



Illustrasjon: Ane Hem

“ALMOST LIKE A DOCTOR FOR THE WHOLE SOCIETY”

EN SAMTALE MED AXEL HONNETH

Av Helga Forus og Eskil Kjos Fjell

Axel Honneth (f. 1949) regnes som den fremste representant for Frankfurterskolens tredje generasjon. Han innehar både direktørposten ved Institut für Sozialforschung og professorat i sosialfilosofi ved Johan Wolfgang Goethe Universitet i Frankfurt. Med sitt hovedverk *Kampf um*

Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte (1992), en rekke bøker og artikler har Honneth markert seg som dagens ledende anerkjennelsesteoretiker.

Med utgangspunkt i Hegels Jena-skrifter og sosialpsykologiske teorier argumenter Honneth for at mennesket må forstås som et

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moralsk sårbart og krenkbart vesen som møter hverandre med anerkjennelsesforventninger. Hvis forventningene ikke imøtekommes, kan moralske erfaringer av krenkelser og følelser av urettferdighet danne utgangspunktet for sosiale konflikter. Honneths sosialfilosofiske teori kan beskrives som (i) deskriptiv, ved at han beskriver og analyserer hvordan samfunnet og mennesket kan forstås; (ii) kritisk, ved at Honneth ønsker, gjennom det deskriptive, å avdekke sosiale patologier; (iii) normativ, i den forstand at avdekkingen av sosiale patologier legger føringer på hvordan man bør handle og hvordan samfunnet bør organiseres. Honneths normative dimensjon kommer til uttrykk i et formalt begrep om det gode liv, og tre former for anerkjennelse (kjærlighet, rett og solidaritet) som utgjør betingelser for vellykket personlig integritet.

Intervjuet med Honneth reiser spørsmål om hans politiske selvforståelse, teorien om anerkjennelse, og hvordan han forholder seg til aktuelle politisk-filosofiske tenkere og problemstillinger. Honneth holdt The Oslo Lecture in Moral Philosophy 2010 arrangert av Etikkprogrammet ved Universitetet i Oslo.

Although you are part of the '68 generation, you have stated that you did not feel politically at home in the student movement. What separated you from the movement?

I was still in high school when it all started. I was an extremely lax scholar there and had to take one of my classes twice, so I did not graduate until 1969. And I have to say that I became politically engaged very late, and that probably had to do with my family and background. When I was about nineteen, I became interested in the real demands of people, especially the workers. That is because I came from an industrial workers central, Essen in Germany, which is full of coalmining and so on. I developed the idea that the real problem in our society at that time was the huge differences between the classes, and the disadvantages especially of young members of the working class. I took the student movement as being almost too demanding, and having a much too revolutionary vocabulary, to take up the real concerns of the working class. Therefore, I had a certain distance to the student movement. To us who were younger they behaved a little bit like the avant-garde, the avant-garde that "knows everything". Even at the time when very few of them had developed a Leninist form of self-understanding, all that came later, there was a certain self-understanding as being *the* avant-garde of society, knowing what was in the

objective interest of the workers. Fighting for revolution when the real workers had completely different concerns. They were struggling at home, with having to get their children into a good school, and so on and so forth. There was a certain discrepancy between what I took as being the basis of real politics, and the language of the student movement. I became a member of the Social Democrats' youth party, which was even more radical than the Social Democrats themselves. I became a member of the Trotskyite part of these youth groups. But I remained sceptical about the student movement when I came to Berlin. Here it was still a demand that you had to be enormously avant-gardistic, progressive, and radical. You see, I always felt a little bit strange in relation to the student movement, and that was the main reason I didn't feel at home there.

What is the political self-understanding you bring to bear on your work, and is it shaped by certain assumptions concerning the political and practice use-context of your own theories?

Sure, as I said already, I think the decisive experience for me when I was younger, was to see the social and psychological effects of being among the disadvantaged in society. And from very early on, without having the language for it, I developed a concern for what the famous sociologist Richard Sennet called "the hidden injuries of class". These hidden injuries have mostly to do not with being economically disadvantaged, which these groups are as well, but with feelings of shame. With feelings such as being deprived, underestimated, and devaluated. Very early I developed an interest and a certain sensitivity for these dimensions of social recognition within a society. Then I became interested, like the rest of us, in critical theory. And I have to say that it did not take too long before it was clear to me that the vocabulary for these hidden forms of injury was missing in this tradition as well. That helped me to develop in my own way: first, by being enormously influenced by Habermas and his theory, but then by trying to deepen his theory in the realm of communicative action, and by understanding communicative action under the perspective of mutual recognition, especially the negative sides of it, and the permanent struggle for recognition in societies. I think this is still my political self-understanding: that we have to be concerned politically with those who have legitimate, justified feelings of being disrespected and devaluated in society. For those who are not privileged.

Do you see your work as a continuation of the Frankfurt School?

In certain respects, yes, but it is very hard to spell out in what sense. I would say in respect to the whole self-understanding of this kind of theory, in certain aspects of the works of Adorno and Horkheimer. And without Habermas I would definitely not have developed the whole concept of the struggle of recognition. In that sense I am still in this tradition. Nevertheless, I think there are certain relatively strong deficits in that tradition. Deficits I try to overcome by using and developing my own concepts.

In an interview with Simon Critchley you say: "That we are, in a sense, the doctors of society". Can you elaborate what is meant by the "doctors of society", and the concepts of "diagnosis" and "pathology"?

I think social critics can take two starting points: They can describe their own society as suffering from certain injustices, from the standpoint of certain privileges or disprivilegations, from certain disadvantages for certain groups. But they may also take a completely different stance; they can think of their society as being false in a deeper sense, namely, that society has developed a wrong self-understanding, or wrong forms of life. Not only one group is disadvantaged or discriminated, but the whole society has probably developed wrong forms of life. This is what I have in mind when I speak of social pathologies. I sometimes think that Marx, for instance, was more interested in social pathologies than in the specific disadvantages of the working class. He was interested in what he called alienation and reification. These are social tendencies by which not one class is especially disadvantaged. These kinds of social developments are disadvantageous for all of us, because we can not live a good life together. Social pathologies violate our possibilities for societal forms of the good life. When I said "the doctor", this was the idea. This goes back to the tradition from Marx to Emile Durkheim, who as a sociologist developed the idea that society can go through stages of anomie. Durkheim thought the sociologist had to analyze these stages of anomie. He even took certain empirical data, for instance a growth in the suicide rate, or a growth in the divorce rate, as being important for diagnosing these social pathologies. In that sense I would say, yes, if you are trying to describe what can be explained as social pathologies, with justified and

good instruments, you behave almost like a doctor for the whole society.

Let's turn to the theory of recognition; how do you define the concept of recognition?

I would say that recognition is basically a kind of affirmative attitude toward another person. There is a difficulty in the word "recognition" as such because it is used differently in different languages. But in the Hegelian tradition that I stand in, it means something very specific, namely, an affirmative, positive attitude toward other persons. If you have that core meaning, there can still be differences in these affirmative attitudes. In the beginning of *The Struggle for Recognition* I distinguished different forms of recognition almost anthropologically. Later I came to understand that these forms are produced by society, they are not simply given by our human life form, but change with the development of human societies. Thus, any distinction between these forms depends on the kind of society we are speaking of. I now tend to say because of the many structured changes in the development of, say, the 17th and 18th centuries, and certain institutional reforms and political self-understandings, there is in our modern societies an institutionalized distinction between three forms of this affirmative attitude, which together integrate people into modern societies. What has been called love since the 18th century has been one of the affirmative attitudes toward others, and a very important one. The second I call respect, legal respect, and the third I call social esteem. Now I see these distinctions as being the products of certain differentiations between social spheres in modern society, not as something which is anthropologically given, as I formerly did.

I would like to follow up on these ideas. You state in the article "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy" that the survival of social philosophy depends on the justification of an anthropology. How weak and how formal is this constant of human nature?

Let me clarify two things. On the one hand, I take it as being clear that the distinctions between different forms of recognition should be understood historically, and as depending on the form of society. On the other hand, I do not think we can manage without a very weak and a very thin form of philosophical anthropology which informs us

of certain conditions of human beings. But these are thin descriptions of what is universal to all of us. As I said, I differentiate between two tasks of critical theory, namely, identifying social pathologies and identifying social injustices. I think one needs recourse to certain elements of philosophical anthropology to identify social pathologies. One needs to be able to draw on components of human beings which are below those differentiations that can be identified on the historical level. For example, I used the idea of recognition in a book I wrote on reification. Here I used an anthropological idea of recognition, an elementary idea of recognition, prior to all the differentiations in society. I take this elementary form of recognition as being so basic that if it were to be violated, we would clearly be speaking of a social pathology. In that sense a social pathology goes somewhat deeper, because it risks a certain component of our being as human beings. Therefore, I think we are in need of both. We need elements of a thin anthropology, a philosophical anthropology, which might be broader than what can be spelled out in terms of recognition. There are components of human beings which do not solely have to do with recognition. And we need that kind of theory of society which informs us of given distinctions between spheres of recognition.

Do you need to be recognised in some way or another before you can participate in a struggle for recognition?

That is an interesting question that I often get. Yes, I think it requires a certain self-confidence, and in that sense it requires a certain experience of social recognition before you are really able to struggle for recognition. The interesting question is where this form of recognition can come from when you are only beginning to struggle for a certain type of recognition. Here are some examples: Let's take the blacks in the 1950-60's in the United States, who were not legally recognized like the white Americans were. They did not have societal respect for their legal autonomy. They obviously had the power to struggle for that recognition, the mutual respect and civic inclusion and inclusion in the legal community. The question is how they got their self-confidence and self-respect. I think this is a question for historical and empirical research. I think they got it from certain background experiences in their own communities. They probably got it from other resources, which I call with reference to Richard Sennett's fantastic concept, "Compensatory forms of respect". You see, there

are compensations, in minorities and in smaller communities, to develop a kind of mechanism for earning respect within your own community. That probably fuels you with the power to start struggling for recognition. Internal compensatory forms of respect are needed and have to be developed. The same might be true for women, who clearly lacked public recognition as beings of worth in the publicness of the political and social. They obviously developed their own modes of earning respect within their own circles and within their own communities, and thus strengthened themselves by these compensatory forms of respect. As I said, I borrowed this concept from Richard Sennett. In his book *The Hidden Injuries of Class* he spoke of subcultures of respect, where you develop your own code of respect, which then empowers you to enter into a struggle with society.

So, if I understand you correctly, you distinguish between recognition as a precondition to participate in a struggle on the one side, and recognition as a motivation on the other?

I do not know whether I would describe it like that. What I intended to say was that there is a difference between what one could probably call internal forms of recognition and societal forms of recognition, and I think that sometimes groups have the capacity to develop their own forms of respect and their own forms of recognition. In order to empower themselves by their own forms of respect they do not only have the motivation to struggle, but they also have the mental capacities for struggling. It is nevertheless very hard to develop, and even harder if you are not even allowed to constitute a group or develop certain group mechanisms. The same goes for homosexuals, and this is probably even more difficult. I mean, the blacks had their own communities, and within these communities they could develop certain compensatory forms of respect. They had their own code of honour which empowered them. The same may be said of women in a certain period. I think they had their own subcultures, after '68, where they developed their own codes of honour and respect, by which they empowered themselves to enter into a struggle with society. It is much more difficult with groups that are forced to be secret, groups that have to hide because they are not allowed to even constitute a group, like with the gays. It would be extremely interesting to look at the history of the development of the gay movement, how they managed to develop that kind of self-respect, and the empower-

ment to actually enter a struggle. The case of the homosexuals is probably the most interesting one because in the other cases I can detect how they empowered themselves. In the case of homosexuals it is very difficult because they were not even legally allowed to meet, at least in some countries. The communities of gays had to be secret. And it was probably necessary that certain legal obstacles were removed before they could empower themselves.

You made a distinction between recognition as a precondition and as a motivation. On the one hand, your revival of Hegel's Jena writings and his concept of "struggle" indicate recognition as motivation. On the other hand, your focus on social psychology, particularly Donald W. Winnicott and the concept of "love" indicate recognition as a precondition to participate in a struggle.

One the one hand, the motivation comes from experiences of societal disrespect. If the whole society somewhat disrespects or devalues you, the motivation lies in overcoming these forms of disrespect and devaluation. But on the other hand, there are preconditions for developing self-relations which enable you to start a struggle. And these preconditions do not always have to be societal, as guaranteed in the whole society. But they can, obviously, be created in smaller communities.

It seems that moral feelings have important roles to play. Firstly, as a characteristic of injustice, in that negative emotions indicate injustice. Secondly, as a psychological link that could motivate struggle. I think this can be problematic. On the one hand, you have immoral acts that are not always followed by a feeling of injustice. On the other hand, you have feelings of injustice that are not always justified, such as people feeling unfairly treated without just reason. When injustice is rooted in moral feelings, how is it possible to unveil all kinds of social pathologies and secure the validity of claims of recognition (at the same time)?

That's an interesting point. In the first period, when I developed the whole framework, I probably made the mistake of linking moral feelings too closely to legitimate and justified claims. In both an explanatory respect, and in terms of normative justification, one has to be much more cautious. Explanatory-wise because there are sometimes forms of disrespect that are not subjectively experienced as such, so that the respective moral feelings are probably not given. I think we know cases like that, where people are mistreated without having

the respective feelings, the feelings we would rationally expect. But clearly, the other link is much too narrow as well. We should not take moral feelings as indications of justified claims. For this reason, I now stress what I call the socially institutionalized principles of recognition more often, because they are the reference points of the whole description and the whole justification. Only in light of those institutionalized principles can certain claims of recognition be justified. I think our feelings of disrespect and misrecognition are normally somewhat bound to these institutionalized principles, which means that our emotions are not unsocialized. Our moral feelings become socialized by our learning of certain expectations with reference to institutionalized principles. Take the principle of equal respect in our society. If I am not legally respected I will only develop the respective moral feelings when I am socialized in a culture in which that principle is institutionalized, if I learn during my socialization process that this is a valid principle. I think people very rarely will develop these moral feelings in societies where such principles are not institutionalized. If I grow up in the household of a peasant in a pre-modern society, where the prevailing and institutionalized principle would be that of a clear status-hierarchy, I would not be allowed to compare myself to a member of the aristocracy. In this instance I would not develop the respective moral feelings. Therefore, I think moral feelings are normally somewhat informed and socialized with reference to institutionalized principles. That is why we normally can presuppose that if people develop certain moral feelings of indignation, of humiliation, these are informed feelings that are already rationalized by the spirit and culture of that time. But there are also clearly cases where people develop pathological feelings of disrespect, which we can know are not justified, because they have these elements of irrationality in them. Irrationality means that they can not be explained with reference to the prevailing institutionalized principles. I think one has to think of it like this: we are probably allowed to make distinctions between justified feelings and non-justified feelings of disrespect, and this demarcation is possible with reference to the institutionalized principles.

Do you think there is a connection between a liquidation of the traditionally solid structures of family and community, and the emergence of the politically and legally recognized individual? Is there a tension between the argument for stronger solidity in human relations, and the argument for the politi-

cally and legally emancipated individual?

If I understand this correctly, I would say no, there is no automatic link between these two arguments. I think we have to be very cautious when describing certain societal developments as a liquidation of personal relationships. I am at present working on a new book where I want to reconstruct – it is a little bit crazy - I want to apply Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* to our modern time. Here I have to deal with the question of what I think about the recognitional needs in the whole sphere of personal relationships. When I go into the empirical and historical details here, I become a little bit more optimistic than I was before because - and it is very interesting to see - friendship, for instance, is of higher importance than ever before. And friendship in the sense of real, personal, trustful friendship, not only within the same kind of gender, but also cross-gender, and even between people from different cultures. Friendship relations are obviously very important cements of our whole society. And there are several empirical investigations which show that friendship is still seen as extremely valuable, and is differentiated from looser forms of friendship, say, strategic friendship, as Aristotle described them. Here there is obviously something like a common intuition again, like a moral grammar which we all share. We have clear intuitions about what is and what is not a real friendship, and this real friendship is of high importance. The same is true even for love affairs. They are surely more unstable than they were a long time ago, but their instability signifies that they have become much more authentic, and much less regulated by stable gender expectations. Empirically I would say that the whole realm of personal relationships is relatively stable and highly democratized. Friendship is more democratic than before, marriage is more democratic than before, and even the family, unstable as it is, is in itself more equal than it ever was before. There is a certain cement of personal relationships that is probably more stable than official social diagnoses think, as in for example Zygmunt Baumann, who believes that all this is falling apart. Sociologically speaking, I think this is quite stable. I believe that this background of stability of personal relationships, if that is true, is a condition even for political engagement and activity in the civil society, to a certain degree. If, for instance, families are no longer these authoritarian institutions we know from the descriptions of the Frankfurt School, but more democratized and equal than be-

fore, this helps us to develop a democratic spirit. In that sense I would not see the kind of liquidation of relationships you are asking about.

We are living in a multicultural society with distinctive cultural traditions and different identities shaped by religion, sexuality, gender and ethnicity. In Norway we have an ongoing debate on whether or not to allow police officers to wear a headscarf. How do you understand the relation between recognition and tolerance? Is it possible, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests, to distinguish between a "negative" and a "positive" recognition of identity? Does recognition as a matter of self-realization imply, and I quote Bauman, that: "you have the right to be what you are and under no obligation to be someone else" and that negative recognition boil down to a "let it be"-stance?

I can not really make much sense of the term "negative recognition". It seems to me to be a certain concept of tolerance where tolerance is nothing but a kind of *laissez-faire* attitude. This implies a certain kind of disrespect, because you don't really care what the other is doing. This kind of tolerance is not really tolerance. For tolerance to actually be tolerance, I have to overcome a certain negative reaction. The starting point of tolerance is a negative reaction on my side toward the other, because I can not simply see his or her way of life as justified in itself. We should speak of tolerance only when I overcome that negative reaction by an attitude of tolerance. I think one element of legal respect is tolerance. We have to be tolerant if we really respect other groups or members of outsider groups as legal. Legal respect includes tolerance toward them, because we simply have to accept that they have their autonomy to decide how they want to live. And that is what is implied by legal respect; it is only one of these forms of recognition. One difficult question in the whole debate on multiculturalism is whether the attitude we can expect from ourselves, in our liberal societies, toward those minority cultures, should boil down to respect, or whether we should have other attitudes as well. Whether it should be a more demanding concept, or whether it comes down to legal forms of respect, which are very often not even given. We have the same debates in Germany, where the question is whether public teachers are allowed to wear a headscarf or something like that. Here I would be on the side of those who defend the rights of minority cultures, because these rights belong to our form of legal respect, even to religious

freedom. The case in Switzerland where a ban was imposed on the building of minarets, is in my view unbelievable, and it is a serious violation of civil rights. Now, to the question of negative recognition. I make other distinctions and I can probably not make sense of negative recognition. I could speak of ideological forms of recognition, but that is something else. Ideological forms of recognition are forms of recognition where forms of evaluations that have been overcome are used again. For example, when women today are praised for being good housewives or good mothers, that is clearly an ideological form of recognition. It is a form of recognition, but it is ideological because it falls back to an overcome period.

You have recently been engaged in a somewhat heated debate with Peter Sloterdijk. In your argument against his position you claim that “no resentment, no envy and no lust for power was needed to motivate the members of the lower classes to fight for an economic redistribution from the upper to the lower social reaches.” Is there any tension between theories of resentment and theories of recognition?

I think the whole concept of resentment, as developed by Nietzsche, was very early, at least in the German world, used by representatives of the upper classes to describe the lower classes. It was a typical instrument of an ideological class struggle. I grew up in an almost social democratic culture in Germany, close to the Scandinavian culture of the past forty years, where it was unthinkable to speak of the demands from the lower classes as being signals of resentment, or of envy. This whole concept was almost forgotten. It probably played an enormous role in the 1950s, and definitely prior to the Second World War. In periods of heated class struggles it was typically an instrument of the upper classes. I was almost shocked to see that somebody like Peter Sloterdijk, who had already played a little bit with the whole idea of recognition and the struggle for recognition in one of his books, turned it around and wanted to say that the upper classes do not feel recognized because they are expected to pay taxes. He redescribes the whole social-psychological situation, in a very powerful way, I would have to say. What's bad about the article is definitely that it had a certain impact. He redescribes the whole situation by saying that demanding taxes means having to give something which you would like to give freely. You are forced to give something away from what you have legitimately and justly earned, and that is a kind of mis-

recognition. And it springs from pure envy, from the lower classes. In that sense I always become instantly nervous when the concept of resentment, and especially envy, is introduced in social theory and in sociological explanations. But it is clear that resentment plays an enormously important role in describing certain forms of social conflict. And we should not give it up simply because some people are mistreating and misusing it. For example, on an international level or on a level between groups, I think one can not understand certain developments without being aware that certain resentments are growing. And resentments are then the reactions toward violations, be it justified or completely unjustified. For this reason resentments are probably always a sign of a certain mental rigidity, a sign that something is blocked. And you can not overcome certain stereotypical reactions. It is an almost neurotic reaction. But sometimes it has an interesting history, and it should be understood because it plays a huge role in social conflicts. I would definitely say that the whole concept is of high importance for sociological explanations. But it should not be used simply as an instrument in a class struggle from above.

According to Chantal Mouffe, “Political thought and practice are stifled by a misconceived search for consensus and the promotion of a bland social unanimity”. Do you think that she is right in claiming that social democracy tendencies toward a deliberative consensus, rather than an agonistic politics, is a problem?

I do not like the whole alternative between the agonistic concept of politics and consensus. I do not think this gets the whole spectrum right. I think the more important notion and concept is compromise. The search for consent is definitely a too demanding concern sometimes, sometimes it is impractical, and I do not know if that is the right concept for describing what is going on in civil society. We are probably not so much searching for consent, we are rather searching for justified compromises between conflicts and conflicting demands we can not settle. I would say that it is misleading to describe the political sphere as being ontologically agonistic, and that this is an overreaction toward a certain search for consensus in the Habermasian theory.

Slavoj Žižek claims that we are heading for some sort of breakdown in the capitalist economy, and that we should all accept

the fact that our economic system will be in need of change. What is your opinion on his call for communism? Do we need to challenge capitalism to realize a just and stable society?

I have to say that there were times I really liked Žižek. I had several debates with him, and they were all very unfruitful because he is such a monological character. But over the last two-three years I have gotten more and more nervous when reading him. And I find him relatively irresponsible. I understand that the idea of communism might have a certain appeal, because it includes an enormous utopian element. But to actually use it as a political instrument in our time, when we do not have any idea how planned economy could be established, I think, is to a certain degree irresponsible. This criticism means that I do not really see an alternative to a limited function of the market. There are two questions: first, where should the limitations be drawn up? And there should be severe limitations. And how do we institutionalize the limitations? But all realistic outlooks for, let's call it a more socialist, or market socialist future, depend on accepting that a certain form of market is irreplaceable, not only for an effective, but for a working economy in really complex societies like ours. I do not believe that people are prepared, or that we are willing, to give up certain forms of freedom that are connected to market societies, in the place of a completely unclear picture of a planned economy. In my view the idea that we should explain the alternative to our existing, horrible forms of capitalism in terms of planned economy is definitely over. And it is over because all forms of planned economy broke down, not only because of external constraints, but because of internal deficits. I think that in a planned society you can not have the kind of bureaucratic power that allows you to get all the information needed in order to effectively organize a planned economy. In that sense I believe we will have to live with the market, we will have to think about alternatives to embed the market in a strong society and with societal constraints, where certain goods should not become elements of the market. The inclusion of work into the market should be highly restricted and accompanied by certain welfare and social security systems. The market should be highly restricted and embedded in society. So I am thinking more in the direction of certain forms of market socialism, but not in terms of planned economy.

Like us?

Yes. You probably went in the right direction. You are probably not happy with it, but if you look to the rest of the world you probably should be happy. But I know that people who are living in such societies are mostly never happy with it, but it does have certain advantages. I do not know if you would describe your system as market socialism already, but you have elements of certain forced forms of equality. The rest of Europe is still dreaming of a Scandinavia like in the seventies and eighties. This was paradise on earth.

Have you taken a Kantian turn in your ideas?

Kantian? No. The opposite.

But it seems that respect, rights and legal recognition have a more fundamental role?

Yes, I see what you mean, but in fact I would say that I have taken a much more resolute Hegelian turn the past ten-fifteen years, because I separated more than ever from certain premises of Habermas and Rawls, which are more Kantian oriented than I am. And I would even justify the whole idea of legal respect and civil rights historically, and not even transcendently, or universalistically. And that is a Hegelian way of speaking. I think even Hegel would agree that one core element in the social integration of complex societies like western liberal societies is the law. It is the idea of equal rights. And the only question is how to justify the whole importance of that principle of equal rights. I would do so by using a kind of historical systematic narrative, like Hegel wanted in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or in the *Philosophy of Right*. In that sense, I feel I have become a more resolute Hegelian than what I was before. I do not know if he is aware of it, but I think the interesting thing with Habermas is that he is permanently struggling with Kant and Hegel, he is always somewhat between the two, and he can never really decide. And you can count the periods where he has more of a Kantian tendency, and when he has more of a Hegelian tendency. I just heard a lecture by Habermas, it was one of these very late lectures he gave on human rights. And it was clearly Hegelian. The whole audience was surprised that he suddenly gave up the idea of justifying human rights in universalistic terms. He simply justified them by a normative reconstruction. And there

you have certain Kantian elements again, whereas I wanted to free myself from these ambivalences, being placed as I was between Kant and Hegel, and never being able to decide. Therefore, I think, especially in the book I am writing these days, I am now freeing myself from the rest of the Kantian tradition.

In The Struggle for Recognition you introduce a formal conception of ethical life. Do you understand the theory of recognition as a teleological theory?

Yes, I would defend the idea of teleology, of progress, under certain methodological constraints. Which means, I would say, in order to be able to give an account of what has to be defended and what has to be developed in our forms of society, we have to work and presuppose a concept of, probably not teleology, but of progress in history. There is a certain methodological or transcendental constraint when we want to take part in a struggle today, when we want to be engaged in public debates and political struggles. I think we are forced to presuppose a certain line of progress, because we have to explain what we are fighting for as embodiments of something which is better than before. And in order to be able to explain what it is for something to be better than before we have to tell a narrative. But again, this is not a Hegelian narrative, because it is not an objective teleology, but it is a kind of subjective teleology, you might say. Kant has an element of this in his own philosophy of history. Kant's philosophy of history is interesting because he is already playing with the idea of teleology, but in the sense that he believes that this teleology has to be constructed, and that it can be legitimately constructed in the name of enlightenment. So it is bound to a certain – if you want – political program. And this would be my defence of that idea of progress, of teleology. Only in that sense I would be more on the Kantian side,

I mean, on that side of Kant where he was already approaching Hegel. In his extremely interesting contributions to a philosophy of history he has elements of Hegel, but in a non-objective way.

Is it possible to draw a clear line between the concept of ethical life and that of recognition?

That is exactly what I am doing in the book I am working on now: I want to spell out the conditions of ethical life, today, by reconstructing what types of freedom are already institutionalized and can be made explicit by the normative demands of the already institutionalized spheres. In that sense there is an intimate link between the idea that we have spheres of recognition which demand something from us because they have principles that have a certain normative surplus, that is, a certain normative demand, and the idea of ethical law. Firstly, there are more forms of recognition and more institutionalized principles of recognition than those explainable in a thin notion of legal and moral achievement. Thus I would speak of ethical life as something which is given in form of practices which we already have at our disposal, but sometimes are not really practicing, and of which we do not have the best account. The best account of all existing social practices of recognition would be a concept of the ethical life. This is really close to Hegel, who wanted to give the best account, at his time, of the family, the civil society and the state. And he would want to say: If you take all this together, you've got modern ethical life. And I would say that we would have to do something like that for our own time. We have to give the best account of what is already built into our social practices, but not yet realized, and this would be an analysis of certain concepts of ethical life in our late-modern societies. This is what I am trying to do.