason for this role and place of recognition seems to be due to the socially sharable structure of human being’s emotional and needy experience and the social and cooperative nature of its rational capacities, i.e., processes of knowledge and significant transformation.

From these premises, it follows that Dewey, from an ontological and theoretical point of view, conceives recognition more broadly than Honneth. Indeed, recognition does not represent a relationship devoted to merely integrating human subjects within the social context positively, but rather to allow the human being to effectively and objectively perform its specific capacity to transform life dynamically, intelligently, and significantly, reaching a harmonious unity with external situations. Therefore, recognition, standing for the relationship of cooperation and enrichment through which the subject’s activity can be performed, is not a normatively autonomous category for the criticism of the social contexts. Recognition’s very

ethical meaning is related to the ontological aspects of the human being's constitutive interaction with the external world. Consequently, it seems feasible to derive from Dewey's anthropological framework a different understanding of the genus of normative recognition, and thus, the possibility to clarify the ontological conditions and ontological status of ethical recognition according to his naturalistic interpretation of the human being's activity. Nonetheless, to accomplish this operation and present Dewey's naturalistic anthropology as a systematic, naturalistic framework with which to enrich the normative grammar of the mainstream contemporary understanding of recognition, it is necessary to refer to other Deweyan works, published a few years after his sojourn in China and which develop the naturalistic premises herein presented. Only by focusing on some of his later works it is possible to disclose Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism and thus clarify his theory of the place and functioning of human action in nature and life and unveil the social, and thus cognitive, structure of the human being's kind of living activity.

In light of the naturalistic anthropology that can be detected in the *Lectures in China*, and the consequent naturalistic understanding of recognition in terms of the mediatory relationship of the living interaction occurring between the human subject and the external world, in the last chapters of our reflections, we aim at developing these general insights. First, we want to refer to other works published by Dewey some years after the sojourn in China, focusing especially on *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Theory of Valuation* (1939). In these works, Dewey systematically outlines his naturalistic anthropology, thus providing a deeper descriptive and normative explanation of the place and function of the human being in the external world, as a specific manifestation of nature that is both continuous to and self-distinguishing from the rest of nature. In the following chapters, it will emerge, indeed, that Dewey deems it feasible to criticize the social world only by first clarifying the general and formal aspects of human action through a naturalistic metaphysics of the natural world, which allows him to define both the place, the role, and the emancipatory functioning of the human being's activity within life. Hence, in Dewey's later naturalistic anthropology, the general directives provided in the *Lectures* concerning the human being's kind of living activity are deepened and clarified. Here, Dewey explains the human being's practical and needy interaction with the external world in its dynamic naturalness, while clarifying the subject's potential for a significant fulfillment of its

needs through the analysis of the role and function of human rationality and its channelling or re-elaboration of pressing needs into “interests.” Moreover, he reconsiders the transformative significance of human activity from the broader perspective of the transformations running through life in its totality. Finally, we will then point out the social and cognitive structure on which, according to Dewey, the human being’s kind of living activity in the world relies, both for its genesis, its performativity, and its restless dynamics.

By analyzing Dewey’s systematic naturalistic framework, our final goal will not be only to state that he has a different understanding of normative recognition than Honneth and his mature theory of recognition. Moreover, it will be possible to present Dewey’s naturalistic anthropology as a systematic naturalistic framework of the human being and its activity with and within the external world where the shortcomings of the naturalistic anthropology outlined by Honneth and Joas in *Social Action and Human Nature* can be overcome. In Chapter Six, we have seen indeed that the naturalistic theory of human action outlined in *Social Action and Human Nature* represents, in Honneth’s philosophical production, a relevant but overlooked and not further developed theoretical framework for rethinking recognition in its constitutive role and normative grammar. Firstly, we have stressed indeed how the naturalistic approach to recognition found in the text opens the possibility to theoretically rethink recognition and enrich its normative grammar, i.e., its genus, ontological conditions, and ontological status, due to the ontological aspects of human action and recognition’s mediatory role for the possibility to perform it. Accordingly, we anticipated the possibility of reformulating the genus of ethical recognition by defining it also in terms of the relationship aiming at the “reconciliation of the natural and embodied subject with the outer world.” Then, we identified, on the one hand, the three-dimensionality – emotional, cognitive, and transformative – that recognition should include in order to be non-ideological and stand for the ethical relationship through which the humanizing quality of human action, as the intelligent transformation of internal and external nature, can be realized and performed. On the other hand, we pointed out the ontological dynamism that Honneth and Joas implicitly confer to social recognition so as to allow the human subject not only to perform its capacity for action with the external world, but also to develop it in its constitutive restless dynamism and situationalism, without being alienating or lifeless, i.e., without powerfully determining and closing subjective contents into static social categories, practices, and institutions. Accordingly, the relationship of recognition should be considered a kind of relationship ontologically defining and stabilizing the human subject’s

contents but also empowering the further creative interaction of the human being with the external world and its further possibilities for transformations.

Therefore, we concluded that, unlike *The Struggle for Recognition, Social Action and Human Nature* provides a naturalistic framework of human action by which it seems feasible to enrich the normative grammar of ethical recognition, critically distinguish and detect the inadequate forms of social recognition, and thus re-evaluate the critical sensitivity of the category of recognition in the criticism of human social contexts. Nonetheless, despite the theoretical and critical potentialities of the naturalistic framework of *Social Action and Human Nature*, we raised some criticisms to it. These criticisms considered the deficiencies of Honneth and Joas' naturalistic framework, namely, the absence of a defined project for social philosophy and, more importantly, the lack of theoretical systematicity and conceptual explanation. Indeed, we pointed out that this work outlines a naturalistic theory of human action by gathering the anthropological suggestions of Feuerbach and Marx but through a mere juxtaposition of their insights on the distinctive aspects of the human being's interaction with objectivity, without providing a theoretical framework suitable to explain and integrate them. Indeed, therein, Honneth and Joas stressed the necessity for social criticism, on the one hand, to consider Feuerbach's insight on the situationality and potentiality for deviation and emancipation of the human being's sensuous and practical interaction with the external world, able to overcome the pre-determined practical and emotional potentialities of historical human contexts. On the other hand, they emphasized the necessity to overcome Feuerbach's merely aesthetic and ahistorical conception of the human being's activity through Marx's insight into the transformative potential of human activity within the external world, both natural and social, even if not to be intended only in productive terms. Nonetheless, proceeding in their reflections, Honneth and Joas do not provide a theoretical framework suitable to integrate such aspects into a coherent naturalistic theory of human action and explain their occurrence. That is, they do not offer a theory of human action suitable to integrate and explain both the dynamic situationality or potential for social deviation of the human being's sensuous and needy intercourse with the external world and the practically transformative character of human activity, not limited to strict materialism and productive activity.

Due to these theoretical shortcomings and problems, it remains fundamental to find a naturalistic framework suitable to provide a naturalistic anthropology wherein these aspects of human action, namely, its restless situational and dynamic creativity combined with its practical

transformative potential, not reduced to productive activity, can be explained in their ontological occurrence and integrate into a coherent conception of human activity. Consequently, it will be feasible to theoretically ground the enlargement and enrichment of ethical recognition's normative grammar, i.e., the further ontological conditions and ontological status that distinguish ethical recognition from its inadequate occurrences. With the reconstruction of Dewey's naturalistic anthropology and metaphysics of the world, we will see that the American philosopher provides the systematic naturalistic theoretical framework we are looking for. We will see that Dewey succeeds in this purpose due to his deeper reflections on the place and functioning of the human being's activity in the ontological continuity of natural life. Hence, our final aim will be to present his understanding of recognition, as being the constitutive relationship for the human subject to perform its capacity for action, combined with his systematic naturalistic theory of human activity, as the theoretical framework suitable to ground the theoretical enrichment of the normative grammar of recognition.

Chapter Nine. Reconstructing Dewey's Naturalism

IX. 1. The Continuity of Life: Processes, Interactions, and Transformations

The detection and definition of nature's end is in itself barren. But the undergoing that actually goes on in the light of this discovery brings one close to supreme issues: life and death. The more sure one is that the world which encompasses human life is of such and such a character (no matter what his definition), the more one is committed to try to direct the conduct of life, that of others as well as of himself, upon the basis of the character assigned to the world. And if he finds that he cannot succeed, that the attempt lands him in confusion, inconsistency and darkness, plunging others into discord and shutting them out from participation, rudimentary precepts instruct him to surrender his assurance as a delusion; and to revise his notion of the nature of nature till he makes them more adequate to the concrete facts in which nature is embodied. Man needs the earth in order to walk, the sea to swim or sail, the air to fly. Of necessity we act within the world, and in order to be, he must in some measure adapt himself as one part of nature to other parts.⁴⁶⁰

In this beautiful statement with which Dewey concludes *Experience and Nature*, his more systematic attempt to outline his naturalistic anthropology, or as he defines it, his "Naturalistic Humanism,"⁴⁶¹ Dewey advocates the necessity to restate the human being as "one part of nature," which, as such, acts in the world. The fact that the human subject is a part of an encompassing world, which is the theatre of its own action, entails, according to Dewey, the necessity to give direction to its conduct, i.e., its own life, according to the character of the world and the "measure" of adaptation that the human being, as one specific "part of nature," has to the world.

Thus, in this brief quotation, we can find a summary of Dewey's later naturalistic philosophical project. This philosophical project is willing to outline a philosophical anthropology of the human being, as the latter stands for a practical being that needs to direct its conduct, but with the conscious acknowledgment that to succeed in this anthropological attempt, it is necessary, first, to reconsider the subject as a part of nature encompassed by an external world. Second, as a consequence, it is necessary to account not for the ends of nature but for the characters of the natural world within which the subject unavoidably lives, acts, and thus, interacts, finding out the specific measure of adaptation to the external world that opens

⁴⁶⁰ LW 1, p. 309.

⁴⁶¹ LW 1, p. 10.

up to the human being as a specific part of nature. The issue at stake, therefore, is to find out “the general features of experienced things and to interpret their significance for a philosophic theory of the universe in which we live,”⁴⁶² in order to outline the descriptive and normative conditions of the human being’s capacity for action, namely, of its place and role in nature. “Any theory that detects and defines these traits is therefore but a ground-map of the province of criticism.”⁴⁶³ That is, it is an instrument and reflective tool for the “criticism of beliefs, institutions, customs, policies with respect to their bearing upon good,”⁴⁶⁴ namely, with respect to their enhancement or dis-enhancement of the human being’s capacity for action in the world. In the later phase of his thinking, therefore, Dewey attempts to expose in detail the naturalistic anthropological premises that he placed at the base of his Chinese lectures for providing a criterion for the criticism of the social world, with the aim, thus, to more deeply ground his account of social criticism.

Already from the former quotation from *Experience and Nature*, where Dewey conclusively summarizes the core intent of his naturalistic anthropological program, it is evident that his metaphysical reflections upon the world and the human being are entirely devoid, from a programmatic point of view, of any teleological or essentialist intent. Quite the contrary, the need for a metaphysics of existence that he advocates is finalized at providing a metaphysical conception of the world alternative to traditional metaphysics, which misleadingly pretends to identify the final ends or the stable essences of nature. Indeed, he clarifies that his analysis of “the world in which we live” and, thus, of the human being’s activity does not aim at identifying a specific end of nature and the human subject, since “the detection and definition of nature’s end is in itself barren.”⁴⁶⁵ The effort of any metaphysical reflection to search for and define the ultimate ends of nature, as well as of the natural human being, is, according to Dewey, completely barren, and thus useless and harmful. The only intelligent observation of nature, according to Dewey, leads the subject and the theorist to consider “[the] supreme issues: life and death,”⁴⁶⁶ namely, to inquire about the “gross features” of the natural world and its living dynamics.

⁴⁶² LW 1, p. 14.

⁴⁶³ LW 1, p. 309.

⁴⁶⁴ LW 1, p. 305.

⁴⁶⁵ LW 1, p. 309.

⁴⁶⁶ LW 1, p. 309.

From this brief statement, we can thus define a fundamental programmatic distinction that Dewey makes among his metaphysics and traditional metaphysics, a distinction on which the entire naturalistic theory of the world and the human being presented by Dewey in the later phase of his thinking is based. That is, Dewey's urgency to provide a naturalistic conception of the human being and its capacity for action through a metaphysics of the gross features of the world in which we live, with a descriptive and normative purpose for the critique of human societies, is in response to the un-satisfying, sterile, and oppressive role that traditional essentialist metaphysics had for the human being, its self-conception, its account of knowledge, its understanding of the world, and its practical life in the social world. Dewey's naturalistic anthropology and metaphysics, thus, should be understood in terms of emancipatory tools by which the account of human subjectivity can be reconstructed, along with its capacity for action, and its potential for social criticism. Its emancipatory function is to liberate human subjects from the burdens and ties of the old metaphysics, which was embedded in human culture, namely, the totality of the human relations with the external environment, natural and social. Therefore, real emancipation means, first, the subject's re-appropriation of its own capacity for action within the world, the re-acknowledgment of its potentialities for growth and practical transformation, and then the recovery of its critical standing and potential for change within existing social contexts.

In different works of his production, for instance, *The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy* (1910), *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), and *Experience and Nature* (1925),⁴⁶⁷ Dewey identifies traditional metaphysics with Greek metaphysics. In traditional metaphysics, Dewey genealogically posits the historical origin of an illegitimate ontological inversion, which unavoidably led to a variety of interdependent dysfunctional dualisms:

Greek thinkers were fortunate to find ready-made to hand and eye a realm of aesthetic objects with traits of order and proportion, form and finality. [...] Changing things were not capable of being known on the basis of relationships to one another, but only on the basis of their relationship to objects beyond change, because marking its limit, and immediately precious. [...] The whole scheme of cosmic change was a vehicle for attaining ends possessed of properties which caused them to be objects of attraction of all lesser things, rendering the latter uneasy and restless until they attained the end-object which constitutes their real nature.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ MW 4; MW 12, Ch. 1, 2, 3; LW 1, Ch. I, II, III. Dewey's critique of Greek metaphysics is a constant trait of many of his works, see also *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), and *The Quest for Certainty* (1929).

⁴⁶⁸ LW 1, pp. 79-80.

According to Dewey, Greek thinkers, among which he refers primarily to Plato and Aristotle, through the observation of the natural world, and specifically of its organic entities, rightly perceived, first, that natural things are *in se* aesthetic, as having their own qualities that the subject can directly experience, and second, that they undergo changes and transformations according to certain structures, for from seeds and eggs develop plants, birds, etc. Nonetheless, from the perception of a “constant order of change,” ancient Greeks misleadingly concluded that the universe always has something that remains “constant *in* change,” namely, a final, fixed, and immutable form of self-fulfillment and self-perfection, which predetermines universally any existing natural change.⁴⁶⁹ From the empirical evidence of the natural world’s overall and persisting process of change, a change that always occurs, nonetheless, according to some process or order, the ancients misleadingly operated an ontological, and thus theoretical, inversion. They turned the restless change of the universe into the ontological priority of an immutable world of fixed forms and final causes or essences, which govern, orderly shape, and delimit the possibilities of change and deviation of natural things. Therefore, according to Dewey, Greek philosophy did not deny change, but it contradictorily emptied its profound meaning by subordinating and predetermining it as a direct effect of permanent ends of perfection and ultimate self-fulfillment. Change ontologically exists, but “development, evolution, never means [...] origin of new forms, a mutation from an old species [...]. So potentialities never mean, [...] the possibility of novelties, of invention, of radical deviation [...].”⁴⁷⁰ The world of antiquity, hence, is a closed world, pre-arranged in its changes, occurring only in terms of the pre-established process of actualization of “forms” or “species.”⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ See *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920). Here Dewey points out how the ancient man tries to define and identify “something remaining constant in change,” rather than describing “a constant order of change.” “While the word ‘constant’ appears in both statements, the meaning of the word is not the same. In one case, we are dealing with something constant in existence, physical or metaphysical; in the other case, with something constant in function and operation” (MW 12, p. 114).

⁴⁷⁰ MW 12, p. 113.

⁴⁷¹ See also *The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy*, where Dewey reconstructs the process that led Greek thinkers to the concept of *eidos* or *species*. “The Greeks, in initiating the life of Europe, were impressed by the characteristic traits of the life of plants and animals; so impressed indeed that they made these traits the key to defining nature and to explaining mind and society. [...] To every appearance, these perceived things were inert and passive. Suddenly, under certain circumstances, these things – henceforth known as seeds or eggs or germs – begin to change, to change rapidly in size, form, and qualities. [...] But the changes in the living thing are orderly; they are cumulative; they tend constantly in one direction; they do not, like other changes, destroy or consume, or pass fruitless into wandering flux; they realize and fulfil. Each successive stage, no matter how unlike its predecessor, preserves its net effect and so prepares the way for a fuller activity on the part of its successor. In living beings, changes do not happen as they seem to happen elsewhere, any which way; the earlier changes are regulated in view of later results. This progressive organization does not cease till there is achieved a true final term, a telos, a completed, perfected end. This final form exercises in turn a plenitude of functions, [...] of fulfilling

The immediate consequence of such an ontological inversion among change and order, according to Dewey, was that Greek thinkers, in front of the empirical evidence of the world as an intermixture of both order and contingency, change, and transformation reached two misleading conclusions. The first one concerned the deduction that perfect forms, due to the contingent and unstable dimension of empirical nature, belong by necessity to a non-material and non-sensible dimension, thus being entirely rational, spiritual, and transcending the world of experience. As Dewey clearly defines in *The Influence of Darwinism in Philosophy*, “since this purposive regulative principle [*eidōs* or *species*] is not visible to senses, it follows that it must be an ideal or rational force. [...] Within natural sensible events there is therefore contained a spiritual causal force, which as spiritual escapes perception, but is apprehended by an enlightened reason.”⁴⁷² The second and consequent conclusion was the conception of the existence of two ranks of reality or separate realms, embedded into an ontological and moral hierarchy and unresolvable dualism: the world of matter and sense, and the world of spirit, ideality, and reason. In *Experience and Nature*, he summarizes the issues as follows:

In briefest formula, ‘reality’ becomes what we wish existence to be, after we have analyzed its defects and decided upon what would remove them; ‘reality’ is what existence would be if our reasonably justified preferences were so completely established in nature as to exhaust and define its entire being and thereby render search and struggle unnecessary. What is left over, (and since trouble, struggle, conflict, and error still empirically exist, something is left over) being excluded by definition from reality is assigned to a grade or order of being which is asserted to be metaphysically inferior; an order variously called appearance, illusion, mortal mind, or the merely empirical, against what really and truly is. Then the problem of metaphysics alters: instead of being a detection and description of the generic traits of existence, it becomes an endeavor to adjust or reconcile the two separate realms of being.⁴⁷³

The ontological dualism among the empirical world of matter and qualities and the spiritual world of final rational forms and essences brought a series of other ontological, epistemological, and moral dualisms. These dualisms are the ones among empirical experience and rational knowledge, praxis and theory, subject and object, body and mind, material and ideal ends or goods. Starting with the first epistemological dualism, the one between empirical experience and rational knowledge, the identification by ancient Greeks of a transcendent and ideal reality that is superior in existence and dignity entailed that the human being could have

self-activity. [...] This principle seemed to give insights into the very nature of reality itself. To it Aristotle gave the name, *eidōs*. This term the scholastic translated as *species*” (MW 4, pp. 4-5).

⁴⁷² MW 4, p. 8.

⁴⁷³ LW 1, pp. 51-52.

access to the ultimate and immutable reality not by empirical sensitivity but by a form of contemplative rationality. Knowledge of the world turned into a process of exclusion of any empirical and subjective factor since the qualities experienced in nature were not considered, as in empirical experience, as “belonging to the things as well as to us,”⁴⁷⁴ namely, inquired in light of their living significance with subjectivity and problematized in their unstable character. Instead, these qualities were directly referred to immutable forms or essences of things, thus, without being inquired in themselves, in their existential occurrence and unity with the subject, but only rationally contemplated in their final forms. “Experience itself, as such, is defective, and hence default is inevitable and irremediable. The only universality and certainty is in a region above experience, that of the rational and conceptual.”⁴⁷⁵ In such a metaphysical framework, knowledge becomes a matter of rational contemplation, severed from the empirical experience of subjects, and, therefore, from the direct and subjectively poignant access to existence. It possesses a qualitative source but is entirely a-personal, a-subjective, and it is exclusively devoted to passively grasping pre-existent final forms of reality. “Thus an immediate contemplative possession and enjoyment of objects [...] was interpreted as defining both true knowledge and the highest end and good of nature.”⁴⁷⁶ Knowledge turned into the possession of “the already known,” learning into an issue of “indoctrination, disciplining,” and demonstration into a “logic of argumentation, proof, and persuasion.”⁴⁷⁷

This settled dualism between empirical experience and knowledge, which aims at searching for ultimate certainty, absolute knowledge, ontological finality, and perfection, unavoidably led Greek thinkers to paradoxically opposite results. The subjection of natural change to a transcendent order and finality and the complete detachment from empirical experience entailed the construction and enactment of an account of knowledge completely inefficient, both in its task of reaching truth and in its function for the human being’s life. Indeed, ancient metaphysics outlined an account of human knowledge where “there is no verification, no effort even to test and check. What is even worse, secondly, is that the things of ordinary experience do not get enlargement and enrichment of meaning [...]. [...] Not tested, this subject-matter become arbitrary, aloof.”⁴⁷⁸ On the one hand, knowledge, being severed

⁴⁷⁴ LW 1, p. 91.

⁴⁷⁵ MW 12, p. 126.

⁴⁷⁶ LW 1, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁷⁷ MW 12, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁷⁸ LW 1, p. 17.

from empirical experience, lost the ground for the experimental verification of its generalizations; while, denying the very meaning of change as transformation, development, and novelty, the objects of knowledge turned into arbitrary, empty, and barren categories. On the other hand, as a consequence of this account of knowledge characterized by contemplation, absence of experimentation, and lack of consideration of transformative change, the knowing subject was supposed to be a passive spectator of existence, unable to strengthen and enhance the qualities of experienced things that it perceives as valuable. In a nutshell, the subject got impeded in action, exposed to contingency and accidents in its interaction with the real world's qualities and ongoing transformations.

Dewey's great and impressive contribution lies in his subsequent reconstruction of the domino effect unleashed by ancient metaphysics' original ontological inversion, ontological dualism between the empirical and spiritual world, and epistemological dualism between empirical experience and reason. That is to say, the dualism between the object known and the real object, and therefore, between human theory and practice, subjectivity and objectivity, mind and body. Indeed, the human subject introjected and embodied an account and procedure of knowledge that denies and deprecates the significance and role of the body in the process of knowledge, thus completely overlooking the primary relevance of the sensuous interaction and fusion, occurring within empirical experience, of subjectivity with objectivity to define the aim and scope of knowledge. That is, the aim and scope of knowledge is the intelligently practical enhancement of the qualities of experienced things having worth for the subject, somehow "belonging to the things as well as to us" or saying something of the subject to be theoretically investigated and practically secured. Because of traditional metaphysics, "the things of ordinary experience do not get enlarged and enriched in meanings,"⁴⁷⁹ and "the intelligently directed experience, as distinct from mere causal and uncritical experience"⁴⁸⁰ is completely prevented, leaving human subjects "with no leverage, no purchase, with which to regulate the source of experience,"⁴⁸¹ and no ability of control.

This metaphysics of being and existence, maintained in all its interconnected dualisms from ancient Greece to modernity, ended up severing the material from the spiritual. On the one hand, it did considerably affect the human being's relationship to the material needs, goods,

⁴⁷⁹ LW 1, p. 17.

⁴⁸⁰ LW 1, p. 6.

⁴⁸¹ LW 1, p. 22.

or values of its existence within the world, like self-reproduction, physical health, production and, thus, to the material and valuable qualities of outer objects and situations on which these needs and goods were related. It deprecated them for their lower significance and deprived them of an ideal effort to strengthen their material dimension and valuableness for human subjectivity. It thus left these material values and objective qualities of experience exposed to accidents and contingencies or encapsulated them into fixed final forms and goods severed from empirical reality and its dynamism, depriving the human beings of efficient and intelligent forms of practical administration of them.⁴⁸² Moreover, according to the lower ontological level accorded to these objective qualities and values, the ancient world distinguished between practical knowledge, having to deal with materiality, and contemplative or pure knowledge, having to do with the ultimate and self-enclosed reality. “Since the world of becoming, of origins and perishings, is deficient in true Being, it cannot be known in the best sense. [...] From this fact follows the superiority of contemplative to practical knowledge.”⁴⁸³ From this ontological and epistemic hierarchy, a social one followed. According to Dewey, “the Greek community was marked by a sharp separation of servile workers and free men of leisure, which meant a division between acquaintance with matters of fact and contemplative appreciation, between unintelligent practice and unpractical intelligence.”⁴⁸⁴

On the other hand, this metaphysics of experience did also affect the human being’s interaction with the “ideal” and “spiritual” needs, values, or goods experienced by the subject within the social context. With Plato and Aristotle, the social world became the dimension of existence wherein, through collective customs and institutions, social members could pursue and actualize the spiritual, ultimate, and absolute values and ends, and thus the more dignified moral goods rationally contemplated within the world, for instance, in the medieval formula, *ens, bonum, and verum*. Here, their error was twofold. In the first instance, they introduced “the traditional distinction between moral goods, like virtues, and natural goods like health,

⁴⁸² In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey focuses on art, medicine, and production in ancient Greek culture, pointing out their limits in the intelligent administration of material values since they used to deal with materiality only with the prior reference to supra-empirical and stable models of perfect art, production, potentialities for material security, reproduction, health, etc. “The material for his point of view was found empirically in what is consummatory and final [...]. Labor, production, did not seem to create form, it dealt with matter or changing things so as to furnish an occasion for incarnation of antecedent forms in matter. [...] Nature first possesses the forms which it afterwards embodies. [...] They precede any particular realization. Design and plan are anonymous and universal, and carry with them no suggestion of a designing, purposive mind. Models are objectively given and have only to be observed and followed” (LW 1, pp. 78-79).

⁴⁸³ MW 12, p. 142.

⁴⁸⁴ LW 1, p. 80.

economic security, art, science and the like,”⁴⁸⁵ thus denying the material and pragmatic component of the more spiritual needs or values, such as communication, justice, beauty, equality, freedom, self-realization, happiness, social and political participation, social sympathy, etc. They completely severed these values perceived and desired by social members in their interaction with the social world from their material conditions, thus leaving them in a dimension of complete aloofness and depriving them of an intelligent practical administration to secure their enhancement and realization in the social world.

The belief in fixed values has bred a division of ends into intrinsic and instrumental, of those that are really worth while in themselves and those that are of importance only as means to intrinsic goods. [...] Historically, it has been the source and justification of a hard and fast difference between ideal goods on one side and material goods on the other. [...] So called intrinsic goods, whether religious or aesthetic, are divorced from those interests of daily life [...] Aesthetic, religious, and other “ideal” ends are now thin and meagre or else idle and luxurious because of their separation from “instrumental” or economic ends. Only in connection with the latter can they be woven into the texture of daily life and made *substantial* and *pervasive*.⁴⁸⁶

Moreover, by severing these values from their material dimension and experiential dynamism, ancient Greeks encapsulated them into fixed final forms and structures, completely empty and barren, thus homogenizing their multiplicity and different occurrences into fixed standards. Finally, they ordered the plurality of both material and spiritual qualities, goods, or values into a fixed hierarchy with a final and ultimate good, which is prior to all other goods and toward which lower values are merely instrumental. With ancient metaphysics, “a predetermined number of ends inherently arranged in an order of increasing comprehensiveness and finality” was identified; and the belief in the existence of ready-made “ends with good and perfection,” autonomously existent in the world, to be contemplated and followed “apart from endeavour” and material considerations developed.⁴⁸⁷

According to Dewey, the final effect of these ontological, epistemological, and moral dualisms was the institution of social contexts intrinsically:

- (i) conservative, as aiming at the passive maintenance and reproduction of existing social structures and organization.
- (ii) oppressive and hierarchical, as entailing the social asymmetry among social members and their needs, goods, or values.

⁴⁸⁵ MW 12, p. 178.

⁴⁸⁶ MW 12, pp. 177-178. Italics mine.

⁴⁸⁷ LW 1, p. 296.

(iii) inefficient in intelligently dealing with the demands and needs of both dominated and dominating subjects. Their material and spiritual needs or values lacked intelligent and practical administration of the outer world to ensure their stability, were devoid of empirical investigation of their adequate material and substantial conditions. In both cases, social subjects in ancient societies were generally kept in a situation of passivity and inactivity. Because of the introjection and embodiment of a certain account of metaphysics and its series of dualisms, they were seriously affected in their very capacity to interact with and within the external world, both natural and social.

According to Dewey, the paradigm of ancient metaphysics, whose influence remained predominant until the modern age, underwent a moment of disruption and serious delegitimization only with the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859. Dewey deems that the development of the naturalistic account of science and its experimental method, which started at the beginning of the modern era with Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, and Francis Bacon,⁴⁸⁸ provided an alternative metaphysical conception of the natural world than the traditional ancient one. Nonetheless, the logic and import of this metaphysical development reached its "latest scientific achievement" and "introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politic, and religion" only with Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.⁴⁸⁹

In *The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy*, Dewey explains that Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* provided a conception of organic nature that completely dropped the ancient ontological category of ideal *species* and *eidos* by overcoming the ontological inversion between change and order that was at the base of their ontological and theoretical instantiation.⁴⁹⁰ Previously, we have seen, indeed, how Greek thinkers, due to the perception of natural changes and the presence of an order of processes, postulated the existence of prior final essences and forms of things regulating the world's change and dynamism, giving birth to a series of dangerous ontological, epistemological, moral, and social dualisms. Darwin refused this illegitimate inversion, reconsidering "the phenomenon of life for the principle of

⁴⁸⁸ See, for instance, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Ch. 2 and 3. Here, Dewey focuses on the revolutionary and anticipatory account of knowledge provided by Bacon in opposition to the traditional ancient account.

⁴⁸⁹ MW 4, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁰ For an overview of Darwin's influence on Dewey's thinking, see Särkelä, 2015b; Westbrook 1991, Ch. I. For an overview of the influence of evolutionist biology and psychology for the development of Dewey's pragmatic naturalism in the years at the University of Chicago (1894-1905), see Westbrook, Ch. 3. To further deepen Dewey's debt to Darwin and naturalistic and evolutionists biology, see *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, pp. 126-138; and Dewey's intellectual autobiography, *From Absolutism to Experimentalism* (1930).

transition.”⁴⁹¹ That is, he reconsidered the living processes of organic entities, such as plants and animals, not as self-occurring in isolation from the surrounding context, according to a set of transformations regulated by pre-determined forms realizing themselves through fixed stages. But instead, he reviewed these living processes as relying upon the material *transitions*, *transactions*,⁴⁹² or *interactions* that natural organisms have with the external environment. Accordingly, for the natural organism, there is life and continuation of life only when its organic survival, development, and reproduction are sustained through the transactions with the outer natural context. These transactions and interactions are eminently practical and not structured blindly and accidentally, but according to the organism’s sensory, motor, and reproductive structure. This latter functionally defines and shapes the organism’s relation with the external environment according to certain processes of sensory, sensuous, and motor selections, in order to ensure the self-reproduction of the organism.

Nonetheless, these practical transactions between the organism and the external world always imply some degree of transformations of both the organism and the external surrounding and entail, thus, a constant chain or order of changes, which lead to different and new living interactions and transactions between the organism and the external environment. Indeed, on the one hand, the organism should adapt to external conditions in order to survive, thus adjusting and changing its own structures; on the other hand, the organism modulates environmental conditions with its own activity to survive and fulfill its needs. In this sense, the species and the entire environment *evolve* and *change each other* to keep living, without having pre-determined teleological forms to guide their living process, so that natural life is a struggle for existence in which variations and transformations can be useful or fatal. Darwin succeeded in “the expulsion of fixed and final causes”⁴⁹³ from biology, in the abolition of any pre-determined and teleological understanding of natural change, development, and organic self-fulfillment. He combines the “marvellous adaptations of organisms to their environment” with the observation that “if all organic adaptations are due simply to constant variation and the

⁴⁹¹ MW 4, p. 3.

⁴⁹² In this chapter, we use the term “interaction” and “transaction” as Dewey uses them in *Experience and Nature*, namely, as synonyms to refer to the transformative relations occurring in natural life. Later, in *Knowing and the Known* (1949), Dewey, with Arthur Bentley, distinguishes the two terms. With “interaction,” he refers to Newton’s conception of natural events, erroneously described as static and fixed entities that merely interact with one another, while he defines his own organic, merging, and dynamic conception of natural events and their relations in terms of “transactions.” For an analysis of this distinction in Dewey’s thinking, see Bernstein, 1991, pp. 331-332.

⁴⁹³ MW 4, p. 9.

elimination of those variations which are harmful in the struggle for existence, that is brought by excessive reproduction, there is no call for a prior intelligent causal force to plan and preordain them.”⁴⁹⁴ From this scientific revolution, according to Dewey, the possibility for a different metaphysics of the world, and consequently, for a different account of knowledge and the human being is disclosed.

In the first instance, the primary issues of the world and nature in general get acknowledged: life and death. Accordingly, from the biological observation of natural organisms, it had been feasible to consider that life is there and persists, both in inorganic and organic entities, only through interactions and relationships between parts, between things, and external environmental conditions. To put it better, life, *as such*, is a process of interactions among parts. And since where there are reciprocal interactions and transactions, there is reciprocal transformation, life is a process of transformative interactions leading to further new interactions and transformations. In a nutshell, life is a constant order *of* change, springing from interacting things, and leading to new qualitative interactions and transformations. From a metaphysical point of view, modern scientists shifted from a closed world with hierarchical ontological realms to an open world, characterized by a chain of processes of change, relying upon interacting things, and ontologically uniform in dignity. In modern science, “development, evolution” started to mean “origin of new forms, a mutation from an old species,” potentialities turned into “the possibility of novelty, of invention, of radical deviation.”⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, “it was asserted that the same laws hold everywhere, that there is homogeneity of material and process everywhere throughout nature.”⁴⁹⁶ Therefore, it was feasible to reinstate and re-acknowledge the ontological uniformity existing within the natural world. This natural uniformity should not be intended as a bare equivalence and sameness of all the natural entities, but rather as a commonality and persistency of “gross features of existence.” That is, *transaction* among parts, reciprocal practical *transformation*, and *change*. Thus, different “levels” of life can be distinguished according to the complexity through which these gross features of existence occur in living entities.

⁴⁹⁴ MW 4, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁵ MW 12, p. 113.

⁴⁹⁶ MW 12, pp. 116-117.

Hence, in *Experience and Nature*,⁴⁹⁷ Dewey distinguishes among three “levels,” “degrees,” or “plateaus” of life, which should not be intended as hierarchically and instrumentally ordered, for the “lower” levels of life are mere phases and instruments to lead to “higher” forms of life. On the contrary, modern science and evolutionism provided, according to Dewey, a uniform account of natural life, whose naturalism opens the path for a “theory of the natural continuity.”⁴⁹⁸ The theory of natural continuity entails that life, in its complex and dynamic interactions, gives rise to the emergence not only of evolving species but also of different levels of living organization. These levels of life are ontologically uniform since they share the same gross features of existence and are reciprocally interdependent on each other, for the higher levels emerge from, depend on, and maintain the previous ones. Nonetheless, they differ concerning the progressively more complex organization that the existence’s gross features, i.e., interactions, transformations, and change, acquire in them.

“Three plateaus [...] may be discriminated.”⁴⁹⁹ The first degree or level of life is the *inorganic* or the *physical* one, whose “distinctive properties are those of the mathematical-mechanical system discovered by physics and which define matter as a general character.”⁵⁰⁰ That is, the inorganic or physical level of life is the one composed of material parts acting and, thus, interacting mechanically, according to “narrower and more external interactions.”⁵⁰¹ For instance, water is the union of two particles of hydrogen and one of oxygen, a unity that is “natural and unpremeditated,” namely, occurring “mechanically” and “narrowly,” according to the rigid structures proper of the nature of particles. Hence, inorganic entities act, interact, and reciprocally transform each other accidentally and according to a strict mechanical logic of cause and effect.

The second level or degree of life is the *organic*, the *psycho-physical*, or the properly “living” one.

Empirically speaking, the most obvious difference between the living and non-living things is that the activities of the former are characterized by needs and efforts which are active demands

⁴⁹⁷ Concerning the number of the levels of life, as Särkelä points out (Särkelä, 2017), Dewey, in his later production, distinguishes between three, four, and six levels of life. At the moment, we are interested in pointing out the three first levels that he identifies in *Experience and Nature*. Proceeding in our reflections, we will refer to the additional level (a fourth one) that he identifies both in *Experience and Nature* and in *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928).

⁴⁹⁸ LW 1, p. 30.

⁴⁹⁹ LW 1, p. 208.

⁵⁰⁰ LW 1, p. 208.

⁵⁰¹ LW 1, p. 209.

to satisfy needs, and by satisfaction. In making this statement, the terms need, effort and satisfaction are primarily employed in a biological sense. By need is meant a condition of tensional distribution of energies such that the body is in a condition of uneasy and unstable equilibrium. By demand or effort is meant the fact that this state is manifested in movements which modify the environing bodies in ways which react upon the body, so that its characteristic pattern of active equilibrium is restored. By satisfaction is meant this recovery of equilibrium pattern, consequent upon the changes of environment due to interactions with the active demands of the organism.⁵⁰²

Here, Dewey distinguishes the organic level of life by considering that plants and animals, for instance, have physical and mechanical properties, but framed into a higher kind of property, the psycho-physical ones. The psycho-physical property entails that vegetal or animal organisms do not only exist and persist not-premeditatedly and unintentionally, in virtue of mechanically interacting material parts. Instead, they “live” in the very sense of the word, namely, they strive to maintain and perpetuate their patterned activity through a certain interaction with the external surroundings, the one of need-demand-satisfaction. In a nutshell, they do not merely and accidentally exist thanks to the unpremeditated union of different particles. Moreover, they strive to survive and self-reproduce their organic structure and pattern of activity through the mediation of surrounding conditions. Organic entities, of which animal organisms represent the “higher” or more complex manifestation, add to their physical properties the psycho-physical one, entailing the capacity for feeling. That is, the sensuous – even if with different degrees of exteriority, contingency, and complexity – attitude to interact with the qualities of outer objects to keep living and self-reproduce their patterned organic structure. Their life depends, thus, on a higher degree of interactions, transformations, and changes with the qualitative properties of outer objects, entities, or situations.

Firstly, these interactions are wider, gathering a series of environmental conditions and objects; and they are striven for, needed, and desired according to different levels of exteriority. The organic entity lives in virtue of an interpenetration with the external environment, since its biological needs, to be satisfied, require material and qualitative conditions supplied by outer objects. The dimension of need implies for the organic entity a situation of “lack,” of “internal tensional distribution of energy,” and of external and problematic disharmony with the outer environment, which leads to the organism’s effort and demand to overcome the internal situation of lack and deficiency and restore the ontological and biological harmony with environmental conditions. It follows that within the organic level of life, the ontological

⁵⁰² LW 1, p. 194.

interactions between the organisms and outer natural objects and entities are eminently *practical*. The natural organism *acts* to adapt to the external environment while also adapting the external environment to its demands: its movements practically and materially modify environmental conditions so as to restore its ontological interdependence and interpenetration with nature harmoniously.

Secondly, according to Dewey, the interactions between the organism and the environment are functional only if they reach not only the mere subsistence of the organism but its *growth*, namely, the proper transformation of internal and external conditions suitable to ensure a more comprehensive and tensionless transaction with the outer world. Within natural organisms, the practical transformations following from the interaction with the outer world turn into *wider reciprocal processes of re-modeling*, whose functionality lies in the growth of life itself, namely, in the extension of the ontological unity of the organism with the interacting environment, and which open up the possibility for new interactions and broader potentialities for novelty and growth.

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it [...]. And in growing life, the recovery is never a mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between the organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.⁵⁰³

Thus, the natural organism adapts to and acts upon outer situations, thus changing their objective conditions. Respectively the external object “reacts” upon the organism, both satisfying the organism’s needs and entailing, due to the changes undergone by the two interacting poles, future different and unique interactions with the organism. According to Dewey, the interactions between the natural organism and the external object, hence, are not to be behavioristically conceived in terms of a series of separate segments of sensory-motor stimulus and response between the two. Rather, they should be conceived in terms of the continuous organic circuit where the natural organism and the external environment reciprocally transform each other leading to a continuity of new, developing, and unique

⁵⁰³ LW 10, pp. 19-20.

interactions, transformations, and changes.⁵⁰⁴ To conclude, in the organic level of life, the “gross features” of existence – interactions, transformations, and change – increase in complexity. Interactions are wider, gathering complex environmental situations, and they are searched, needed, striven for rather than accidentally undergone, even if lived with different degrees of exteriority and mechanicism. For instance, plants and animals interact differently with environmental conditions: the former keep living through environmental interactions according to mechanical patterns of action, whereas the latter through instinctual sensory-motor patterns entailing degrees of evaluative readjustment and responsive variations. Transformations between the organism and the external environment are more varied, functional, extended, and continuous, leading life, as the process of change springing from interacting and interdependent parts, to grow. In the organic degree of life, change, as the ontological co-existence of the settled and the uniform on the one hand, and the precarious, the contingent, and various on the other, increases its potentiality for occurrence and diversity.

Then, Dewey identifies a third degree of life, the one to which the human being belongs. The great contribution of modern science and naturalistic Evolutionism had been the re-acknowledgment and reconsideration of the human species as belonging to the natural world and its intrinsic processes of transformation, change, and evolution. That is, the belief that the human being belongs to a realm separate from the rest of nature was dropped. The human being

⁵⁰⁴ Dewey develops the critique to behaviorism and the elaboration of the concept of “organic circuit” in his revolutionary essays *The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology* (1896), where he makes a critique of a psychological concept become central in the new biological and pragmatic psychology, the one of “reflex arc” (for instance, William James recovered the concept in “Reflex Arc and Theism” in 1881). Although this concept was used primarily to inquire about the human subject’s empirical and organic experience with the external environment, its theoretical results were referable to all forms of organic experiences, thus to natural organisms. Dewey’s critique of the category of the “reflex arc” emphasizes the dualistic interpretation that it provides of the sensory-motor organic interaction of the organism with the external environment, according to which the experience of the organism with outer conditions can be conceived as a set of different interactions, organized in terms of a causal relationship between an external sensory stimulus and a motor response. The concept of “reflex arc,” characterized by a mere behavioristic conception of animal activity, which dualistically severs the external stimulus from the organism’s activity, as two ontologically distinct moments, does not consider the holistic and unitary occurrence of organic experience. As finalized to the organism’s survival within the external environment, the latter is a unitary whole, a “comprehensive, organic unity,” where stimulus and response are not separate segments ordered according to a bare mechanism of cause and effect. Rather, they are ontologically coordinated, since the external stimulus perceived by the organism already entails the latter’s activity in selecting the sensuous elements necessary for action. The organism pragmatically perceives the external stimulus, and its motor reaction is finalized at reaching a new organic and sensitive stimulus. Moreover, the ontological coordination between stimulus and response entails that organic experience is not a series of empirical fragments unconnected with each other, but rather a chain wherein the reciprocal and interconnected transformations of the organism and the external environment cumulatively grow and maintain each other. It follows that experience is not a series of “arcs”. But rather an “organic circuit”. For an analysis of Dewey’s theory of the organic circuit, see Szpunar, 2010; Westbrook, 1991, pp. 66-68; and Santarelli 2018, Ch. 4.

is, first of all, an animal organism. Like other animal organisms, it is an embodied existence, embedded into a natural environment with which it interacts. It follows that, first, the human being includes the physical level of existence, since it is constituted of material and physical parts interacting mechanically and it interacts with physical things, such as lands, natural elements, physical apparatus, etc. Second, it includes the psycho-physical and organic level of existence, for it is a living organism having “the conjunctive presence in activity of need-demand-satisfaction.”⁵⁰⁵ That is, “[its] physical activity has acquired additional properties, those of ability to procure a peculiar kind of interactive support of needs from surrounding media.”⁵⁰⁶ Like other animal organisms, the human being is an animal dependent for its survival and development on the external environment and its qualitative objects. Thus, it is not a self-enclosed entity developing according to some fixed internal structure. Instead, it is a sensuous body that can develop, self-reproduce, and grow only due to the sensuous and practical interactions with external objects with specific qualities of which the organism is deficient, entailing the human being’s practical and active effort to transform outer objects for self-fulfillment and consummation. Also for the human being, thus, “every need, say hunger for fresh air or food, is a lack that denoted at least a temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings. But it is also a demand, a reaching into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium.”⁵⁰⁷ First, the human being is a sensuous body, having sensitivity in order to transform valuable outer qualities for its survival and development. As for other animal organisms, the transformative interactions among the human being and its external environment are reciprocal and continuous, entailing, in the short term, the institution of a wider and searched living and practical unity with the rest of nature and the disclosure of more varied and extended interactions and transformations; in the long term, the evolution of the human species and the external environment.

Therefore, according to Dewey, modern science and Evolutionism, from a metaphysical point of view, helped, firstly, in revolutionarily rethinking the *world* as a uniform and continuous process of change, wherein parts interact with each other according to different degrees of exteriority, contingency, inclusiveness, transformation, and potentialities for variations. Secondly, they contribute to replacing the human being in the natural context, as an

⁵⁰⁵ LW 1, pp. 195-196. Concerning Dewey’s idea of the inclusiveness of simpler levels of life into the more complex ones, see also *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea*, LW 3.

⁵⁰⁶ LW 1, p. 196.

⁵⁰⁷ LW 10, p. 19.

existence continuous and uniform to the rest of nature and the gross features of life. Thirdly, they challenged philosophy to identify the proper quality that makes human activity both continuous with inorganic and organic levels of existence, and ontologically specific.⁵⁰⁸ In fact, the human being is revealed to be an animal organism, with a sensuous and transformative active interaction with the outer world, but acquiring, at the same time, distinctive and additional properties. The human being's capacity for action, indeed, departs from animal behavior as standing for an even more complex qualitative interaction with outer objects, qualified by *meaningfulness* and *significance*, in a nutshell, by *mind*, *meanings*, and *linguistic signs*.

Therefore, Dewey identifies a third level of life, that of *mind*. Mind is naturalistically conceived by Dewey, for it is not "a mysterious intrusion occurring in some unaccountable way in the order of nature;" nor an "illusory [occurrence], or, in current language, an epiphenomenon;" nor "a section of being on the same level with the physical section, or as the Being of which so-called physical things are but disguised forms of 'appearances'."⁵⁰⁹ According to Dewey, mind should be philosophically approached neither according to an

⁵⁰⁸ See EW 1, pp. 205-226. In *Ethics and Physical Science* (1887), Dewey considered evolutionary biology in terms of a "challenge" for philosophy. The rediscovery of the human being as an animal organism, following the same laws of nature of other living entities, according to Dewey, led to the necessity to account for the specific capacity for action and conduct belonging to the human being, as able to think, know, and also create harmonious social interactions different from the "struggle for survival." The mistake of evolutionary ethics, such as that of Herbert Spencer, is, according to Dewey, the contradictory attempt to consider the human being in its complete sameness with other animal organisms and their natural laws of conduct and activity, but acknowledging the possibility for the human being to create and aim at the construction of harmonious societies. Nonetheless, the possibility for social interactions and phenomena remained, for moral evolutionists, a potentiality deriving contradictorily from the uniform laws of nature, in which, nonetheless, the laws of "the struggle for survival" and "the survival of the fittest" reign. Therefore, according to Dewey, it was necessary to naturalistically inquire about the specific natural properties and ways of conduct disclosed to the human being, in continuity but in distinction with the rest of nature. As Robert Westbrook clearly explains: "Spencer and other 'physical philosophers' argued that modern science had established man as a natural being subject to the same natural laws as other natural facts. The law of evolution showed man to be the pinnacle of a process at work everywhere in the world. Ethically these facts were said to point to two conclusions. First, because man was not generally different from the rest of nature, ethical science did not require a distinctive set of methods and concepts from those of physical science. Ethics was freed from theology and metaphysics, and the determination of the fundamental laws of human conduct was one with the determination of the natural laws of the world. [...] The ethical ideal was thus one with the evolutionary development of human communities. [...] Dewey did not disagree with these conclusions, for they accorded with his own ethics. What he did dispute was the contention that this ethical ideal could be derived from the natural law of evolution. [...] First, Dewey noted that the naturalists' ethical ideal of a cooperative society was incompatible with the process of natural selection which was the natural law of evolution. [...] Natural selection involved a "struggle for existence" in which various forms of life competed for a limited supply of resources, a struggle in which the fittest survived and the unfit went on the wall. The ethical deal of cooperative moral community was at odds with the conditions of physical change. [...] Dewey's second objection was to the naturalists' identification of the terminus towards which evolution was moving as an ethical end. Ethical categories were not be applied to evolution of the universe but to the conduct of men" (Westbrook, 1991, pp. 30-31).

⁵⁰⁹ LW 3, p. 49.

ontological dualism nor to an ontological reductionism. Indeed, mind, on the one hand, if considered as belonging to a spiritual realm severed from an unintelligent and unintelligible nature, turns into an extraneous and exterior element in the natural context, thus approaching natural entities arbitrarily and un-legitimately. On the other hand, if considered as a mere “epiphenomenon,” namely, a dimension illusorily distinguished from the physical level, mind is ultimately reduced to brain and neural processes, to the physical level and its properties, i.e., material and mechanical processes, without being grasped in its ideal and spiritual component in dealing with the external world. Dewey, therefore, advocates for “an emergent theory of the mind,”⁵¹⁰ according to which mind is a natural but additional property assumed by organic entities in their dealing with the external environment, not “an anomaly or an accidentally

⁵¹⁰ LW 1, p. 207. In the enormous contemporary debate on naturalism and the plurality of its approaches, it is useful to refer to De Caro and Macarthur’s distinction between “scientific naturalism” (to which analytic philosophers such as Quine, Fodor, Dennet, and Chomsky have contributed) and “liberal naturalism” (sustained, for instance, by Davidson, Putnam, Stroud, and McDowell). According to De Caro and Macarthur (De Caro & Macarthur, 2013), scientific and liberal naturalism share some fundamental theories, such as philosophy’s illegitimacy in referring to supernatural processes and properties, and the rejection of the foundational role of philosophy, as representing the privileged form of inquiry destined to ground all other branches of knowledge. Nonetheless, these two approaches of naturalism are distinguished from each other by relevant points. In arguing for the uniformity of existence and nature, they provide different interpretations, strong or weak, concerning the ontological and methodological uniformity between nature and mind or spirit, and science and philosophy. “For the scientific naturalism, between science and philosophy, there can be only continuity (a continuity that, in principle, can turn into an entire absorption of philosophy by science). For liberal naturalism, between philosophy and science, there must be rather compatibility. Moreover, liberal naturalism distinguishes from scientific naturalism both for its more inclusive interpretation of what can be defined ‘natural’ (and consequently, a narrower interpretation of what is ‘supernatural’) and for a more liberal approach to the status of science, i.e., its objects of inquiry and method of study” (De Caro & Macarthur, 2013, pp. 27-28. Translation mine). Indeed, from a methodological and epistemological point of view, scientific naturalism (in a plurality of variations and positions) argues for a strong reductionist and hierarchical interpretation of the relationship between science and philosophy: philosophy should absorb and conform to the method of investigation proper of science and, if science is hierarchically and foundationally conceived, to the objects and methods of the primary scientific branch, physics. From an ontological point of view, scientific naturalism argues that in order to accept the existence of the “spiritual” entities, such as mind, concepts, moral categories, aesthetic and religious concepts and make them objects of inquiry, it is necessary to reduce and return them to their constitutive physical entities. Accordingly, “the naturalization of a concept means the reduction of the latter to concept naturalistically acceptable, or to prove that the concept can be eliminated by our vocabulary” (De Caro & Macarthur, 2013, p. 32. Translation mine). Instead, liberal naturalism (with a variety of strategies and theories) argues for the irreducible plurality of what is existent and natural, intending “mental” or “spiritual” categories, such as moral, aesthetic concepts, as natural entities but not reduceable to physical ones, being a form of “second nature” that is in continuity, interconnected, and emergent from the “first nature”. Consequently, from a methodological point of view, “liberal naturalism” sustains the compatibility between the scientific and philosophical method, as sharing a similar method for inquiry (based on empirical observation, experiment, and progressive revision and validation), as having different objects and tools for inquiry and having both legitimate access to reality and knowledge. “Scientism”, according to which only science can know reality while philosophy should only systematize scientific truths, is dropped in favor of an epistemological pluralism. In De Caro and Macarthur’s distinction, Dewey is generally considered a liberal naturalist. The enormous debate on naturalism cannot be the object of inquiry of our actual reflections. We are interested in locating Dewey’s naturalism, in its pluralist ontology and emergentist theory of mind and the mental, in the liberal typology of naturalistic philosophy. Dewey, indeed, argues for the uniformity of nature while accounting for its intrinsic ontological pluralism and emergent occurrence. For an analysis of Dewey’s liberal or humanistic naturalism, see Renault, 2015; Särkelä, 2015a, 2015b, 2017.

supervening quality but a constitutive ingredient of existential events.”⁵¹¹ The naturality of mind entails that the latter is a legitimate part of the natural world, and thus that the intelligible dimension of natural events that mind is suitable to grasp is not something brought from without the natural world, but something existent and belonging to natural events and disclosed by mind from within nature. “It [the human being] domesticates the exercise of intelligence within nature. [...] Nature is capable of being understood. But the possibility is realized not by a mind thinking about it from without but by operations conducted from within [...]”⁵¹² But in what does mind or the mental consist?

As life is a character of events in a peculiar condition of organization, and “feeling” is a quality of life-forms marked by complexly mobile and discriminating responses, so “mind” is an added property assumed by a feeling creature [...]. Then the qualities of feeling become significant of objective differences in external things and of episodes past and to come. This state of things in which qualitatively different feelings are not just had but are significant of objective differences, is mind. Feelings are no longer just felt. They have and they make sense [...]. They are “objectified”; they are immediate traits of things. This “objectification” is not a miraculous ejection from the organism or soul into external things, nor an illusory attribution of psychical entities to physical things. The qualities never were “in” the organism; they always were qualities of interactions which both extra-organic things and organisms partake. When named, they enable identification and discrimination of things to take place as means in a further course of inclusive interaction. Hence they are as much qualities of things engaged as of the organism.⁵¹³

In this long quotation from *Experience and Nature*, Dewey makes a fundamental consideration following his “emergent theory” of the levels of nature, which the metaphysical reconsiderations of modern science and evolutionism made possible. With mind, “the qualities of feelings become significant.” Here, Dewey refers to the fact that the human being, since it is an animal organism, has a sensuous interaction – marked by affectivity and all the feelings belonging to liking and disliking⁵¹⁴ – with the qualities of external objects, according to a non-dualistic logic wherein passivity and activity are ontologically interconnected. Indeed, in animal organisms, feelings are had, revealing both the organisms’ demands and the consummatory qualities of external objects. And they entail the activation in the animal organism of instinctual sensory-motor reactions devoted to sensuously select elements of external situations to practically act on outer qualitative objects for the organism’s self-reproduction and self-

⁵¹¹ LW 3, pp. 49-50.

⁵¹² LW 4, pp. 171-172.

⁵¹³ LW 1, pp. 198-199.

⁵¹⁴ See *Theory of Valuation*, where Dewey gathers the organism’s emotional and affective shades in two gross categories, the ones of “liking” and “disliking” (LW 13, Paragraph III).

development, namely, for the fulfillment of its needs. Nonetheless, unlike other animal organisms, the human being is able to develop a different relation with the feelings emerging from the interaction with external situations and the qualities of outer objects. As Dewey says, “the mental has a recognized claim to serve as a category of description and interpretation of natural existence,”⁵¹⁵ namely, it is a property or quality of activity and behavior able to acknowledge feelings as referring to outer qualitative objects, and to consider the latter in terms of “events [...] characterized by histories, that is, by continuity of change proceeding from beginnings to endings.”⁵¹⁶ The mental, therefore, as the capacity for signification and knowledge, unveils the natural world in its own “significance,” “meaningfulness,” and “intelligibility.” That is, it can grasp qualitative objects as events, rather than as mere singular existences, as *processes* having intrinsic gross features. The first feature is that outer objects and situations, in their qualitiveness, are results of *prior* interactions and a source of *future* interactions, being “both conditioned and conditions,”⁵¹⁷ the “beginning of one course and close of another; [as] both transitive and static.”⁵¹⁸ The second feature is that outer qualitative objects, being results and sources of interactions, are a mixture of certainty and uncertainty, settled and unsettled, uniformity and variations. Indeed, they are results emerging from dynamic interactions among parts, namely, from changes wherein:

[There is] an impressive and irresistible mixture of sufficiencies, tight completeness, order, recurrences which make possible prediction and control, and singularities, ambiguities, uncertain possibilities, processes going on to consequences as yet indeterminate. They are mixed not mechanically but vitally like the wheat and tares of the parable. We may recognize them separately but we cannot divide them, for unlike wheat and tares they grow from the same root. Qualities have defects as necessary conditions of their excellencies; [...] change gives meaning to permanence and recurrence makes novelty possible.⁵¹⁹

Therefore, according to Dewey, the human being’s capacity for signification and knowledge turns the qualitative and sensuous experience of outer objects and situations, or what he names “the gross, macroscopic, crude subject-matters in primary experience,”⁵²⁰ into objects of reflection. That is, the singular and unique qualitative objects, to which the subject has direct

⁵¹⁵ LW 3, p. 48.

⁵¹⁶ LW 1, p. 6.

⁵¹⁷ LW 1, p. 74.

⁵¹⁸ LW 1, p. 85.

⁵¹⁹ LW 1, p. 47.

⁵²⁰ LW 1, p. 15.

access through sensuous feelings, are turned into “derived objects of reflections,”⁵²¹ into “symbolic unities,” “representatives,” “surrogates,” or “signs,” having different functions. On the one hand, real objects turned into concepts and objects of knowledge are abstracted from their immediate occurrence and grasped in the processes and interactions upon which their qualities depend, namely, in the objective conditions that regulate their existence and open up the possibility to govern their future changes. On the other hand, they are tools that can be employed even when objects are not at hand and present. “Events, when once they are named lead an independent and double life. In addition to their original existence, they are subject to ideal experimentation.”⁵²² Through mental operations, from meanings – where objects turn into “signs for an ulterior event”⁵²³ – to knowledge – when objects turned into objects known – real and qualitative objects become sources of possibilities, of changes to be managed, of choices, evaluations, and experimentations to be made.

From this understanding of the mental, therefore, it follows that Dewey, sharing Peirce’s core understanding of the pragmatic nature of concepts and meanings,⁵²⁴ provides a pragmatic interpretation of the human processes of signification and knowledge, both for what concerns their *source*, *mediation*, and *final aim*. For what concerns the practical mediation and final aim of intelligence and knowledge, Dewey points out that modern science, with its new metaphysics, which dropped the existence of final and ideal forms to be merely contemplated

⁵²¹ LW 1, p. 15.

⁵²² LW 1, p. 132.

⁵²³ LW 1, p. 140.

⁵²⁴ In “The Fixation of Beliefs” and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (1877-1878), Peirce exposes and grounds early pragmatists’ shared idea of the pragmatic nature of the mental, concepts, and knowledge. In these essays, he revindicates the practical significance of concepts, which we know what they mean not only by giving an analytic and general definition of them but by pointing out the practical consequences that they entail for human conduct. Therefore, Peirce systematizes the core practical finality of meanings and concepts. As Cheryl Misak (2013) stresses, this practical finality does not entail that meanings and concepts are reduced to bare descriptions of practical patterns of action. Instead, it implies that the general descriptions and discriminations of real objects have an eminently practical function, allowing the subject to behave intelligently and test their adequacy. Like other pragmatist thinkers, Dewey recovers this very general understanding of meanings, concepts, and knowledge, declining and developing it personally and differently. For instance, Dewey’s core intent is to outline a naturalist interpretation of the mental, accounting not only for the practical significance of human concepts, meanings, and categories, but also for the ontological, moral, and social consequences that the pragmatic function of the mental entails for the interaction of the human being with the external world. Moreover, as Misak emphasizes, Peirce, James, and Dewey develop the same idea that there can be knowledge only with the practical test of experience, but in a different manner. While Peirce elaborates a very epistemological theory of knowledge aiming at reaching stable truth, James is interested in the subjectivist usefulness of beliefs, and Dewey is more concerned with stressing the necessity for the continuous revision and eventual drop of stable and verified beliefs, focusing on the practical adequacy of knowledge, rather than on its ultimate and final truth. For an analysis of these differences among Peirce, James, and Dewey, see Misak, 2015, Part I and II; Calcaterra, Maddalena & Marchetti, 2015, Ch. 2, 3, 5.

through reason, inaugurates for humanity a different account of knowledge and its procedure or method. “Knowledge is power,” as Bacon said, namely, “control of natural forces.”⁵²⁵ Due to the gross features of life, i.e., interactions, transformations, and changes, knowing the real objects disclosed within experience means investigating their secrets, processes, objective interactions, and conditions of new potential interactions. “Interest shifts from the wholesale essence back of special changes to the question of how special changes serve and defeat concrete purposes; shifts from an intelligence that shapes things once and for all to the particular intelligences which things are even now shaping.”⁵²⁶ Accordingly, knowledge follows from the empirical observation of reality in its qualities and aims at providing generalized descriptions of their underlying processes, whose adequacy and truth depend on the concrete and practical control of these processes, being thus subject to practical experimentation and verification in the primary level of experience. The experimental method of science entails, firstly, that “change [is] going on all the time, that there is movement within each thing in seeming response; and that since the process is veiled from perception the way to know it is to bring things into novel circumstances until change becomes evident.”⁵²⁷ Therefore, empirical reality should be observed and unveiled in its underlying processes and conditioning interactions, whose very truth and adequacy are verified only by manipulating such processes to induce specific changes and pursue particular purposes. Second, it implies that, due to the continuous and ongoing interactions, transformations, and changes among things, and due to knowledge’s task to analyze interdependent changes, knowledge is continuous, progressive, and cumulative, and its cognitive generalizations and descriptions are but regulative tools. As such, they guide the interaction with the outer world and should be employed to further unveil the novelties, the new changes, and interactions growing in nature. They are not fixed and ultimate generalizations, but rather they should be used to further and continuously investigate the real world in itself. Accordingly, “[knowledge] would be a logic of discovery,” while “learning meant growth of knowledge, and growth belongs in the region of becoming, change.”⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ MW 12, pp. 95-96. Moreover, in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Ch. 2) and *Experience and Nature* (Ch. 3), Dewey underlines that modern science’s new account of knowledge was enormously influenced by the historical development of human manufactory and industry, for whose development it was necessary to apply a different method of inquiry, eminently empirical, practical, and experimental.

⁵²⁶ MW 4, p. 11.

⁵²⁷ MW 12, pp. 145-146.

⁵²⁸ MW 12, pp. 96-98.

Modern science, thus, began a metaphysical revolution that allows philosophy to rethink the world in which we live, to re-place the human being in nature, and to provide a completely new conception of subjectivity by overcoming the ontological and epistemological dualism and hierarchy between empirical objects and objects known, body and mind, practice and theory. Meanings and knowledge are dependent on sensitivity and its direct access to qualitative objects, and on empirical and experimental verification occurring within experience. Accordingly, the human body is re-acknowledged in its mediatory role for knowledge. And the ideal and mental processes of signification and knowledge, which rely upon temporary abstractions from particular, pre-reflexive, and immediate qualitative situations, aim both at practically controlling natural changes, penetrating the transformations of nature, and returning to experience with new tools for further investigations and inquiry.

[It is necessary] to invite attention to the relationships between the objects of primary and secondary or reflective experience. That the subject-matter of primary experience sets the problems and furnishes the first data of the reflection which constructs the secondary objects is evident; it is also obvious that test and verification of the latter is secured only by return to things of crude or macroscopic experience – the sun, earth, plants and animals of common, every-day life. But just what role do the objects attained in reflection play? Where do they come in? They explain the primary objects, enable us to grasp them with understanding instead of just having sense-contact with them.⁵²⁹

In this sense, for Dewey, feelings are not merely had by the human being. They disclose to the human being an access to the world that does not remain merely aesthetic, consummatory, final, or instinctively managed. Instead, they provide a direct access to nature's own qualities while allowing the human subject to unveil their underlying intelligibility, i.e., their processes of occurrence, objective conditions, and possibilities for change. Thus, a naturalistic interpretation of the world and the human being, according to Dewey, discloses the possibility to rethink human activity as additionally having a mental property or quality, with a profound meaning and role: that of intelligent and enhanced administration of life's processes in their qualitative significance. The aim of Dewey's pragmatist thinking, thus, is to reveal that the human subject, through meanings and knowledge, ceases to be an idle spectator of qualitative objects, turning into an active and mediatory partaker in the processes of life. Indeed, the gross difference between other animals and the human being is that the world's qualities disclosed by feelings are not merely had, perceived, and instinctively managed. But rather, they are

⁵²⁹ LW 1, pp. 15-16.

perceived in their intrinsic intelligibility, thus turning intelligible and mental tools – concepts and knowledge grasping the underlying ontological processes of objects – into regulative tools for practice. “They enable identification and discrimination of things to take place as means in a further course of inclusive interaction.”⁵³⁰ Therefore, through mental life, the gross qualities of existence reach a further level of complexity than in the inorganic and organic degrees of life. While the organic dimension of the human being entails its possibility to have a direct access to the changes going on in nature, the capacity for signification and knowledge allows the human being to unveil the intelligible order of changes occurring in the external world, practically manipulating and directing them in a significant and meaningful manner and leading intentionally and purposefully to specific and stabilized changes. It follows that, in the human being, the interactions and transactions with outer things and environmental conditions reach a plurality, a variety, and a richness not achieved by inorganic and organic entities. Indeed, external objects are not merely perceived in their single occurrence and managed through mechanical or instinctual sensory-motor selections. They are known and signified in their processes and objective conditions of occurrence, displayed and uncovered in the unperceived interacting parts that generate their qualitateness. In a nutshell, life, as an order of change and interacting parts, is disclosed as such, penetrated, and directed towards new wider transformations and changes. Transformation is intelligently conducted, and thus enhanced, enforced; while change is planned, directed, investing a variety of natural objects, and sustained in its occurrence and further potentialities.

IX. 2. Human Action as the Enhancement of Life

Nonetheless, according to Dewey, as modern and contemporary history forcefully shows, the reconsideration, made possible by science, of human subjectivity, its cognitive capacity, and interaction with the natural world, often loses sight of the humanistic significance and role of the human being’s capacity for action in life. Indeed, modern science, in its application within industrial and capitalist societies, often leads to culturally and socially considering the “power over nature” as a finality that the human being should pursue for its own sake, thus conceiving the cognitive penetration of nature as an end in itself, regardless of

⁵³⁰ LW 1, p. 199.

the neediness characterizing the sensuous and qualitative interaction and transaction between the human being and the external environment. To say it better, science and human societies can lose sight of the ultimate humanistic function of the human processes of signification and knowledge. That is, the very *source* of human cognition, destined to unveil within empirical experience the intelligible processes of objects to control them, is the *neediness* of the human subject, which is an animal organism dependent on the external world for its survival, well-being, and development.⁵³¹

Many modern thinkers, influenced by the notion that knowledge is the only mode of experience that grasps things, assuming the ubiquity of cognition, and noting that immediacy or qualitative existence has no place in authentic science, have asserted that qualities are always and only states of consciousness. [...] Without a basis in qualitative events, the characteristic subject-matter of knowledge would be algebraic ghosts, relations that do not relate. [...] From the standpoint of causal sequence, or the order with which science is concerned, qualities are superfluous, irrelevant, immaterial. [...] [It] takes the subject-matter of knowledge to be exclusive and exhaustive – as much as modern philosophy has done – they form a most perplexing problem, a mystery. [...] They alone [qualities], as we say, are of interest, and they are the cause of taking interest in other things. For living creatures they form the natural platform for regarding other things. They are the basis, directly or indirectly, of active response to things. As compared with them, other things are obstacles and means of procuring and avoiding the occurrence of situations having them.⁵³²

In this long quotation from *Experience and Nature*, Dewey contests that modern science, in its development and application within human societies, often misinterprets the functional and humanistic role of human reason and knowledge, contradictorily ending up detaching the latter from its origin within qualitative and sensuous human experience, which stands for the very original source and final aim of knowledge. Indeed, the naturalistic Evolutionism's primary contribution was to re-acknowledge the human subject in terms of a natural and embodied organism, thus self-reproducing, self-constituting, and self-developing through the sensuous and practical interactions with outer qualitative objects. Nonetheless, the primary reason for the human being's pre-cognitive and sensitive access to the outer world's own qualities, namely, the growth of the organism, is frequently abandoned or overlooked by

⁵³¹ Dewey criticizes modern science in different works, pointing out precisely its risk to lose sight of the humanistic and social significance of any form of scientific knowledge. Dewey's primary objects of critique, in this sense, are, on the one hand, the societies wherein science is "compartmentalized," thus being severed from the real needs of social members and not socialized in its results. On the other hand, Dewey criticizes those societies where science and knowledge are employed for bare instrumental and individualistic materialist purposes, thus losing sight of the spiritual, social, and ethical connubium of material needs with social needs (see, for instance, MW 12, pp. 164-165; LW 1, Ch. III; LW 2, Ch. III; LW 5 [pp. 41-124]; Dewey, 1973, Lecture XV).

⁵³² LW 1, pp. 75-87.

science and human societies. Indeed, science often overestimates the role of human cognition with respect to primary experience, namely, the qualitative and sensuous interaction occurring between the human being and external objects and situations. It deems that knowledge can develop, i.e., grow and be verified, only through empirical experiences. But, nonetheless, it assumes that, since cognition entails the abstraction from particular and qualitative situations in order to grasp the causal processes underlying the occurrence of external objects, these latter's qualities and the consequent sensuous needs and feelings of human beings are but superfluous considerations, merely private and thus to be excluded and severed from the knowledge of nature as such. According to this contradictory approach, which "forgets" the very origin of knowledge and the natural dimension of the human being as endowed with needs, cognition and knowledge are "compartmentalized," with two interconnected dysfunctional effects. The first one is that the import of the mental on human experience and existence within the world and nature is completely overlooked and erased, and thus, the very place and role of the human being within nature fails to be considered in its normative meaning. The second one is that cognition and knowledge completely abandon their real source, reason, and final task.⁵³³

In these considerations, Dewey's specific use of the naturalistic metaphysics disclosed by modern science and the descriptive and normative task he confers to a naturalistic anthropology are disclosed. To start with the first issue, he deems it necessary to recover the metaphysical perspective revealed by modern science and Evolutionism in order to overcome the several dualisms entailed by traditional metaphysics. These dualisms indeed led human subjects to introject and embody a self-conception, account of knowledge, and understanding of the social world, implying a dangerously passive, contemplative, and conservatory interaction with the external world, both natural and social. In opposition to this metaphysical account, modern science and naturalistic Evolutionism entirely questioned the traditional account of the natural world and the human being, by recovering the ontological unity and continuity within nature and pointing out the gross features of existence, namely, interactions, practical transformations, and change. Accordingly, three significant contributions followed.

⁵³³ For a reconstruction of Dewey's personal experience of industrialism, capitalism, and technological science in Chicago and New York, and their influence on his philosophical thinking, see Westbrook, 1991, Ch. 4, 7, 11. Westbrook also analyzes Dewey's opposition and philosophical-political production against World War II and the tremendous contribution of science's new technologies. To identify Dewey with a bare instrumentalist thinker, due to his positive valuation of the practical human control of processes and the novelties of technologies, would be misleading. He condemns a blind, selfish, disrespectful, aimless, or to-gain-power exploitation of the outer world. Knowledge should be a tool to enhance life's qualities and the profound, ontological unity and interdependence among its parts. On this point, see also Särkelä, 2020.

(I) Life, as such, is the presence of transformative interactions and transactions among parts, namely, change.

(II) The world is a mixture of settled or uniformity and contingency and variations, an order of changes.

(III) The human being is a natural being, an animal organism whose life is maintained, reproduced, and developed only due to a constitutive interaction with the external surroundings and its qualitative objects. Therefore, the subject is a needy creature characterized by lack and deficiencies that only a practical interaction and transaction with the qualities of external objects can supply and fulfill. As for other animals, between subjectivity and objectivity, there is a reciprocal interpenetration: the human being defines its needs, and therefore itself, only in relation with outer objects and their own qualities. These qualities “[belong] to the things as well as to us,”⁵³⁴ since they reveal something of the subject, of its structure, and needs. Hence, according to Dewey, the naturalistic paradigm of Evolutionism allows the theorist and the subject to reconsider subjectivity and objectivity, subjective and objective, not as two separate poles, acting on each other exteriorly. Instead, it permits the acknowledgment of the ontological unity between human subjectivity and objectivity, the dependence of subjectivity upon external qualitative objects, which define the subject’s needs and thus belong also to its living process, and the reciprocal transformation, both passive and active, occurring between subjectivity and objectivity for the sake of ontological unity. “In life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges.”⁵³⁵

Indeed, sensations, feelings, and emotions belong to the subject, but “[they] belong to the self that is concerned in the movement of events toward an issue that is desired or disliked.”⁵³⁶ The non-cognitive, affective, and qualitative level of human experience, thus, should not be intended in introspective and merely subjectivist terms, as mere interior and private contents to be disregarded in the very process of knowledge to focus only on the mechanic processes of cause and effect sustaining outer objects. According to Dewey, the contradiction which science and industrial societies often incur is to forget that the pre-propositional, non-cognitive, and sensuous dimension of human experience is a vivid demonstration of the illusory dualism between “subjective” and “objective.” In the first place,

⁵³⁴ LW 1, p. 91.

⁵³⁵ LW 10, p. 24. On Dewey’s metaphysical considerations on the “mergence” or “fusion” of subjectivity and objectivity, see also Bernstein, 1961; 1971, Part III.

⁵³⁶ LW 10, pp. 48-49.

feelings, emotions, and sensations arise and are dependent on *objective conditions* with which the subject interacts. That is, they spring from the affecting or transformative effect that outer objects' qualities have on the human subject, as representing something valuable, negatively or positively, for its self-reproduction and well-being. Moreover, it follows that their affective side is intrinsically and functionally connected with the organism's motor attitude, initiating, and preparing an action aiming at dealing with and consuming outer objective qualities.⁵³⁷ Emotions and feelings are pragmatic. They are motor attitudes leading to actions, which bring about "consequences," namely, transformations of outer situations that, respectively, will newly interact and affect the human subject in a progressive and continuous experiential circuit. According to Dewey, feelings and emotions, conducive to the gross categories of *liking* and *disliking*, should be recognized in their functional role in "getting a living," in surviving in the external environment, as standing for "observable and identifiable modes of behavior."⁵³⁸

As behavioral the adjective 'affective-motor' is applicable, although care must be taken not to permit the 'affective' quality to be interpreted in terms of private 'feelings' – an interpretation that nullifies the active and observable element expressed in 'motor.' For the 'motor' takes place

⁵³⁷ Concerning the motor dimension of emotions and feelings, Dewey also criticizes British Empiricism. This philosophical tradition was fundamental, according to Dewey, for its recovery of the primacy of empirical experience, but it was an object of Dewey's critique for several reasons. For instance, Dewey, like other early pragmatists, refuses its "myth of the given," namely its belief in the absolute veridic content of feelings and sensations, which affect a merely passive and empty mind, for it does not account for the shaping activity of the subject (and social world) in empirical experience. Moreover, it completely overlooked the sensuous and practical significance of sensitivity, conceiving it as severed from practice. This severance entails that British Empiricism also misunderstood the function of knowledge, according to Dewey, as aiming not at the mere theoretical possession of objects, but rather at the practical enhancement of outer qualities. For an overview of Dewey's relation to British Empiricism, see Misak, 2013, Ch. 1, 7; Bernstein, 2010, Ch. 1, 2, 3.

⁵³⁸ LW 13, p. 202. The issue of the affective-motor function of human emotions has been technically analyzed in specific by Dewey in the two essays, *The Theory of Emotions. (1) Emotional Attitudes* (1894) and *The Theory of Emotions. (2) The Significance of Emotions* (1895). Here, Dewey criticizes Darwin's theory of emotions and emotional facial expressions since it entails a psychological fallacy. According to this theory, emotional facial expressions – namely, the motor side of affectivity – have the function to publicly express the emotions undergone by the subject. The psychological fallacy of the theory, according to Dewey, lies in its illegitimate conclusion that since emotional facial expression can be interpreted by an observer and associated with a certain emotion, then the emotional facial expression has *in se* an expressive intent. According to Dewey, the motor side of emotions is due to their practical function for the organism's survival in the external environment. The distinction between emotion and facial or motor reaction is, in fact, misleading since emotions are in themselves a kind of attitude. Following James-Lange's "theory of retro-action," according to Dewey, emotions should be intended as attitudes, namely, organic discharges of bodily energy that are due to some disturbance of the habits through which the organism deals with the external environment, which prepares and conditions an attitude to action, namely, a further complex pattern of action to deal with outer situations. This does not mean that, for Dewey, emotional facial expressions do not play a *fundamental* social role in the interactions among individuals, but only that their occurrence is primarily due to the activation of motor attitudes. Therefore, Dewey overcomes any dualistic conception of experience: emotions, purpose, and action are ontologically interconnected with each other and are distinguishable only theoretically. For an overview of the 19th century's debate on emotions between Darwin, James, Lange, and Dewey, see Caruana & Viola, 2018.

in the public and observable world, and, like anything else taking place there, has observable conditions and consequences.⁵³⁹

Hence, due to the ontological interpenetration of the organism and the external environment, according to Dewey, it is necessary to drop any subjectivist or introspectionist understanding of the human being's non-cognitive, pre-reflexive, affectional, and qualitative experience of the outer world in light of a theoretical perspective that overcomes the dualism between subjective and objective. Feelings and emotions are subjective since they are had by the organism; but, at the same time, they are objective since they have objective conditions of arousal and entail objective consequences on outer things due to their motor and practical function in conditioning an action devoted to deal with external situations.

Therefore, according to Dewey, two fundamental elements are at hand to rethink, not only descriptively but also normatively, the place, the role, and the quality of the human being's activity in nature. The first element is the metaphysical reconsideration of the natural and living world – as a process of interactions, transformations, and order of change, i.e., an intermixture of the settled and the uniform with the uncertain and the various. The second element is the anthropological redefinition of the human subject, in the first place, as an embodied, sensuous, and practical organism, which is embedded into an objective outer world with which it is interpenetrated for its self-survival, self-development, and well-being. Only by maintaining that these two elements are continuously interconnected, both from a descriptive and normative point of view, is it feasible for Dewey to really grasp the very function of the mental, i.e., signification and knowledge, and the humanistic significance of the human being's capacity for action. Indeed, human knowledge and cognition have not a value *in se* and *per se*, namely, they are not destined to provide a description, definition, and control on the world for its own sake. On the contrary, they develop as *functions* of the human being's experience, i.e., of its sensuous and practical interactions with the outer world, characterized by the need and desire for outer qualities exposed to contingency, variations, and instability. On the one hand, “where there is change, there is of necessity numerical plurality, multiplicity, and from variety comes opposition, strife. Change is alteration, or ‘othering’ and this means diversity. Diversity means division, and division means two sides and their conflict.”⁵⁴⁰ On the other hand, “want, desire, affection of every sort, indicate lack. Where there is need and desire [...] there is

⁵³⁹ LW 13, pp. 202-203.

⁵⁴⁰ MW 12, pp. 141-142.

incompleteness and sufficiency.”⁵⁴¹ The mental, namely, signification and knowledge, are really parts of the natural world since they develop in terms of primary tools to deal with the contingency and variety of the natural world by strengthening, in contrast, its uniformity, namely, the intrinsic intelligibility that lies under change: orders of interactions and relationships among parts. And the primary and final aim of knowledge, in unveiling and strengthening the intelligibility of the outer world, is to secure and enhance the qualities of outer objects and situations that are valuable for the subjects and testify the intrinsic ontological interdependence, continuity, and interpenetration between the human being and the outer world.

If we start from primary experience, occurring as it does chiefly in modes of action and undergoing, it is easy to see what knowledge contributes – namely, the possibility of intelligent administration of the elements of doing and suffering. [...] To be intelligent in action and in suffering (enjoyment too) yields satisfaction even when conditions cannot be controlled. But when there is possibility of control knowledge is the sole agency of its realization. And when we trace the genesis of knowing along this line, we also see that knowledge has a function and office in bettering and enriching the subject-matters of crude experience.⁵⁴²

As is manifest from this quotation, according to Dewey, cognition develops as “the intelligent administration of the elements of doing and suffering” that belongs to the human being due to its embodied, sensuous, and practical relationship with the outer world. Its task of intelligent administration of the elements of doing and suffering is defined not only by the naturally ontological and theoretical interpenetration of subjectivity with objectivity but also by the intrinsic features belonging to life and its consequent intermixture of uniformity and variety, certain and uncertain. Indeed, there is knowledge *since* life, as such, is crossed by continuous chains of interactions, transformations, and changes, in which nonetheless, there is the possibility to find out processes of interacting things, relationships, order, continuity, and intelligibility. In the world, due to instability, dependence, deficiencies, and lack, there are needs and desires. And due to the co-presence of stability and intelligible interactions among parts, there are profound urgency and potentiality for control.

With control, Dewey means *control* of objective changes and their underlying processes, *valuation* of objective qualities as “events” or “histories” where things reciprocally relate, thus, as occurrences that can be enhanced and secured. In a nutshell, in the world in which we live

⁵⁴¹ MW 12, p. 143.

⁵⁴² LW 1, p. 29.

and in the degree of adaptation belonging to the human being as a specific part of nature, there are potentialities for *choice* and *purpose*, rather than for mere mechanical and instinctual patterns of action to deal with the outer world. Accordingly, the perception, description, and definition of “the relationships among what is done and what is undergone” is “the work of intelligence.”⁵⁴³ Intelligence is the evaluation of the objective conditions regulating outer objects for the identification of a functional pattern of action. That is, the pattern of action suitable to transform external conditions, situations, and objects for securing the human being’s significant fulfillment of its needs and strengthening the qualities of the external environment. “[Intelligence converts] the relations of cause and effect that are found in nature into relations of means and consequence,” finding out the proper organization of behavior that is functional to transform outer conditions not for the mere reproduction of the organisms and the accidental restoration of its unity with the external environment, but for the growth of its living interaction with the external world. Through signification and knowledge, the human being maintains the sensuous, practical, and transformative interaction that, like other animal organisms, it has with the external environment. But, additionally, it is able to turn the instinctual and pre-reflexive aspect belonging to animals’ interaction with the outer world – thus still maintaining degrees of exteriority and mechanicism with outer objects – into a purposeful, evaluated, and enhanced one.

In the human being, cognition is not a property having a value or distinguishing the human being from the rest of nature for its mere possession. Instead, it is a property or a capacity whose real value and function can be grasped only in its integration in the totality of human experience, namely, in the human being’s overall constitutive interaction with the external world. If cognition is referred to the general and whole interaction that the human organism undertakes with the objective world, it is feasible, for Dewey, to grasp the very place and humanistic role of the human being’s activity in nature. That is, cognition confers to the human being’s activity in the external world, in its office of bettering the doings and suffering of experience through an intelligent transformation of objective conditions, the distinguishing quality and capacity to “reconstruct human experience” and to “reshape existence.”⁵⁴⁴ The reconstruction of human experience and the reshaping of existence are the two meanings and forms in which the human being’s capacity to operate “a practical and progressive idealism” or

⁵⁴³ LW 10, p. 52.

⁵⁴⁴ MW 12, pp. 120-134.

“idealization” of nature, both internal and external nature, self-expresses. From a normative point of view, this human capacity to idealize nature and life does not involve giving meaning to life from without. Instead, it signifies the unveiling of its intrinsic intelligibility, the practical strengthening of its own qualities and values, the enhancement of the practical and ontological unity between its parts, and the improvement of its gross features, namely, the plurality and richness of its qualitative interactions, the occurrence of its transformations, and the dynamism of its changes.

Therefore, the descriptive metaphysics of the world in which we live and the philosophical anthropology of the human being’s capacity for action as a specific manifestation of the natural world, should lead, according to Dewey, to a normative understanding of the task and role of the human being’s activity. It provides tools to understand how we act and *should* act and live. Dewey’s final consideration, hence, is that the human being should not shape the world arbitrarily and idealistically and sever itself emotionally, theoretically, and practically, from the empirical world. Moreover, it should not merely control the world’s processes for its own sake or instrumentally. Instead, it should humanly improve and enhance life by significantly reconstruing its neediness, practical interaction, and ontological interdependence with the qualities of the outer world and by reshaping life to improve its gross features. The human being can regain its capacity for action only in the strict re-acknowledgment and respect for the living world’s own features and in the recovery of its natural humanity. It has a responsibility to life.

Men move between two extremes. They conceive of themselves as gods, or feign a powerful and cunning god as an ally who bends the world to do their bidding and meet their wishes. Disillusionized, they disown the world that disappoints them; and hugging ideals to themselves as their own possession, stand in haughty aloofness apart from the hard course of events that pays so little heed to our hopes and aspirations. But a mind that has opened itself to experience and that has ripened through its discipline knows its own littleness and impotencies. [...] But it also knows that its juvenile assumption of power and achievement is not a dream to be wholly forgotten. It implies a unity with the universe that is to be preserved. The belief, and the effort of thought and struggle which it inspires are also the doing of the universe, and they in some way, however slight, carry the universe forward. A chastened sense of our importance, apprehension that it is not a yard-stick by which to measure the whole, is consistent with the belief that we and our endeavors are significant not only for themselves but in the whole.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁵ LW 1, pp. 313-314.

Chapter Ten. The Place of the Human Being in Life

X. 1. Reconstruction of Experience and Reshaping of Existence

It is necessary now to go deeper into Dewey's idea that the human being, standing for a natural being in continuity with the rest of nature, is able to develop a distinguishing kind or quality of living activity with and within the external environment due to its capacity for cognition. The latter indeed seems to allow its activity, unlike that of other animal organisms, to turn into a process of both *liberation* or *reconstruction* of its sensuous and practical experience in the external environment, entailing its capacity to meaningfully fulfill its needs by operating significant transformations of outer conditions, and *reshaping* of existence.

Previously, we have seen that the human being should be reconsidered, first, in its natural dimension of animal organism, dependent, for its self-reproduction and self-development, on the transformative exchange with outer objects, entailing processes of practical consummation and satisfaction.

Wherever there is life, there is behavior, activity. In order that life may persist, this activity has to be both continuous and adapted to the environment. This adaptive adjustment, moreover, is not wholly passive; is not a mere matter of the moulding of the organism by the environment. In the interests of the maintenance of life there is transformation of some elements in the surrounding medium. The higher the form of life, the more important is the active reconstruction of the medium. [...] Such transformation scenes are so familiar that we overlook their meaning. We forget that the inherent power of life is illustrated in them. [...] Experience becomes an affair primarily of doing. The organism does not stand about [...], waiting for something to come turn up. It does not wait passive and inert for something to impress itself upon it from without. The organism acts in accordance with its own structure, simple or complex, upon its surroundings. As a consequence the changes produced in the environment react upon the organism and its activities. The living creatures undergoes, suffers, the consequences of its own behavior. This close connection between doing and suffering or undergoing forms what we call experience.⁵⁴⁶

We have reported this long quotation since, from it, it is feasible to start to untangle the normative meaning of Dewey's naturalistic conception of human activity in terms of an interaction with objectivity wherein the possibility for a significant reconstruction of experience and transformation of the outer world discloses. Herein, Dewey starts from reconsidering that wherever there is a living organism, there is somehow always behavior and activity. Indeed, the

⁵⁴⁶ MW 12, pp. 128-129.

living organism should, in order to survive and self-reproduce, transformatively act on the outer surrounding. Its capacity to satisfy its needs through the consummation of the qualities found in external objects entails, firstly, its sensuous and experiential interaction with the latter, occurring in the forms of the affective undergoing of feelings of pleasure and displeasure, liking and disliking. Secondly, it entails the enactment of a pattern of action, having different degrees of exteriority, namely performed more or less mechanically and instinctively, that is destined not only for a passive adjustment to the environmental conditions. But instead, this pattern of action is devoted to modifying outer conditions, which, respectively, qualitatively reacts upon the organism, entailing the restless living interaction and transformation occurring between the organism and the rest of life. Every inorganic form of life implies accidental interactions and transformations between parts, and thus changes, while every organic form of life, with increasing complexity, strives for the continuation of the interactions with outer objects and the transformation of external conditions through activity, namely, through mechanical (such as in plants) or instinctive (such as in animals) patterns of action, determined by their organic structures. Organic entities act or behave, and the process of action with and within the outer world should be named, according to Dewey, “experience.”

With “experience,” Dewey refers to “an affair primarily of doing,” namely to a process broader than the affective, sensitive, qualitative, and emotional one usually named “experience” by philosophy, for instance, British Empiricism. Indeed, Dewey acknowledges⁵⁴⁷ that British Empiricism was fundamental, in the history of ideas, for the recovering of the primacy of empirical experience, sensitivity, and sensations in the relation between the human individual and the outer world. Nonetheless, it entirely overlooked the primary practical import of the pre-reflexive, sensitive, and emotional level of experience, which, by disclosing the world’s qualities to the organism, is destined to render possible and continuative the reproduction of the natural being through and within the external environment. Therefore, according to Dewey, “experience,” on the one hand, is *holistic*. That is, it is the overall process of practical transformations occurring between the organism and the outer environment, wherein the pre-reflexive, qualitative, sensitive, and sensuous level of the organism’s interaction with the external environment is ontologically and un-dualistically interconnected with the practical and motor one. Accordingly, experience cannot be dualistically conceived in terms of the mere

⁵⁴⁷ See, for instance, MW 12, Ch. 4; LW 1, Ch. 6. For an analysis of Dewey’s and the pragmatist’s recovery and critique of British Empiricism of the 17th century, see Misak, 2013; Bernstein, 2010; Calcaterra, 2003.

affective and sensuous level of the organism's interaction with objectivity, severed from or irrelevant for action and adaptation to and of the outer environment. In its dependence and self-constitution with the external environment, the organism has feelings, emotions, sensuousness that have *in se* a functional import for action and behavior, namely, the continuation and reproduction of the living organism; and behavior and action take form only according to the outer objects' sensuous qualities disclosed through sensuousness and sensitivity.

It follows that, for Dewey, experience is "a matter of doing." It is the totality of the transformative interactions occurring between the organism and the outer world for the sake of survival, development, and self-constitution, wherein the difference between the sensuous and the practical level of the organism's objective interactions is but a theoretical and analytical distinction that in the living process does not exist. In the living process, there is *mergence* and *overlap* between organism and objectivity, sensitivity or sensuousness and action, moulding and transformation. The organism's final aim is action or behavior destined to reach the harmonious interdependence with the external environment and the consummation of its qualities. For animal organisms, these levels, the sensuous/sensitive and the motor/practical one, are all phases of the organism's behavior but with different qualitative focus.

An experience has a unity that gives it its name [...]. This unity is neither emotional, practical [...] for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it. In discourse about an experience, we must make use of these adjectives of interpretation. In going over an experience in mind after its occurrence, we may find that one property rather than another was sufficiently dominant so that it characterizes the experience as a whole.⁵⁴⁸

All the organic entities – and especially animals, which have higher and more complex organic and sensitive structures than plants, and thus wider and less mechanical interactions with outer objects – experience or behave constitutively with the outer world. Their experiences with the outer world are not only holistic. Moreover, they are restless and continuous with one another, namely, at the same time various, projective, and unified into a living circuit. In fact, the transformations achieved in the external surroundings entail, respectively, the qualitative change of outer objects, new qualitative interactions between the organism's sensuousness and outer objects, and the new progressive adjustment of the organism's action for attaining

⁵⁴⁸ LW 10, p. 44.

consummation and fulfillment, in a restless projection and continuity. In life, outer situations, objects, organisms, and their actions change interdependently and situationally.

According to Dewey, human beings are subject to the gross features of existence and share with other animal organisms the same ontological interdependence with outer objects' qualities. Since they are animal organisms, human beings live due to the sensuous, emotional, and affective openness to the external world's valuable qualities. And their life depends on the necessity to practically operate a transformation of the outer surroundings for consummation. Furthermore, they can reproduce only through the restless projection of their experience – in its sensuous and practical levels – according to the changes of outer conditions, whose transformations are caused both by the organism's behavior and by the autonomous changes undergone by external objects through the interactions with the rest of life. Nonetheless, due to its capacity for signification and cognition, the human being can reach a *significant reconstruction* of its experience, namely, of its interaction or behavior with objectivity, devoted to achieving an harmonious unity with the external environment and satisfying its needs. With “reconstruction of experience,” Dewey does not mean the creation of an experience *de novo*, regardless of actual interactions occurring between the human being and the organism. Instead, he refers to the reformulation of *de facto* experience into a liberating experience, aligned with and enhancing the life-process. Indeed, the human being can give meaning to its sensuous feelings of liking and disliking towards outer objective qualities or values. According to Dewey, the capacity to signify the sensuous and emotional interaction with objectivity entails that the human subject, unlike other animal organisms, can develop, from its pre-reflexive feelings of liking and disliking, *interests*, can turn outer qualities or values into something to be accomplished, its instinctual transformative behavior into intelligent conduct of transformation, the mere satisfaction of its needs for self-reproduction and well-being into the intelligent fulfillment of its needs, leading to an enhanced and harmonious practical and ontological unity with outer life and the external environment.

Thanks to cognition, i.e., signification and knowledge, the human being reformulates and reconstructs the chain between needs-demands-satisfaction. Previously, we have seen that Dewey defines “need” as follows:

Every need, say hunger for fresh air or food, is a *lack* that denotes at least a temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings. But it is also a *demand*, a reaching out into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium. Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march

of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it – either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.⁵⁴⁹

Every need entails a *lack* or a *deficiency* of the organism, which, it follows, is crossed by an internal tensional energy and temporarily misses an adequate adjustment or equilibrium with the external environment. The occurrence of a need implies the development of a *demand*, namely, the searching for an outer objective value, i.e., an external qualitative object or situation that is valuable for the organism for its self-reproduction and self-constitution. All the sensuous feelings classifiable into the categories of liking and disliking, namely, pleasure and pain, are the pivotal tools through which the organism has access to the outer world's values. In other animal organisms, feelings entail the activation of instinctual, i.e., predetermined and pre-reflexive, patterns of action, whereas in the human being, these feelings, from being had, can be valued in their objects of arousal, and therefore, in themselves. Indeed, they can be intelligently valued, for they do not merely enact instinctive reaction for consummation but instead “they are such as to provide material for propositions about observable events – propositions subject to empirical test and verification or refutation.”⁵⁵⁰ In the human being, thanks to cognition, feelings of liking and disliking can be consciously conceived in their being forms of “desiring.” That is, they are referred directly “to an existing situation and indirectly to a future situation which it is intended and desired to produce,”⁵⁵¹ thus introducing between the sensory-motor attitude of feelings in initiating an act for consummation and the instinctual activity devoted to the fulfillment of a need a moment of intelligent consideration. According to Dewey, this moment of consideration values the existing objective quality desired *significantly*, as an event or sign. That is, it acknowledges it as the result of conditioning processes of occurrence that can be practically regulated and guided in order to reach a future situation or object wherein the pressing need is not contingently, unsteadily, and blindly satisfied, but rather it is securely, significantly, and more profoundly fulfilled, with the

⁵⁴⁹ LW 10, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁵⁰ LW 13, p. 201.

⁵⁵¹ LW 13, p. 202.

institution of an extended, harmonious, and deeper union and interdependence of the human being with the external environment.

Therefore, Dewey forcefully underlines the *secondary* and *derivative* character of the mental with respect to the human being's experience, i.e., sensuous and practical transactions with outer objects. This secondary occurrence of intelligence does not suggest that signification and theorizing are irrelevant or dualistically separated from human feelings and practice. On the contrary, according to Dewey, an un-analyzed world entails "an impoverished and truncated experience."⁵⁵² Thus, reason should be intended as a "function" of the human being's sensuous and practical transaction with the outer world. As breathing allows lungs and air to realize their potentialities and unity, intelligence is a functional activity that permits the human being to enrich its experience or transaction with the external world, which acquires the additional property of meaningfulness and significance, empowering and liberating new potentialities.

Hence, according to Dewey, feelings of liking and disliking are valued by the human being in their qualitative object of arousal, leading to the constitution of an *interest*, namely, an activity emotionally, intelligently, and objectively mediated that seeks a certain end, object, or situation to be brought about for the enhancement of the quality and the significant fulfillment of the need. Emotional and sensuous activity no longer enacts instinctual and mechanical motor reactions but refers to a future object or "end in view," to be practically accomplished through an organized activity, which is "[the] condition of realization of harmony."⁵⁵³

X. 2. The Category of Interest

The word "interest" suggests in a forcible way the active connection between personal activity and the conditions that must be taken into account [...]. Even in etymology it indicates something in which both a personal and surrounding conditions participate in intimate connection with one another. In naming this something that occurs between them it names a transaction. It points to an activity which takes effect through the mediation of external conditions. When we think, for example, of the interest of any particular group, say the bankers' interest, the trade-union interest, or the interest of a political machine, we think not of mere states of mind but of the group as a pressure group having organized channels in which it directs action to obtain and make secure conditions that will produce specified consequences. Similarly, in the case of singular persons, when a court recognizes an individual as having an interest in some matter, it recognizes that he

⁵⁵² LW 10, p. 137.

⁵⁵³ LW 10, p. 21.

has certain claims whose enforcement will affect an existential issue or outcome. Whenever a person has an interest in something, he has a stake in the course of events and in their final issue – a stake which leads him to take action to bring into existence a particular result rather than some other one.⁵⁵⁴

In this long quotation from *Theory of Valuation* (1939), Dewey provides a definition of his category of “interest,” which, as we have previously seen, plays a fundamental role in the program for social philosophy he presented in the *Lectures in China* in 1919-1920, wherein, nonetheless, it is not deeply analyzed in its naturalistic meaning and disentangled in its normative implications. Accordingly, in *Theory of Valuation*, Dewey clearly defines “human interest” in terms of a personal activity emotionally, intelligently, and objectively mediated,⁵⁵⁵ whose descriptive and normative meaning should be grasped as follows.

I. In the human being, thanks to cognition, the immediate conscious feelings and emotions arising from experience within the outer world turn into *interests* since these feelings are not only consciously felt. Instead, they are rationally evaluated in terms of *personal* emotional activities, belonging personally to the subject, revealing something in which the subject is interested, namely, a precious or un-precious objective quality. Therefore, human interests are feelings identified by the subject as personal contents, referring to an outer object that substantially says something of the subject and defines its individuality. Interest is, first, an emotional personal activity through which subjectivity self-consciously defines itself by demanding or desiring an immediate external qualitative object.

⁵⁵⁴ LW 13, pp. 205-206.

⁵⁵⁵ For an analytical and finely detailed analysis of Dewey’s theory of interest, see Santarelli, 2019. In *La vita interessata. Una proposta teorica a partire da John Dewey*, Santarelli reconstructs Dewey’s understanding of the category of interest through the analysis of his early, middle, and late production. In this reconstruction, Santarelli’s aim is twofold. On the one hand, he wants to overcome the analytic carelessness and illegitimate exclusion of Dewey’s theory of interest from the philosophical history of this category. On the other hand, he wants to stress the significance of Dewey’s contribution to the debate on this concept. To accomplish this purpose, Santarelli first reconstructs Dewey’s reflections on the concept of interest, starting from the analysis of *Psychology* (1887) and the early and middle writings on education, such as *Interest in Relation to the Training of the Will* (1896), *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), *Interest and Efforts in Education* (1913), and *Democracy and Education* (1917). In these works, Dewey starts to approach and develop his notion of interest, but, as Santarelli argues, he develops his more mature and significant definition of the concept in his later works, especially in *Theory of Valuation* (1939). In fact, in *Theory of Valuation*, Dewey provides a theory of human interest that does not explain the latter in subjectivist and selfish terms, as the 19th century’s economic theory of human interest presented it. On the contrary, Dewey, as we will see, considered interest as a form of subjective and personal activity that, nonetheless, is not merely subjectivist and selfish, thus severed from any public and objective valuations and destined to the sole benefit of the subject in opposition to the external environment. On the contrary, for Dewey, human interest relies upon objective conditions, which provide both the substantial contents of human personal activity and the verification bench of the “adequacy” and “functionality” of the interest for the human being’s growth. In the second instance, interest, standing for a transaction between subjectivity and objectivity, should be evaluated for its consequences *both* on subjectivity and the external environment.

II. As the etymology of the word, “*inter-esse*” (to stay in-between) suggests, interest, is according to Dewey, a “transaction,” namely, “an activity which takes effect through the mediation of outer conditions.”⁵⁵⁶ Thanks to signification and knowledge, the practical attitudes enacted by feelings and the instinctual motor reactions destined to the consummation of outer objects for the satisfaction of needs are turned into an emotional activity that, due to the valuation of the immediately demanded or desired qualitative object, seeks for the constitution of a future object or situation to be brought about through a reorganization of the instinctual patterns of action in an intelligent activity lying on a coordination of means.⁵⁵⁷ Therefore, interest is an emotional and personal activity wherein the mediation of objective conditions for the satisfaction of pressing needs is not instinctively and mechanically sought and brought about. Instead, the mediation of outer conditions is intelligently and significantly valued. Indeed, the objective qualities emotionally appraised, through meanings and knowledge, are disentangled in their underlying and conditioning processes of cause and effect, with the definition of channels of action destined to manage these causal processes as *means* to bring about specific consequences and results.

For instance, the need for care does not entail in the subject only the activation of biological instincts for the creation of family groups. Rather, it entails the constitution of a not present object or situation wherein the value of care can be intelligently secured and rendered stable through an intelligent inquiry on its processes of occurrence, for examples, the constitution of a family unit having a secure and safe place to live, a certain organization of the family members, certain material and economic conditions for self-sustenance, and certain educational processes. In this way, the existing quality, that of care, can be enhanced and secured, and the need of the subject can be significantly and tensionlessly fulfilled, rather than blindly, contingently, and unintelligently satisfied. Therefore, in human interest, the human being’s immediate feelings are valued through propositions by which the processes of cause and effect underlying outer qualitative objects are unveiled and turned into a series of means to intelligently overcome the tension between the organism and the external environment, reaching a harmonious, implemented, and growing practical unity between the two.

⁵⁵⁶ LW 13, p. 206.

⁵⁵⁷ Accordingly, Santarelli defines Dewey’s category of interest as an activity that is *both* subjective and objective: it does belong to the human being but occurs, is substantially defined, both in its means and end, and is verified in its adequacy only through the mediation of outer conditions, situations, and objects. See Santarelli, 2019, Section II; 2020 (forthcoming).

Dewey names the object of an interest “end-in-view.”

By ends we also mean ends-in-view, aims, things viewed after deliberation as worthy of attainment and as evocative of effort. They are formed from objects taken in their immediate and terminal qualities; objects once having occurred as endings but which are not now in existence and which are not likely to come into existence save by an action which modifies surroundings.⁵⁵⁸

Dewey, with “end-in-view,” means the potential object rising from the intelligent valuation of the objective conditions regulating the occurrence of the objective qualities appraised by the subject. It should be brought about through a chain of specific actions or means that, transforming objective conditions and regulating their change, should create the context wherein the quality reached, e.g., care, and the need of the individual can be significantly merged. Thus, human interest is an emotional and personal activity relying upon the mediation of objectivity but seeking a *particular* end. This end is “in-view” since it is both immanent in the existent situations’ potentialities and transcends actual conditions. The end-in-view is that “object of the environment which, if it were present, would secure a re-unification of activity and the restoration of its ongoing unity.”⁵⁵⁹

Hence, according to Dewey, there is a humanizing and idealizing aim in human interests, namely, the significant re-elaboration, interpretation, channelling, and fulfillment of human needs through more complex and significant interactions with outer conditions. Indeed, the need for care is significantly interpreted and channeled since the general and un-inquired demand for care is turned and mediated into an interest in a family organization, wherein the subject can tensionlessly and harmoniously fulfill its immediate and constitutive demand. This process of humanization should be conceived neither as the bare instrumental exploitation of the outer world by the human being nor as the selfish and only materialistic and consumerist satisfaction of human needs. On the contrary, according to Dewey, the very function of human cognition should be the *enhancement* of life, both objective (external) and subjective (internal) life.

In the first place, the human capacity to turn immediate practical attitudes of liking and disliking into a personal activity emotionally, intelligently, and objectively mediated, should normatively entail, on the one hand, the implementation, securing, and growing of the qualities belonging to the external world itself and disclosed to the human being. It leads to

⁵⁵⁸ LW 1, p. 88.

⁵⁵⁹ MW 14, p. 172.

a *reshaping* of existence in its dynamic qualitiveness and intelligibility. Thus, interest is a form of “humanization” of external nature (both natural and social), which is revealed in its intrinsic meaningfulness and enhanced in those qualities interacting with the human being. On the other hand, through intelligent human activity, the life’s gross features – interactions, transformations, and change – are and should be enhanced. Accordingly, the qualitative transactions occurring between the external environment and the human organism can be extended and expanded in their quantity and quality, while the reciprocal transformations between the two can be broadened and regulated in their restless continuity, bringing to greater meaningful changes in life.

In the second place, through the creation of interests, the organism’s mechanic interpenetration with the external environment turns into a voluntary, intelligent, and enhanced one. Thus, the intrinsic constitutive and interdependent unity of the human being with the outer world can be strengthened.

Hence, the very distinguishing quality of the human being’s activity is the “idealization” or “humanization” of external nature and internal nature. It is an idealization or humanization of external nature since human beings can disclose life’s intelligibility and meaningfulness in their dynamic qualities. It is an “idealization” or “humanization” of human nature itself since, in human activity, the human being’s natural interactions with the outer world, namely, natural human experience, can be intelligently *re-constructed*, leading the subject to reach a self-conception and voluntarily self-realization as a living part interdependent with the rest of life. Accordingly, its needs are not accidentally, blindly, and only materially satisfied. Instead, they are *significantly* fulfilled, with a union of the “ideal” and the “material.” Namely, they are interpreted and channeled into “interests,” which are devoted to the intelligent organization and planification of a chain of actions aiming at converting the obstacles and deficiencies present in the interaction with the external environment into objective and material conditions adequate for a tensionless, harmonious, and increased living unity and interdependence with the rest of life.

The need that is manifest in the urgent impulsion that demand completion through what the environment – and it alone – can supply, is a dynamic acknowledgement of this dependence of the self for wholeness upon its surroundings. It is the fate of a living creature, however, that it cannot secure what belongs to it without an adventure in a world that as a whole it does not own and to which it has no native title. [...] But the impulsion also meets many things on its outbound course that deflect and oppose it. In the process of converting these obstacles and neutral conditions into favouring agencies, the live creature becomes aware of the intent implicit in its

impulsion. The self, whether it succeed or fail, does not merely restore itself to its former state. [...] The attitudes of the self are informed with meanings. [...] Yet what is evoked is not just quantitative, or just more energy, but is qualitative, a transformation of energy into thoughtful action, through assimilation of meanings [...]. [...] It is a re-creation in which the present impulse gets form and solidity, [...] given *new life* and *soul* through having to meet a new situation.⁵⁶⁰

III. Due to the gross features of existence, namely, interactions, transformations, and change, human interests, according to Dewey, should be conceived as *situational* and *projective*, namely *specific* and *multiple*. In fact, we should recall that life, as an ensemble of interacting parts reciprocally transforming one another, is an order of changes, which entails that events or situations, resulting from specific qualitative interactions and transformations, are always specific and unique, both in their occurrence and future development. Thus, human needs are always determined by and arise from specific situations, and thus, their demands refer always to values having specific underlying objective conditions. For instance, the human need for the value or quality of physical health and security always rises in a certain environmental situation, which substantially determines and gives consistency to what, in that situation, health and security are and should be. The specificity of these objective qualities, which result from and are always conditioned by specific and situational interactions among different factors, entails that any human interest, since it is an activity mediated by objective conditions, is always *specific* and, at the same time, *projective* and *multiple* in both its end-in-view and means. “Action is always specific, concrete, individualized, and unique. And consequently, judgments as to acts to be performed must be similarly specific. To say that a man seeks health [...] is only to say that he seeks to live healthily [...]. These things, like truth, are adverbial. They are modifiers of action in special cases.”⁵⁶¹ Therefore, human interests should always be relational to a changing world, should seek a particular end-in-view through a certain chain of means, thus bringing about a particular transformation and change that, respectively, will react upon the individual. Therefore, to develop their humanizing significance, human interests should be relational and specific, and hence, *projective*, dynamically re-adjusted, respectively, in their means and ends in light of new occurring situations.

Needs, from the one in health to the one in care, security, and material reproduction, always entail the institution of interests, such as the interest in having a family, a home or a safe

⁵⁶⁰ LW 10, pp. 65-66. Italics mine.

⁵⁶¹ MW 12, p. 175.

place to live, in work and economy, that should be always *specific*. For instance, the constitution of a family unit represents the end intelligently identified by subjects for reaching and ensuring their need for the value of care and support. Nonetheless, this end should always be *in-view*, *specific*, namely, it should involve the realization of a certain kind of family unit according to the environmental objective conditions, both natural and social, that disclose and define in what “care” consists and how it can be preserved and enjoyed in that specific situation. The end-in-view of creating a family should be substantially defined according to the specific natural environing conditions in which the individual lives, or the economic, religious, and working conditions that impede or should be enhanced to ensure the stable and secure enjoyment and consummation of care by subjects.

Since interests are always specific in their ends, according to the particular processes that sustain the occurrence of the quality demanded, they should be *projective* and, thus, *multiple* both in their *ends-in-view* and the *means* set up to attain them. It follows, according to Dewey, that it is essential to abandon “the absurdity of any ‘end’ which is set up apart from the means by which it is to be attained,” in favor of a non-dualistic theory of the “continuum of end-means.”⁵⁶² Accordingly, Dewey overcomes the dualisms between ends-in-view and means, by stating that, first, any interest’s end-in-view, determined and valued according to actual objective conditions, both defines and is defined by the means identified to accomplish that end. To state an end in view, indeed, means to intelligently value the chain of means or transformations of objective conditions that is adequate to attain the specific desired object, situation, and self-fulfillment. Therefore, as a specific consequence to be attained, the end-in-view is constitutively defined by the means to attain it. “The attained end or consequence is always an organization of activities, where organization is a coordination of all activities which

⁵⁶² LW 13, p. 227. For an analysis of Dewey’s critique of the dualism between ends and means and theory of the continuum of ends-means, see Visalberghi, 1953; Joas, 2000, Ch. 7; Santarelli, 2019, Part II. In overcoming the dualism between end and means, Dewey aims at criticizing and distinguishing its theory from the utilitarian idea that “the end justifies the means,” and, thus, that, for the attainment of enjoyment in action, the process or the means by which the end is attained are apart from the end itself and a priori justified. This view represents, for Dewey, the denial of the very profound meaning of human activity, to be conceived not in terms of a bare satisfaction and reaching of pleasure, but rather as a *process* wherein fulfillment of needs and enjoyment of objective qualities can be reached through the intelligent transformation of objective conditions and the reaching of the very humanizing unity and interpenetration with the outer world. The critique of British utilitarianism and moral theory, mostly in the figures of Bentham and Mill, is a persistent element in Dewey’s production, from the early works (see, for instance, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* [1891] and *The Study of Ethics* [1894]) to the middle and later works (see, for instance, *Ethics* [1908], *Reconstruction in Philosophy* [1920], *Theory of Valuation* [1939]). For an overview of Dewey’s relation to British utilitarianism, wherein criticisms but also the acknowledgment of the latter’s recovery of the dimension of enjoyment and situationality in human moral action are gathered, see Pappas, 2008.

enter as factors.”⁵⁶³ It follows, firstly, that there is not a distinction between “things that are good and right in and of themselves, immediately, intrinsically, and things that are simply good for something else.”⁵⁶⁴ Any means to attain an end-in-view requires effort and should be desired and treated as an end. Secondly, the subject’s effort in realizing the chain of means to attain an end always entails, according to Dewey, a change of situations and circumstances, and thus, “the time of consummation is also one of beginning anew.”⁵⁶⁵ The realization of an end-in-view through the chain of actions or means adequate to reach it always brings determinate consequences and changes of outer situations and, thus, entails the intelligent re-valuation of the end-in-view itself, in its adequacy for the significant fulfillment of the pressing need, and in the means that are necessary to accomplish it. Therefore, both ends and means are objects of valuation, appraisal, and effort, and reciprocally determine and change one another. To conclude, according to Dewey, any interest is, at the same time, *one* – as related to a pressing need – and *multiple* – as changing in its very end-in-view and means according to the mediational, relational, and transformative interaction occurring between the acting subject and outer specific situations and conditions.

According to Dewey, the misleading hypostatization of fixed interests by subjects, and thus, the hypostatization of fixed values and means to accomplish them, are in contrast with the very features of the world in which we live and, thus, with the potentialities for adaptation that are descriptively and normatively disclosed to the human being.

In the process of living, attainment of a period of equilibrium is at the same time the initiation of a new relation to the environment, one that brings with it potency of new adjustments to be made through struggle. The time of consummation is also one of beginning anew. Any attempt to perpetuate beyond its term the enjoyment attending the time of fulfillment and harmony constitutes withdrawal from the world. Hence it marks the *lowering* and *loss* of vitality. [...] Experience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one’s private feelings and sensations, it signifies complete interpenetration of the self and the world of objects and events. Instead of signifying surrender to caprice and disorder, it affords our sole demonstration of a stability that is not stagnation but rhythmic and developing.⁵⁶⁶

In this beautiful quotation from *Art and Experience* (1934), Dewey explicitly clarifies that the human being should be legitimately intended as a specific part of nature that can reshape

⁵⁶³ LW 13, p. 234.

⁵⁶⁴ LW 13, p. 212.

⁵⁶⁵ LW 10, p. 23.

⁵⁶⁶ LW 10, pp. 23-25. Italics mine.

existence and reconstruct experience through intelligent and meaningful actions. Nonetheless, he points out that the interests through which the subject channels its pressing needs, and thus, the categories and meanings through which it signifies the world and organizes plans for action to overcome the obstacles preventing its very unity with the outer world, should always be traced back to life. That is to say, “to their origin in primary experience, in all its heterogeneity and fulness.”⁵⁶⁷ Interests should always be traced back to the restless dynamism of life and of the bodily and sensuous interactions that the human subject has with the outer world. As an animal and natural organism, the subject depends on outer conditions, lives only due to its dynamic sensuous access to the external world, and shares the same gross features of existence. Hence, the human being should reshape and reconstruct life through cognition and knowledge but always maintaining its very participation and sensuous access to life’s dynamism. An unanalyzed world entails a truncated human experience and the loss of meaningfulness in life, while a hypostatized and severed-from-life humanized experience leads, in turn, to a loss of vitality. In the former case, there is an abandonment of an intelligently enhanced and transformed life; in the second case, there is a loss of living vitality and change.

IV. From the idea that the human being, unlike other animal organisms, can reconstruct its experience by turning its immediate feelings into an interest, namely, an emotional and personal activity intelligently and objectively mediated in order to reach a harmonious interaction with outer conditions for the sake of growing life, it follows that interests are objects of empirical and experimental *evaluation*. That is, for Dewey, human interests are not only the embodiments and results of processes of rational *valuation* but can and should be, in turn, objects of *evaluations*, as “good”/ “adequate” or “bad”/ “inadequate” interests.⁵⁶⁸ Accordingly, interests can and should be objects of a second-order of valuation concerning, on the one hand, their humanizing function, i.e., their capacity to *reshape* existence and *reconstruct* human experience to reach a harmonious and dynamic unity of the subject with the external environment, and, on the other hand, concerning their adjustment to the restless dynamism of outer living situations, conditions, and objective qualities.

⁵⁶⁷ LW 1, p. 39.

⁵⁶⁸ For the jargon difference between “valuation” of subjective and objective situations and “evaluation” of interests in Dewey, see Santarelli, 2020, p. 19 (forthcoming). With the second term, Dewey specifically refers to a second-order type of valuation, the one about the intelligent valuation embodied in human interest, concerning its adequacy or inadequacy.

To start with the first aspect to be evaluated, human interests should be considered in the adequacy of their humanizing function, namely, regarding the suitability of their emotional, cognitive, and practical organization in leading to an enriched, significant, and growing practical unity of the human subject with the external environment. This evaluation, according to Dewey, should be carried under two formal criteria:

The first is the adequacy with which inquiry into the lacks and conflicts of the existing situation has been carried on. The second is the adequacy of the inquiry into the likelihood that the particular end-in-view which is set up will, if acted upon, actually fill the existing need, satisfy the requirements constituted by what is needed, and do away with conflict by directing activity so as to institute a unified state of affairs.⁵⁶⁹

Hence, as can be seen from this quotation from *Theory of Valuation*, the humanizing capacity of human interests in both reshaping existence and reconstructing immediate experience is objectively and experimentally tested through the observation of their practical consequences. That is, their adequacy is verified in light of their emotional, cognitive, and practical organization's functionality in allowing the human being to satisfactorily and meaningfully overcome the previous tensional and problematic interaction with outer conditions, reaching a practical unity with the external environment that is harmonious. As we have previously stressed, this harmonious unity with outer conditions does not mean bare "restoration," namely, the merely blind, accidental, and partial satisfaction of the human need through an exploitative and instrumental consummation of desired qualities. But instead, it means the *growth* of the living individual within the external environment. Meaningful growth stands for the expanded, tensionless, and enriched practical unity between the human being and its context of action, for the enhanced, stable, and significant enjoyment of the qualities found in life, and for the individual's growing consciousness of and seeking for its interdependence with the external world. As Dewey clearly points out, there is no growth whenever the subject is, from an objective point of view, practically *stuck* or *blocked* in successfully pursuing its ends-in-view and devoid of a "unified state of affairs," namely, unable to overcome the objective tensions and obstacles that impede its action from being harmonious, its need to be meaningfully fulfilled, and its demanded quality to be fully enjoyed.

The reason for these dysfunctional contexts of practice, objectively observable, can lie, on the one hand, in the *wrong* kind of inquiry employed to deal with the problematic situation.

⁵⁶⁹ LW 13, p. 221-222.

Human inquiry can overlook, for instance, the objective dimension and mediation of the subject's interests, and the proper dynamism of outer situations and consequent change of ends and means. On the other hand, practical dysfunctionality can lie in the *inadequacy* of the interest itself, namely, of the emotional, cognitive, and practical organization by which one seeks to fulfil a specific need, to overcome a tensional and problematic interaction with outer situations, to identify the means for operating functional transformations. Thus, the adequacy or inadequacy of an interest in disclosing the human potential to reshape existence and reconstruct experience is to be conceived as a matter of *experimentation* and as *empirically testable* through the observation of their effective consequences on the contexts of practice.⁵⁷⁰

Instead, the second aspect of interests to be evaluated concerns, according to Dewey, their "living" or "lifeless"/ "dead" quality, namely, the dynamic adjustment or stagnation of their ends-in-view and means in front of the new interactions, transformations, and changes occurring in new living situations. In the previous pages, we have seen that Dewey conceives any interest as *projective* and, thus, *specific* and *multiple* according to the different situations and conditions in which the subject finds itself due to the ongoing changes which the subject and the external environment undergo in their reciprocally transformative interactions. And we have also pointed out that, for Dewey, the intrinsic projection or adjustment of interests to new situations occurs through the continuum of ends-means, for, respectively, the change of the end-in-view in new conditions entails the reorganization of means, i.e., plans of action, while the realization and enactment of means entail the progressive re-definition and re-adjustment of the end-in-view in itself. Wherever interests, in their ends-in-view and means, are hypostatized and rendered static, it is feasible, according to Dewey, to speak of "stagnation" or "a lowering or loss of vitality."⁵⁷¹

In the case of inadequate humanization of experience, the human being fails to successfully pass from the "organic level" of life and experience to the intelligent and transformative potential proper of the human being, namely, of the third degree of life, the one of "mind," leaving its experience un-regulated, un-empowered. While in the case of loss or lowering of vitality, the issue at stake is that the human being interrupts the ontological

⁵⁷⁰ Every interest arises from the valuation of a problematic situation. The valuation of the problem must always be tested in its adequacy in identifying which is the problematic nature of a situation and the solution developed to overcome it. For an analysis of Dewey's notion of problematic situation, see *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Ch. 6; *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Part II. Concerning this point, see also Jaeggi's analysis of Dewey's theory of problematic situation (Jaeggi, 2018, Part IV).

⁵⁷¹ LW 10, p. 25.

continuity existing between the “organic” and “mental” levels of life, to both of which it belongs. That is, it severs its interests or reconstructions of experience from primary organic experience, from the living interactions that, as a natural and animal organism, it has with the rest of life, through which it participates in life, and discloses its very practical potential for enhancement. The subject’s contents and interests, thus, become “lifeless.” Hence, the human being’s capacity for action becomes restricted by static categories, concepts, plans for actions, and delimited in narrow emotional, practical, and transformative potentialities. It loses the living and thus situational dynamics that naturally pertain to the practical subject, as a living and natural organism interacting with orders of changes, and the starting point by which its humanizing potentiality can be enacted, namely, primary and bodily experience. But why can the subject have the tendency to hypostatize its interests, and thus the intelligent plans for action destined to fulfill its needs, regardless of the dynamism of living interactions? Because the human being is required, for its survival, to turn its intelligent patterns of action into habits, with the risk of letting bare unintelligent and rigid mechanicism prevail over reasonable and elastic stability of action.

Concerning this point, it is necessary to integrate the picture of Dewey’s naturalistic theory of human action outlined so far by referring to his category of “habit.”⁵⁷² In Chapter Eight, we saw that in the *Lectures in China* (1919-1920) and, mostly, in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey considers “habit,” intended as a reasonable, routinized, and pre-reflexively enacted pattern of action, as a kind of action that is fundamental for the human being’s survival and development in the external environment. Indeed, according to Dewey, habit is any pattern of action that, once revealed to be reasonable and functional in a prior experience, gets repeated until it is mechanically, pre-intentionally, and pre-reflexively performed. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey explains the fundamental role of habit for human survival and development within the external environment by pointing out its *empowering function*.

Indeed, the stable acquisition, the pre-reflexive embodiment, and the practical mastery of a reasonable pattern of action that is functional to the interaction of the human being with the external environment and, thus, to the meaningful fulfillment of human needs, allow the

⁵⁷² The category of “habit” crosses the entire history of philosophy, from Aristotle to Hume and Bourdieu. For an analysis of Dewey’s contribution to this historical debate and his personal interpretation of habit and its critical potential, see Sparrow & Hutchinson, 2013. Instead, for an overview on Dewey’s theory of action, see Testa, 2017a, 2017b.

subject to dispose of mechanical “ways of using and incorporating the environment.”⁵⁷³ Accordingly, the human subject can successfully manage its dynamic interactions with outer situations and conditions without sensitive, cognitive, volitional, and practical efforts. Therefore, Dewey considers habits as routinized structures of reasonable action, through which the subject pre-intentionally and pre-reflexively enacts a set of emotional, reflexive, and practical potentialities without the intervention of reflexive and propositional considerations and reconstructions.

Habit has an *empowering* function for the subject, according to Dewey, since “the human being differs from the lower animals in precisely the fact that his native activities lack the complex ready-made organization of the animals’ original abilities.”⁵⁷⁴ Accordingly, the human being is biologically deprived of the mechanical quality of animals’ behavior, derived from the strong correlation among sensory stimulus-instincts-functional motor reactions. In fact, the interactions of animals with external conditions are characterized by greater awareness, a greater potential for practical variation, and a greater voluntary effort to survive through external objects than, for example, plants. Moreover, animals’ self-reproduction through the external environment in which they live is ensured by the possession of strong biological instincts, which entail a stable triangulation between sensory impulses selected for self-reproduction and functional patterns of activity for the satisfaction of needs. As we have previously pointed out, the human being should be re-acknowledged as an animal organism for Dewey. But in *Human Nature and Conduct*, he specifies that, due to its more complex biological structure and consequent richness of sensitivity, the human being lacks the strong instinctiveness of lower animal organisms. This means that it is deprived of the rigid relation among sensory stimuli and patterns of motor reactions belonging to animals. Its needy impulses are more “plastic,” directed towards a larger range of outer objects’ qualities, and thus, their fulfillment requires a stronger effort and more complex practical organization of functional patterns of action.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ MW 14, p. 15.

⁵⁷⁴ MW 14, p. 77.

⁵⁷⁵ The theory of the “plasticity” of human impulses and the biological inefficiency of the human organism was widespread in the philosophical anthropologies of the 20th century and was inspired by the new revolutionary biological studies of the time. For a better overview of this biological and anthropological theory, in its spread from the United States to Germany (for example, in Arnold Gehlen’s work), see Honneth & Joas, 1988, part 2; Deranty, 2009, Ch. 3.

It follows that the human organism, to deal with the external environment's overlapping situations and enormous amount of stimuli and reach the temporary "equilibrium" and "the stability that is essential to living,"⁵⁷⁶ is led to implementing the use of habitual activity. This latter's mechanical functioning, acquired through repetition, entails "the incorporation of objective conditions" by the human subject, namely the introjection and embodiment by the subject of the environment in which it lives and acts. Thus, the subject, thanks to habit, not only compensates for a biological deficiency but also empowers its capacity for action according to a very process of learning through repeated praxis. On the one hand, the human being reaches the progressive and wider control of its external environment, the effortless *mastery* of existing situations, and its practical actions, channeled into repeated patterns of actions, become "arts," "techniques." "[...] Habits are art. They involve skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning or craft, and objective materials. They assimilate objective energies, and eventuate in command of environment. They require order, discipline, and manifest technique."⁵⁷⁷

On the other hand, the empowering and learning function of habit lies in the fact that the human being, dealing reasonably but pre-reflexively, without cognitive and volitional efforts, with existing situations for the fulfillment of certain needs, is able to focus its efforts in enjoying, searching for, dealing, and mastering new objective qualities of the outer environment. Habit forming is an "extension of power," namely, a growth of the individual practical unity with the external environment. Indeed, it permits the subject to turn the successful practical results of prior reflexive, intentional, and humanizing activity, i.e., the functional and meaningful organizations of behavior, into stable, embodied, and mastered acquisitions, pre-reflexively, and energy-saving performed.

The "mechanical," or "pre-reflexive" and "pre-intentional," dimension of habit, according to Dewey, should not be understood either in terms of an irrational reaction to existing situations or a bare and blind repetition of the same act. Instead, to be functional, habit should be, firstly, "reasonable," and thus based on a prior experience wherein a certain pattern of action proved to be intelligent, functional, and humanizing in its practical results. Secondly, it should be "projective" or "creative", without standing for the repetition of the same act but for the predisposition to select certain sensitive and reasonable aspects of different situations

⁵⁷⁶ LW 10, p. 20.

⁵⁷⁷ MW 14, p. 20.

and enact general modes of action, which, according to a certain situation, turn into specific and unique deeds.

The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response, not to particular acts except as, under special conditions, these express a way of behaving. Habit means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrence of specific acts. It means will.⁵⁷⁸

Finally, habit should be “elastic,” namely, intelligently re-adjusted whenever new situations, new disruptive emotions, and practical demands, which cannot be successfully managed by existent patterns of action, require a meaningful and humanizing reconstruction of behavior.⁵⁷⁹

Normally, the environment remains sufficiently in harmony with the body of organized activities to sustain most of them in active function. But a novel factor in the surroundings releases some impulse which tends to initiate a different and incompatible activity, to bring about a redistribution of the elements of organized activity between those have been respectively central and subsidiary. [...] Now at these moments of a shifting in activity conscious feeling and thought arise and are accentuated. The disturbed adjustment of organism and environment is reflected in a temporary strife which concludes in a coming to terms of the old habit and the new impulse. [...] Without habit there is only irritation and confused hesitation. With habit alone there is a machine-like repetition, a duplicating recurrence of old acts.⁵⁸⁰

Therefore, according to Dewey, the subject’s turning of successful reflexive, intentional, and volitional patterns of action into habitual and mechanical actions is functional for the subject when habit maintains a certain elasticity. That is, the subject should avoid turning intelligent routinized actions into unintelligent and rigid mechanisms, thus reflexively re-adjusting its patterns of action whenever new qualitative, sensuous, and practical situations objectively demand an intelligent re-interpretation and redefinition of conduct.

Hence, in the *Lectures in China* and *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey presents and considers habit as an essential form of agency for the human being and its development in the external environment, strictly interrelated with reflexive and intentional agency. He does not conceive human action as occurring only on an intentional, reflexive, and voluntary level, but,

⁵⁷⁸ MW 14, p. 32.

⁵⁷⁹ See Testa, 2017b. Here, Testa analyzes Dewey’s theory of habit in terms of an acquired “second nature,” while pointing out the intrinsic creativity, plasticity, and elasticity that should belong to habits to be functional, adequate, or good for the human subject. Moreover, Testa underlines the closeness of Hegel’s concept of “second nature” with Dewey’s.

⁵⁸⁰ MW 14, pp. 125-126.

on the contrary, also on a pre-intentional, pre-reflexive, and pre-propositional one. His account of human action, therefore, attempts to consider as functional and legitimate forms of agency in which both intentionality and propositional cognition, and pre-intentional and pre-reflexive reasonableness are involved. And he does more. That is, he posits intelligence and cognition as tools to reasonably and functionally re-adjust and modify habits when disruptive emotions and sensuousness in the individual's interaction with the external environment reveal new or qualitatively different pressing needs not manageable significantly with existing habits and requiring a cognitive reconstruction of human experience and agency.

Habit is energy organized in certain channels. [...] Emotion is a perturbation from clash or failure of habit, and reflection, roughly speaking, is the painful effort of disturbed habits to readjust themselves. In truth, feelings as well as reason spring up within action. [...] Rationality of mind is not an original endowment but is the offspring of intercourse with objective adaptations and relations. [...] Reason as observation of an adaptation of acts to valuable results is not however a mere idle mirroring of preexistent facts. It is an additional event having its own career. It sets up a heightened emotional appreciation and provides a new motive for fidelities previously blind. It sets up an attitude of criticism, of inquiry [...].⁵⁸¹

When the habitual set of actions by which the subject functionally and significantly managed outer conditions while ensuring the stability of its practical harmony with the external environment fails to work properly, because of a clash among different and competing habits or because inefficient and rigid in channelling human sensuousness successfully, intelligent activity should intervene. Indeed, it should reflexively evaluate immediate feelings and emotions and inquire into objective conditions for the re-definition or creation of new intelligent and functional organizations of activity.

Therefore, with the consideration of the role of "habit" in Dewey's theory of action, it is feasible to clarify how the ongoing projection or adjustment of interests according to new situations, and thus, the reflexive and voluntary intelligent re-definition by the human subject of its already reshaped existence occur and should be directed. In fact, the humanizing process of the subject's action, in its reflexive, propositional, and intentional form, should be conceived neither as the only mode of action essential to human survival nor in terms of the complete re-definition of human conduct in its entirety, namely, in all its patterns of action. In the first case, indeed, human action would be entirely equated with intentional, voluntary, and reflexive action, without considering the essential practical stability, continuity, energy-saving, and

⁵⁸¹ MW 14, pp. 54-55.

learning function that only habitual action, in its routinized and pre-reflexive occurrence, can ensure to the human being's survival *and* to the practical results of its intentional, reflexive, and humanizing capacity. Hence, also the subject's interests, or meaningful organizations of behavior, can become solid and mastered acquisitions for the individual, thus being performed without efforts, only by turning into habits through repetition and pre-intentional and pre-reflexive routine.

In the second case, the humanizing function of intelligent activity, in re-constructing experience and reshaping existence, would be conceived in terms of the complete redefinition of human action in its entirety, which would prevent the subject from having the stability needed to not succumb to the enormous amount of stimuli of the outer world. Instead, reflexive action and, thus, the ongoing and progressive redefinition of human interests should entail, according to Dewey, the situational transformation of human behavior following new situations' emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities, and the preservation of those habits that are functional, i.e., reasonable and necessary to maintain a stable and energy-saving interaction with the external environment.

When subjects' habitualized interests let prevail only their mechanical aspect, turning into blindly performed and rigid interpretative and practical patterns severed from the dynamic sensuousness of human experience and from intelligent inquiry, they become hypostatized, and thus, rigid and lifeless, deprived of their necessary *projection*. Then, the subject's rich, sensuous, and bodily interactions with the outer world should be recovered, and the intelligent reconstruction of experience and life should retrieve its continuity and projection, with the redefinition or construction of new interests and intelligent patterns of action.

V. Finally, according to Dewey, given the richness of outer objects' qualities or values and the human being's wider sensitivity, human needs and, thus, human interests are not only *specific* and *multiple*, but they are also *plural*. Already in Chapter Eight, we have seen that, for Dewey, the attempt to rigidly fix the number and the types of human impulses or needs is counterproductive for the theorist, at least for two reasons. In the first place,

It is unscientific to try to restrict original activities to a definite number of sharply demarcated classes of instincts. We are guilty of presumption which nature promptly punishes. We are rendered incompetent to deal effectively with the delicacies and novelties of nature and life. [...] To classify is, indeed, as useful as it is natural. [...] Speaking generally the purpose is to facilitate our dealings with unique individuals and changing events.⁵⁸²

⁵⁸² MW 14, p. 92

Classification is useful, both for the subject and the theorist, to start an inquiry into problematic situations, providing generalizations that can help manage and interpret existing unresolved tension and immediate feelings. As we have previously seen, in the *Syllabus: Social Institutions and The Study of Morals* (1923), Dewey refers to some fundamental human needs – support/sustenance, security, protection, reproduction, recreation, language/sociability. Nonetheless, he does not want to provide a fixed and closed number of needs: classification is to be used only as a regulative tool that can be modified according to existing new situations and conditions, which, according to Dewey, are always unique, as determined by the transformations that both the external world and the subject undergo. The subject's needs, therefore, are not only multiple due to their specific occurrence, but they are also plural and various, and new types of need can emerge from new situations. Due to the coexistence of a plurality of needs and objective values or goods associated with those needs, it follows that the human subject has a variety of interests, each of which represents an interpretation and channelling of the need into an emotional and personal activity intelligently and objectively mediated. The variety and plurality of human needs and interests are due to the dynamics proper of life as such, the richness of its qualitative objects, and the wide sensuous capacity of the human being. It follows that the attempt to rigidly fix the various types of needs does but neglect the dynamism proper of life.

In the second place, to provide a classification of needs can be counterproductive, according to Dewey, since it can turn into the effort to identify a rigid and fixed hierarchy among the needs, values, and interests of human subjects, as traditional Greek metaphysics attempted to do. Previously, we have mentioned that Dewey's critique of Greek metaphysics focuses, among other things, on the ontological hierarchy that it establishes between spiritual life and material life, and the consequent moral and social hierarchy between spiritual needs, values, and interests, and material or natural needs, values, and interests.

The hierarchy is explicit in Greek thought: first, and lowest are vegetative ends, normal growth and reproduction; second in rank, come animal ends, locomotion and sensibility; third in rank, are ideal and rational ends, of which the highest is blissful contemplative possession in thought of all the forms of nature. In this gradation, each lower rank while an end is also a means or preformed condition of higher ends. [...] Such a classificatory enterprise is naturally consoling to those who enjoy a privileged status, whether as philosophers, as saints, or scholars, and who wish to justify their special status. But its consoling apologetics should not blind us to the fact that to think of objects as more or less ends is nonsense. They either have immediate and terminal quality;

or they do not: quality as such is absolute not comparative. [...] Objects may be more or less absorptive and arresting and thus possess degrees of intensity with respect to finality. But this difference of intensity is not, save as subject to reflective choice, a distinction in rank or class of finality.⁵⁸³

Therefore, a similar process of hierarchization, according to Dewey, entailed two problems. From a general point of view, the institution of a hierarchy of needs, values, and interests, and thus, the identification of a supreme and ultimate human need, value, interest, or end does but neglect, first, the equal intensity of objective qualities and values, and the equal pressing nature that any need can have. Second, it overlooks the fact that only the unique and specific situations in which the subject finds itself determine the greater importance and intensity of one need and objective qualities above others. Accordingly, the uniqueness of any living situation entails that, for the subject, a certain need can be more pressing, a certain quality or value more demanded, the construction and realization of a certain interest more relevant. The cogency of certain needs and interests is not an absolute fact. Instead, it is a relational, relative, and situational cogency, which is open to be evaluated in its legitimacy according to the publicly observable objective conditions of practical tension and disharmony to which the human being is subject within a specific situation. Moreover, according to Dewey, the stronger cogency of a certain need or interest in a specific situation does not entail the erasure of all other needs and interests. Instead, it implies the humanizing constitution, through intelligent valuation and inquiry, of an interest that, to be functional in solving the tension of existing situations and providing a harmonious unity of the subject with objectivity, should be adjusted to and adjust other exiting interests. “Certain acts and times are devoted to getting health, others to cultivate religion, others to seeking learning, to being a good citizen, a devotee of fine art and so on. This is the only logical alternative to subordinating all aims to the accomplishment of one alone – fanaticism.”⁵⁸⁴

From a specific point of view, the institution of a hierarchy between material or natural and spiritual needs, values, and interests is, according to Dewey, problematic since it leads the subject to misleading the very nature of human needs and interests. As previously pointed out, the human being, unlike other animals, has a wider capacity for sensitivity due to its more complex biological and organic structure, which allows the subject to be sensuously open to a broader range of outer objective qualities and values, and thus to have a plurality of needs.

⁵⁸³ LW 1, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁸⁴ MW 12, pp. 175-176.

These objective qualities needed by the subject, hence, are not only the natural or material values demanded by animal organisms – such as health, material sustenance, and reproduction – but also the more spiritual ones – for instance, association, support, care, beauty, recreation, social participation, justice, equality, respect for life, culture, learning, intelligibility, etc. Even if considering these spiritual values as qualities of outer objects can sound bizarre and weird, it is important to stress again that, according to Dewey, the qualities or values demanded to fulfill human needs are always of *both* objects and subjects. Of course, the subject is the one who feels the need for such values, such as the need for sociability, justice, participation, beauty, intelligibility, learning. But, at the same time, even if this can sound very unusual, these values or qualities are *objective* since, firstly, they are perceived by the subject in the interaction with objective situations. Secondly, they are necessarily mediated, in their substantial contents, by outer conditions, and they can be secured and consumed only through the practically transformative activity of the subject towards the existing situation in order to create a new context of practice wherein the consummation of that value is ensured. It follows that outer conditions' more material values such as physical survival, self-maintenance, material production, security from outer perils, as well as more spiritual qualities, such as aesthetic consummation, happiness, social justice, equality, affective care, participation, learning, and inquiry and so on, are all values or qualities that the subject sensuously perceives, feels, and demands but only in the interaction with outer conditions and situations, both natural and social.⁵⁸⁵ Therefore, external conditions are set up so that they are suitable to be just, beautiful, supportive and healing, to stimulate learning and allow participation. Valuable qualities are, as such, *transactions* between subjectivity and objectivity: the subject perceives them by interacting with outer objects and situations, natural or social, and, to ensure them, it has something to “accomplish.” That is, the human subject should always turn its contingent feelings into interests, i.e., into emotional activities that intelligently organize behavior to bring about, through a chain of the means, the situation wherein outer qualities can be enhanced meaningfully and the need of the subject significantly satisfied.

From this understanding of values, needs, and interests, it is necessary, according to Dewey, to drop any pretending hierarchy among “natural”/ “material” and “spiritual” values, needs, or interest. In both cases, the human being is called to secure qualities and meaningfully

⁵⁸⁵ Regarding the objective and subjective dimension of values or valuable qualities in Dewey, see Bernstein's amazing reconstruction, 1961; 1971, Part III.

satisfy its needs through a practical transformation of outer conditions. In ancient Greek societies, material needs, values, and interests were abandoned to contingent and non-experimental forms of inquiry, due to the lack of esteem for any form of knowledge departing from mere contemplation and seeking to investigate the real processes of outer things. Instead, spiritual needs, values, and interests were completely severed from the objective conditions that both give and change their very content, disclosing the potential transformations to be practically pursued to ensure their public and secure enjoyment.

To provide a naturalistic metaphysics of the world in which we live means, according to Dewey, to recognize the plurality of needs and interests belonging to the human subjects and to refuse any form of fixed classification and hierarchization of them. Instead, to provide a naturalistic anthropology means to consider the subject as partaking in life and sharing its gross features, but through a specific “measure of adaptation” or quality of action. This specific quality is that of *enhancement of life*, to be understood as both humanizing *reconstruction of experience* and *reshaping of life*, destined to reach the harmonious interdependence and tensionless practical union of the subject with the outer world. This humanizing reconstruction of experience and reshaping of life occurs by turning immediate, pre-reflexive, and sensuous experiential feelings and needs into interests, namely, into emotional and personal activities intelligently and objectively mediated that significantly outline an organization of behavior destined to fulfill human needs in a significant and enhanced way, through the functional transformation of outer conditions. Whether material or spiritual, according to their primary biological or spiritual dimension, all human plural needs involve, to be significantly satisfied, an intelligent and practical transformation of the world in which we live, both natural and social. Therefore, for Dewey, human activity, in its capacity for humanizing transformation, should not be narrowed and equated mainly with labor or technique, which aim at satisfying material needs through the transformation of objects, and organized systems and ways of production. On the contrary, human activity, in its humanizing transformation, should be associated with all the patterns of action destined for intelligently modifying outer conditions for the enhancement and enjoyment of objective qualities, also the more spiritual ones, such as association, social participation, equality, justice, care, inquiry, and beauty. Thus, the transformative import of human action is not narrowed to the production of consumer goods, but to all the forms of organized behavior that allow the subject to significantly strengthen and enjoy valuable qualities for its self-development and well-being.

X. 3. A Systematic Naturalistic Account of the Human Being's Activity and its Recognitive Conditions. The Path for Social Criticism

From the analysis of the project that Dewey develops in the later phase of his thinking through different works, such as *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, *Human Nature and Conduct*, *Experience and Nature*, *The Quest for Certainty*, *Art as Experience*, and *Theory of Valuation*, we have seen that he seeks to revise a metaphysics of existence in order to provide a philosophical anthropology, namely, a theory of human activity. Indeed, according to Dewey, only by inquiring on the features of the world in which the subject lives and acts is it feasible to descriptively and normatively define the specific kind or quality of living activity belonging to the subject, namely, to disclose the measure of adaptation to the external world proper of the human being. To point out an anthropology of the human being is, for Dewey, an essential issue. It allows the subject to dispose of an instrument for self-reflection, self-acknowledgment, re-appropriation of capacities, and thus, emancipation and criticism. In fact, ancient metaphysics led historical subjects to assume and introject radically misleading, inefficient, and dysfunctional conceptions of the world and themselves, whose ultimate result was to alienate the subject from the very meaning of its practical action and turn it into a passive spectator unable to efficiently act. To overcome this “impasse in life,”⁵⁸⁶ it is necessary for Dewey to completely drop ancient metaphysics and its consequent anthropology, whose dualisms among subject-object, matter-spirit, body-mind, action-theory, and material-ideal were but impediments to a successful human practice in the world in which we live.

To make such an operation, Dewey considers the naturalistic metaphysics disclosed by modern science and Evolutionism the starting point to rethink human subjectivity in its capacity for action. Indeed, modern science opened up the possibility to abandon the Greek ideal of a closed natural world, regulated in its changes by fixed forms, in favor of a conception that re-acknowledges life as an order of changes, that is, as a series of interacting and reciprocally transforming parts. This radical and revolutionary change of route in world metaphysics had, as we have seen, enormous effects, on the one hand, on the conception and methods of inquiry and knowledge, which, from being considered merely the act of contemplation of the final and

⁵⁸⁶ LW 1, p. 186.

supra-empirical forms, turned into a “matter of doing.” Accordingly, knowledge and inquiry are *experimental* tools devoted to penetrating the secrets of the world, namely, the processes of occurrence of the objects that qualitatively disclose to the human being by empirical experience, in order to practically control their changes.

On the other hand, the metaphysics and theory of inquiry provided by modern science entailed the possibility to drastically drop the dualisms of ancient metaphysics and provide a new conception of the human subject in terms of a living and natural being. In fact, thanks to modern science, the human subject ceased to be considered an entity severed from the rest of the world and observing nature from without, for being re-acknowledged as a legitimate part of the natural world, subject to its main features and, for this reason, able to investigate nature from within. In fact, the subject is reconsidered in terms of an animal organism whose self-reproduction, self-development, and evolution do not depend on the self-enclosed unfolding of a predetermined form of self-realization, but on the practical interactions and reciprocal transformations occurring among its organic structure and the external surrounding. The rediscovery of the human being’s naturalness, co-constitutive relation with external qualitative objects, and practical dimension made it possible to explain the disclosure of objects’ qualities and properties within empirical human experience and justify the consequent possibility for subjects to experimentally and legitimately grasp their underlying intelligible processes. Thus, modern science’s revolutionary metaphysics helped philosophy dispose of a new theoretical background through which outlining a new conception of human subjectivity, emancipating the latter from the burdens and dualisms of ancient metaphysics. Accordingly, the challenge of science for philosophy was to rethink the human being in its continuity with the natural world, by acknowledging the former as a legitimate part of nature but with distinguishing properties, which disclose to the subject the possibility of a certain measure of adaption to the external environment, namely, a specific kind or quality of action with and within the external environment. Then, we have seen how Dewey takes on the challenge and identifies three different degrees or levels of nature, which differ according to the progressive complexity that the features of life – interactions, transformations, and changes – acquire. Dewey develops, thus, a metaphysics of existence and life relying upon a theory of continuity and emergency, for from “lower” levels of life develop the “higher” ones, which maintain the precedent levels and their properties while acquiring new ones.

The first three degrees or levels of life identified by Dewey are “inorganic life,” “organic life,” and “mental life.” We have stressed how, in these degrees, the gross features of life increase in complexity. In the organic level of life, of which animal organisms represent the more complex living organization, the interactions of the organism and the external surrounding acquire a less exterior and mechanical quality, a wider range of objects or entities involved, higher forms of transformations of the organism and the external environment, and, thus, broader possibilities for change. Indeed, the organism “lives” only through a reached and desired consummation of outer qualitative objects, and therefore, through a strived co-constitution with the rest of life. In such an ontological classification, the human being should be identified with the third degree of life, the mental one. Indeed, the subject is both an animal organism endowed with needs, self-reproducing, surviving, and self-developing through the mediation with objectivity, and a subject able to grasp, thanks to intelligence, i.e., the capacities for signification and knowledge, the intelligibility of life itself, namely, its orders of changes. Therefore, the mental is not conceived by Dewey in terms of an intrusive property in natural life, but as a property developing within life and able to grasp the underlying intelligibility, or relations of cause-effect, that belong to life’s changes and processes. Moreover, the legitimate “membership” of the mental to natural life is due to human intelligence’s capacity not only to disclose the intelligibility belonging to life but also to enhance life itself, as a process of interactions, relations, transformations, and changes among things. Indeed, reason allows the subject to render the outer qualitative objects that it demands and needs for its self-constitution, self-reproduction, and self-development into meaningful objects, namely, into “events” or “signs” of histories and processes that conditioned their qualitative occurrence.

It follows that to uncover the intelligible conditions and changes that sustain outer objects and situations’ qualitiveness is not an end in itself, but rather a tool for the enhancement of life, both external and internal. In fact, reason should be intended as a *function* of the human being’s sensuous and practical co-constitutive interaction with the external environment, destined to meaningfully enrich, strengthen, and ensure the ontological interdependence and interpenetration of subjectivity with objectivity, thus consciously and purposefully pursuing and enhancing the profound living unity running through existence. Indeed, unveiling the processes conditioning the occurrence of qualitative objects has a scope for life. This scope is the transformation by the subject of the outer relations of cause-effect into relations of means-consequences, namely, the organization of intelligent plans or organizations

of actions. These plans are destined not for the blind and contingent satisfaction of human needs and exploitative consummation of outer qualitative objects. But rather they are functionally devoted to the intelligent fulfillment of human needs, representing plans for the practical direction of courses of change, for the transformation of existing conditions to bring about potential situations wherein the demanded objective qualities are enhanced and disclosed, and the harmonious and tensionless ontological unity and interpenetration of the human being with the rest of life are realized.

Hence, it follows that, for Dewey, human action has a *humanizing* function, and its distinguishing quality is *the enhancement of life*. On the one hand, human action, thanks to the practical function of intelligence and cognition, is able to *reshape* existence, enhancing and ensuring the interactions, transformations, and changes that constitute and cross it. In human action, indeed, the profound unity of the subject with the rest of life is strengthened, the interactions among parts unveiled and secured, the transformations and changes directed, regulated, and enlarged. On the other hand, in human action, immediate experience, namely the ensemble of the organism's sensuous and practical interactions with the external environment, is *reconstructed*. As previously analyzed, *reconstruction* of human experience means turning immediate sensuous feelings and emotions, with their habitual and mechanical motor reactions destined to consuming outer qualitative objects, into *interests*. In these later works, the category of interest, which Dewey in the *Lectures in China* employs without disentangling its profound naturalistic and humanizing meaning, is positioned in his naturalistic framework and, thus, unveiled in its profound significance. In fact, Dewey considers the formation of "interests" as representing and embodying the humanizing process of reconstruction of immediate and pre-reflexive experience of which the human being, with its action, is capable.

Dewey defines interest in terms of a personal activity emotionally, intelligently, and objectively mediated. That is, it is an activity wherein the immediate sensuous feelings deriving from the encounter with outer qualitative objects are not merely had by the subject and followed in their practical attitudes for action for the blind fulfillment of its needs. But rather, it is an activity wherein the subject's feelings turn into means of inquiry, outer objective qualities turn into "something to be accomplished," and needs or deficiencies into intelligently channeled and interpreted demands. Indeed, on the one hand, feelings are intelligently considered, firstly, as belonging to the subject, and secondly, in their associated qualitative objects. Accordingly, the valuable qualities of outer objects and situations get rationally and significantly grasped as

revealing something of the subject, which demands them for its well-being, and as standing for “something to be accomplished.” With “end-in-view,” Dewey attempts to explain how, in the construction of the interest, the outer qualities or values demanded by the subject are meaningfully considered as resulting from specific conditionings. That is, they are grasped in their being results of unique processes and interactions among parts or objective factors, which are suitable to be practically managed to reach *specific* consequences or new situations. The object of any interest, i.e., its end-in-view, represents, on the one hand, the immanent but transcending objective situation wherein the enhancement, enjoyment, and consummation of outer values can be ensured, and thus, wherein the subject’s needs can be significantly interpreted, channeled, and fulfilled. On the one hand, it represents the chain of means or the organization of the specific series of actions that are needed to reach the desired situation and that, thus, are both determined and determine the end-in-view.

Therefore, the formation of interests, according to Dewey, has a profound humanizing potential since the latter are organizations of transformative behavior, intelligently and objectively mediated, that regulate processes in order to create future situations wherein outer qualities or values are enhanced and secured in their occurrence, and the needs of the individual are intelligently fulfilled through the recovery of a harmonious, tensionless, and unifying interpenetration between subjectivity and objectivity. Nonetheless, such a humanizing potential of human activity, and thus of interest formation, is, according to Dewey, something to be evaluated on the basis of the practical consequences. That is, through the observation of the new objective contexts of practice, human interests should be evaluated according to their adequateness.

On the one hand, they should ensure the harmonious and tensionless constitutive unity of the subject with the external environment. They are inadequate whenever the subject is practically blocked, devoid of the correct investigation and interpretation of situations and needs, and equipped with dysfunctional plans for action unable to overcome the tension between the subject and the external world. On the other hand, they are inadequate whenever they fail to be *specific* and, thus, *projective*, adjusting to outer situations’ dynamic changes. In fact, through its metaphysics of existence, Dewey describes life as an order of change, determined by the restless interactions and transformations among parts. From these metaphysical premises, Dewey concludes that any practical situation wherein the subject interacts with the outer world is *specific* and always entails a certain modification of outer

conditions, which conditionally react and transform the subject and its sensuous and practical approach to the world. Any human interest, thus, even if responding to a certain need, is always specific and thus multiple in different situations. It always implies an adjustment or a redefinition of established emotional, cognitive interpretations and practical organizations to fulfill a need, according to the new sensuous and practical interactions occurring in new situations. Whenever an interest is hypostatized and rendered static, it becomes lifeless. It becomes a sign that the subject has detached itself from its primary dimension, that of being a living and natural organism that engages in a restless sensuous, and practical exchange with objectivity and participates in life and its gross features, and only in relation to which intelligence and cognition can perform their function. Moreover, the situationality and projection of human interests are also due to the plurality of needs and interests belonging to human subjects. This plurality of human needs is related to the human organism's more complex biological structure and wider sensitivity in relation to the world qualities and entails that, in specific situations, a certain need and interest can be momentarily more pressing than others, requiring a cognitive and practical organization that always implies an adjustment *to* and *of* other subjective interests. Moreover, we have stressed that, according to Dewey, any attempt to rigidly classify, hierarchize, and differentiate in nature the plurality of human needs is counterproductive for the subject. Indeed, the subject should conceive its needs as open to being enlarged, as uniform in their pressing demanding of attention and effort, and always entailing a mediation of "material" and "ideal," "objective mediation" and "cognitive mediation." Natural and spiritual values, needs, and interests share the same conditions of formation, realization, and evaluative verification.

To conclude, in the later phase of his thinking, Dewey extensively develops a naturalistic metaphysics of the world in which we live in order to outline a naturalistic anthropology suitable to descriptively and normatively define the kind of living activity or capacity for action belonging to the human being. From our previous analyses, it should be evident that Dewey provides a naturalistic anthropology that, in the attempt to define the quality of the human being's activity with and within the external environment, reveals a greater systematicity and effort of theoretical organization than that of Honneth and Joas in *Social Action and Human Nature*. Indeed, Dewey's naturalistic theory of human activity is accompanied and enriched by his broader metaphysical reflections on life, its gross features, and emergent degrees. This interpenetration among metaphysical and anthropological

reflections allows Dewey to define and justify in a precise and consistent manner the ontological conditions of human action, namely *intelligent transformation* and *dynamism*. Indeed, his metaphysics of existence and naturalistic anthropology allows him to account for:

(i) The *specificity* of the qualities perceived as valuable by the human being in the sensuous interaction with the outer world. Due to the gross features of life – interactions, transformations, and change – and the continuous and reciprocal transformations between the human being and the external environment, the individual’s valuable qualities are always mediated by specific objective conditions. Firstly, this fact entails that these qualities always rely, in their occurrence, upon particular objective conditions, and thus, can be secured and always enhanced according to a specific chain of means or practical transformation of the outer world. Secondly, it implies that human interests are always *specific*, *multiple*, and *projective* in their ends-in-view and defining means, and characterized by an intrinsic dynamism, situationalism, and deviational creativity.

(ii) The *plurality* of the subject’s needs, and thus, the *plurality* of the subject’s desired qualities and interests. The subject is, indeed, characterized by a plurality of needs. Dewey attempts neither to conclusively define the number and the type of human needs nor to provide a hierarchy between ultimate and instrumental needs. On the contrary, Dewey describes any need as potentially pressing in specific situations and demanding a specific value or quality. This quality or value can be both more “material” – such as health, physical reproduction, material sustenance through work and production – or “spiritual” – such as communication, care, association, participation, equality, justice, leisure, inquiry. But all these qualities, having a greater material or spiritual character, depend, in order to be enhanced and stabilized, on the mediation of specific objective conditions, on a particular chain of objective transformations.

Therefore, Dewey provides an account of human action, in its transformative meaning, that, firstly, considers “transformation” as a general feature of existence, which, in the human being, acquire an intelligent and significant dimension, consisting in the identification of the specific objective transformations, or chain of means, that are necessary to enhance and stabilize a specific demanded quality. Secondly, his account of human action does not entail the identification of human action merely with work and productive activity. Instead, human activity’s transformative meaning is referred to and identified with all the intelligent organizations of behavior seeking to enhance the objective qualities valuable for the subject, allowing their more stable consummation and enjoyment.

(iii) The possibility to objectively and publicly verify human action in its adequacy, namely, in its very humanizing meaning or character. Indeed, Dewey specifies how human action, standing for a process of *valuation*, can and should be itself an object of a second-order and experimental *evaluation*. In the first instance, it can be evaluated in its effective capacity to reconstruct the human being's experience, assuring both the expansion and enhancement of the qualities demanded by the subject, the stable and significant fulfillment of its needs, and the tensionless and harmonious unity and interdependence of the subject with the outer world. Whenever the subject remains practically blocked or stuck in fulfilling its needs in a stable and un-contingent manner, in enjoying and consuming the quality he demands, accomplishing and expanding it without practical tensions or accidents, in reaching a practical interpenetration with the external environment in which it lives, it means that the emotional, cognitive, and practical organization that the subject has set up to fulfill its need, namely, its interest, is inadequate. It means that the cognitive valuation of the quality demanded by the subject did not grasp the right interaction of objective and conditioning factors, that the series of objective transformations or means to accomplish the demanded quality is not the functional one, and thus, that the end-in-view searched by the subject is not the adequate or the humanizing one.

In the second instance, human action, as the humanizing institution of interests, can be evaluated concerning its vitality or loss of vitality. Whenever the subject hypostatizes and fixes its personal contents, namely, its needs and interests, regardless of the changing situations and the dynamism belonging to life and its living interaction with the external environment, the subject's action becomes "lifeless." On the one hand, its interests undergo a loss of vitality, being prevented from the situationalism and projection that characterize them because of the gross features of existence, to which the subject partakes. On the other hand, human action becomes rigid and gets restricted in its emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities. Dewey explains the possibility for human interests and action to become lifeless and rigid by referring to the mechanism of habit. Indeed, he acknowledges that the human being, to gain the stable interaction with the external environment necessary for its life, does not only rely upon an agentive capacity reflexively, intentionally, and propositionally mediated. Instead, the subject is led to turn its humanizing interests, namely, the emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations that are revealed to be functional for the fulfillment of a certain need, into habits, namely, into practical patterns which, thanks to repetition, get mastered and performed on a

pre-intentional, pre-reflexive, and pre-propositional manner. Thanks to the mechanism of habits, indeed, the subject can master the patterns of action that are functional to its significant survival and well-being in the external environment, it can stabilize its interests and contents, performing them without wasting cognitive and practical energies, and focusing on new qualitative elements of the external environment. Nonetheless, whenever habits lose their intrinsically elastic and creative character, becoming rigid and static channels of action, unintelligent and severed from the specificity and uniqueness of the new situations to which the subject can be sensuously opened, they turn human interests into empty and lifeless contents and restrict the emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities of human activity. Human activity ceases to be uniform with the rest of life, and its specific quality, the one of liberation and significant transformation, get stopped, missing the possibilities to be developed.

Dewey's purpose in providing a human anthropology, i.e., a description of human action, through a metaphysical reflection on the world in which we live, has, therefore, an explicit normative intent. That of identifying general directives on how the human being *does* and, thus, *should* act in a world constituted in a certain way and allowing the subject to perform a specific kind of living activity or qualitative action. Therefore, his naturalistic anthropology seeks to represent an emancipatory tool for human subjects; a means for the individual to revise its self-conception of practical being and re-appropriate its capacity for action and criticism. Through our reconstruction of Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism, we can conclude that he outlines a systematic theory of human action, of the constitutive interaction of the human being with the external environment, defined in terms of the *enhancement of life*, since it is suitable to theoretically explain and justify this latter's ontological conditions, namely, intelligent transformation and dynamism. Accordingly, the naturalistic framework delineated by Dewey is revealed to be capable of overcoming the theoretical lacks and deficiencies of the naturalistic theory of human action provided by Honneth and Joas in *Social Action and Human Nature*. In Chapter Six, we saw indeed that the two German authors, in their anthropological and naturalistic reflections, do not offer a systematic theory of the quality of the human being's activity with the external world, namely, the *humanization of internal and external nature*. Indeed, they merely flank and juxtapose Feuerbach's and Marx's fundamental insights on human action's ontological conditions, i.e., creative dynamism and intelligent transformation, without outlining a systematic framework wherein these agentic conditions were both justified and integrated.

On the one hand, Honneth and Joas praise the necessity for critical social theory to anthropologically consider Feuerbach's insight on the human being's "sensuous openness to the world." Feuerbach's anthropology, indeed, focused on the subject's creative, situational, and dynamic sensuous interaction with the outer world, due to the specificity and uniqueness of external situations. Nonetheless, Honneth and Joas do not justify and more deeply explain Feuerbach's abstract and general insight. They assume it theoretically without attempting to ground it in light of a broader metaphysic of existence and life, as being a chain or process of change, relying upon continuously interacting and reciprocally transforming parts.

On the other hand, they highlight Marx's insight on the practical and transformative character of human action, conceived in terms of intelligent "praxis," and on the consequent historical and social dimension of human needs. And they insist on the necessity to not theoretically identify, as Marx does, the transformative character of human action only with work and productive activity, but without offering an alternative theoretical framework suitable to explain this non-identification. Accordingly, they should have provided a theoretical framework of human action capable of considering "transformation," firstly, as a feature of existence in general, from which the transformative meaning of the human being's activity can be conceived as the intelligent consideration of the *specific* chain of means or objective transformations necessary to enhance the subject's demanded qualities, to be tested in their adequateness. Secondly, this framework should have been capable of considering it as a transformation involved not only in the fulfillment of more "material" needs and in the enhancement of more "material" qualities or values, thus being essentially equated with work and productive activity, but also in the significant fulfillment, enrichment, realization, and enforcement of the more "spiritual" needs and values. Therefore, they should have provided a theoretical framework apt to conceive spiritual needs and values as not hierarchically superior or instrumental to the material ones, regardless of specific situations, and as being respectively mediated by objective conditions and intelligent practical transformations. Accordingly, as the "humanization of nature," human action would have been theoretically identified with all the patterns of actions aiming at securing the consummation and enjoyment of the objective values of human experience.

Nonetheless, at this point in our reflections, in which we have defined the specific quality of action belonging to the human being in its constitutive interaction with objectivity, we should investigate the other essential and complementary aspect of Dewey's thinking and

naturalistic project, in the absence of which his naturalistic anthropology and this latter's very emancipatory meaning cannot be grasped properly. This essential and complementary element is recognition among subjects. In fact, Dewey's anthropological analysis of the quality of human activity, i.e., of the subject's kind of living activity, is not considered independently from an analysis of the relationships of affirmation occurring among subjects, but instead only in its strict interdependence with the latter. Accordingly, Dewey considers the relationship of recognition among subjects as the relation that is constitutive for the subject to develop and perform its specific quality or kind of living activity with and within the external living environment. Without the reciprocal relations of engagement and affirmation with other subjects, the individual is prevented from realizing its very capacity to reconstruct human experience and reshape existence according to the dynamism belonging to life, namely, from developing humanizing and living interests, both from a genetic and performative point of view. In Dewey's naturalistic framework, human action, in its distinguishing quality, does but have a social and recognitive structure, since the processes of signification, knowledge, valuation, and practical transformation of outer situations through ends-in-view are not and should not be considered as individual capacities, belonging autonomously to the subject for the mere possession of a brain or a mind. On the contrary, these processes are always *social*, developing and being performed *with the mediation of* and *thanks to* other subjects' engagement, affirmation, and participation, namely, only through social recognition. In the absence of reciprocal relations of recognition, considered by Dewey as emotionally, cognitively, and practically "taking the attitude of the other" or "engaging in its experience," there cannot be for the subject either the development of self-consciousness or the effective possibility to perform functional cognition and operate meaningful and stable transformations of the outer world. These abilities can develop and be maintained and performed only through other subjects' recognition, since self-consciousness, human signification, knowledge, and transformative action are not private and individual possessions, but social processes.

Therefore, in the next and last chapter, we want to explain, firstly, how and why, according to Dewey, recognition among subjects should be conceived as the condition of possibility for subjects to develop and perform their kind of living activity or qualitative action. We will point out how, in Dewey's naturalistic anthropology, recognition is not considered as an *a latere* type of interaction, severed from the one that the subject has with the world in which it lives, but instead, as having a constitutive role for the subject's possibility to reach its

distinguishing interaction with objectivity and life. Secondly, we will underline that through the systematicity of his naturalistic anthropological framework, which is due to his deepened metaphysical reflections on existence and life as such, and the recognitive and social structure that Dewey acknowledges for human action, two considerations are at hand. The first one is that Dewey's philosophical anthropology's very emancipatory meaning is to allow subjects to have tools for the criticism and the transformation of the social world, as impeding or obstructing the very capacity for action of the human subject. The second one concerns the fact that, with Dewey's naturalistic anthropology and conception of recognition, it seems possible to theoretically enlarge and enrich the contemporary theoretical framework of recognition, as it is highly represented by Honneth's theory, in order to strengthen its critical sensitivity in front of inadequate forms of social recognition. Indeed, Dewey's naturalistic theoretical framework, due to its systematic naturalistic definition of human activity and its recognitive structure, seems suitable to theoretically ground the genus, further ontological conditions, and ontological status of recognition we previously pointed out by interpreting and unveiling the unsystematic and undeveloped naturalistic potentialities of *Social Action and Human Nature*.

Chapter Eleven. Recognition and Life within Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism

XI. 1. Recognition as the Genetic and Performative Condition of the Human Being's Capacity for Action

From the examination of the *Lectures in China* in Chapter Eight, we argued, firstly, that Dewey refers to a naturalistic understanding of the human being, according to which this latter self-constitutes in virtue of a specific interaction with the external environment, the one of dynamic and intelligent transformation. Indeed, the subject is recovered in its needy dimension, as an individual with needs that can be fulfilled only in relation to the external environment, but with the possibility to satisfy them intelligently and stably, rather than blindly or accidentally. Accordingly, the subject can interpret and channel its needs into specific interests, which entail a functional organization of behavior and a regulated transformation of objective conditions, which ensure the significant, tensionless, and enhanced fulfillment of its pressing needs. Secondly, we pointed out that Dewey deems that such a human form of living or quality of action relies upon the reciprocal recognition with other subjects, since, to be performed, it necessitates relations of cooperation and engagement. Thirdly, we argued that a specific methodological and theoretical approach to recognition emerges from the *Lectures in China*. Herein, recognition is conceived in terms of the mediatory relationship that allows the subject to perform its agentive and constitutive interaction with the external environment. From these considerations, it follows that the ethical core of recognition, in the *Lectures in China*, is tied to the ontological conditions of the human being's capacity for action, namely, intelligent transformation and dynamism.

Consequently, we anticipated the possibility to carve out from the *Lectures* an original grammar of normative recognition, concerning its ontological conditions and ontological status, which, nonetheless, to be pointed out, necessarily entails the analysis of some works written by Dewey after his sojourn in China, for two main reasons. In these later works, Dewey offers, in the first instance, a systematic and explanatory account of his naturalistic anthropology; in the second instance, he better explains the reason for which the human being is dependent on other subjects to realize and perform its capacity for action, thus giving consistency to his

understanding of the relationship of recognition among subject and disclosing to us the opportunity to carve out, from his naturalistic anthropology and its recognitive structure, an original and rich normative grammar of recognition.

Therefore, in Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten, we first approached some of Dewey's later works with the purpose of reconstructing and better explaining the naturalistic premises lying under his critical project. We sought indeed to argue and show how, only in these later works, Dewey attempts to more steadily ground his critical project by expanding and explaining the descriptive and normative meaning of the naturalistic anthropology he refers to generally in the *Lectures*. It is only in *Reconstruction in Philosophy, Human Nature and Conduct, Experience and Nature, The Quest for Certainty, Art as Experience, and Theory of Valuation* that he outlines his Naturalistic Humanism, namely, a systematic version of his naturalistic anthropology. From the reconstruction of Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism, it should be clear how, due to the broader metaphysical considerations on existence and life within which he posits his naturalistic anthropology, he can provide a systematic naturalistic account of the quality of the human being's activity within the external world. This latter is intended in terms of the *enhancement of life*, occurring as both the "reconstruction of experience" and the "reshaping of existence," wherein its ontological conditions, intelligent transformation and dynamism, are explained and justified from a theoretical point of view.

At this point of our reflections, once we have argued that Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism represents a systematic theory of the human being's constitutive interaction with the external environment, we want to consider the recognitive structure that Dewey, in some of his early and later works, puts at the bases of the human being's possibility of developing and performing its specific agentive quality or form of life. Accordingly, we will be able, on the hand, to disentangle the meaning of social recognition already present in the *Lectures in China*. On the other hand, we will disclose the theoretical and normative potentialities of Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism for the contemporary theory of recognition, its problems, and its pressing need to enrich its normative grammar.

XI. 1. 1. Recognition as the Participation and the Engagement in the Experience of the Other

That the mental has a recognized claim to serve as a category of description and interpretation of natural existence is evident [...]. [...] Now of the mental as of the physical and the organic it may

be said that it operates as an included factor within social phenomena, since the mental is empirically discernible only where association is manifested in the form of participation and communication. It would therefore appear legitimate to adopt as a hypothesis worthy of being tried out that the ulterior meaning of the mental as well as of the physical and vital is revealed in this form of associational interaction. The implication is not that they have no describable existence outside the social, but that in so far as they appear and operate outside of that large interaction which forms the social they do not reveal that full force and import with which it is the traditional business of philosophy to occupy itself.⁵⁸⁷

In the essay *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928), Dewey makes a fundamental consideration. In the first instance, he reaffirms his idea that it is feasible to metaphysically discern three degrees or levels of life – the physical, the vital (or the organic), and the mental – and to conceive the mental in terms of the “higher” level of life. The mental is again presented as the ontological degree to which the human subject belongs and wherein the previous levels of life are maintained and enriched. Indeed, the human being is constituted by material or physical parts, it interacts with inorganic entities (such as lands, tools, and natural sources), and it is an animal organism or a living creature that relates constitutively with the external environment. Nonetheless, the subject is not only an ensemble of physical parts nor an organism that self-survives in virtue of instinctually or mechanically predisposed interaction with external conditions. Additionally, the subject is endowed with “reason,” i.e., with the capacities for signification and knowledge, which allow the individual to provide a “description and interpretation of natural existence.” As we have previously analyzed, for the subject, the capacity to describe and interpret natural existence represents the possibility to enhance life. On the one hand, the subject can *reshape existence*, unveiling the intelligibility running through life, in all its manifestations, improving its qualities, disclosing its conditioning interactions, and regulating its transformations. On the other hand, the subject can enhance or *reconstruct its experience*, namely, its immediate constitutive interaction or living interpenetration with the external environment, as having the possibility to turn its feelings of liking and disliking and needs into interests.

In the second instance, Dewey considers an additional fact: “the mental is empirically discernible only where association is manifested in the form of participation and communication.”⁵⁸⁸ Herein, what Dewey suggests is that the mental, and thus, the cognitive capacities that entail a substantial difference in the human being’s behavior and activity within

⁵⁸⁷ LW 3, pp. 48-49.

⁵⁸⁸ LW 3, p. 49.

the external environment, can be neither genetically developed nor performed in the absence of an association with other subjects, i.e., in the absence of relationships of participation with other subjects. Therefore, the human being's capacity to enhance life, genetically and performatively, relies upon the human subject's capacity to instantiate a specific kind of association with each other, the one reciprocal participation and engagement.

A start may be conveniently made by noting that associated or conjoint behavior is a universal characteristic of all existences. [...] And the implication of our argument is that in such a comparison of definite types of association, the social, in its human sense, is the richest, fullest, and most delicately subtle of any mode actually experienced.⁵⁸⁹

Although in *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea*, Dewey does not go deeper in considering the difference among the different types of association or sociality present in life, then specifying the different form of association of the human being, we can find an explanation of this point in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7 of *Experience and Nature*. Here, Dewey specifies how even other animals interact with each other, for they live only due to the dependence on each other and, thus, within forms of social groupings. Nevertheless, these forms of interactions and social groupings, necessary for survival and self-reproduction, remain tied to a certain "exteriority" and "egocentricity." That is to say that non-human animals do reciprocally interact with each other for their reciprocal survival, thus being embedded into forms of "joint action" and "inclusive schemes of behavior."⁵⁹⁰ Nonetheless, these joint actions and inclusive schemes of behavior devoted to their self-survival are performed by the interacting animals instinctively, by responding mechanically to the stimuli they ego-centrally perceived in the other animals' behavior. Accordingly, for Dewey, the association and social groupings within which animals survive, interacting with each other, remain forms of organic co-existence, mediated by signalling acts and instinctual reactions to other counterparts' behavior.

Sub-human animals thus behave in ways which have no direct consequences of utility to the behaving animal, but which call out certain characteristic responses, sexual, protective, food-finding [...] in other animals. [...] [The animal's] activity is ego-centric; that of the human being is participative. The latter puts himself at the standpoint of a situation in which two parties share.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ LW 3, pp. 41-44.

⁵⁹⁰ LW 1, p. 213.

⁵⁹¹ LW 1, pp. 139-140.

In the human being, according to Dewey, things go differently. Subjects, indeed, are able not only to be connected in joint actions in an instinctual manner, according to predetermined and ego-centric responses to exterior signals. Instead, they can take the perspective of the other, namely, they can share its perspective on a certain experiential situation, making their action participative and cooperative for the needs of the other. “In the human being [...] the consequences of the experience of one form of life are integrated in the behavior of others. [...] Not merely its own distant world of space-time is involved in its conduct but the world of its fellows.”⁵⁹² Therefore, Dewey isolates a remarkable character in human beings’ associations and interactions, namely, the human capacity to overcome an ego-centric perspective, taking and introjecting that of the other subject, i.e., the world of its fellow. This process of decentralization and consideration of the other subject’s experience, which occurs in a reciprocal manner, for Dewey, does but stand for an affirmative and recognitive process, having a fundamental constitutive role for the human being, at least under three several aspects.

Firstly, this human capacity to take the perspective of the other subject affirmatively is the ontological precondition, according to Dewey, for the genetic development in the human being of “a feeling for self,” which is not to be intended as the mere perception of its own body, but in terms of the perception of itself as an individual centre of experience, with personal feelings and capacity of behavior, distinct from other centres of experience and the exterior objective world.

There can be no egoistic feelings except as the self is distinguished from others and set over against them; there can be no altruistic feelings, except as others are recognized in their relations to self, and compared with it. Our first feelings are not personal, in the sense of egoistic. They are, properly considered, not personal at all; they become personal only as they are referred to persons; and they cannot be referred to the ego, except as the ego is compared, consciously or unconsciously, with others, and preferred before them; they cannot become altruistic except as others are compared with the immediate claims of the ego. [...] ‘Mine’ requires a contrasted ‘thine.’⁵⁹³

In this quotation from an early work of Dewey, *Psychology* (1887),⁵⁹⁴ he explains the mechanism through which the subject can become a self-conscious centre of experience, which

⁵⁹² LW 1, pp. 213-214.

⁵⁹³ EW 2, pp. 281-282.

⁵⁹⁴ Here, to explain Dewey’s recognitive and social understanding of human self-consciousness, we are quoting a passage from one of his earlier works, *Psychology* (1887). This text was highly contested by the philosophical

does not have mere feelings, perceptions and capacity of behavior, but rather feelings, perceptions, and capacities considered as “personal,” as its own contents, different from that of others and related to an objective world that is autonomous and external to it. According to Dewey, the subject can turn into a self-conscious individual, which considers itself as an individual centre of experience and approaches the world not only instinctively but in light of a valuation of its personal contents and an objective consideration of the outer world in its autonomous structures, developing reason, knowledge, and intelligent behavior. Nonetheless, this ontological development, from a genetic point of view, cannot occur in isolation and atomistically, but always with the mediation of the other subject. Indeed, only by affirmatively taking the perspective of the other subject, by recognizing it as an individual centre of behavior with its own feelings, perceptions, and capacities is it feasible for the subject to self-consciously perceive itself. Hence, self-consciousness results from a process of “identification in” and “distinction from” the other subject, i.e., it is the product of a process of affirmative recognition among subjects as different centres of experience. In virtue of its capacity not to merely co-exist with the other subject but to take the perspective of the other, recognizing it as an individual centre of experience, the individual is able, by means of this process – which has to be considered in its reciprocal functioning – to self-consciously conceive itself as a centre of experience. Therefore, it acquires the capability to value its contents as “personal” contents to be managed, and to relate to the world, considering the latter as an external and objective environment, having its own existence and autonomous structures that can be grasped. Accordingly, thinking, which for Dewey stands for the possibility to intelligently value personal contents and consider the autonomous processes underlying external objects and situations, emerges.

community of the time due to Dewey’s consistent adherence to Hegel’s metaphysics. Indeed, in this work, Dewey attempts to offer a psychology of the human being and grasp the psychic mechanisms (affectual, cognitive, and volitional) of human subjectivity, while securing the Hegelian idealism that he inherited from Morris on scientific bases. Although it is feasible to detect, within the text, several elements that Dewey maintained and developed in his later works through the new metaphysics disclosed by Darwin’s Evolutionism (for instance, the unity of human experience – in its emotional, cognitive, and volitional dimension – and a pragmatic understanding of human rationality), in *Psychology*, Dewey attempts, in a Hegelian manner, to explain the possibility for the subject to reach a cognitive and practical unity with the world by referring to the Absolute as the postulate or an a-priori condition, severed from experience, for such an experienced possibility. Despite these idealist metaphysical presuppositions, which Dewey later abandoned for explaining the unity between the individual and the external environment with a different metaphysical reflection on life, in *Psychology* it is feasible to find a clear exposition by Dewey of the recognitive conditions of the human being’s self-consciousness – always inspired by Hegel’s social and intersubjective understanding of self-consciousness – which is hard to find in other subsequent texts. For an overview of *Psychology*, its problems, and innovative theoretical points for Dewey’s later thinking, see Westbrook, 1991, pp. 13-29.

No individual can realize himself in impersonal relations – relations of things to each other [...]. He can truly develop himself only in self-conscious activity, in personality, and this is impossible without relations to other persons. A person, developing his personality in isolation from other persons [...] is impossible. It is hardly conceivable that he should ever become a being capable of knowing objects, and of enjoying beauty, without the aid and stimulus given by others; it is impossible to conceive him as developing the social side of his nature.⁵⁹⁵

Secondly, Dewey considers the constitutive role of this human capacity to reciprocally participate in the experience of the other, i.e., recognition, not only concerning its ontological contribution to the genetic constitution of the human being's self-consciousness, which is the condition for the development of human rationality, and thus, for the significant and intelligible interaction of the human being with the outer world. Instead, he considers it as constitutively fundamental also from an epistemic point of view, namely, for the subject's very possibility to think, to institute and create functional meanings, and to develop true knowledge.

In Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten, we have seen how, according to Dewey, the human being, unlike other animals, is able to develop a meaningful, significant, and intelligible interaction with the outer world, which allows the subject to approach the qualities and values that it experiences and needs for its self-reproduction and well-being as "signs" or "events." Accordingly, the subject does not passively receive and perceive these qualities, enacting mechanical transformative reactions for their consummation. Instead, it can consider them in terms of "signs for something else," namely, in terms of "events" conditioned by a series of objective conditions, which disclose the possibility to organize a regulated transformative behavior and expect certain consequences, with a humanizing import. "Meanings are rules for using and interpreting things; interpretation being always an imputation of potentiality for some consequences."⁵⁹⁶ Therefore, for Dewey, to give meanings to the outer world's objects and situations, considering them as "signs for something else," i.e., as referring to an underlying series of objective conditions and entailing potential practical consequences, relies upon both a process of investigation on the outer world, considered as external to and autonomous from the subject, and an organization of a transformative and functional behavior. "Events that are

⁵⁹⁵ EW 2, p. 281.

⁵⁹⁶ LW 1, p. 147.

objects or significant exist in a context where they acquire new ways of operation and new properties. [...] Natural events become messages to be enjoyed and administered [...].”⁵⁹⁷

Nonetheless, Dewey argues that it is misleading to conceive of meanings in terms of “a ready-made specific physical or mental endowment of a self-sufficing individual.”⁵⁹⁸ To conceive of them as atomistically instituted and individually possessed by the subject entails, first, “that the occurrence of ideas becomes a mysterious parallel addition to physical occurrences, with no community and no bridge to one another.”⁵⁹⁹ Secondly, it entails overlooking the greater import of meanings for the human being’s behavior, which involves not only individual intelligent behavior but also *communication*, and thus, “social interactions, companionship, mutual assistance, direction and concerted action [...]”⁶⁰⁰

On the contrary, according to Dewey, it is fundamental to acknowledge how human beings are able to develop a significant and meaningful interaction to the world in which they live, and thus, to institute meanings due to a process of knowledge, inquiry, and investigation of outer objects and situations and their qualities and values, only in virtue of their capacity to take the perspective of the other subject reciprocally. That is, only in virtue of their capacity to reciprocally perceive the world “as it may function in A’s experience, instead of just ego-centrally,” so that the world is “literally made common in at least two different centres of behavior.”⁶⁰¹ Accordingly, subjects do not only affirm each other as individual centres of experience. They can also reciprocally partake in their qualitative experiences with the outer world, as experiences marked by needs and demands of objective qualities, which can be observed and perceived not from a self-enclosed point of view but from a plurality of points of view. A thing enters “into the other’s behavior,”⁶⁰² and the “possession of the capacity to engage in such activity is intelligence,” for “intelligence and meaning are natural consequences of the peculiar form which interaction sometimes assumes in the case of human beings.”⁶⁰³ Indeed, intelligence, as the capacity to consider a thing as a “sign for something else,” i.e., as the result of an interaction or process of underlying objective conditions, springs from the possibility to perceive that thing from an objective and plural point of view, from a richer perspective. Thus,

⁵⁹⁷ LW 1, p. 137.

⁵⁹⁸ LW 1, p. 134.

⁵⁹⁹ LW 1, p. 134.

⁶⁰⁰ LW 1, p. 135.

⁶⁰¹ LW 1, p. 141.

⁶⁰² LW 1, p. 141.

⁶⁰³ LW 1, p. 142.

thanks to other subjects' engagement in the affective and qualitative experience of the individual and to the unification of their perspectives, true knowledge or "mind emerges."⁶⁰⁴ The outer world, in its things and situations, ceases to be experienced by subjects as a mere object, turning into a sign or an event, and thus into a world that can be known, due to the unification of different perspectives. Knowledge of outer objects and situations, of their qualities demanded by the living and desiring subject, develops and can be realized only with the other subject's experiential and epistemic mediation or cooperation. The emotional and epistemic cooperation of the other subject consists in sharing with the needy individual its perspective on the outer world and the quality desired, which is approached and considered from a plurality of points of view and under a plurality of aspects. Consequently, the world, approached from a plurality of points of view, is reconsidered from an enriched and unified perspective. This unified perspective pragmatically entails an intelligent organization of behavior aiming at the functional transformation of the outer world, and it is tested and justified in its legacy, truth, and functionality, again, only through the mediation of the community of subjects.⁶⁰⁵

With such considerations, what Dewey attempts to suggest is not that the capacity for signification and knowledge, i.e., the mental, which are properties of the human being's behavior due to its possession of self-consciousness and a mind, do not have "a describable existence outside the social."⁶⁰⁶ The human being has a brain with the potential to significantly approach the world, conferring to it meanings due to processes of investigations. Instead, he argues that "in so far as they appear and operate outside of that large interaction which forms the social, they do not reveal that full force and import [they possess]."⁶⁰⁷ Accordingly, in the absence of the affirmative mediation among subjects as individual centres of experiences, the

⁶⁰⁴ LW 1, p. 135.

⁶⁰⁵ See also MW 12, pp. 100. Here, Dewey refers to Bacon, considering him one of the first thinkers who acknowledged the cooperative nature of reason, inquiry, and knowledge. "To Bacon, [...] truth must be discovered by social agencies organized for that purpose. Left to himself, the individual can do little or nothing; he is likely to become involved in his own self-spun web of misconceptions. The great need is the organization of cooperative research, whereby men can attack nature collectively and the work of inquiry is carried on continuously from generation to generation. [...] Power over nature was not to be individual but collective." Concern the public and social nature of inquiry and knowledge, both of the ordinary and scientific one, see also, LW 1, p. 39. To have a true and stable belief is possible only by showing to other subjects the procedure employed to form it: "this procedure tells other inquirers how they are going to work to get results which will agree or disagree in their experience with those previously arrived at, and thus, confirm, modify, rectify the latter."

⁶⁰⁶ LW 3, p. 49. For an analysis of the "social" as the fourth degree or level of life in Dewey's metaphysics, see Särkelä, 2017a.

⁶⁰⁷ LW 3, p. 49.

subject cannot develop the “feeling for self” that is a condition of possibility for intelligence. Instead, in the absence of other human beings, without their engagement in its affective and emotional experience and their epistemic cooperation in disclosing the intelligible character of the world due to a plurality of points of view and to the cooperative effort to justify and test the adequacy of such knowledge processes, the individual subject does but remain with mere “fantastic beliefs” and “opinions.” It is delimited by a self-enclosed perspective on outer objects, deprived of that perspectival pluralism that allows the consideration and the verification of the rich processes lying under qualitative objects and situations to occur effectively.

The actual structure of knowledge viewed in relation to the operations with which it is concretely established to be knowledge in the honorific sense, that is as tested and justified, as grounded, instead of as mere opinion and fantastic belief, can be understood only in social terms. By knowledge I mean belief in relation to evidence that substantiates it. Now the simplest distinction that can be drawn between objects of knowledge in this sense and mere matters of opinion and credulity, or even through however internally self-consistent and formally valid, is the distinction between the socially confirmed and the privately entertained. [...] It is a truism that science is science because of observations, experiments, and calculations are so conducted as to be capable of report to others and repetition by others. Now this report and repetition are wholly misconceived when thought of simply as external additions to a thought complete in itself. [...] The entire operation of individual experimentation and soliloquizing has been influenced at every point by reference to the social medium in which their results are to be set forth and responded to.⁶⁰⁸

The subject, therefore, *realizes* and *actualizes* its capacity to know the world, i.e., to have “a belief in relation to evidence that substantiates it,”⁶⁰⁹ rather than having merely opinions, in virtue of the other subjects’ emotional engagement and epistemic participation and effort in cognitively valuing and considering the quality or value desired by the individual, enriching the perspective on it and cooperating in the process of investigation and justification of its underlying processes of occurrence. Only in virtue of these social processes of participation and engagement in the affective and needy experience of the subject, which is a “sign for something else” to be investigated and reconstructed through a plurality of perspectives and cooperative cognitive efforts, can the subject realize its capability to instantiate an intelligible interaction with the external environment, and thus, give meanings to outer objects and situations.

⁶⁰⁸ LW 3, pp. 50-51.

⁶⁰⁹ LW 3, p. 50.

According to Dewey, to give meanings to the external qualitative objects and situations of desire pragmatically means for the subject to find intelligent organizations of transformative behavior – a specific chain of means for the attainment of a certain end – with the purpose to enhance, expand, and secure the qualities or values it demands, to fulfil its pressing needs in a significant, stable, and tensionless manner, and to reach a harmonious inter-penetration and unity with the external environment and life. Now, we have seen how the subject can give functional meanings to outer objects and situations only in virtue of a social learning process of investigation concerning the “intelligibility” or “meaningfulness” of outer things, as signs or results of conditioning factors. Thus, meanings, for they result from cooperative and collective processes of observation and investigations, are socially *instituted* and *shared* with other subjects. They are neither results of a self-enclosed individual nor a private possession. Rather, on the one hand, they are created only with the cognitive cooperation of other subjects; on the other hand, they are shared with other subjects, being suitable to be communicated and understood by others, disclosing the possibility for communication and cooperative or participative action. As Dewey specifies:

Meaning is not indeed a psychic existence; it is primarily a property of behavior; and secondarily a property of objects. But the behavior of which it is a quality is a distinctive behavior; cooperative, in that response to another’s act involves contemporaneous response to a thing as entering into the other’s behavior. [...] Primarily meaning is intent and intent is not personal in a private and exclusive sense. [...] Meaning is the acquisition of significance by the things in their status in making possible and fulfilling shared cooperation. In the first place, it is the motion and sounds of A which have meaning, or are signs. Similarly, the movements of B, while they are immediate to him, are signs to A of B’s cooperation or refusal. [...] Significant things are things actually implicated in situations of shared purpose and execution.⁶¹⁰

Accordingly, meanings are not only properties of things. They are also signs shared by subjects, which can be communicated in forms of gestures and words, understood by other subjects in terms of personal intentions, demands, and plans for action in the outer world, and thus entailing the possibility to turn an individual purpose into a public and shared purpose, realized through a social undertaking and execution. It follows, therefore, that meanings, which represent organizations and plans for action outlined in light of the intelligent consideration of outer objects and situations, are not only instituted in their functional task in virtue of social cognitive and learning processes but are also shared and communicated to other subjects in

⁶¹⁰ LW 1, pp. 141-142.

order to undertake cooperatively intelligent and transformative plans for action, devoted to the significant fulfillment of the subjects' pressing needs. Thanks to communication, gestural or verbal, subjects practically become active participants to the experience of the subject in its pragmatic dimension, the one of intelligent transformation to enhance life, and the world becomes a context for socially shared self-realization. Hence, Dewey does not only rethink the role of the mental in its pragmatic significance while reconsidering the social conditioning for its genetic and performatively functional realization, thus conceiving intelligence in terms of a transformative intention that relies upon collective processes of cognitive investigation and institution of meaningful objects. Furthermore, he reconsiders how the possession of socially instituted and shared meanings entails the possibility for communication, and thus, for the reciprocal expression among subjects of demands to be practically pursued collectively, cooperatively, through conjoint actions, entailing reciprocal expectations and socially reached fulfillment, consummation, and enjoyment.

[Any theory that denies interaction and association in the origin and function of language] regarded the word not as a mode of social action with which to realize the end of association, but as an expression of a ready-made, exclusively individual, mental state; sensation, image, feeling, which, being an existence, is necessarily particular. For the sound, gesture, or written mark which is involved in language is a particular existence. But as such it is not a word, and it does not become a word by declaring a mental existence; it becomes a word by gaining meaning; and it gains meaning when use establishes a genuine community of action.⁶¹¹

Meanings, i.e., the mental, have not a mere psychic existence, but rather they have an objective and observable existence. Indeed, they are instituted in virtue of relationships of participation between organic beings and are objectified and expressed within an intelligent mode of conduct, which occurs within a community of individuals who can understand the significance of the subject's behavior and participate collectively through cooperative forms of agency. Hence, through such reflections, Dewey suggests that the "significance," "meaningfulness," and "intelligibility" of the human being's interaction with its external environment is effective and objectively realized not only when it entails the possibility for the

⁶¹¹ LW 1, p. 145. Here Dewey is contesting nominalism's core theory, according to which meanings and ideas do not have a real existence, standing for mere signs in the mind of the subject. In contrast to this assumption, Dewey considers the mental – meanings, ideas, concepts, knowledge – as having an existence and making part of nature and reality, as we saw in the previous chapters. On the one hand, the mental is a level of existence developing from previous degrees of reality, where the intelligibility of inorganic and organic life can be disclosed through the institution of intelligent behavior. On the other hand, the mental is a *social* mode of behavior and springs from objective relations among organic subjects, thus having a concrete and observable existence.

subject to undertake an intelligent individual action. But furthermore, when it implies the possibility for the subject to communicate with other subjects while being understood in its intent, giving to its experience a public and shared existence that leads to the constitution of a common and inclusive undertaking in transforming the outer world for the fulfillment of the subject's demand. Therefore, the type of association that distinguishes the human being from other organisms, i.e., participation and engagement, ends up consisting not only in the emotional and cognitive participation in the other subject's experience for the institution of shared and functional meanings, but also in the consequent practical institution of corresponding forms of social and cooperative actions, of a community of action for the intelligent transformation of the outer world.

Hence, in different works of his early and later philosophical production, Dewey argues for the theoretical necessity to acknowledge how the mental depends in its genetic development, performative realization, and functional role in the human being's life on the specific type of association existing among human beings, the one of participation and engagement in the other's experience, which, to all effects, represents a relation of recognition. The American philosopher, following Hegel's intersubjective theory of human self-consciousness, places such a form of participation and engagement, firstly, at the base of the genetic acquisition by subjects of self-conscious attitudes, of personal feelings as individual centres of experience and behavior, which are necessary conditions for the development of intelligence and rational capacities. He generally describes this basic level of participation and engagement in terms of the subjects' reciprocal and affirmative taking the perspective of the other as an individual and particular centre of experience, having its own feelings, perceptions, and intents. Thus, this reciprocal process of affirmative decentralization turns into a process of self-identification, which enables each individual to develop a feeling for self, to identify its contents as its own, as distinguished from others' and opened to be valued and referred to an outer world with an autonomous existence and processes that can be objectively grasped and managed. In virtue of this basic level of recognition, subjects can ontologically and genetically develop a self-conscious attitude to themselves, which is an essential condition for intelligence, i.e., knowledge and signification.

Then, Dewey refers to another three connotations of the human beings' capacity to recognize the other subject, or take its perspective, which reveal a manifest normative and ethical meaning. Indeed, these forms of taking the perspective of the other turn, on the one

hand, into real forms of active participation in the experience of the other subject, and, on the other, into forms of participations allowing not merely the possession by subjects of cognitive capacities having a potential practical function with respect to its constitutive interaction with the external environment. Instead, these forms of participation represent the very possibility for subjects to performatively realize their cognitive capacities in their functional and humanizing meaning, i.e., to acquire an intelligent and meaningful relation to the outer world's qualitative objects and situations for the significant satisfaction of its pressing needs.

First, Dewey points out that the possibility for subjects to develop real knowledge of the outer world instead of having mere fancies and arbitrary beliefs, and thus to confer meanings to it that disclose functional plans for actions, relies upon the emotional and cognitive engagement of other subjects into its qualitative and affective experience. This participation or engagement stands for an emotional affirmation of the needy subject's experience as both having worth and being "a sign for something else," referring to a desired quality or value to be investigated in its processes of occurrence. The engagement of other subjects in its own experience entails that its demanded quality can be perceived and approached from a plurality of perspectives and points of view, rather than from a self-enclosed and individualistic one. And it leads to the subsequent cooperative cognitive engagement in disclosing the conditioning factors lying under the desired qualities and in justifying practically the hypothesis outlined. Due to such an emotional and cognitive participation, the human being can provide functional meanings to the outer world and undertake programs for intelligent transformative action. These meanings are not defined atomistically and individually by the human being, but rather are the results of collective learning processes and common agreements among subjects. Then, Dewey specifies that meanings do not only represent properties of objects and consequently intelligent forms of individual behavior, but furthermore, are signs suitable to be communicated and understood by other subjects, entailing the possibility for subjects to participate and engage in the needy experience of the other subject also pragmatically, instituting forms of coordinated and cooperative actions for the significant fulfillment of human needs. It follows, thus, that the human being can fully realize the potentialities of its form of living or level of life – the mental – not only in virtue of an emotional and cognitive engagement of other subjects in its needy experience but also in virtue of a pragmatic engagement in operating collectively those transformations of the outer world that condition the expansion and enhancement of the qualities that it needs. In conclusion, the human being can *effectively* and *performatively* realize

its capacity for action, i.e., the reconstruction of experience and the reshaping of life, with the institution of humanizing interests, only in virtue of the recognition of other subjects, occurring in terms of their emotional, cognitive, and practical engagement in its needy experience.

According to Dewey, this emotional, cognitive, and practical engagement coincides, in the first place, with the creation of social groups that, having the same needs, intelligently channel these latter into shared interests. Shared interests, thus, are functional objects or situations to be realized in virtue of a certain chain of means, i.e., specific transformations of both the environing conditions and the social or associative world. These transformations represent the objective conditions necessary for the enhancement and stability of the qualities or values needed by the group members and get realized through the organization of coordinated and cooperative social practices, socially established and communally pursued, entailing reciprocal duties and expectations. In Chapter Eight, we pointed out that Dewey, in his lectures in social and political philosophy, considers social groups as follows:

Human nature has a variety of interests to be served, a number of types of impulses that have to be expressed, or instincts that form needs to be satisfied, and about each one of the more fundamental of these some form of association, of *living* together or of acting together continuously or repeatedly and regularly (as distinct from mere chance and transient contacts). Above [?] the sexual need and the function of reproduction there grows up the cohabitation of man and woman, and then the adhesion of children – the family group or form of associated life. The need of support, of sustenance and the need of regular activity, of impressing the energy of man upon nature, develop association for industry and business. Again, men associate for worship, for religious ends and churches, monastic orders come into existence. Men's interest in investigation and discovery make them join together for educational ends, schools, learned societies, etc. The need of regulating men's conducts, their behavior to one another, protecting public order etc., and the desire for power and authority give rise to governmental association, political society. Aside from the hundreds of special associations for amusement, companionship, common feasts, which are more [or] less temporary clubs, we have these fairly universal modes of union and association.⁶¹²

Social groups, therefore, exist to intelligently respond to a need shared by individuals and entail the collective institution of a shared interest. This latter is defined according to a cognitive and intelligent valuation of the conditioning factors regulating the occurrence of the quality needed by subjects in a specific situation, and represent the potential object or situation wherein this quality can be enhanced and secured to subjects in virtue of a specific chain of

⁶¹² Dewey, 2015, III.2-3.

means. It is now feasible to draw three considerations concerning the ontology of social groupings provided by Dewey in the *Lectures in China*.

The first consideration that we want to point out is that, for Dewey, the institution of social groups entails reciprocal relations of recognition among subjects that have the same need to fulfil, which have to be considered in terms of subjects' reciprocal participation and engagement in the needy experience of the other, both emotional, cognitive, and practical, with the collective institution of an interest, i.e., of a specific end to be pursued and realized through a specific transformation of the outer world, both environmental and social, thus entailing the institution of a collectively followed organization of social behavior. Moreover, if this collectively followed emotional, cognitive, and practical organization, i.e., the social interest, is revealed to be objectively functional for the group members in significantly fulfilling their need, it turns into an "acting together continuously or repeatedly and regularly (as distinct from mere chance and transient contacts)."⁶¹³ The shared interest embeds, indeed, a certain emotional connotation/denotation of the subjects' need, a certain cognitive interpretation of its objective conditioning factors, and a certain organization of cooperative and coordinated social practices, which, if they are functional, turn into social habits. That is to say that they turn into emotional, cognitive, and practical patterns of action enacted and performed by the group members repeatedly, regularly, pre-intentionally, and pre-reflexively, which ensure the stability and the mastery of their shared interests reflexively instituted.

The second consideration that we want to draw is that, for Dewey, the possibility for the human being to fully perform its specific constitutive interaction with the external environment, the one of "reconstruction of experience" and "reshaping of life" through the institution of humanizing interests, cannot occur, first, without the constitution of social groups and, thus, without relationships of recognition with other subjects, to be conceived in terms of the emotional, cognitive, and practical engagement of others subjects in its experience. Indeed, only through the emotional, cognitive, and practical efforts of other subjects has the individual the possibility to grasp the intelligible conditions of its needy experience and to institute a humanizing interest, wherein the objective quality that it needs can be enhanced and secured through specific transformations of the outer world, both natural and social. The experience of the human being, thus, in its descriptive and normative meaning, is never private. It stands for an intelligently and objectively mediated intent, which, as such, is always intimately social.

⁶¹³ Dewey, 2015, III.2.

Indeed, only in virtue of its potentiality of being shared, rendered public and common, can it actually disclose and realize its true humanizing potential, namely, the *enhancement of life*.

The third consideration, which follows from the previous two, concerns the fact that the subjects' interests are never individual but always social interests, in at least two senses. On the one hand, due to the needs of human nature, they are always shared with other individuals having the same pressing need. On the other hand, they are instituted and defined through the mediation of other subjects, in virtue of reciprocal relationships of recognition. Due to the social nature of the emotional, cognitive, and practical processes lying under the institution of the subjects' interest, it follows that the subject's need or sensuous interaction with the outer world is valued collectively. It is cognitively defined in its desired quality and fulfilled through functional organization of behavior not atomistically, but in virtue of social relations and processes. The relationships of recognition by which the possibility of the subject to perform its specific capacity of action is ensured, on the one hand, enable the subject to define its interests. On the other hand, they entail that other subjects are involved in defining the subjects' interests. Therefore, these interests are always instituted through categories, meanings, knowledge, and practical organizations collectively established and then reproduced habitually by the subjects. Thus, in Dewey's framework, relationships of recognition are always both *conditions* of possibility for the subject to perform its specific capacity for action and *conditionings* of its contents. The conditioning of the individual by the other subjects is, for Dewey, a matter of fact, following from the kind of association that belongs to human beings. Reciprocal engagement and participation represent the conditions of possibility for the subject's self-realization, and thus, the subject's self-realization cannot occur without social processes that define and stabilize the subjects' contents. "The individual is subordinated [to the other individuals of a social group] because except in and through communication of experience from and to others, he remains dumb, merely sentient, a brute animal. Only in association with fellows does he become a conscious centre of experience."⁶¹⁴ The human being can truly become a conscious centre of experience, disclosing the agentive quality belonging to its humanity, only within the context of social groupings, within association and recognition, which respectively realize individuals and are "means for creating individuals."⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁴ MW 12, p. 198.

⁶¹⁵ MW 12, p. 191.

In light of such considerations, therefore, we can clarify that Dewey, in the *Lectures in China*, conceives social groups in terms of the basic “unities” or more elementary “forms of association” wherein the subject is embedded, and wherein, through relations of reciprocal recognition, it can functionally define its interests and realize its specific constitutive interaction with the outer world. Nonetheless, in the *Lectures*, Dewey specifies that it would be misleading to consider the analytic identification of social groups as the basic unities or elements of human association in terms of an ontological reality. Accordingly, it would be feasible to argue that the subject’s membership into a social group and its recognitive relationships is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the realization of the subject’s capacity for action through the institution of a shared interest. Indeed, “a society is made up of a multiplicity of groups each of which is constituted on the basis of at least one interest held in common by its members,” and “no group is independent and isolated.”⁶¹⁶ Human needs are plural, and accordingly, there is a plurality of social groups wherein individuals institute different interests, each of which represents a specific end-in-view to be pursued through particular means, i.e., a chain of transformations of the environment and the social world.

The consideration of the plurality of social groups pursuing different and competing interests – such as the interest in family, in religion, in work, in economics, in art, in politics – complicates the framework, since it entails that these interests should be somehow adjusted to each other in order to develop, in the greatest possible way, equably and homogeneously:

We can frame in imagination a picture in which there is an equal proportionate development of all these forms of associated life, where they interact freely with one another, and where the results of each one contribute to the richness and significance of every other, where family relations assist equally the cooperation of men in science, art, religion and public life, where association for production and sale of goods enriches not merely materially but morally and intellectually all forms and modes of human intercourse – where in short there is mutual stimulation and support and free passage of significant results from one to another.⁶¹⁷

By referring to the plurality of social groups and interests, to the necessity for each group to develop its interest in the social arena, and to the ideal picture of a social context wherein each group contributes to the richness and the significance of every other by materially and intellectually supporting it, Dewey makes a fundamental consideration. That is, he suggests that the emotional, cognitive, and practical definition of each social interest, in its humanizing

⁶¹⁶ Dewey, 1973, pp. 65-66.

⁶¹⁷ Dewey, 2015, III.3.

meaning, cannot occur in the self-enclosed circle of the single group members, but always in the broader social world gathering all other social groups. The interest of a group, for instance, the interest in family, is not defined in a vacuum. By our previous reconstruction of Dewey's category of interest in Chapter Ten, we know that any interest, to really have a humanizing import and embed the realization of the human being's kind of action, should always be *specific*. That is to say that it should always be defined, in its end-in-view and particular means, according to the specific situation in which the subject finds itself and thus, according to the objective conditions that, in the specific existing outer situation, can ensure the enhancement and the stability of the desired value or quality. Nonetheless, the specific situations in which the group members find themselves are always social situations, framed within a social context that is constituted of a plurality of social groups that, to significantly fulfil their needs, have established specific social practices and institutions. The social world wherein the social group develops is the ensemble of the social practices and institutions devoted to the fulfillment of the social groups' interests and needs, collectively accepted and becoming habitual. Hence, it follows that the external environment wherein the subjects' need emerge, which objectively mediates the specific quality of which subjects are deficient, and where the groups' interest can be defined, is the existing social context wherein the group is embedded. Its interest, therefore, in its humanizing sense, is defined through the intelligent valuation of the social world in its complexity, in its given environmental conditions, social practices, and institutions, which have been functionally established for the significant fulfillment of a plurality of social needs, i.e., for the realization of specific interests.

From this complex emergency context of the group's shared need, it follows, first, that the emotional expression and transmission of the groups' affective and qualitative experience cannot occur only within the group but also outside the group, with the other groups of the social world. Indeed, the cognitive valuation of the objective conditions lying under the stability of the social group's desired quality, which is defined according to the ensemble of the existing social practices and institutions composing the social context, should necessarily also involve the other groups of the social context. It should involve their pluralistic perspective on the demanded quality, their cognitive efforts in making meaningful, with their knowledge and means of expression, the needy experience of the group members, through the creation of cooperatively established knowledge, social meanings collectively shared, and cooperative organizations of functional behavior for the transformation of existing social practices and

institutions. There must be “mutual stimulation and support, free passage of significant results from one another.”⁶¹⁸

Any social interest, hence, is the result of at least two essential and interpenetrated associating processes or processes of recognition. This includes the one among the individuals sharing the same pressing need and associating for the realization of a common interest, and the one with the other groups of the social world, by which the need of the social group can be defined into an intelligent and humanizing interest in virtue of more extended, and thus more functional, social learning processes and cooperative transformations of the social world’s existing conditions into the ones suitable to enhance the experience of subjects. Therefore, the condition of possibility for the subject to realize its specific capacity for action, i.e., reconstruction of experience and reshaping of life, entails not only the reciprocal engagement and participation in its needy experience of the individuals sharing its same need, but also, the engagement and participation of the other individuals of the social world, pursuing different interests. Now, we can thus rephrase our previous consideration. According to Dewey, the genetic and performative condition for the human being to realize the potentialities of its form of living or quality of action relies upon the specific form of association that belongs to human subjects, i.e., recognition, as the emotional, cognitive, and practical participation and engagement in its experience by all the groups constituting the social world.

Society means association; coming together in joint intercourse and action for the better realization of any form of experience which is augmented and confirmed by being shared. Hence there are as many associations as there are goods which are enhanced by being mutually communicated and participated in.⁶¹⁹

Recognition, as the emotional, cognitive, and practical association, participation, or engagement, is thus presented in terms of the social relation by which any experience can be better realized, being “augmented and confirmed by being shared.”⁶²⁰

On the one hand, in light of our previous reconstruction of Dewey’s Naturalistic Humanism, we know that Dewey with “experience” normatively refers to the constitutive interaction that the human being can develop with the external environment, but according to a specific and distinguishing quality, that of *enhancement of life*, which is both the liberation of

⁶¹⁸ Dewey, 2015, III.3.

⁶¹⁹ MW 12, p. 197.

⁶²⁰ MW 12, p. 197.

the emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities of immediate experience through the institution of humanizing interests, and the reshaping of life in its totality. Furthermore, we have seen how, with his metaphysical reflections, Dewey conceives this capacity of the human being to reconstruct its immediate experience, first, in terms of a specific or situational process, which should be accomplished with the valuation of specific situations and their objectively mediated quality, and with the corresponding institution of a behavior entailing a specific chain of means for transforming the outer world, both the natural and the social one. Second, he conceives this capacity of the human being to reconstruct its experience as a projective and dynamic process, due to the restless transformations and dynamism that belongs to existence and to the living interaction of the human being with the outer world.

On the other hand, with our reconstruction of Dewey's analysis of the specific form of association belonging to human beings, we know that Dewey bases the *effective* and *full* realization of the human being's capacity for action in the external world on the social recognition with the group members and the other social members. In his framework, recognition is conceived in terms of the reciprocal participation and engagement into the experience of others, from an emotional, cognitive, and practical point of view, and it is ethical, i.e., devoted to the human being's self-realization, only if it entails the "augmentation" and "enhancement" of the human being's capacity for action and interaction with the outer world, through the institution of humanizing interests. The possibility for subjects to institute humanizing interests relies upon normative relationships of recognition with other social members. It follows that they are instituted with collective learning and transformative processes, being defined, in their ends and specific chain of means, by means of knowledge socially created and meanings socially instituted, and they are realized through transformative actions cooperatively pursued, which concretely change the existing social world, in its social practices and institutions.

The individual, hence, can develop its specific humanizing experience only in virtue of relationships of recognition. And these relationships, respectively, somehow "create" the subject's interests, through knowledge, meanings, and practices that are not results only of the personal emotivity, intelligence, and action of the individual, but also of the other social members, which actively participate in the substantial constitution and realization of the individual's interest. Hence, the reconstructed experience of the subject is never private or a ready-made interior thing, but it always entails the substantial and active participation of the

social world. Moreover, the interests of the individual, if they are functional and adequate, become stable acquisitions of the social world, being realized in their specific emotional, cognitive, and practical organization repeatedly and habitually, namely, on a pre-intentional and pre-reflexive level, which allows the subject to stabilize its contents and expect and count on a mastered and tensionless cooperation of other subjects for the realization of its contents.

XI. 2. The Criticism of the Social World, Ideological and Lifeless Recognition, and the Normative Grammar of Recognition

From our reconstructions of Dewey's theory of the human being's constitutive interaction with the external world and its ontological interdependence with relationships of recognition with other subjects, it is now feasible for us to provide three interrelated conclusions regarding Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism.

XI. 2. 1. The Priority of Social Criticism: "A Comment on Nature and Life"

We want to call our first conclusion "the priority of social criticism." That is, now it is feasible to argue that Dewey's attempt to provide a naturalistic anthropology devoted to the analysis of the human being's specific capacity for action with the external world has a clear and primary critical intent: to offer a criterion, both to social individuals and to the theorist, for the criticism of the social world. The metaphysical inquiry on the gross features of life, the consequent anthropological considerations on the human being's constitutive interaction with the outer world, the anthropological definition of its capacity for action in terms of the enhancement of life, the descriptive and normative analysis of the category of interest, the conclusive considerations of the recognitive and social conditions for the genetic and performative realization of the human beings' capacity for action: all these interconnected elements represent the "*ground-map of the province of criticism.*"⁶²¹ That is, they represent the general trajectories through which to make "a comment on nature and life in the interest of a more intense and just appreciation of the meanings present in experience."⁶²² Accordingly, it is feasible for Dewey to formally and critically approach social contexts concerning their capacity or incapacity to realize and enhance the human being's capacity for action. That is, the social

⁶²¹ LW 1, p. 309.

⁶²² LW 1, p. 304.

world and its cognitive relations can be criticized or evaluated “with discriminating judgment, careful appraisal, and judgment”⁶²³ concerning their effective capability to enhance and enrich the lives of human beings, allowing them to “give greater freedom and security” to the expansion of their desired qualities, to “perpetuate more enduring and extensive values,” to satisfy their needs intelligently and stably, and to reach an ontological interpenetration and tensionless unity with the external environment.⁶²⁴ The critical theorist and social subjects, thus, should use this ground-map for the sake of criticizing “beliefs, institutions, customs, policies with respect to their bearing upon good,” which is the clarification, liberation, and extension of “those goods which inhere in the naturally generated functions of experience.”⁶²⁵

According to Dewey, the effective capacity of social contexts to enhance the life of social members, is something open to be objectively and publicly evaluated in light of the ontological conditions of the human being’s capacity for action, namely, intelligent transformation and dynamism.

As we previously analyzed in Chapter Ten, on the one hand, the values or qualities desired by subjects for the satisfaction of their needs are not only subjectively perceived in their lack, but additionally, they are always mediated in their contents and conditionings of occurrence by the specific outer situation in which subjects find themselves. Therefore, it follows, in the first instance, that these conditions are always suitable to be valued from an objective and public point of view. In the second instance, the consequences of the cognitive valuation of these qualities, in their specific chain of conditionings, and the subsequent organization of behavior, which state an end-in-view and specific means or transformations of the outer world to attain it, can be evaluated from an objective point. Whenever subjects are practically blocked or stuck in fulfilling their needs intelligently and stably, in enhancing and expanding their desired quality, in reaching a harmonious and tensionless interpenetration with the outer world, both natural and social, it means that the immediate and affective experiences of subjects have not been adequately reconstructed in the social context, both from an emotional, cognitive, and practical point of view. That is, the social groups composing the social contexts and/or the group members to which subjects belong can provide emotional, cognitive, and practical interpretations of their experience, thus partly satisfying their needs in the social

⁶²³ LW 1, pp. 298.

⁶²⁴ LW 1, p. 302.

⁶²⁵ LW 1, p. 305.

contexts through the social definition of interests, but which, nonetheless, prove to be inadequate for the humanizing reconstructions of their experience and to hinder the very self-realization of human subjects. The inefficiency of the social interpretation of social members' experience and the consequent inadequateness of the socially defined interest unveil the *obstruction* or *refusal* of the social context to really participate in the affective and emotional experience of social members, to employ all the means of knowledge and signification of the time, and to realize the transformations of the existing social context functionally needed. Hence, the final result of these social contexts is the inability of social subjects to successfully unify the two living degrees belonging to them, the organic and living one with the mental one.

On the other hand, according to Dewey, the values and qualities of the human being's experience are always specific and hence *dynamic* and *projective*. "Values are as unstable as the form of clouds. The things that possess them are exposed to all the contingencies of existence [...]. Good things change and vanish not only with changes in the environing medium but with changes in ourselves."⁶²⁶ The qualities desired by the subjects *necessarily* change due to the processual dynamism of existence and life, as being characterized by ongoing interactions, transformations, and change. Accordingly, since the human being is part of life and *properly* lives only due to the ongoing qualitative transactions and reciprocal transformations with the outer world, it follows that the affective and emotional interaction with the outer world is always situational and has a *minimum* or *maximum* potential of creativity, novelty, and deviationality from previous experiences. Indeed, through previous experiences, the outer world and the subject undergo changes, and consequently, their subsequent living interactions are always unique in their emotional, cognitive, and practical dimensions. The qualities needed and demanded sensuously and affectively by subjects are always necessarily specific, more or less different from previous ones, and so are the consequent cognitive valuations of their objective conditionings and the functional behavior necessary to strengthen them.

The dynamism, situationalism, and creativity of the subject's constitutive interaction with the outer world, and hence the projection and deviational potential of its demanded values and humanizing interests, is a sign, according to Dewey, of the human being's partaking in *life* as such. Respectively, the hardening, the stagnation, and the lack of nourishment of the subject's constitutive interaction with the outer world, and thus the hypostatization and stiffening of its

⁶²⁶ LW 1, p. 298.

demanded values and interests, is a sign of the human being's severance from life, from the gross features of existence and from the dynamism that necessarily characterized the living unity of the sensuous organism with the outer world. In Chapter Ten, we saw that the tendency and reason for which subjects can hypostatize their interests and develop a rigid interaction with the outer world, restricting the emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities intrinsic to new living experiences, is due, according to Dewey, to a distortion of the functional mechanism of habitual activity. Through the repetition of the emotional, cognitive, and practical organization rationally defined by the individual for the significant fulfillment of its need, and the transformation of such organization into a pre-reflexively and pre-intentionally enacted pattern of action, the subject acquires a practical mastery of external situations, it stabilizes its interests, realizing them without emotional, cognitive, and practical efforts, and it can turn its attention to other elements of its experience with the external world. Hence, Dewey acknowledges the enormous significance of habitual action for the human being's interaction with itself and the external world, but at the same time, points out how habits, due to the dynamism proper of life, should always be elastic and creative, open to be intelligently redefined according to the new emotional and needy requests of different situations. On the contrary, if habits turn into mere "rigid roots," into a bare repetition of narrow and stagnating patterns of meanings, values, and actions, the interaction of the human being with the outer world becomes "dead," i.e., deprived of new interactions, transformations, and change, opposed to "alive." Consequently, the interests of the subject become lifeless, reified, petrified, and without vitality. Hence, due to the dynamism, the situationalism, and the creativity intrinsically characterizing the living interaction of the human being with the external environment, according to Dewey, the subject *can* and *should* also evaluate, from an objective and observable point of view, its interests concerning their possible "loss of vitality," and judging if its emotional, cognitive, and practical patterns of action that have become habitual has become tight, rigid, and restricted in the potentialities for deviation and creativity.

But now, concerning Dewey's reference to the possibility for subjects to rigidify their contents and capacity for action, we have an additional element at our disposal to grasp the social implications of this phenomenon. Indeed, we know that the subject can institute humanizing interests only with the recognitive mediation of other social members, belonging both to its group and to other social groups. This recognitive mediation entails, hence, the "creation" of the subjects' interests through the employment of socially defined and shared

meanings, the provision of different cognitive perspectives and social knowledge, and the institution of behavioral organizations collectively defined, accepted, and followed. Therefore, the subjects' contents are always mediated and constituted, from a substantial point of view, by the entire social context. What's more, these contents are stabilized and ensured in their ongoing realization, only if their underlying emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations socially established become social habits, namely, dispositions introjected and acquired through repetition and pre-reflexively and pre-intentionally enacted by all the social members, ensuring to subjects both the mastery of these social behavioral organizations and the tensionless and energy-save institution of reciprocal expectations, coordination, and cooperation.

Nonetheless, now that we have underlined how the subject, for the development of adequate interests, is always dependent on the social context and other social members, which not only enable the subject to perform its capacity for action but at the same time substantially define its contents, we can emphasize two fundamental points. First, for Dewey, the subjects' interests are always defined, from a descriptive and normative point of view, through the active recognitive mediation of the existing social context, and thus, are in part determined supra-subjectively with the mediation of the ensemble of the social forces. Second, the habits by which individuals stabilize and secure their interests, i.e., the emotional, cognitive, and practical interpretations for the significant fulfilment of their needs, are never entirely *individual* habits, but always *social* habits, substantially established with the mediation of the social world and pre-reflexively and pre-intentionally followed by the entire social context.

To talk about the priority of "society" to the individual is to indulge in nonsensical metaphysics. But to say that some pre-existent association of human beings is prior to every particular human being who is born into the world is to mention a commonplace. These associations are definite modes of interaction of persons with one another.⁶²⁷

The interpretation of the subject's emotional experience, the cognitive valuation of its demanded quality, the practical organization to accomplish the latter are all elements embodied and introjected by the individual and the entire social context, thus allowing the individual to "be empowered," to have the "mastery on external situations." Indeed, the subject is enabled to follow and realize a series of emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities without impediments and through the tensionless and immediate emotional, cognitive, and practical

⁶²⁷ MW 14, p. 44.

cooperation of other subjects. Thanks to the recognitive mediation of the social context and to the transformation of these recognitive relations into habitual conferrals to subjects of meaningful feelings, qualitative values, and practical intent, the subject is empowered to feel, think, and act in a certain way without efforts and social impediments.

The activities of the group are already there, and some assimilation of his own acts to their pattern is a prerequisite of a share therein, and hence of having any part in what is going on. [...] The problem, however, of how those established and more or less deeply grooved systems of interaction which we call social groups, big and small, modify the activities of individuals who perform are caught-up within them, and how the activities of component individuals remake and redirect previously established customs is a deeply significant one.”⁶²⁸

Therefore, the second critical issue, according to Dewey, is to evaluate if the social context, in its recognitive mediation and subsequently habitualized descriptive and normative conferral of emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities to subjects, does enable and sustain the possibility for subjects to be open to the deviational potentialities of new situations and living interactions with the outer world, self-adjusting to the dynamism and projection of their needy contents, therefore, allowing them to *live* and be part of the dynamism proper of life. If the social world empowers the subjects’ activity through the habitualized recognitive conferral of social meanings, values, and practices that are nonetheless rigidly maintained and mechanically reproduced regardless of new situations, entailing the reification of their contents and the standardization of their capacity and potentiality to act, the social world and its recognitive structure should be criticized. They should be criticized as preventing, from an objective and publicly observable point of view, the individual from performing its specific qualitative interaction with the outer world in its intrinsic living dynamism, sustaining the severance of its second nature (the mental life) from first nature (the organic and living interaction with the external environment). “Narrowness, superficiality, and stagnation follow from lack of nourishment which can be supplied only by generous and wide interactions.”⁶²⁹

To conclude, Dewey opens up the possibility to criticize the social world in virtue of a parallel and interrelated analysis of the human being’s constitutive interaction with the outer

⁶²⁸ MW 14, pp. 43-44.

⁶²⁹ LW 1, p. 306. See also MW 12, p. 198, where Dewey stresses the necessity to conceive society not as a mere organization but as a *process of associating*, which, as such, should be a dynamic recognitive context, adjusted to the dynamism of living individuals. “The tendency to treat organization as an end in itself is responsible for all the exaggerated theories in which individuals are subordinated to some institution to which is given the noble name of society. Society is the process of associating in such ways that experiences, ideas, emotions, values are transmitted and made common.”

world, in its defined ontological conditions, and the consideration of its recognitive and social mediation. Hence, now it is feasible to move to our second conclusion concerning Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism. Accordingly, we want to point out how Dewey, due to his Naturalistic Humanism and its recognitive structure, is able, in the *Lectures in China*, to provide a program for social criticism aiming at unveiling and critically detecting those social contexts that are ideological and lifeless, disclosing the possibility to distinguish between inadequate/weakly normative and adequate/strongly normative relationships of social recognition.

XI. 2. 2. Ideological Recognition and Lifeless Recognition

In Chapter Seven and Eight, we analyzed how Dewey, in the series of lectures on social and political philosophy delivered at the University of Peking in 1919-1920, provided, for the first time, a systematic program for the criticism of the social world. On the one hand, this program, from a methodological point of view, relies upon an immanent-transformative and experimental critical approach. On the other hand, it is based on the critical category of recognition and the emancipatory category of social conflict. Accordingly, we highlighted that Dewey considers the social world as a context to criticize and transform whenever the interests of the social groups composing the social arena become “more or less suppressed, choked, dwarfed, or deflected into one-sided channels.”⁶³⁰

In the first instance, Dewey considers social domination in oppressive terms, as the parasitic hegemony perpetrated by an interest of the social world at the expense of the other social interests. That is, social domination arises whenever a group of the social world, with its interest, assumes an uncontrolled and socially extended development that prevents other social interests from equally and homogeneously developing. Nonetheless, the American philosopher provides a theory of social domination that acknowledges that oppressive social contexts, to be maintained, necessarily rely upon an instrumental use of social recognition in order to induce oppressed social groups to reproduce the social structure, assuming an attitude of voluntary servitude.⁶³¹ Hence, we considered that from his theory of domination and discrimination of two different components of recognitive relationships – “*social attention*” and “*social energy*” – Dewey considers oppressive social contexts as *inadequate* or weakly ethical recognitive contexts. These are inadequate and ideological recognitive contexts since they allow *most*

⁶³⁰ Dewey, 2015, III.4.

⁶³¹ See Chapter Eight, paragraph VIII. 1. 1.

oppressed social groups, with their interests, to be legitimately and symbolically accepted and cultivated in the social arena, being somehow positively considered in their worth for the social context and hence receiving symbolic and practical forms of affirmation sufficient for social members to positively consider and reproduce the social context.

We have seen, for instance, that, according to Dewey, during the social hegemony of the church and its religious interest, the interests in family, in art, in work, and economy were neither denied nor entirely oppressed within the social arena. Instead, they were allowed and cultivated, and hence, their underlying needs were somehow satisfied within the social context. Nonetheless, Dewey specifies that these interests, even if symbolically and practically accepted, integrated, included, and allowed, were “choked” and “dwarfed,” in a nutshell, they represented *inadequate* emotional, cognitive, and practical social interpretations of a pressing need.

European history for example was marked for centuries by such a predominance of association for religious purposes, by the church, that other modes of life were more or less suppressed, choked, dwarfed, or deflected into one-sided channels. Family life [was] affected because chastity was supposed to involve abstinence from marriage, the celibate life [was supposed to be] superior; industry [was affected] because wealth and material production was a distraction from the spiritual life; science [was affected] because the results of free inquiry might be dangerous to theological doctrines of the church; art [was affected because it] might instill a love for the things of the eye and the flesh at the expense of divine things. So these were allowed and cultivated only as they took a form subordinate to the dominant religious interest; they had to be made to contribute in a one sided way to the supremacy of the church – architecture, music, painting, philosophy etc.⁶³²

From our previous reconstruction of his Naturalistic Humanism, we now know that, for Dewey, the human being can turn its constitutive interaction with the external world into a process of *enhancement* of life. In the first instance, this is to be intended in terms of the capacity to “reconstruct its experience” with the institution of humanizing interests, which are suitable to ensure the stability and the expansions of the qualities and values demanded by the subject through a specific chain of means or objective transformations of the social and natural world, to satisfy their needs significantly, plenty, without accidents and contingency, and to reach an ontological and practical unity with the outer world. In the second instance, this process of enhancement of life, with the institution of humanizing interests, can be effectively realized only with the recognition of other subjects, intended in terms of the emotional, cognitive, and practical participation and engagement in the experience of the subject. In the third instance,

⁶³² Dewey, 2015, III.3-4.

the adequateness of this process of enhancement of life, which ends up with the institution of a social interest and occurs through social processes of emotional engagement, cooperative learning, and joint transformation of the outer world, can be objectively evaluated and considered in light of the effective capacity of subjects to enhance and stabilize their values, to significantly satisfy their needs, and to reach an extended and harmonious interpenetration with the outer world.

Through such considerations, we can now better explain that, according to Dewey, all those contexts of recognition which positively integrate and accept the cultivation of the social interests of the social arena but impede the *effective* self-realization of human beings are ideological. These recognitive contexts, apart from positively accepting the needs and interests of oppressed social groups, do not represent real efforts in partaking and engaging in their needy experience in order to reconstruct it into an adequate emotional, cognitive, and practical organization socially realized. The interests of oppressed social groups, indeed, are social interests deprived of the *adequate* cognitive consideration of the necessary objective conditions and transformations to be brought about for the stable and enhanced occurrence of their demanded quality. And the following consequences of this inadequateness is observable, according to Dewey, in the fact that oppressed social groups are practically blocked and stuck in attempting to satisfy their needs intelligently and stably, in enjoying and consuming the values of experience upon which their survival and well-being depend without tensions and harmoniously. In a nutshell, oppressed social groups are precluded from living according to the human being's potentialities: they cannot live significantly, in an enhanced and enriched manner, reaching the expanded ontological interpenetration with the outer world and unveiling the richness of life's values and qualities.

For instance, during the predominance of religious association, the human needs for care, sustenance, beauty, and inquiry were not denied, considered non-legitimate, deprived of positive conferral of social value and worth, and devoid of any form of practical satisfaction. There were indeed families, for the fulfillment of the need for care; there were working corporations, for satisfying the need for material sustenance; there were artistic organizations and workshops, for enjoying the need for beauty; and there were scientific organizations and centres of knowledge for expressing the thirst for learning and investigation. All these needs, hence, were socially accepted as legitimate and somehow satisfied through the social institution and realization of interests or ends-in-view, such as through the institution of family units, the

creation of working systems, and artistic and scientific organizations. Nonetheless, from an objective point of view, these socially defined interests did not represent the adequate emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations for the enhancement and significant fulfillment of subjects' demanded qualities and needs.

Indeed, in pursuing the consummation of care, the family system was devoid of further objective conditions and consequent transformations of existing social practices, customs, and institutions that were necessary for the enhancement and stable enjoyment of care. For instance, there was not a cultural social framework sustaining and allowing physical love and intimacy among partners, a free and independent educational system inside the family, the existence of juridical guarantees for the autonomy of the family unit in the social context, the legitimate possibility to engage freely and creatively in work for the production of wealth and the sustenance and effective care of the needs of the family members. Similarly, the need for beauty and inquiry were socially integrated and accepted in the social context and interpreted and channeled into interests in art and science, which entailed the constitution of communities of artists and scientists, the creation of schools, universities, and academies, the organization of exhibitions, commissions, laboratories and so on. Notwithstanding, artists and scientists were prevented from fully enjoying the values of beauty, creation, and investigation since they were embedded into a social context that did not ensure further objective conditions necessary for stabilizing and enhancing these qualities in the social context. Such as forms of legal protection for free expression and thinking, the independence from external influences through the assurance of economic autonomy, or the creation of an inclusive educational and cultural system for sharing and socializing works of art and knowledge, born to be communicated to other social fellows.

Hence, from the analysis of the *Lectures in China* and the systematic exposition, with the reference to Dewey's later works, of the naturalistic anthropology underlying the text and its cognitive conditions, we can conclude that, for the American philosopher, the ideological use of recognition in social contexts of domination can be detected and criticized by observing the effective incapacity for social subjects to realize their capacity for action within the external world, the *enhancement of life*. Whenever social subjects are practically blocked and stuck, from an objective point of view, from consuming and enjoying their demanded values or qualities in a stable, enhanced, expanded, non-contingent, and non-accidental manner, and hence, in satisfying their pressing needs significantly, it means that existing social relationships

of recognition are weakly ethical, i.e., not devoted to the effective realization of the subject's living and constitutive interaction with the outer world. Accordingly, these cognitive relationships turn out to be inadequate in relation to the ontological condition of the human being's activity, the one of intelligent transformation. Thus, they are revealed to be ineffective efforts in engaging, from an emotional, cognitive, and practical point of view, in the reconstruction of the social members' experience. They are not ethical since they represent neither real emotional participation efforts in the needy experience of social members, nor serious collective learning processes for pointing out the specific objective conditions and chain of means necessary for the significant fulfillment of subjects' needs, nor cooperative processes for the functional transformation of existing social contexts. In conclusion, they are not "functions" or mediational tools for the *life* of the human being.

In the second instance, in the *Lectures in China*, Dewey does not consider social domination only in its oppressive occurrence, but also in its standardizing dimension. That is, he also refers to the standardizing effect that the social context, substantially defining the interests of the social members through cognitive processes while stabilizing them through social habits collectively followed, can exert on the social members' contents and capacity for action, reifying the former and delimiting the latter to restricted emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities socially established.

In virtue of our previous reconstruction of Dewey's naturalistic anthropology and its underlying metaphysical considerations, we now know that he acknowledges two general ontological conditions of the human being's activity within the world, the one of "transformation" and the one of "dynamism," or vitality. We saw that Dewey justifies this latter condition by considering the gross features of existence and life as an ongoing process of interactions, transformations, and change, and consequently, by pointing out the persisting more or less deviational potential embedded in the living and constitutive interaction of the human being with the outer world. Then, we know that the human being, on the one hand, defines and realizes its interests only in virtue of social relationships of recognition, i.e., processes of social engagement and participation into the needy experience of the subject, which occur in terms of collective participation in the affective experience of the individual in order to cognitively and meaningfully interpret it and realize it through cooperative organizational behavior. On the other hand, we know that the human being can stabilize its interests and be ensured of their effective realization in the social context only in virtue of the transformation of these

recognitive social processes into habits socially performed, which guarantee the possibility to enact without efforts the emotional, cognitive, and practical organization and interpretation of the subject's experience. Hence, relationships of recognition, for the survival and well-being of the subject, should necessarily turn into the habitual, i.e., pre-reflexive and pre-intentional, conferral to the subject of emotions, meanings, and categories, and into the habitual enactment of cooperative organization of behavior. Nonetheless, whenever recognitive relationships, in their habitual functioning, become *rigid*, reifying the contents of the subject and empowering its emotional, cognitive, and practical capacities into restricted potentialities and channels, the social subject is led to standardize or normalize its contents. That is, it is led to hypostatize its interests, but at the expense of a loss of vitality, mechanically reproducing contents transmitted heteronormatively.

In this case, the issue at stake is not the incapacity or impossibility of subjects to act due to the lack or ideological stance of social relationships of recognition. Indeed, subjects are recognized by the social context and thus, are empowered and enabled to realize their needs and interests in virtue of socially shared and habitually performed emotional, cognitive, and practical patterns of action, which, nonetheless, become *rigid*. That is, they become *mechanical* and *fixed*, leading social members to make uniform and standardize their contents regardless of the deviational potentialities of human experience and the dynamism that belongs to life as such. In these rigid recognitive contexts, the subjects' contents are *forcefully* determined and defined by the social contexts and become *lifeless*, i.e., devoid of the vitality running through life as an ongoing process of interactions, transformations, and change. And the human being is consequently impeded from further developing its specific agentic quality.

In the *Lectures*, Dewey conceives dominant interests as incurring in this process of loss of vitality, but of course, any interest, also not socially dominant, can be socially standardized and made uniform due to the social world's "priority" or "pervasiveness" with respect to the individual and its pre-reflexive and pre-intentional reproduction through the mechanism of social habit. However, in the *Lectures*, in an interesting way, Dewey refers to this mechanism considering the "masters." Indeed, dominant subjects, although their interest is recognized by the social context, and not in an ideological manner since it receives the socially adequate emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations, are not embedded in an ethical recognitive context functionally devoted to their self-realization. In fact, they are embedded in intra-group

and extra-group relationships that prevent subjects from “feed[ing] their contents by natural sources.”

Some interest with the form of association in which it is embodied gets a particularly intense and widespread start; it then lords it over other interests and associations and makes them tributary so far as may be to itself. It insists upon dominating activity, monopolizing attention and interest. Free give and take, mutual enrichment, reciprocal stimulation is prevented. Then the interest in question becomes isolated; it ceases to be fed by natural sources; it becomes rigid, petrified, fossilized, and unless its pretensions are broken down and interaction and balance restored, it decays, there is general relapse and stagnation, corruption. Some force has to come in from outside to stir things up and bring about a vital interplay of social activities. [...] It lacks the contacts which will give it fullness and an all-around character. It becomes at once harsh and relatively empty, barren.⁶³³

With the background of Dewey’s Naturalistic Humanism, we can now consider indeed how the masters are those social members considered “lucky,” since they enjoy social recognition, being empowered and enabled to undertake emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities, but who, in the end, incur in turn another “distortion of human nature.”⁶³⁴ They are embedded in a habitual recognitive context, gathering both the intra-group and the extra-group relationships of recognition, which is *rigid* and *lifeless*, and sustains the standardization and hypostatization of their interests or personal contents, regardless of the occurrence of new and unique situations having a deviational potential from the roots rigidly pre-determined and expected by the social context.

For instance, in the *Lectures*, Dewey gives the example of the patriarchal family. With its internal hierarchical subdivision and repartition of roles, rights, and duties among the family members, this family system probably represented in a specific and past situation a functional way to satisfy the need for care of subjects. Nonetheless, it had been then dysfunctionally maintained regardless of the occurrence of new situations and pressing needs on the parts of both women and children, thus turning, on the one hand, into an oppressive and ideological context of recognition for women and children, whose demands for alternative ways to interpret the need for care were not functionally met. On the other hand, it turned into a lifeless context of recognition for men, regardless of the superior role they played in the family context, as “heads” of the family, having an active social, working, and educational role in the social context. Indeed, in this case, we could say that the need to receive or give care belonging also

⁶³³ Dewey, 2015, III. 5-6.

⁶³⁴ Dewey, 2015, III. 10.

to men became reified by being socially interpreted and allowed according to static and rigid emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities. For instance, these emotional potentialities did not include the possibility to be vulnerable, emotive, in need of receiving or giving physical affection, or asking for help in ensuring the economic sustenance of the family. The consequent cognitive potentialities or socially shared meanings and categories conferred to “men” within the family context were entirely rigid and static: to be men in the family stood for being the leading authority and the person responsible for all its needs, the only worker devoted to the economic sustainment of the family, the principal educator of children, to be feared and respected, having the responsibility to define and establish their social future, and so on. All these strict emotional and cognitive potentialities were accompanied and sustained, of course, by socially accepted and supported social practices, customs, and institutions. In patriarchal families and societies, men, unlike women, were symbolically and practically recognized in their being receiver and giver of care within the family, for they were identified as the only authorities in family, being allowed to work for its sustenance, and to educate children. But these social relationships of recognition acquired such a *rigid* and *static* stance that, in the end, men were used to conform and standardize themselves to contents and interests socially and exteriorly imposed, detached from the deviational emotivity, sensuousness, meaningfulness, and transformation opened up by new experiences. In this case, the human being incurs a second form of “natural distortion,” objectively observable and evaluated: the lack of dynamism, the loss of vitality, and the alienation from the gross features of existence.

Therefore, recognitive contexts do constitute and empower the capacity for action of subjects, opening up socially legitimate and habitual potentialities for feelings, meanings, categories, and actions. Nonetheless, according to Dewey, social recognition, for being ethical, should be a *process of association*.⁶³⁵ As a process, despite its habitual dimension, it should always be dynamic by sustaining the possibility for subjects to *keep living*, to *live* in the universal way commonly shared by all the living entities: the ongoing embeddedness in new interactions, transformations, and change. Social recognition makes part of life, and, as such, it partakes in the living process of interactions, transformations, and change that is existence. Hence, in Dewey’s framework, from an ontological point of view, social recognition should

⁶³⁵ See MW 12, p. 198: “The tendency to treat organization as an end in itself is responsible for all the exaggerated theories in which individuals are subordinated to some institution to which is given the noble name of society. Society is the process of associating in such ways that experiences, ideas, emotions, values are transmitted and made common.”

represent a *transaction* that defines or determines the subjects' contents but empowering them with further power to *live*, to undertake new living interactions with the outer world, which are always qualitatively unique, and with a more or less deviational potential from the socially and historically defined feelings, meanings, interests, social practices, and institutions. Recognition, hence, to be ethical, must in turn partake in and mediate life as a process of interactions, transformations, and change, standing for a *living transaction*. That is, it should stand for a transaction of the power to live, to further project needs, feelings, emotions, values, and interests according to the intrinsic situationality, dynamism, creativity belonging to life and to the subject's constitutive interaction with the outer world. Whenever social relationships of recognition, in their constitutive (i.e., defining) and habitual component, become rigid, by leading to the normalization, standardization, or hypostatization of the subject's contents and capacity to act, they impede the human being from realizing its specific qualitative interaction with the outer world, in its second ontological condition, i.e., living dynamism, and they should be objects of critique. Indeed, they entail the social members' loss of vitality and severance from the gross features of existence that also belong to them as living organisms and starting by which their specific agentive potentialities can develop, be expressed, and realized. They cease to be *living transactions*.

XI. 2. 3. The Normative Grammar of Recognition within Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism

In the *Lectures in China*, Dewey does rely upon the category of recognition his program for a critical-social analysis, but the normative and ethical meaning of the latter is defined in relation to the specific constitutive interaction that the human being has with the outer and objective world, both natural and social, of which recognition is the condition of development and effective realization. Indeed, we considered Dewey's systematic naturalistic anthropology and understanding of its recognitive mediation, and we have pointed out the socio-critical intent of Dewey's naturalistic framework. Then, we have made explicit his application of this naturalistic framework within the *Lectures'* program for social criticism and critique of social domination – both in its oppressive and standardizing dimension. Now, we want to conclude that from Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism it is feasible to carve out and theoretically ground an original normative grammar of recognition. Accordingly, recognition, in its ethical or normative meaning, is presented in terms of the relationship of affirmation among subjects which constitutively mediates and realizes the human being's specific ontological interaction

with the external environment, both natural and social, the one of *enhancement of life*, in its specific ontological conditions, intelligent transformation and dynamism. Indeed, Dewey considers the subject as being dependent, for its self-realization, on two constitutive interactions, the one with objectivity or the external world, and the one with other subjects, which are not dualistically considered. Rather, they are conceived as strictly interrelated.

As we have seen, in the first instance, Dewey reconsiders the subject as being dependent for its survival, self-constitution, and well-being on the ontological interaction with the external environment. Indeed, as the other animal organisms, the subject is a living organism with needs and deficiencies, which can be satisfied only in virtue of the qualitative and transformative interaction with the outer objects and situations, which, nonetheless, in the human being, assumes a specific quality. In virtue of its cognitive capacities, it can transform its immediate qualitative and practical interaction with the outer objective values of which it is deficient in an interaction devoted to the *enhancement of life*. On the one hand, the subject can *reconstruct its experience*, i.e., its immediate sensuous and practical living transaction with the outer world. Indeed, it can intelligently value the specific objective conditionings that regulate the occurrence and stability of its demanded qualities and identify the consequent specific chain of transformations of the outer world, both natural and social, that can be brought about for the enhancement and stable occurrence of these qualities, and hence, for the significant, harmonious, tensionless, and non-contingent fulfillment of its needs. The final consequence of such a qualitatively specific capacity for action of the human being within and with the external world, the one of reconstruction of experience, is the subject's possibility to reach a deep ontological and practical interpenetration with the outer world, which is open to be objectively observed and verified. On the other hand, according to Dewey, the subject, with the reconstruction of its experience, is also capable of reshaping existence and life as such, by unveiling and enhancing the intelligibility of its qualities and by strengthening its gross features, i.e., interactions, transformations, and change.

Hence, Dewey, thanks to his broader metaphysical reflections on life, its gross features, and ontological degrees, outlines a systematic naturalistic anthropology that is suitable to explain the specificity of the subjects' constitutive interaction with the objective world, while theoretically grounding and deeply explaining its main ontological conditions, i.e., intelligent transformation and dynamism. Indeed, he can stress the unicity and situationality of the qualities demanded by the subject, and hence, the specificity of the objective conditionings

regulating their occurrence and the chain of means or objective transformations necessary to enhance and secure them. He can consider the necessary objective mediation of both the more “material” and “spiritual” values or qualities of human experience, and hence, he can interpret as “transformative” any humanizing activity devoted to strengthening and enhancing the consummation or enjoyment of these values. Finally, he can justify the intrinsic dynamism, situationalism, creativity, and potential of deviation of the human being’s interactions with the outer world, and the intrinsic projectivity of human values, needs, and ends-in-view.

In the second instance, Dewey considers the human being’s constitutive interaction with the outer world, as being mediated, from a genetic and performative point of view, by the specific kind of social association belonging to human beings, namely, *recognition*, which is intended in terms of the “participation” and “engagement” in the experience of the other subject. Indeed, on the one hand, according to Dewey, the possibility for subjects to have a feeling for self, i.e., self-consciousness, which is a necessary precondition for the development of rationality and cognitive capacities, relies upon the subjects’ capability to reciprocally “take the perspective” of the other, affirmatively acknowledging it as an individual centre of experience, according to a process of decentralization in the other and identification of self.

On the other hand, Dewey argues that the *effective* and *full* realization of the subject as a “conscious centre of experience,” with a specific constitutive interaction with the outer world, depends on other subjects’ three-dimensional recognition, which occurs in the form of an emotional, cognitive, and practical engagement in the experience of the individual in order to enhance its living interaction with the outer world by participating in the functional reconstruction of its experience. Indeed, the subject can really and functionally reconstruct its experience through an intelligent consideration of its emotional and sensuous interaction with the outer world, through a cognitive and meaningful valuation of the specific objective conditions regulating the occurrence and the stability of its demanded qualities, through the identification of a certain end-in-view to be realized through a particular chain of means or objective transformations, only in virtue of the cooperation of other subjects. In fact, the process of knowledge and signification of outer objective values and the meaningful transformation of the outer world, both natural and social, can be functional only when they are socially shared and participated by other subjects, and hence mediated by the recognition of other social subjects. This recognition occurs, first, in the form of the emotional participation in the experience of the individual, not only as worthy for the social context but also as being the “sign

for something else.” Second, it occurs in the cognitive effort to render meaningful, through collective knowledge and socially shared meanings, the objective quality of which the subject is deficient, identifying its specific conditionings and the consequent “end-in-view” or specific object and situation to be realized by a specific chain of environmental transformations. Third, it occurs in the practical effort to cooperate pragmatically and actively in these natural and social transformations, and hence in the realization and stabilization through social habits of the emotional, cognitive, and practical interpretation and organization socially outlined for the significant fulfillment of the subjects’ needs.

Therefore, within Dewey’s framework, the relationships of social recognition in which the subject is embedded are *objectively evaluated* in their ethical meaning according to the subject’s specific qualitative interaction with the outer world and its ontological conditions, i.e., intelligent transformation and dynamism. Consequently, it follows that, from Dewey’s Naturalistic Humanism, it is feasible to carve out an implicit and original normative grammar of ethical recognition. Accordingly:

(I) the *constitutive role* of recognition for the human subjectivity’s self-realization is defined in terms of the mediational affirmative relationship devoted to the development and the effective, performative realization of the human being’s specific capacity for action with and within the external environment, the one of enhancement of life.

(II) the *genus* of ethical recognition, thus, may be conceived in terms of “the reconciliation of the human being, as an *embodied* subject, with the outer world,” or, in more Deweyan terms, in terms of “the *function* of the human being’s life, i.e., of its constitutive interaction with the outer world.”

(III) the *ontological conditions* of ethical or normative recognition may be defined according to the ontological conditions of human actions itself. Ethical are those relationships of recognition which allow the subject to objectively enhance life by cooperating in the reconstruction of their experience, in the social institution of emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations for the significant fulfillment of the subjects’ needs, for the expansion and stabilization of its demanded qualities, and for the realization of the tensionless and harmonious ontological and practical interpenetration of the subject with the outer world. Ethical recognition, thus, should stand for:

(i) the emotional engagement in the subject’s qualitative and needy experience, as worthy but also as the “sign for something else.”

(ii) the cognitive engagement in the subject's qualitative and needy experience, devoted to intelligently value its needs and demanded qualities through collective knowledge and processes of signification, identifying the specific conditionings of these values and the consequent "end-in-view" or specific object and situation to be brought about through a specific chain of transformations of the social and natural world.

(iii) the practical engagement in cooperating practically to the realization and stabilization of the socially defined contents of human subjects, i.e., of the emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations that are adequate for the intelligent fulfillment of the subjects' needs.

(IV) the *ontological status* of recognition, namely, the *kind* of relationship that recognition should be to allow the subject to not be strictly and rigidly determined by the social context, might be defined, again, in light of the specific constitutive interaction of the human being with the outer world and according to its second ontological condition, that of *dynamism*, which Dewey justifies and explains by means of his metaphysics of existence.

In fact, this metaphysics of existence allows him to stress that life, in its general occurrence, is an ongoing *process* of interactions among parts that reciprocally transform each other involving change and new qualitative interactions and transformations. Consequently, the relation between the subject and the outer world's qualities and values is effectively a *living* relationship if it is always specific and unique, entailing a more or less potential of deviation from previous experiences and the consequent projection of the subjects' needs and humanizing contents. In addition to these metaphysical and anthropological reflections, Dewey considers social recognition as being constitutive not only of the human subject's possibility to realize its specific capacity for action but also of the substantial definition of its personal contents. Indeed, on the one hand, the subject's personal contents, namely, the emotional, cognitive, and practical interpretations or reconstructions of its needy experience, are always defined with the recognitive mediation of the entire social context, through collective knowledge, socially defined meanings and categories, and realized through behavioral organizations socially shared and cooperatively followed. On the other hand, the stable realization of the subject's personal contents within the social context is strictly related to the transformation of this intentional, voluntary, and reflexive recognitive mediation by the social context into a habitually performed one. This transformation permits indeed the pre-reflexive and pre-intentional significant interpretation of the subject's feelings and emotions, the pre-reflexive and pre-intentional

conferral to its needy experience of shared meanings and categories, which imply the socially shared enactment of specific organizational behaviours, without emotional, cognitive, and practical efforts. In virtue of this stabilization of social recognition, which turns into a set of habitual attitudes, the social subject can ensure the effortless realization of its contents in the social world, while being empowered with specific emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities. Nonetheless, according to Dewey, recognition, in its substantially constitutive and habitual dimension, should not turn into a *rigid, mechanical, lifeless, and heteronormative* constitutive relationship that discourages and prevents subjects from following the dynamism, creativity, and potential of deviation that ontologically characterizes its living interaction with the outer world and entails the progressive projectivity of its needs, demanded qualities, and contents.

Accordingly, recognition is an interaction that is part of *life*, of the ongoing process of interactions, transformations, and change that is existence. Hence, we could say that, within Dewey's framework, recognition should be a relationship that, in addition to defining and stabilizing the contents of the subject, should always be a *living transaction*, namely, a *transaction of living power*. It should entail neither the subjects' standardization and normalization to the socially defined categories, meanings, norms, standards, social practices, and institutions, nor the reification of its contents. Instead, it should encourage and allow the subject to *keep living*, to engage in the new and qualitatively unique interactions with the outer world, which open up new transformations and change, new emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities, new possibilities of deviation from the symbolic and practical framework of the social world, and hence the projection of its needs, demanded values, and personal contents.

In conclusion, from Dewey's program for social philosophy in the *Lectures*, from the reconstruction of its underlying naturalistic anthropology and the place of recognition in this latter, we can draw three final considerations. In the first place, we can argue that his philosophical framework discloses a specific understanding of recognition's constitutive role for the self-realization of human subjectivity and the possibility to carve out a particular normative grammar of recognition, which is similar to the one that, in Chapter Five, we derived from Honneth and Joas' naturalistic anthropology in *Social Action and Human Nature*. Indeed, both Honneth and Joas in *Social Action and Human Nature*, and John Dewey, with his Naturalistic Humanism, redefine the criticism of social contexts by starting from a naturalistic analysis of the human being. Their intent is to grasp, from a descriptive and normative point of

view, the natural continuity and the specificity of the human being's qualitative and practical interaction with the outer world, then conceiving social recognition in terms of the relation that mediates the human being's specific constitutive interaction with the external world ("the humanization of nature" or "the enhancement of life"), providing the chance to ethically define recognition in light of the ontological conditions characterizing human activity, i.e., intelligent transformation and dynamism.

In the second place, we can argue that Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism and program for social philosophy, unlike Honneth and Joas' theoretical framework, allows us, on the one hand, to theoretically ground and more deeply explain this normative grammar of recognition in light of his more systematic and profound theory of the human being's capacity for action in the external environment, in its ontological conditions. On the other hand, it permits us to refer to a structured account of social philosophy that, in its critical and normative aim, directly relies upon this category of recognition, using it as a universal and formal criterion for the criticism of the social world and consequently defining its critical methodological procedure according to a principle of experimentalism/verificationism and situationalism.

Indeed, as we have seen in Chapter Seven and paragraphs XI.2.1 and XI.2.2 of this Chapter, Dewey outlines a critical social program devoted to detecting those social contexts wherein, due to inadequate relationships of recognition, subjects are prevented from realizing their capacity for action, and conceives social philosophy as an ally either of the silently misrecognized social members or of the struggles for social recognition developed by oppressed social members. In accomplishing this task, according to Dewey, social philosophy should approach existing and particular social contexts by orienting itself through a "map and a compass," through a universal and entirely formal normative criterion, the one of "associated life." The latter refers to the form of living activity that belongs to the human being and its general cognitive structure, without attempting to define additional normative principles, such as the qualitatively different forms or species of recognition on which the subjects' self-realization might depend in a certain historical phase. This criterion should orient social philosophy in stating a social situation as problematic. Then, it is up to specific social theories to define the particular normative principles and programs for social transformations that can guide social emancipation, experimentally testing and verifying their validity in light of the observable consequences on the social members' experience, and being open to redefine, revise, or reject them according to new social situations and experiences.

In the third and last place, we want to argue that John Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism, understanding of recognition, and socio-philosophical account can be relevant for the contemporary critical theory of recognition. In fact, they can contribute to significantly enrich and strengthen the normative grammar of recognition and critical methodology provided by its currently central and more structured account, the one outlined by Honneth in its mature critical theory, hence contributing to address those contemporary criticisms that have seriously questioned the critical capacity of a critical theory of recognition.

Chapter Twelve. Recognition and Life. An Enriched Normative Grammar for the Contemporary Critical Theory of Recognition: Going With Honneth, Beyond Honneth, Through John Dewey

In the first part of our reflections, “The Contemporary Paradigm of Recognition and the Role of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition,” we have reconstructed the progressive rediscovery, starting from the 1960s, of the social-critical relevance of the category of recognition, and we have explained the fundamental role of Axel Honneth in providing the currently more structured and systematic critical theory based on the concept of recognition. Indeed, the relationship of recognition, mainly recovered from Hegel’s Jena writings and defined in terms of “knowing oneself in the other,” represented a fundamental tool to address a variety of theoretical exigencies of the time.⁶³⁶ In the first instance, it allowed philosophers to contrast both an atomistic or pre-social understanding of human subjectivity and a bare instrumental conception of the social world. Indeed, philosophers could emphasize, from a descriptive point of view, the social constitution of human subjectivity by unveiling the reciprocal processes of recognition among subjects underlying the development of the subject’s self-consciousness and rational capacities. Moreover, they could also highlight the reciprocal relations of recognition and identification among subjects that are necessary for the agreed institution of social contexts and their stable reproduction, which a bare instrumental understanding of the social context cannot sufficiently explain. In the second instance, the Hegelian category of recognition also permitted philosophers to rethink the social conditions of the subject’s self-realization and freedom, considering, from a normative point of view, the reciprocal relationships of affirmation among subjects as a necessary precondition for the free expression and development of the subjects’ personal contents. Recognition, therefore, started to reveal a promising potential for the criticism of the social contexts, which, accordingly, should be criticized whenever they negate social recognition to social members, thus impeding their social freedom and self-realization.

⁶³⁶ See Chapter One, paragraph I. 1.

In this ascending parabola of recognition as a critical category of social contexts, with the possibility to create a very critical theory of recognition, Axel Honneth has played a fundamental and incontestable role by providing the currently more structured and systematic critical paradigm of recognition. Two steps were necessary for us to explain the relevance of his critical thinking and present his paradigm of recognition as the contemporary higher expression of a critical theory of recognition.

The first step was the reconstruction of the theoretical exigency that induced Honneth to focus on recognition as a fundamental critical category of social contexts, conceiving it as endowed with a specific constitutive and normative potential.⁶³⁷ We saw indeed how the main goal of Honneth's mature critical project was to overcome the critical impasse following from the pessimistic conclusions of the previous generations of the Frankfurt School, specifically of Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, concerning the critical and emancipatory capacities of social subjects within late capitalist societies. By analyzing *The Critique of Power* (1985), we highlighted how Honneth mainly led Horkheimer and Adorno's pessimistic conclusions back to the unidimensionality of their normative anthropology. This latter, indeed, based the successful self-constitution and self-realization of the human subject only upon the free, aesthetic, non-instrumental, meaningful, and identificatory interaction with the outer world and its rich qualities. Accordingly, Adorno and Horkheimer conceived human subjectivity as being dependent, for the successful development and realization of its personal identity, only on the natural and qualitative constitutive interaction that, as a human being, it has with the outer world, characterized by the meaningful perception of outer objective qualities and values. Nonetheless, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, the advent of modernity and the development of capitalist societies led to the progressive and totalizing replacement of the emancipatory and free interaction of the human being with the natural world with a rationalistic interaction aiming at the mere control and domination of the outer world. Such an interaction empties the world from the qualities that are constitutive of human subjects' immediate and natural life, reifying them into bare general concepts. This pathological interaction with the outer world, aiming at blind domination of nature for its own sake, extended to the interaction of the human being with itself and with other subjects and to the totality of the social world, being entirely introjected by social subjects as a second nature and ideologically mitigated by the compensatory economic policies of late capitalist societies. The final consideration

⁶³⁷ See Chapter Two.

following from these anthropological and sociological analyses was the declaration of the social subjects' complete forgetfulness of their original natural interaction with the outer world and consequent loss of any normative, critical, and emancipatory reaction against the oppressive and pathological structure of late capitalist societies.

In front of these pessimistic conclusions, which deprived, from a theoretical point of view, social subjects of any capability of morally transforming oppressive and unjust societies and disregarded the social struggles running through modern and contemporary societies, Honneth stressed the necessity to review the normative anthropology provided in the previous generations of the Frankfurt School. Accordingly, it was necessary to reconsider the other interactional pole lying under the successful self-constitution and self-realization of social subjects, namely, the subject-subject relation, and its striking moral, normative, and emancipatory potential. Indeed, recovering, *via* Habermas, the Hegelian concept of recognition, as “knowing oneself in the other,” and the idea of a “moral struggle for recognition,” Honneth re-acknowledged how the human being can self-realize and develop its personal contents only by being recognized by the other subject, namely, by “seeing itself from the normative perspective of the other subject.” According to Honneth, to “see itself from the normative perspective of the other” means for the individual to receive a positive confirmation or affirmation from the other concerning the worth of its personal contents and entails the possibility for the subject to develop a positive image of itself. Recognition, hence, represented for Honneth the key category to reconsider, in the first instance, the intersubjective and social dimension of human subjectivity's self-realization, as not exclusively dependent on the qualitative constitutive interaction with outer objects and their qualities, but also on the affirmative relationships with other subjects, which are constitutive of the experience that the subject has of itself. In the second instance, it disclosed the possibility of locating in intersubjective and social relationships the very source of subjects' moral, normative, and emancipatory capabilities. Indeed, by intending recognition in terms of that affirmative relationship underlying the possibility for subjects to reach a positive image and experience of itself, according to Honneth, it follows that, in the absence of social recognition, subjects undergo moral feelings of disrespect that lead them necessarily, even if not instantly, to engage into struggles for social recognition with a moral, rather than instrumental or egoistic, significance. That is, the emancipation from social oppression and the institution of more

extensive (including more categories of subjects) and more *inclusive* (conferring social worth to increasingly pluralistic personal contents) social recognitive contexts.

In his exchange with the Frankfurt School's previous generations, Honneth laid the foundations for an expanded normative anthropology. The latter should consider at least two different interactional poles for human subjectivity's self-realization: the subject's interaction with the objective world and the one with other subjects, identifying in the latter an enormous and still overlooked normative potential, as having to do with the very possibility of subjects to reach a positive image of themselves and entailing the arousal of emancipatory and transformative reactions towards unjust and oppressive social contexts. Hence, we have stressed that, in *The Critique of Power*, where we can find the original preparatory program for his mature critical theory, Honneth declares a willingness to outline a normative anthropology accounting for the two interactional poles through which the human subject self-constitutes and self-realizes, although he presents them in dualistic terms, without pointing out the possibility of conceiving of them as interdependently interrelated. Accordingly, Honneth puts the constitutive relationship of the subject with the outer world, characterized by the meaningful perception of the outer qualities, on one side, and the constitutive relationship of the subject with other subjects on another side, while stressing that, in the recognitive relationship with the other, the individual can reach that primary precondition that is necessary for its self-realization, i.e., the development of a positive self-experience. This differentiation allowed him to emphasize the overlooked constitutive role of recognition for human subjectivity and to theoretically grasp the empirical dependence of social subjects' positive self-image upon the normative perspective of the other subject while reconsidering their normative and emancipatory core. Furthermore, it permitted him to acknowledge and phenomenologically interpret the social struggles running through modern and contemporary societies characterized by moral watchwords, such as "social inclusion," "equality," "respect," "social esteem," and to recover the ontological reliance of social contexts, in their legitimization and reproduction, upon the moral agreement of social subjects.

This differentiation between the two interactional poles of human subjectivity's self-realization, therefore, revealed a theoretical and analytical importance, but subsequently, Honneth attempted neither to overcome it, exploring the interpenetration of social recognition with the subject's constitutive interaction with the outer world's qualities, nor to maintain it in his subsequent writings. Indeed, from *The Struggle for Recognition* (1992), Honneth focused

unilaterally on further inquiring on the sole constitutive interaction among subjects, entirely dropping the consideration of the relationship of human subjectivity with objectivity and abandoning the possibility to reflect on the interpenetration between the two constitutive poles of human subjectivity. As a consequence, we pointed out that the German author outlined a critical theory based on a normative anthropology that considers human subjectivity as *entirely* relied, for its self-realization, upon the relationships with other subjects, hence further investigating the mechanism for which the subject can reach a positive image or experience of itself only in virtue of the recognition of the other subject, intended in terms of a positive confirmation of its personal contents.

At this point in our considerations, we reached the second step for explaining Honneth's fundamental contribution in providing a critical theory of recognition.⁶³⁸ Indeed, by mainly referring to *The Struggle for Recognition* (wherein Honneth more systematically defines his critical theory), we showed how Honneth reached a threefold goal. The first goal was to provide a clearer and scientifically based explanation of the mechanism for which social recognition is constitutive of the human subject's possibility to reach a positive experience of itself, and consequently, of its self-realization. By re-actualizing Hegel's insights on recognition with Mead's concept of recognition, he argues, on the one hand, that the precondition for the subject's self-realization is the development of a *normative self-disposition*, since only by having a personal integrity, i.e., a positive psychic attitude towards its personal contents, the subject can practically pursue and develop the latter in the social arena without obstructions and inhibitions. On the other hand, he points out that the subject cannot develop or reach this normative disposition to itself atomistically, but only in virtue of the recognition of other subjects, namely, in virtue of the normative and positive affirmations and confirmations received by other subjects concerning the worth of its personal contents. He justifies this theory through a series of psychological and sociological studies, which empirically demonstrate that the subject, within social contexts (such as the family, the working, or the cultural context) that are symbolically and physically disrespectful, is prevented from developing a personal integrity, and thus is unable to dispose of that positive attitude towards itself that is fundamental to practically dispose of its own bodily and practical agency for the development and realization of its personal contents. Hence, Honneth succeeded in grasping the psychic and personal sufferance undergone by subjects within disconfirming and devaluing social relationships and

⁶³⁸ See Chapter Three.

the consequences these relational contexts have on the subjects' relationship to themselves and practical engagement in their own personal contents.

The second goal was to systematically distinguish among three forms of social recognition within modern and contemporary societies. In this systematic intent, Honneth succeeded in gathering and ordering, from a theoretical point of view, the affective morality phenomenologically possessed by social subjects within modern and contemporary societies, and mostly guiding, from a historical point of view, their emancipatory struggles, then outlining a paradigm of recognition to be used for the criticism of human societies. Indeed, first, he defined three normative self-dispositions that are fundamental for modern subjects' personal integrity – self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem – and hence, for their possibility to positively approach the contents of their personal dimensions – to be a unique individual with needs, to be a rational person with moral capacities, and to be a social member with capacities, qualities, and values through which they can contribute to the reproduction and development of the social context. Second, he distinguished three species of recognition: love, respect, and social esteem. They all represent forms of positive confirmation of the subject's contents, mediated by care and active participation, but they differ according to the subjective practical dimension they confirm – to be a unique needy subject, to be a moral person, and to be a social member; to the subject's normative self-disposition of which they are constitutive conditions – self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem; to their more emotional or cognitive component; and to the social dimension wherein they develop while normatively regulating and transforming it – the family and the intimate context, the political and juridical context, and the working and cultural context. Third, through this theoretical framework, Honneth was able to phenomenologically interpret those moral feelings of disrespect that, from a historical point of view, have shaken misrecognized social members, leading them to engage in moral struggles aiming at the *progressive* and *cumulative* evolution of human societies into greater recognitive context ensuring subjects' self-realization.

The third goal was to redefine the role of critical social theory. Honneth conceives it as an ally of existing social struggles for recognition, with the duty to help interpret and transform human societies in light of a formal and universally applicable critical criterion, that of the *good life*, through which criticizing social contexts which prevent social members from reaching their self-realization. We have analyzed that Honneth's criterion of the *good life* relies upon his systematized paradigm of recognition. On the one hand, by theoretically conceiving the

constitutive role of recognition for human subjectivity's self-realization in terms of the positive affirmation of the subjects' personal contents, mediated by care and active participation, suitable to allow the subject to develop a positive relation to itself, his paradigm discloses a certain normative grammar of recognition to be used for the criticism of social contexts. Indeed, from Honneth's paradigm of recognition and from his subsequent specifications,⁶³⁹ the genus of ethical recognition should be conceived in terms of "taking the subject as a person with normative disposition." Instead, the ontological condition that a relationship of recognition should satisfy to be ethically devoted to the subject's self-realization is to stand for an affirmative confirmation of the subjects' personal contents, mediated by care and active participation, hence occurring both from an evaluative (emotional and symbolic) and practical dimension, suitable to allow the subject to reach the positive relation to itself that is necessary for approaching its personal contents freely and without obstructions in the social context. In light of this normative grammar of recognition, the theorist should criticize those social contexts wherein social members are impeded from reaching a personal integrity and manifest feelings of personal injury, preventing them from freely developing their personal contents.

On the other hand, his paradigm of recognition does not only disclose the possibility to criticize the social world through a concept of recognition that embeds a normative grammar reflecting the exigencies and the feelings of historical subjects. Instead, it also provides the theorist with three normative principles to interpret social sufferance and outline programs for social transformation, which are the three species of recognition that represented the social conditions for the personal integrity of modern and contemporary social subjects. According to Honneth, the criterion of the "good life," gathering a specific normative grammar of recognition and three different normative principles, should be considered in terms of the formal and universally applicable criterion for the criticism of the social world and the emancipation from social oppression, which the critical theorist should use for the progressive and cumulative moral progress of human societies.

In conclusion, in the first part of our reflections, on the one hand, we have highlighted the relevance of Axel Honneth in stressing the importance to consider, within the critical social analysis, the normative and critical potential of the constitutive relationships among subjects, as reciprocally dependent upon the recognition of the significant other, overcoming the unidimensional consideration of the constitutive relationship between subjectivity and

⁶³⁹ See Honneth, 2007.

objectivity. On the other hand, we have attempted to reconstruct how, from his insight on the distinguishing constitutive role of recognition in *The Critique of Power*, Honneth did not investigate the ontological and theoretical interpenetration between the two interactional poles lying under the subject's self-realization. Rather, he attempted to give systematicity to the idea that the human being is normatively dependent on recognition since the latter is constitutive of subjects' positive image of themselves.

For sure, this narrowing process of his analysis allowed him to deeply explain the psychic mechanism for which subjects depend on social recognition to develop their personal integrity, while giving theoretical expression to the moral feelings of personal injury undergone by subjects within disrespectful social contexts and leading to struggles for social recognition. Furthermore, it allowed him to provide a normative grammar of recognition to critically approach social contexts and to systematically identify three different normative principles, or species of recognition, embodied in subjects' processes of moral interpretation and transformation of modern and contemporary societies. Considering these theoretical contributions, Honneth's paradigm of recognition and critical theory currently represent the more systematic and structured account of a critical theory of recognition.

However, in the conclusion of the first part and in the second part of our reflections,⁶⁴⁰ "The Structural Problem of Honneth's Mature Theory of Recognition and the Desiderata for A Critical Theory of Recognition," we have pointed out two main problems of Honneth's paradigm of recognition and critical theory, which a contemporary theory of recognition should address in order to maintain its feasibility and critical capacity and which cannot be solved within Honneth's theoretical and critical framework.

I) The first problem is that Honneth's paradigm of recognition provides a normative grammar of recognition that is not sufficiently defined and sensitive for distinguishing between adequate or strongly ethical relationships of recognition and inadequate or weakly ethical relationships of recognition. Within the contemporary debate in social philosophy and critical theory, indeed, we have distinguished between two levels of criticisms addressed to a critical theory of recognition and, specifically to Honneth's account, as representing the more systematic and mainstream account for a similar critical project, which seriously questioned the critical and emancipatory capacity of the category of recognition.

⁶⁴⁰ See Chapter Four and Five.

On the first level, we have gathered all those criticisms⁶⁴¹ that have stressed the necessity for a critical theory of recognition such as Honneth's to not conflate the normative or ethical meaning of recognition with the descriptive one. Indeed, social recognition can be not only normatively devoted to the self-realization of human subjects, but instead it can also be instrumentally used to maintain social members in oppressive and unjust social contexts, leading them to reproduce existing social structures through an attitude of "voluntary servitude." Indeed, those ambiguous and ideological recognitive contexts do positively confirm the social members' personal contents, allowing them to develop a positive image of themselves, but prevent the effective fulfillment and realization of their personal contents. Therefore, recognition does have a "dark side," as being usable for social domination, and the normative grammar of ethical recognition provided by Honneth does not offer useful conceptual tools for distinguishing and detecting them. Indeed, ideological recognition seems to satisfy the ontological condition of ethical recognition. In fact, it stands for a conferral of normative worth to the oppressed social members' identity contents, supported by positive symbolic evaluations and practical responses, that allows social subjects to reach a feeling of personal integrity and social inclusion, while effectively impeding them, from a retrospective point of view, to materially and significantly realize their personal contents and recognitive requests.

In front of such an intrinsic ambiguity of recognition and the insufficient discriminatory capacity of the current normative grammar of recognition provided by Honneth's paradigm, and in front of Honneth's inefficient attempt to identify a further ontological condition of ethical recognition in the lack of instrumentality, which remains an internal and easily concealed condition, we have reached two conclusions. First, these criticisms downplay the critical and emancipatory capacity of a critical theory relying upon the category of recognition. Indeed, through Honneth's paradigm of recognition and its normative grammar, it is feasible to detect only "manifest" mis-recognitive relationships which seriously impede social subjects from reaching a personal integrity, but it is not sufficiently sensitive for detecting ambiguous and ideological relationships of recognition. Nonetheless, despite the "dark side" of recognition, we pointed out that to keep defining and aiming at a normative relationship of recognition, wherein social subjects can flourish and realize themselves through others, remains a core and

⁶⁴¹ Carnevali, 2004, 2008; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; McNay, 2008a, 2008b; Markell, 2003; Petherbridge, 2011, 2013; Van den Brink & Owen, 2007.

fundamental goal. Therefore, it follows that it is necessary to have clear in mind what challenge this level of criticism poses to a critical theory of recognition, and which, in order to maintain its normative potential, a critical theory of recognition is compelled to address: to further specify the ontological conditions of ethical and non-ideological recognition.

On the second level of criticism, we have referred to those criticisms that have been defined as “the negative theories of recognition.”⁶⁴² These criticisms are more pervasive than the former since they do not merely argue that recognition can often be an instrument for domination, but rather that recognition is *in se* a relation of power.⁶⁴³ According to such theories, recognition is a necessary relationship for the development of human subjectivity and for its existence and inclusion in the social context, but it inevitably prevents the individual from truly self-realizing and being free, hence being precluded from standing for a real ethical relationship. Recognition is constitutive of the individual’s social existence, but it can be in no way considered an ethical relation. This level of criticism, mostly elaborated by referring to the Foucauldian concept of “constitutive power,” argues that social recognition is “constitutive” of human subjectivity under a second aspect not considered by a critical theory of recognition, and in specific by Honneth in his mature theory of recognition. That is, recognition is not only constitutive of the subject’s personal integrity, but at the same time, it is constitutive, from a substantial point of view, of the subject’s personal contents. In fact, the subject lives in a “pervasive” social context, which, by positively confirming its identity contents from an evaluative, symbolic, and practical point of view, unavoidably *defines* them supra-subjectively, by conferring descriptive and normative social categories (meanings, values, qualities, capacities, roles, statuses, rights) to the subject. These descriptive and normative categories are socially, i.e., supra-subjectively, determined, and mostly conferred by the social context habitually, namely, pre-reflexively and pre-intentionally.

The constitutive meaning of recognition lies, on the one hand, in the fact that the contents of the subjects are always *defined* by the totality of the social world and inevitably *reified* due to the mostly pre-reflexive and pre-intentional reproduction by social members of the social world’s symbolic and practical framework. On the other hand, it lies in the fact that they are *productive* since they ambivalently empower and enable the subject’s capacity for action with a set of emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities to be explored in their

⁶⁴² See Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017, Ch. 5.

⁶⁴³ See Butler, 1997; Sartre, 2003.

declinations, which nonetheless are always products and expressions of the symbolic and practical framework current in the social context. The final conclusion of these “negative” theories of recognition is not that relationships of recognition can be oppressive and unjust, but rather, that they always entail the social definition and reification of the subjects’ contents, thus predetermining its future capacity for action, which even if it is productive, is always an expression of the power of the social context. Indeed, they distinguish between the mainstream category of “domination,” perpetrated by an identifiable social group at the expense of another social group, which is impeded in the very possibility to act, and the one of “constitutive power.” With “constitutive power,” they refer to the influence exerted by the totality of the social context through recognition, entailing both the empowerment of the subjects’ capacity to act and the heteronormative predetermination of its emotional, cognitive and practical potentialities, impeding its absolute freedom and creativity.

As we have attempted to stress, these negative theories of recognition rely upon an unbearable conception of the subject’s real freedom, as the complete absence of any external determination, which is problematic under two main aspects. In the first instance, this conception presupposes a metaphysical idea of human subjectivity as prior to the social context, which is misleading. Given the very ontological social nature of human subjectivity, to attempt to think the latter from without a social context is, in fact, fallacious. In the second instance, this conception entails that *any* social context and *any* relationship of recognition is *per se* problematic. Therefore, the negative theories of recognition lose sight of the very theoretical necessity to think about *how* the subject can reach its freedom within the social context due to its unsurpassable social existence and consequent social determination. And they end up being *critically ineffective*,⁶⁴⁴ since they fail to critically focus on those recognitive social contexts that really become *rigid* and *lifeless*, wherein subjects are *problematically* determined, being driven to normalize and standardize their personal contents to restricted emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities, and developing feelings of alienation, detachment, and loss of vitality.⁶⁴⁵

Nonetheless, despite the radical presuppositions and pessimistic conclusions of these negative theories, they still have a critical relevance towards a critical theory of recognition. They unveil, first, the inevitable constitutive power of recognition, for the subject’s personal

⁶⁴⁴ See Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017, Ch. 5.

⁶⁴⁵ See Jaeggi, 2014.

contents, being recognized within the social world, are always defined through meanings, categories, statuses, roles that are not individual but *social* possessions, which empower the subject with a series of emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities open to be pursued and realized legitimately and with the support of the social context. Second, they emphasize that the relationships of recognition and the symbolic and practical social framework that they mediate also assume a habitual stance, as not being reproduced always on a cognitive and reflexive level, but also on a pre-reflexive, pre-intentional, and pre-cognitive one. By referring to Martin Saar's ontology of power, which does not entail the radical conclusions of the negative theories of recognition, we pointed out that any critical theory of recognition should account for the fact that relationships of recognition *can* become *rigid*, reifying the contents of the subject, entailing its normalization and standardization, and narrowing its agentic creativity. These relationships of recognition are inadequate not because they are manifestly or ideologically oppressive and unjust, since they include and empower the subject within the social world, but because they narrow the creative deviation of subjects from the socially accepted symbolic and practical framework, leading to the normalization and standardization of their identity.

In front of such inadequate or weakly ethical relationships of recognition, which impede subjects from truly self-realizing as being rigidly determined by the social context, a critical theory of recognition is again compelled to enrich its normative grammar in order to maintain its critical efficacy. In this case, it should not define the ontological conditions that recognition should satisfy to be non-ideological and truly devoted to the realization of the contents of subjectivity. Instead, it should define, as a meta-condition, the *ontological status* of ethical recognition, i.e., the kind of relationship that recognition should be in order to remain ethical, despite its unavoidable constitutive character, to not stand for a reifying, alienating, and lifeless relationship, and in light of which inadequate relationships of recognition can be detected and criticized. Accordingly, we proposed that any attempt to provide a critical theory of recognition, such as Honneth's, might intend recognition's ontological status in terms of a *transaction of power to act*. That is, recognition should not only determine the subject while enabling it with strict channels for feelings, thinking, and practice, but should also provide the subject with the power to transform its social determinations according to the new emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities intrinsically emerging from the new contexts of practice. However, we concluded that such an understanding of the ontological status of recognition inevitably remains

unsatisfactory, since it can neither be really grasped in its meaning nor theoretically grounded unless there is a less abstract assumption and clearer consideration of the human subject in its creativity and deviational potential from its previous socially determined contents.

Hence, in the second part of our reflections, we have considered the first main problem of Honneth's theory of recognition. Indeed, we have analyzed the two levels of criticisms addressed to a critical theory of recognition, of which Honneth's mature paradigm of recognition and critical theory represent the currently more structured account, and we pointed out the *desiderata* for a critical theory of recognition to maintain its critical sensitivity. That is, to further specify the ontological conditions and the ontological status of recognition, and hence to enrich and strengthen the normative grammar of ethical recognition. Then, we argued that Honneth's mature paradigm of recognition cannot satisfy these desiderata due to a structural problem of his theoretical framework.⁶⁴⁶ Accordingly, we have argued that Honneth's mature strategy to narrow the subject's self-realization to the constitutive relationship with other subjects, even if disclosing the potentiality to grasp a fundamental constitutive meaning of recognition, has necessarily implied the forgetfulness of the other interactional pole upon which the subject's self-realization depends, i.e., objectivity or the external environment. This forgetfulness has necessarily led Honneth to outline a psychologist understanding of recognition in its constitutive role and normative grammar while preventing the critical theorist and social subjects from disposing of further instrumental tools to criticize inadequate relationships of recognition, hence leaving subjects, both from an empirical and theoretical point of view, to be *entirely* dependent on the recognition of other subjects without any exterior parameter to value its ethical meaning.

We have concluded, therefore, that only by also considering the other interactional pole of the human subject's self-realization, i.e., objectivity or the external environment, and by accounting for the ontological and theoretical interpenetration of recognition with this latter, can a critical theory of recognition enrich its current normative grammar, addressing its criticisms, and strengthening its critical detection of inadequate relationships of recognition. Indeed, only by investigating the constitutive interaction between the human being and the external world is it feasible to contrast a merely "private" and "psychologist" understanding of the subject's personal contents, e.g., needs, values, interests, as being suitable to be fulfilled, realized, and developed due to an abstract exterior confirmation mediated by affection and

⁶⁴⁶ See Chapter Four and Five.

active participation. In fact, the human subject does not develop its personal contents interiorly, in a vacuum. Instead, it dynamically constitutes them only through a sensuous and needy interaction with an outer world, both natural and social, and it can realize and fulfill them according to a specific potential quality, distinguished from the rest of nature and other animal organisms. Without considering the human subject also as an embodied being that constitutively interacts with an outer world, only in the meeting with which its personal contents actually emerge, can be fulfilled according to a specific quality, and develop dynamically, three main problems follow for a critical theory of recognition.

Firstly, it does not have an integral account of the human subject's self-realization, for it does not account for the specific way or quality by which the subject does potentially realize, from a practical point of view, its personal contents. Secondly, it does not consider ethical recognition as being constitutive not only of the subjects' personal integrity but also of the specific constitutive interaction of the human being with the external environment. Thirdly, it misses the opportunity to further define recognition's normative grammar, in its ontological conditions and ontological status, in light of the human being's qualitative interaction with the outer world and its specific ontological conditions. Fourth, it follows that it cannot disclose the possibility to critically detect inadequate forms of recognition as impeding the subject from realizing its constitutive interaction with the outer world.

Hence, the main contribution that our reflections have set out to make is to strengthen the critical capacity of a theory of recognition by enriching the normative grammar provided by Honneth's paradigm through an alternative account of recognition. This alternative account ontologically and theoretically frames recognition within a broader anthropological reflection on the constitutive interaction of the human being with the outer world, disclosing the possibility to further define its ontological conditions and ontological status, and employing it for the criticism of the social world.

II) The second problem that we have pointed out in Honneth's critical theory of recognition concerns his identification of three forms of recognition and consequent normative principles for the criticism of the social world.⁶⁴⁷ Indeed, we have stressed that, despite having defined these three species of recognition in light of the structural transformations occurring within modern societies, helping to grasp the normative morality of modern subjects, the German author has subsequently considered them as formal and universally applicable normative

⁶⁴⁷ See Chapter Three, paragraph III. 2.

principles for the criticism of the social world. This internal tension within Honneth's criterion of the "good life" is related to his attempt to provide a *strongly normative criterion*, which does not only orient criticism according to the normative grammar of recognition, but structures criticism by referring to three forms of recognition. This internal tension and strong methodological approach for providing a normative criterion relying upon recognition has been mitigated by Honneth in one single essay⁶⁴⁸ and has been contested in the contemporary debate of critical theory and social philosophy⁶⁴⁹ since it denies the possibility to empirically revise, if not any more emancipatory, or enrich the species of recognition that were historically relevant within modern societies. Hence, in view of this problem, a critical theory of recognition is compelled, from a methodological point of view, to refer to a formal and universal criterion relying upon recognition, which nonetheless should just orient social critique while empirically defining and experimentally testing more specific normative principles, e.g., the species of recognition, according to specific situations, which can always embed structural transformations.

In light of these two sets of problems with Honneth's critical theory, we have attempted to contribute to a critical theory of recognition by identifying a philosopher who, on the one hand, has provided the alternative approach to recognition that we think would allow us to enrich the current normative grammar of a critical theory of recognition, strengthening its critical capacity towards inadequate forms of recognition. And, on the other hand, who has outlined a program for social philosophy wherein the latter is still conceived as an "ally" of misrecognized social members, which thus should orient its critical look through a formal and universal category of recognition, but without attempting to strongly structure the category of recognition through specific normative principles or species of recognition. Instead, this account of social philosophy emphasizes the importance of critical analysis to rely upon a *situationalism* and *verificationism* of both more specific normative principles and theories of social transformation and emancipation.

Following the reconstruction of John Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism and program for social philosophy to which we have dedicated the third part of our work, "Dewey's Social Philosophy and Naturalistic Humanism: Their Critical Relevance for Recognition Theory," we want to conclude that Dewey has provided the theoretical framework we were searching for,

⁶⁴⁸ See Honneth, 2009.

⁶⁴⁹ See Petherbridge, 2013; Rössler, 2007; Young, 2007.

which a contemporary critical theory of recognition should introject and integrate with its current one, that of Honnethian origin. Indeed, his theoretical framework contains, on the one hand, a systematic naturalistic analysis of the human beings' constitutive interaction with the external world, wherein recognition stands for the relationship through which the former can be genetically developed and performatively realized, and whose ethical meaning is defined in light of the ontological conditions of the human beings' activity with the external environment. From Dewey's framework we have indeed carved out an original underlying normative grammar of ethical recognition, which can enrich the one currently used by the contemporary critical theory of recognition and strengthen its critical capacities. On the other hand, his theoretical framework contains an account of social philosophy wherein the latter relies upon the category of recognition and a "weak normativism," since he emphasizes the *situationalism* and *verificationism* that social criticism, from a methodological point of view, should maintain concerning its more specific normative principles and theories for social transformations.

I) As we have shown by starting from his program of social philosophy in the *Lectures in China* (1919-1920), then explaining its theoretical and critical insights through an analysis of some of his later works⁶⁵⁰ – such as *The Influence of Darwinism in Philosophy* (1910), *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (1928), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Theory of Valuation* (1939) – Dewey provides a critical perspective on human societies by means of a naturalistic anthropology strictly related to a metaphysics of existence. Indeed, he bases the possibility to undertake a critique of social contexts on a primary descriptive and normative analysis of how the subject, as a *living being*, *can* and *should* interact and act with the external world. The striking originality of Dewey's critical thinking, indeed, lies in his attempt to replace the human subject within the broader context of life, as standing for an individual that is part of life while belonging to a specific degree or level of existence, which entails a particular capacity to act.

Accordingly, Dewey generally conceives of life in terms of a *process of interactions, transformations, and change*. There can be life only where there are parts that interact with each other, transforming each other, and entailing changes, from which new and unique interactions among these parts, new transformations, and changes arise. Therefore, he proposes, on the one hand, a theory of uniformity of existence or life: any living manifestation, to be properly "living," is embedded into an interaction with other parts, undergoing transformations and

⁶⁵⁰ See Chapter Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, and Eleven.

respectively transforming what it interacts with, and undertaking consequent new and different interactions with other parts. Thus, all living entities, from the inorganic to the organic ones, share three main ontological features: interactions, transformations, and change. On the other hand, Dewey argues for a theory of natural continuity. There are different degrees or levels of existence, which are ontologically continuous and differ according to the complexity that the fundamental features of existence – interactions, transformations, and change – assume in them: the inorganic level, the organic level, and the mental level.

Dewey lays the foundations of his social criticism by rethinking human subjectivity as belonging to life and its main features, and specifically, as belonging to a specific degree of existence, the mental level, which includes the organic one while providing the latter with a specific ontological potential. The human being, indeed, is, first of all, an animal organism. Organic entities differ from inorganic ones since they do not only exist and persist in virtue of accidental interactions with other parts, but rather “live” or continue to exist, in the deep sense of the world, in virtue of qualitative and transformative transactions with the external environment. The human being, like other organic entities, is a sensuous body endowed with needs and lacks, which can be satisfied, ensuring its self-survival and well-being, only by means of a constitutive interaction with the external environment, through the sensuous perception of the outer world’s qualities of which it is deficient and the consequent transformation of these qualities by a process of consummation and enjoyment. In the organic level of existence, the gross features of life are enhanced since the organism lives and self-constitutes in virtue of progressively richer interactions with various qualitative environmental objects. Furthermore, these living and constitutive interactions with outer objects, more or less mechanically, are desired and striven for by the organisms and entail manifest transformations within the organism and the external environment, leading to new and different living and constitutive interactions between the two. The human subject, therefore, is not an entity severed from nature, but rather, Dewey stresses the necessity to re-conceive it in its continuity with the rest of nature, for it lives only in virtue of a living and constitutive interaction, both sensuous and transformative, with the outer objective world’s qualities and values. Nonetheless, the human being differs from the rest of nature and other animal organisms, hence belonging to a higher level of life, since it has intelligence, i.e., the cognitive capacities of signification and knowledge. These cognitive capacities, considered by Dewey in their main practical function, allow the subject to consider the external qualities of which it is deficient *significantly*, as “signs

for something else,” grasping the *specific* conditioning objective factors that regulate their occurrence and stabilization, then intelligently identifying an organization of behavior devoted to operating specific transformations of the outer world, both natural and social, in order to enhance its demanded qualities. Thanks to intelligence, the human being can potentially turn its immediate experience, i.e., its organic living and constitutive interaction with the outer world, into a *qualitatively* different interaction, the one of *enhancement of life*, which entails both the *reshaping of existence* and the *reconstruction of its own living experience*.

Thanks to its cognitive capacities, the human being, on the one hand, can “reshape existence” since it can unveil the intelligibility running through existence and the external environment, disclosing the interactions underlying outer objects and situations, regulating their transformation and change, and expanding their own qualities.

On the other hand, it can reconstruct its immediate experience, i.e., the sensuous and transformative constitutive interaction that it has with the outer world for its self-survival and well-being. Indeed, in virtue of his holistic conception of experience, Dewey considers that organic beings are endowed with sensibility and emotions since, for surviving, they depend on the qualities of the outer world’s objects and situations. Sensibility and emotions, thus, pragmatically entail the activation, within the organism, of mechanical or instinctual practical reactions for the consummation of these qualities, which effect transformations of the external environment and the institution of new sensuous interactions of the organism with the outer world, in a continuum that Dewey defines as an “organic circuit.” Nonetheless, the cognitive capacities of signification and knowledge permit the human being to reconstruct its immediate experience, namely, the ensemble of the interactions that it has with the outer world for the fulfillment of its needs. Accordingly, the human being does not merely perceive the objective qualities of which it is deficient sensuously, with the immediate activation of instinctive and pre-determined patterns of practical reactions. Instead, it can intelligently *value* its feelings of liking and disliking and the outer qualities to which they refer, with which it identifies as standing for something valuable for it and, hence, as revealing something of itself. This process of cognitive valuation consists of considering these demanded qualities as being mediated in their occurrence, stabilization, and enhancement by specific objective conditions. Thanks to these evaluative processes, the individual can channel its need and accomplish its demanded quality through an “interest” or an end-in-view. This latter represents a future potential object or situation wherein, through a specific chain of means, namely, transformations of the external

world, both natural and social, its contingent needed quality can be enhanced, expanded, and secured in its occurrence, its needs can be significantly and not-contingently fulfilled, and its immediate living unity with the outer world can be transformed into an ontological and practical interpenetration without tensions and harmonious.

Hence, in his goal to provide a critical perspective on social contexts, Dewey attempts to reconsider the human beings' capacity for action in its continuity and specificity from the rest of nature, concluding that it *can* and *should* enhance the immediate constitutive interaction that, as an animal organism, it has with the external environment. Accordingly, it follows that the *specific* constitutive interaction with the outer world belonging to the human being is the one wherein its immediate and living experience can be reconstructed and enhanced through the dynamic transformation of the outer world for the significant fulfillment of its pressing needs and the expansion of the outer qualities with which it identifies. Therefore, the personal contents of the subject, i.e., its needs, feelings of liking and disliking, and the quality or value that it demands, arise from its immediate sensuous interaction with the outer world, and, from a descriptive point of view, they can be satisfied and realized significantly, rather than contingently or accidentally. Indeed, its needs can be interpreted, its immediate feelings of liking and disliking can be cognitively processed in their reference qualities or values, which can be "accomplished" in a desired "end-in-view," i.e., an object or situation wherein, through a specific chain of objective transformations, this quality can be enhanced, expanded, and secured, and the need of the subject fully and securely satisfied. Furthermore, Dewey deeply describes and justifies the human being's capacity for action within the world, i.e., the "reconstruction of experience," in its two ontological conditions, namely, *intelligent transformation* and *dynamism*. In light of his metaphysics of life, he points out:

(i) the *specificity* of the qualities demanded by the subject, as always relying, in their occurrence, stabilization, and expansion, upon *specific* objective conditionings, and always entailing the identification by the subject of specific ends-in-view, to be accomplished through particular chains of means or outer transformations.

(ii) the *intrinsic situational projectivity* and *deviational potential* from previous experiences of the subject's needs, demanded qualities, and interests or ends-in-view, as necessarily changing due to the uniform gross features of life, i.e., ongoing interactions, transformations, and change. The external environment, in its qualitative objects and situations, undergoes changes, also due to the transformations following from the interactions with the human subject, which,

respectively, as being an animal organism always engaged in a living interaction with the outer world, undertakes transactions with the external environment's qualities and values qualitatively different from the former, always disclosing a more or less sensuous and practical potential of deviation and enrichment. Hence, the human being's specific constitutive interaction with the outer world is effectively "living," if it partakes in life's dynamism, and thus, if it always entails a more or less deviational potential from previous experiences.

(iii) the *plurality* of human needs, as demanding both more "material" or "spiritual" qualities, which uniformly are objectively mediated. All these qualities, therefore, can be accomplished only by the cognitive consideration of their specific objective conditionings, with the institution of an end-in-view to be reached by specific objective transformations. Hence, the transformative meaning of the human being's interaction with the outer world is identified by Dewey with all the attempts to transform the external world for the strengthening of the values of experience.

(iv) the possibility of *evaluating* the *adequateness* of the human being's activity of enhancement of its own life, through the public and objective verification of the *humanizing potential* and *vitality* of its ends-in-view. Whenever its ends-in-view are emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations that prevent the subject from enhancing and strengthening its demanded qualities, from fulfilling its needs in a stable and significant manner, from reaching a tensionless unity with the external world, they are inadequate and not properly humanizing. Instead, whenever its ends-in-view get hypostatized and rendered static, detached from their intrinsic situational projection and possibilities of deviation and enrichment, they become "dead," reified," and the subject undergoes a "loss of vitality." The possibility of the human being to pathologically hypostatize its contents and restrict the dynamism, creativity, and potential of deviation of its action with the external environment is related by Dewey to the pathological distortion of the mechanism of habit, necessary for the stability of the human being's interaction with the outer world. Indeed, the ends-in-view of the subject, as emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations, should become "habits" to become stable acquisitions and to be masterfully realized. That is, they should become patterns of feelings, meanings, and actions pre-reflexively and pre-intentionally performed, which, nonetheless, should not develop into rigid, uncreative, and unintelligent patterns, thus severed from the potentialities of new situations.

Once we analyzed Dewey's naturalistic anthropology and his theory of the human being's specific constitutive interaction with the outer world, once we defined the descriptive and normative ontological conditions that he acknowledges to it, we reconstructed how, according to Dewey, the human being can genetically and performatively realize its capacity for action with the external environment thanks only to the cognitive mediation of other subjects. Hence, Dewey ends up defining social criticism in terms of the evaluation of the capacity or incapacity of social contexts to realize social members' specific qualitative interaction with the outer world. Accordingly, Dewey considers that the human subject can genetically and fully realize its capacity of enhancing life thanks only to the specific association of which human beings are capable, the one of reciprocal recognition, that is conceived in terms of the *participation* or *engagement in the other subject's experience*.

From a genetic point of view, the human being can develop self-consciousness, i.e., a feeling for itself, which is the precondition for the identification of its feelings and emotions as its own personal contents, distinguished by an outer world with autonomous qualities and properties, and hence for the development of cognitive capacities as valuing and transformative processes, only through the reciprocal recognition with another subject as "individual centres of experience." Dewey understands this base-level of recognition in terms of the reciprocal affirmative acknowledgment between subjects as individual centres of experience, in virtue of which the individual can identify itself as a specific centre of experience. Consequently, it develops a feeling for itself only in virtue of a process of decentralization and self-identification through the other subject.

Instead, from a performative point of view, the subject can *fully* and *effectively* realize its specific constitutive interaction with the outer world, i.e., the enhancement of life through the cognitive valuation of its needs and demanded quality and the humanizing transformation of the outer world, only through the *recognition* of other subjects, which, in this case, is intended by Dewey respectively as the *emotional*, *cognitive*, and *practical* participation and engagement in its immediate experience, with the aim to reconstruct it. Dewey highlights that the processes of knowledge, signification, and transformation of the outer world underlying the possibility of the subject to reconstruct its experience are not processes that, in their functional meaning, the individual can accomplish by itself, since they are eminently social processes. Indeed, on the one hand, he provides a conception of knowledge of the outer world as relying upon both the pluralistic perspectives of different subjects, devoted to grasping the objective conditionings of

the subject's demanded qualities and the specific chain of means necessary to enhance them, and the collective agreement and verification of its adequateness and validity. On the other hand, he consequently conceives the meanings by which the subject signifies its immediate experience and that lead to the definition of its ends-in-view, representing emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations, as being not only socially instituted and shared but also socially understood, hence entailing the practical participation of other subjects in the intelligent transformation of the outer world for the significant fulfillment of the subject's needs. It follows that the effective and performative possibility of subjects to realize their capacity for action or constitutive interaction with the outer world, namely, the enhancement of life, through the reconstruction of their experience and the reshaping of existence, cannot but occur through ethical cognitive relationships with other subjects. These cognitive relationships should be conceived in terms of other subjects' participation and engagement in the subject's experience cooperating for reconstructing it, for defining – through their perspective, knowledge, meanings – and realizing – through their practical effort – the end-in-view, the object or situation reachable through a specific chain of means, wherein the need of the individual can be satisfied stably, its demanded quality can be expanded and enhanced, and its ontological and practical unity with the external world can become a tensionless and harmonious interpenetration or fusion.

Therefore, we have stressed that Dewey conceives other subjects as those who allow the individual to effectively be a “conscious centre of experience,” to self-realize in its specific constitutive relation with the external world, according to its specific ontological conditions, i.e., intelligent transformation and dynamism. Hence, recognition is a *function* of human experience, and thus, has a function for *life*. His metaphysics of existence, his descriptive and normative theory of human action with the external world, and the consideration of its cognitive structure represent the theoretical framework by which Dewey defines his program for social criticism while giving social members useful tools to critically approach their social contexts. Accordingly, social philosophy should criticize and outline social transformation programs whenever social members are prevented from realizing their specific constitutive interaction with the external environment due to inadequate contexts of recognition. In the *Lectures in China*, Dewey refers to two main inadequate contexts of recognition, the ideological and the standardizing or lifeless one. With the first category, Dewey refers to those cognitive contexts which are pathological since they entail the symbolic acceptance and

integration of the subject's and social groups' contents, but without standing for real emotional, cognitive, and practical engagements in their experience, without being devoted to significantly realize, enhance, and stabilize their contents through the cognitive identification and practical accomplishment of the specific chain of means and transformations of the natural and social world objectively necessary. In these recognitive contexts, the contents of subjects and social groups remain "choked" and "dwarfed," since the ends-in-view socially defined to satisfy their needs and expand their qualities are *inadequate*. They do not stand for the emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations suitable to *enhance* life, for they objectively maintain subjects and social groups in a situation of practical block in fulfilling their need significantly, of instability in the enjoyment of their demanded qualities. These recognitive contexts maintain subjects into a situation of oppression and domination and unveil the parasitic hegemony of the social world by a specific group of the social world, with its need and interest.

Instead, with the second category, Dewey refers to those recognitive contexts that *rigidly* determine and hypostatize the contents of social members, interpreting and realizing them with categories, meanings, knowledge, customs, statuses, social practices, and institutions, which empower the subjects' capacity to act but delimiting and restricting its emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities, hence leading to a reification, standardization, and normalization of their personal contents. We have seen, indeed, that Dewey considers that the subject can reconstruct its experience, defining and realizing its contents, only through the recognitive mediation of the social context, through other subjects' and groups' knowledge, meanings, and cooperative action. Therefore, its contents are always *socially* defined in their substance. Furthermore, they can be stabilized and effortlessly realized only when their underlying emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations become habitually accomplished by the entire social context. That is, they can be stabilized only when the recognitive interpretation of the subject's immediate experience, the cognitive attribution of a specific end-in-view to the subject, and the realization of the cooperative transformations and actions entailed by the end-in-view become habitual, namely, pre-reflexively and pre-intentionally enacted by the social context, without effort and with the institution of reciprocal expectations. Recognitive relationships, if they are functional for the human being's experience, should become habitually performed by the social context. Nonetheless, due to the possible risk of habits becoming rigid emotional, cognitive, and practical patterns, recognitive relationships can become reifying, rigidly defining, and lifeless. They can turn into processes that rigidly,

heteronormatively, and strictly determine the subject's contents, which become "dead," delimiting its sensuous, emotional, and practical potentialities, discouraging its engagement in the more or less deviational potential of new living experiences.

According to Dewey, these cognitive contexts must be criticized. Indeed, they prevent human subjects from performing and realizing their constitutive interaction with the external world according to the intrinsic dynamism which ontologically belongs to it as being a *living* interaction, which entails transformations in the outer world and consequently different sensuous, cognitive, and practical transactions with outer qualities, always disclosing a more or less potential for deviation from previous experiences.

With the reconstruction of Dewey's metaphysics of life and systematic theory of human activity within the world, in its ontological conditions and cognitive structure, and with the consideration of Dewey's application of this theoretical framework, i.e., its Naturalistic Humanism, to the criticism of the social world, we have pointed out that it is feasible to grasp from this theoretical framework an original approach to recognition. Here, the subject's self-realization is analyzed in relation to the human being's ontological interaction with the external environment, and the relationship of recognition among subjects is respectively considered in its constitutive role and defined in its ethical meaning in relation to the distinguishing quality of the human being's activity with and within the external environment and its ontological conditions.

Consequently, in Dewey, we do not find a systematic consideration of recognition as being constitutive of the human subject's personal integrity. This latter, as Honneth pointed out, is an essential part of a good life and allows a critical theory of recognition to explain the human beings' moral dependence on social recognition, to acknowledge and interpret the feelings of personal injury perceived by subjects deprived of a positive confirmation by the social context, and to detect those social contexts manifestly oppressive and unjust. Instead, Dewey has an alternative approach to recognition, from which an additional meaning of the constitutive role of ethical recognition emerges, and which a contemporary critical theory should integrate with the one that it currently considers, since it allows the critical theorist to disclose a normative grammar of recognition capable of enriching the one derived from Honneth's paradigm of recognition, with the possibility to detect and criticize the inadequate or weakly ethical relationships of recognition.

A contemporary critical theory of recognition, integrating Honneth's anthropological framework and paradigm of recognition with Dewey's naturalistic anthropology and understanding of recognition, is enabled, in the first instance, to conceive recognition as being constitutive for the human subject's self-realization not only since it represents that affirmative relationship, mediated by care and participation, that allows the subject to develop a normative disposition towards its personal contents, as Honneth argues. But, furthermore, since it allows the subject to realize its constitutive interaction with the outer world, the one of *enhancement of life*.

In the second instance, through Dewey's framework, a critical theory of recognition would be able to additionally define the genus of ethical recognition, intending it not only, as in Honneth's paradigm, in terms of "taking the other as a person, with normative dispositions" but also in terms of "the reconciliation of the human being, as an *embodied subject*, with the outer world," or, alternatively, in terms of "the *function* of the human being's life, i.e., of its constitutive interaction with the outer world."

In the third instance, a critical theory of recognition would not narrow the *ontological conditions* that recognition must meet in order to be ethical and non-ideological to the subjects' possibility to develop a personal integrity or a normative relationship with themselves, to recognition's lack of instrumentality, and to the coherence between its evaluative and practical dimension. Additionally, the ontological conditions of recognition would be defined according to the ontological conditions of human action itself. Ethical would be those relationships of recognition which allow the subject to *objectively enhance its life* by cooperating in the reconstruction of its needy experience, in the social institution of emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations functional for the significant fulfillment of the subjects' needs, for the expansion and stabilization of its demanded qualities, and for the realization of its tensionless and harmonious ontological and practical interpenetration with the outer world. Thus, recognition, in order to be ethical, should meet three further ontological conditions, standing for:

(i) the emotional engagement in the subject's qualitative and needy experience, as worthy but also as the "sign for something else."

(ii) the cognitive engagement in the subject's qualitative and needy experience, devoted to intelligently value its needs and demanded qualities through collective knowledge and processes of signification, identifying the specific conditionings of these qualities and the

consequent “end-in-view” or specific object and situation to be brought about through a specific chain of transformations of the social and natural world.

(iii) the practical engagement in cooperating practically with the realization and stabilization of the socially defined contents of human subjects, i.e., of the emotional, cognitive, and practical organizations that are adequate for the intelligent fulfillment of the subjects’ needs.

In the fourth instance, the *ontological status* of recognition, namely, the *kind* of relationship that ethical recognition should be in order to allow the subject to not be strictly and rigidly determined by the social context, might be better defined and explained. From the possible definition of the ontological status of recognition in terms of a “transaction of the power to act,” empowering the subject to transform its social determinations in light of its creativity in the new contexts of practice, it would be feasible to more concretely and meaningfully intend it as a “*living transaction*,” namely, a “*transaction of living power*.” Accordingly, recognition is an interaction that is part of *life*, of the ongoing process of interactions, transformations, and change that is existence. Hence, it should be a relationship that defines and stabilizes the contents of the subject, without entailing the subjects’ standardization and normalization to the socially defined categories, meanings, norms, standards, social practices, and institutions, and the reification of its contents. Instead, it should encourage and allow the subject to *keep living*, to engage in the new and qualitatively unique interactions with the outer world, which open up new transformations and change, new emotional, cognitive, and practical potentialities, new possibilities of deviation from the symbolic and practical framework of the social world, and hence the projection of its needs, demanded values, and personal contents.

A contemporary theory of recognition, integrating its current anthropological framework and normative grammar, derived from Honneth, with Dewey’s naturalistic anthropology and consequent original understanding of ethical recognition, would be enabled in detecting not only manifest relationships of misrecognition but also the inadequate or weakly ethical ones, as *objectively* preventing subjects from “making life vary and rich in meanings,” from “getting a living.”⁶⁵¹ Hence, a contemporary critical theory of recognition should go with Axel Honneth beyond Honneth through John Dewey, therefore grasping the interpenetration of recognition with life: recognition has a responsibility to *life*.

⁶⁵¹ LW 1, p. 97.

II) Through the analysis of the *Lectures in China*, we have also pointed out that Dewey outlines an account of social philosophy that, from a methodological point of view, can be named “weak normativism.”⁶⁵² Indeed, he argues that critical social analysis should orient its critical outlook by means of a universal and formal criterion, that of “associated life,” which refers to the form or kind of living belonging to human beings and its recognitive structure, and should use it as a “map and a compass” to determine a social situation, first, as “problematic.” He deems it the duty of *specific* social theories to more precisely define the normative principles that, in a particular social situation, can be emancipatory and to provide programs for social transformation, which should always be considered as “hypotheses.” That is, more specific normative principles, such as the different species of recognition, and the theories for social transformation should be experimentally tested and verified in their adequacy, in light of their consequences and the further experiences of social members. Accordingly, they should be revised, enriched, or dropped in light of new and different social situations, as being always historically determined, and hence, possibly not suitable to ensure the moral progress within different social situations.

Even the methodological account of Dewey’s social criticism can be inspiring and useful for a contemporary critical theory of recognition. On the one hand, it can allow the latter to overcome the internal tension of Honneth’s “strong normativism.” In fact, Honneth, in the attempt to provide a richer and more structured criterion for social critique, ends up considering the species of recognition, which are fundamental historical normative principles of modern societies, in terms of normative principles to be employed universally, without considering the necessity to test and revise their emancipatory potential in structurally different social situations. On the other hand, it also allows for the stressing of the necessity to consider the programs for social transformation provided by critique as hypotheses to be tested in their potential for the social moral progress, and as being potentially droppable in different social situations, hence abandoning the conviction of a strong teleological, uniform, and cumulative moral progress running through human societies’ history.

Accordingly, a contemporary critical theory of recognition could consider itself as an “ally” of misrecognized social members and struggles for social recognition, orienting its critical outlook by means of the category of social recognition, without, nonetheless,

⁶⁵² See Chapter Three, Chapter Eight, and Chapter Eleven. For the distinction between “strong” and “weak” normativism, see Renault, 2010.

considering the three main forms of recognition that were emancipatory for human societies in terms of universally valid and applicable normative principles; and without considering its programs for social transformation both as valid apart from empirical verification and social members' experience and as making part of a uniform, cumulative, and teleological moral progress of human societies, to which any specific social situation should be conformed. Hence, it should acknowledge the *situationalism* and *verificationism* of its normative principles and theories for social transformation. It should be open to think of possibly different and new emerging species or forms of recognition and consider its theories for social emancipation as being revisable and dropped in different social contexts and situations.

To conclude, a contemporary critical theory of recognition, in order to be reconsidered in its effective critical capacity and emancipatory potential within human societies, is compelled to revise its current critical paradigm of recognition, mostly relying upon Honneth's account. We think that John Dewey's Naturalistic Humanism and program for social philosophy should be acknowledged in their theoretical and critical contributions and be integrated in the theoretical framework of a contemporary critical theory of recognition, as being able to strengthen its critical capacity and relevance for social freedom, and to keep it on its original track. That is, to struggle for the very possibility of human beings to "get a living" only with the mediation of other fellows.

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