THE INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS OF RECOGNITION THEORY

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> No one follows me for any friendship that may exist between him and me… all they say to me and do for me is but makeup. Their liberty being on all sides restricted by the great power I have over them, I see nothing about me but what is covered over and masked.[1]

> "There's a pretty nursery rhyme", I said, "in which a girl asks 'little clown, little clown, will you dance with me?' And somebody answers, 'Pretty little clown, will dance with **anyone**'. "Do you think Michael, that that was a good enough answer to the girl's question?"[2]

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[1] Michel De Montaigne, *The Essays* (Translated by J. Zeitlin), (New York: Knopf, 1934, Vol. 1), p. 235.

[2] Amos Oz, *My Michael*, (Translated by N. de Lange), (NY: Knopf, 1968, 1972), p. 166.

THIS ARTICLE AIMS TO CRITICALLY ANALYZE recognition theory, with special attention given to what I consider one of the most sophisticated versions of this theory: Axel Honneth's version. I shall argue that recognition theory faces substantial challenges following its attempt to argue for a normative[3] framework that tries to achieve self-respect *and* self-esteem. While this attempt is attractive in many ways, there are substantial potential tensions between self-respect and self-esteem, and the detailed analysis that will be offered below will focus on those tensions. My main argument, briefly put, is that a recognition theory that recommends the fulfillment of self-respect, self-esteem, *and* full and simultaneous recognition as normative goals will face significant internal tensions, and this point has yet to receive adequate attention in the relevant literature. Explaining the nature and the importance of these internal tensions however, will require several complex steps. My intention is not to be overly critical of recognition theory, but to try to clarify important aspects of it. I shall therefore also analyze some important potential contributions of recognition theory both to theory and actual policies, *as long* as the tensions mentioned are carefully taken into consideration.

The article will be organized as follows. *First*, I shall analyze the recognition approach following Honneth (I will briefly discuss Charles Taylor and others, but the focus of this article is Honneth's work). *Second*, I will present, rather succinctly, the distinction between self-respect and self-esteem. *Third*, using the distinction between self-respect and self-esteem, I shall point to a difficulty in recognition theory which is the potential tension between self-respect (the second level of Honneth's theory), and self-esteem (the third level of his theory). The tensions between self-respect and self-esteem are rather fundamental, and the consequences for Honneth's recognition theory are, or so I think, important. I shall demonstrate my argument with an example that will be explained in section 3 below. *Fourth*, I shall try to clarify the scope of the tension between self-respect and self-esteem, by discussing (and answering) four potential objections to my argument that there is an important tension between self-respect and self-esteem. The four potential objections or difficulties *vis-à-vis* my argument are: Why not universal positive[4] appraisal (that would lead to equal self-esteem)?

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[3] 'Normative' here means a standard of conduct according to which a given society should conduct itself, the source of this standard can vary, from ethical and moral theories (Kantian, utilitarian etc.), to religious codes.

[4] 'Positive' appraisal here means roughly the equivalent of a compliment or a good evaluation of one's performance in a given field of conduct. 'Positive' appraisal also

Assigning different weights as a solution? How frequent is the noted tension between self-respect and self-esteem? And lastly: can inauthentic positive appraisal produce self-esteem? *Fifth*, I shall return to the issue of self-respect vs. self-esteem, this time from a different perspective: that of the self-esteem of the larger category or group to which the given individual being recognized belongs. I will conclude with some observations with regard to the potential contributions of recognition theory, even given the tension between self-respect and self-esteem.

1. Analyzing Recognition

Both Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor rely upon Hegel's philosophy[5] to try to show how recognition by the surrounding society is necessary for the emotional and social development of a person who enjoys a healthy relationship with herself/himself. According to Honneth, recognition is the positive mutual relation between individuals or groups in a given society. He writes: "…according to this theory, the integrity of human subjects, vulnerable as they are to injury through insult and disrespect, depends on their receiving approval and respect from others."[6] For Honneth, a lack of recognition causes considerable harm to an individual. Taylor makes a similar argument: "The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being."[7]

Both scholars agree that individual identity is formed following mutual relations with the surrounding society, and that distorted "recognition"

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includes an actual act towards a candidate, for example, hiring her/him for a job, which implicitly means a good evaluation of one's abilities.

[5] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1807] 1977), pp, 111-119, Robert, Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[6] Axel Honneth, 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', *Political Theory*, 20, 2, (May 1992), pp, 187-201, at 188.

[7] Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in A. Gutmann (Ed) *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp: 25-73, at 25.

relations (on which I elaborate below) may cause considerable harm to the individual.   After this very short presentation, we will turn to a more systematic presentation of Honneth's approach.

Honneth tries to show how Hegel's philosophy of recognition can, *mutatis mutandis,* suit research in anthropology and social psychology, following G. H. Mead. However, more relevant for this essay is Honneth's attempt to provide a *normative* framework from which to assess existing societies.[8]   I shall not try to present the whole of Honneth's fascinating approach, but concentrate solely on his three dimensions of recognition. Honneth divides recognition into three parts: love or personal relations; rights or legal relations; and fellowship or solidarity. According to Honneth, all three are required for a given individual to become an adult who enjoys self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem correspondingly. Lacking one of the levels of recognition can bring about a series of problems: emotional incoherence, lack of social integration, and lack of dignity, respectively. The following table, taken from Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition*, presents (with some omissions made to make the argument more parsimonious) these three components and their corresponding parts:[9]

Forms of recognition	Primary relationship (love, friendship)	Legal relations (rights)	Community of value (solidarity)
Practical relation to self	Basic self-confidence	Self-respect	Self-esteem
Forms of disrespect	Abuse and rape	Denial of rights, exclusion	Denigration, insult
Threatened component of personality	Physical integrity	Social integrity	"honor," dignity

[8] Axel Honneth, and Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political – Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), pp: 257-265.

[9] Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition, the Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 1995), p. 129.

The first level that Honneth describes is relations within the family, such as love and friendship. The second is legal relations, mainly the gradual expansion of rights to different groups and classes in society, overcoming traditional exclusions and discriminations stemming from previous social situations. Honneth includes here political and social rights.[10] According to Honneth, such legal rights are not only a way to protect one's important interests, but they are also a signal of the moral status of the individual who holds those rights (and see section 2 below). Lastly, Honneth describes solidarity, the most complex form of recognition. Honneth distinguishes between two kinds of recognition that follow this level. The first stems from belonging to a community in a situation where recognition is granted through belonging to such a community. Honneth, by and large, dismisses this kind of recognition since it is less relevant for the contemporary world, which has gone through a process of individuation. Instead he emphasizes a second meaning, in which recognition is dependent upon a situation in which the individual knows that his or her achievements will be accepted as valuable by the surrounding society. Honneth writes: "…the experience of being socially esteemed is accompanied by a felt confidence that one's achievements or abilities will be recognized as 'valuable' by other community members."[11] According to Honneth, when a society accomplishes a situation in which every individual enjoys this level of recognition, the society achieves social solidarity: "To the extent to which every member of a society is in a position to esteem himself or herself, one can speak of a state of societal solidarity."[12]

Honneth explicitly argues that all three levels of recognition are equally important,[13] *including* universal self-esteem. For example, when discussing self-esteem, Honneth argues that the distinct social esteem given to a small number of positions / professions under capitalist regimes, should be broadened to include many other fields of activity[14], probably hinting at activities such as child rearing. Perhaps it would be prudent to indicate that Honneth's discussion of his third level of recognition is lacking in details, and he rarely describes concrete policies that would fulfill this level. However, for the purposes of the current article, it is sufficient to indicate that the third

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[10] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition,* pp, 107-121.

[11] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p, 128.

[12] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p, 129.

[13] Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition,* p, 180.

[14] Axel Honneth, "Recognition and Justice: Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice" *Acta Sociologica*, (2004), Vol 47, No. 4, pp: 351-364, at 362.

level, of universal self-esteem, is the final goal, or ideal, of his theory[15] (along side with the fulfillment of the first two levels of his recognition theory).[16]

This ends the succinct description of recognition approach.[17] The next section presents the distinction between "self-respect" and "self-esteem" that plays an important part in the critique I shall present of Honneth's recognition theory.

2. The 'Respect' - 'Esteem', 'Self-respect'- 'Self-esteem' Distinctions.

This section will offer distinctions between respect and self-respect and then esteem and self-esteem, mainly (but not exclusively) following Darwall's writings.[18] This will allow clarity of discussion in the analysis of the recognition approach in the sections to follow.

We will refer to the first kind simply as *respect*. Darwall writes: "to have… respect for someone as a person is to give appropriate weight to the fact that he or she is a person by being willing to constrain one's behavior in ways required by that fact."[19] What is important here is that a person, *qua person*, is eligible for this *relation/status* unconditionally, with no regard to

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[15] I shall consider the option that universal self-esteem is not recognition's goal, in sections 3.b and the conclusion.

[16] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp, 128-9, 179, Honneth,   *Redistribution or Recognition,* 166-170, 181-182.

[17] Honneth's theory as a whole, and more specifically, his usage of the term 'recognition' won the attention of several scholars. Most useful is the detailed analysis offered by Heikki Ikaheimo and Arto Laitinen, 'Analyzing recognition: identification, acknowledgment and recognitive attitudes towards persons', in *Recognition and Power* (eds.) Bert van den Brink and David Owen, (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 2007), pp, 33-57. For the purposes of the current article, I discuss solely the 'self-respect' and 'self-esteem' issue.

[18] Stephen L. Darwall, 'Two Kinds of Respect', *Ethics*, 88, 1, (Oct. 1977), pp, 36-49. Darwall's distinction between self-respect and self-esteem is clear and precise, and would assist me in demonstrating the potential collision between the two concepts in Honneth's theory. Honneth himself discusses or even adopts parts of Darwall's distinction between kinds of respect in *The Struggle for Recognition,* 112-3, which is another good reason to use Darwall's distinction as a helpful clarification. I shall say nothing of any further implications/relations between the two theories, aside from this 'clarifying' aspect.

[19] Darwall, 'Two Kinds of Respect', p, 45.

excellence or achievement of any kind.[20]   An important *institutional* aspect of this treatment is the way in which liberal[21] governments accord equal rights and liberties to their citizens. Such a governmental treatment ought to include a considerable *constraint free* sphere, in which citizens are free to choose activities, opinions etc.[22]

Self-respect will be a relation of a person to herself/himself that concerns their intrinsic worth.[23]   Honneth argues that in order to develop adequate self-respect, a person, in most cases, will need an attitude of respect from the surrounding society, and especially the government.   A liberal government provides a signal, so to speak, to a person (usually, but not necessarily a citizen) that s/he has self-respect, through this person's ability to demand (not ask for!) one's rights *vis-à-vis* the government, institutions such as courts, and fellow citizens.[24]

Esteem is connected to a positive (i.e. 'good', 'appreciative') appraisal towards a given individual following some activity or achievement of this individual that is positively evaluated according to moral criteria or criteria of merit, depending on the field of activity.   As Darwall writes: "… having an attitude of appraisal respect for someone as a person… is a positive appraisal

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[20] Why is this so? Mainly because of the ability of humans to choose, although this is a complex issue, beyond our current discussion. In the text above, I shall simply accept this assumption. See, Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1996) pp, 57-112.

[21] The word 'liberal' here should be understood in a fairly minimal sense, denoting an attitude that accepts the centrality of liberty understood as lack of external constraints, and see for further elaboration in the text. Arguably, both classical and left liberals can recognize and agree to such a definition (and arguably, both will find recognition theory problematic). On this definition of liberalism see, Gerald Gaus, *Political Concepts and Political Theories* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 77-82; and Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (selection), in Ian Carter, Matthew H. Kramer, and Hillel Steiner (eds.), *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology* (London: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 39-58.

[22] In other words, I make a rather modest assumption here, that self-respect and lack of external constraints ('negative liberty') are connected (although negative liberty is not the only normative consideration connected to respect). I find it hard to imagine a liberal theory that would completely disconnect the two. See the discussion of Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Oxford, 1999), pp: 477-480. On this point I think both libertarians and left liberals may agree.

[23] Robin Dillon, "Respect", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, section 4.1, online at: Plato.stanford.edu/entries/respect.

[24] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 109.

of an individual made with regard to those features which are excellences of persons. As such, it is not owed to everyone, for it may or may not be merited."[25] This 'positive appraisal' is conditional, i.e. it follows an activity performed by a given individual that merits our positive appraisal. As such, it can be granted or withdrawn. It relates to specific acts and histories— not to the fact of merely being.

Self-esteem, as Honneth defines it (as explained in section 1 above) is: "…the experience of being socially esteemed is accompanied by a felt confidence that one's achievements or abilities will be recognized as 'valuable' by other community members."[26] This confidence that Honneth is describing is strongly connected to (or even depends on) the positive appraisals (or lack thereof in cases of low self-esteem) given to a person by her/his surrounding society. One's self-esteem may be reduced or harmed therefore, if s/he receives negative appraisals.

In the context of our discussion of self-respect and self-esteem, especially in the context of Honneth's recognition theory, the main difference between self-respect and self-esteem therefore, is that self-respect is the result of an attitude towards oneself that the surrounding liberal society and government is under a duty to provide and protect— i.e. the non violation of one's rights. Many governments violate the rights of their citizens, but liberal governments are under a duty not to do so. Self-esteem, however, is the result of an attitude towards oneself from the surrounding society that is the result of other persons' free choice, whether to provide it or not. This raises the issue, discussed in section 3, of whether the surrounding society is under any obligation to provide one with the positive appraisals required for one's self-esteem.

To succinctly conclude: a person has a right to the bundle of rights accorded to her/him following the mere fact that s/he has self-respect (and those rights reflect the fact that this person has self-respect), but no such right exists with regard to one's self-esteem. While Honneth is correct to observe that having self-esteem is valuable, the esteem of the surrounding society (and the following self-esteem) has to be earned.

I consider the distinction between self-respect and self-esteem to be a liberal distinction. Although not undisputed, this distinction has a strong connection to similar distinctions made by several liberal thinkers.

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[25] Darwall, 'Two Kinds of Respect', p, 45.

[26] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p, 128.

Unfortunately, while some used the term self-respect,[27] others made a similar distinction while using a different terminology,[28] causing some confusion.

Specifically, the features of a liberal society that would be central to my analysis of the self-respect— self-esteem distinction include, *first*, the lack of external constraints ('negative liberty')[29] that will provide 'space' for the liberty to hold positive or negative judgments following one's own freely formed opinion (connected both to self-respect as discussed above and the ability to choose among options[30]); *second*, given scarcity of resources, the inevitability of competition, and specifically, competition on positive judgments by the surrounding society with regard to one's achievements; and *lastly*, the unavoidable disappointment that may follow.[31] Given that these are all well-known features of liberal-capitalist societies, hardly avoidable in a society that permits a reasonable sphere of lack of external constraints to its citizens,[32] I shall refer to the distinction offered between self-respect and self-esteem as a liberal distinction.

Now, the liberal distinction between self-respect and self-esteem is motivated by a concern for individual liberty to provide negative appraisals (as will be further discussed in sections 3 & 4 below). What liberals, who worry about external constraints on one's liberty, may find problematic in the individual's wish to have high self-esteem, therefore, is that self-esteem is provided by positive appraisals provided by one's surrounding society. A government that wishes to provide self-esteem, therefore, will have to limit the ability of individuals to negatively appraise each other, and to limit individual liberty. This is why the distinction between self-respect and self-

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[27] Stephen L. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*. (Cambridge: Mass. Harvard U.P. 2006), p, 21, John Rawls, 'Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory', *Journal of Philosophy* 77, 9, (September 1980), pp, 515-572, at 546.

[28] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy State and Utopia*, (Basic Books, 1974), pp: 239-246, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard U.P. 1971), pp: 440-445, Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Harvard U.P. 2009), p. 288.

[29] See the clear discussion in Gerald Gaus, *Political Concepts and Political Theories* (Westview: Boulder, 2000), chapters 4 & 5.

[30] Thomas M. Scanlon, "The Significance of Choice." In S. M. McMurrin, (ed), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Vol. 8,* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), pp, 149-216.

[31] F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1960), pp, 71-84.

[32] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Harvard: Harvard UP, 2001, ed. E. Kelly), p. 44.

esteem explained above is a liberal one: it allows for the freedom of people not to provide positive appraisals. Such a freedom is strongly connected to one's self-respect.[33]   This liberal distinction is recognized by Honneth's theory as seen by the second ('self-respect') and third level ('self-esteem') of his theory as summarized in section 1. Where he arguably differs from liberal theory is his treatment of 'self-esteem'. I shall analyze this complex issue in great detail in sections 3 & 4 below.

3. Recognition: Self-respect vs. Self-esteem?

The following example is hypothetical, but is similar to many real cases in the contemporary U.S. Imagine an unemployed young person, who finished his/her undergraduate degree, and s/he is looking for work in (let us say) contemporary California: s/he sends CVs, but seldom gets a response, and the few interviews s/he manages to get end in negative responses. S/he also tries to go back to school, let us say law school, at several universities and ends up being rejected. Suppose further, that there are no violations of his/her rights involved, no discrimination or any other unlawful behavior from potential employers or potential law schools. There are simply a large number of applicants, few places, and tough competition. As a result, although the rights of the young person in our example were not violated his/her self-esteem was reduced[34] following the repeated negative appraisals

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[33] The connection between one's autonomy (in the meaning relevant to our context: the option of choosing not to positively appraise the performances of other people) and one's self-respect, is almost self evident— if one is used as an instrument of another's self-esteem, s/he would lose some of her/his self-respect. A good overview of this point, with its obvious Kantian aspects is: Diana Meyers, "Autonomy and Self-esteem", in *Dignity, Character and Self-respect*, (ed) R. Dillon, (Routledge, 1995), 218-251, Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect", p. 36, Robert Lane, "Government and Self-esteem", *Political Theory*, (1982), 10, 5, pp: 5-31, at 15-18 (using a different terminology, but a similar meaning).

[34] Note that I accept Honneth's view of the importance of a positive appraisal to the young person's self-esteem (and will continue to do so throughout the article). Therefore, Fraser's suggestion (that she presents but does not endorse), that the issue of positive appraisals (and the ensuing self-esteem) may be solved by expecting the person lacking self-esteem to stop caring about positive appraisals, is not convincing. Honneth is right to identify this as an important issue. Furthermore, I doubt if Fraser's own analysis can solve the problem of self-respect v. self-esteem, because if institutions will try to provide positive appraisals (and the ensuing self-esteem), as Fraser, if I understand her correctly, argues, the issue of the liberty to choose not to positively appraise will remain, and depriving it will lead to deprivation of self-respect. Fraser's critique of Honneth

that s/he received. However, those providing those negative appraisals (work places to which s/he applied, law schools in California) conducted themselves in a lawful manner, within their rights (that Honneth's recognition theory would have classified as 'self-respect' of the persons making those appraisals, as a part of the second level of his theory discussed above in section 1).

This example, which is a reality in the California of 2010 (and in many other places) will help us understand the tension between self-respect and self-esteem in Honneth's theory.[35]   I shall first discuss how the liberal distinction between self-respect and self-esteem, explained in Section 2, would have dealt with such a situation, (Section 3.a.). I will then discuss the potential response of Honneth's theory to this situation (Section 3.b.).

3.A. The Liberal Perspective: Self-Respect, Self-Esteem and the applicant/hiring committee[36] dilemma

The liberal perspective presented in Section 2 will offer the following guidelines in the interactions between the applicant and the members of the hiring committees (HC hereafter). First, both parties are eligible to be treated as individuals with self-respect. It is also reasonable to expect civility and manners in the interaction. Furthermore, there is a procedural aspect here. The HC, given a reasonable amount of time, ought to consider the applicant's resume, cover letter and so on seriously. However, following the liberal perspective, if the HC politely informs the applicant that after reading his/her file the members of the HC decided not to offer a place to him/her in their institution, this is where the obligations following "self-respect" end.[37]

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concerning this point can be found at: Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?* pp, 26-48 (esp. 30-32).

[35] There may be tensions between self-respect and self confidence as well, but as self confidence (the first level of Honneth's theory) is connected to basic relations within the family, violations of self confidence are roughly violations of the rights of a child, and do not raise the same difficulties as the relations between self-respect and self-esteem.

[36] I shall use the term 'hiring committee' to refer to both work places and universities.

[37] It is interesting to note that several prominent liberal political theorists use 'recognition' discourse when discussing 'self-respect', due to the importance they assign to the relation between the individual and the surrounding society, as symbolizing that individual's moral status, see, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, *Revised Edition* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U.P. 1999), p. 386, Joel Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights", *The*

The "self-esteem" aspect will offer the following guidelines. The HC might positively appraise the applicant's effort; however, if they believe that other applicants are better qualified, they will differentiate between the applicant's effort, and their judgment of the quality of his/her candidacy: simply put, that the applicant is not of sufficient merit/qualifications that would justify accepting him/her to their institution. The HC is under no obligation to provide the one thing that realistically would provide self-esteem for the applicant: a positive appraisal, i.e. hiring him/her, or accepting him/her to graduate school. No just procedure or eloquently written rejection letter may replace this simple fact. If self-esteem follows from positive appraisals, we have to honestly argue that the *end result* will provide the sought after positive appraisal, *not* the fair procedure.

This point merits emphasis. From the perspective of the applicant, *only* the desirable outcome equals a positive appraisal that will produce self-esteem in her/him. In important cases (and see section 4), the conventional wisdom of "always a bridesmaid, never a bride" is adequate.

The problem is that placing the members of the HC under an obligation to provide positive appraisals would harm their self-respect as individuals capable of independent judgment (and probably several other important auxiliary interests). The probable result is that the applicant will suffer a major loss of his/her self-esteem,[38] but the liberal approach will insist that providing him/her with the mentioned remedy will create an unjust violation of the self-respect of the members of the HC.

3.B. Honneth's Theory and the Dilemma of Self-Respect vs. Self-Esteem

What would be Honneth's response to the loss of self-esteem of the applicant, *vis-à-vis* the perspective of the HC members, arguing that obligating

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Journal of Value Inquiry, vol. 4, issue 4, (1970), 243-257, at 252, Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Harvard U.P, 1996), pp: 28-40.

[38] Although this is a sad outcome, it is not unjust. As Darwall argues, in what I think is a very liberal point, people do not have a right to have self-esteem. See Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint,* pp, 134-136, and also the conclusion of this article. Several philosophers discussed the tragic component of self-esteem, although in somewhat different versions, see: Rousseau, 'The Second Discourse; in *'The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought)' (Translated by V. Gourevitch), (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1997), pp, 111-188, at 166, Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), pp, 272-280, Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton U.P. 2003), chapter 3.

them to accept 'our' applicant, rather than the most adequate candidate, will violate their self-respect? Honneth, as you will recall from Section 1, aims to create a society in which all three levels of recognition exist *simultaneously.*[39] To put it simply, Honneth argues that recognition should apply beyond self-respect and extend to self-esteem: i.e., to the *actual positive appraisal* of all individuals.[40]

How then would Honneth analyze the scenario described above, of the young applicant and the repeated negative responses? Assuming that the first level, self-confidence, exists, the applicant will likely expect the members of the HC to respect the second level of Honneth's theory, that of self-respect (i.e., legal rights[41]). This practice will be similar[42] to what was discussed above in "liberal self-respect." The members of the HC ought to be responsive to the applicant's candidacy. If, however, the members of the HC think that the applicant does not merit acceptance to their institution, this is where the duties that follow from self-respect end.

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[39] Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?* p, 180.

[40] I would like to avoid interpretive disputes here. S. Thompson, in his important interpretative book, claims that Honneth argues for an opportunity to equal esteem, not actual esteem. However, his analysis of an actual case, that of changing views with regard to household work, from an 'inferior' field of activity to an important achievement, is actually about positive appraisal. Simon Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp, 76-7. I shall therefore follow Thompson's analysis, and Honneth's own words that all three levels of recognition are equally important (Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition,* p, 180), and stick to the argument that Honneth's theory aims at full, equal self-esteem. I will however, analyze the alternative option too (that Honneth aims at opportunities to equal esteem) — in this section, and in the conclusion. Note that while recognition is famous for its contribution to the minority cultures literature, recognition's treatment of self-esteem has much wider implications, as seen from the presentation of Honneth's approach in section 1.

[41] There is a further issue here: that of identifying the scope of rights connected to self-respect. Some critics of Honneth argue that he too easily 'jumps' from a normative theory about the state to what the state actually does. For my perspective, as long as the tension between self-respect and self-esteem remains (i.e. as long as there is a 'constraint free' zone of individual liberty), the exact definition of the legal rights has no bearing on my critique. For a discussion of the place of the state in recognition theory see: L. Feldman, 'Redistribution, Recognition, and the State: The Irreducibly Political Dimension of Injustice', *Political Theory,* 30:3 (June 2002), pp, 410-440.

[42] This similarity will play an important part in the closing section of this article.

The important difference between the liberal perspective and Honneth's recognition theory will become clear as we move to the third level, that of self-esteem. Honneth's theory, as explained above, *demands* that this third level be applied to its fullest. This means that the applicant, following Honneth, will be justified in expecting that at some point, at least some of his/her attempts will be successful. *Otherwise, Honneth will have to waive one of his strong and consistent arguments: that self-esteem is connected / depends on positive appraisals.*[43]

However, Honneth's insistence on the importance of positive appraisals is where his theory confronts a difficulty. *Expecting the members of the HC to accept the applicant to their institution will harm their self-respect.* Why? Because self-respect means, in Honneth's words:

> …with the optional activity of taking legal action recourse to a right, the individual now has available a symbolic means of expression, whose social effectiveness can demonstrate to him, each time anew, that he or she is universally recognized as a morally responsible person… in the experience of legal recognition, one is able to view oneself as a person who shares with all other members of one's community the qualities that make participation in discursive will-formation possible. And we can term the possibility of relating positively to oneself in this manner 'self-respect.'[44]

Having self-respect means being able to follow one's own judgment in decision-making, within reasonable limits, in many aspects of one's life. This ability is expressed— following examples from Honneth and others— via rights, including political rights. This is most important within the sphere of one's field of expertise, in this case the HC's judgment of the applicants' files (and their responsibilities *vis-à-vis* their institutions). The HCs are therefore entitled, within reasonable constraints, to be the judge of the applicant's file. The end result is that universal applicability of Honneth's theory is in this case analytically impossible, given that either the HC members' self-respect or the applicant's self-esteem is bound to be disappointed.

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[43] See Honneth, "Recognition and Justice: Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice", p. 362 for two explicit examples: one concerning labor, the second, relations within the family (note that even if Honneth's suggestion applies to the moral sphere rather than the legal sphere, it would still create the noted tension between self-respect and self-esteem; see the text).

[44] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition,* p, 120.

There is one last point to consider.[45] Can Honneth and recognition theory avoid this conclusion? One possibility is to claim that recognition does not demand the actual positive appraisal, but satisfies itself with a fair procedure. This will solve the aforementioned collision between self-respect and self-esteem. But this will come at a cost to recognition theory, as follows: first, the realistic connection that recognition theory made between self-esteem and positive appraisals might have to be dismissed from the theory, thereby losing an important empirical observation that I think recognition theory was right to make. Second, recognition theory will then become, in its normative prescriptive part, very similar to the liberal fair-procedure approach, thus losing its unique place in normative thinking. Lastly, recognition theory can maintain its empirical observation of the connection between self-esteem and positive appraisals, but dismiss the prescriptive part that aims to provide universal self-esteem due to the collision between self-esteem and self-respect. This would change recognition theory to an empirical theory, identifying cases of lost self-esteem, rather than a normative (prescriptive) theory. This is perhaps not so bad, but it will certainly be quite far from the original theoretical stand of recognition theory described in section 1.

I wish to emphasize here that I'm not committing myself to one of the interpretive options just described (that Honneth's recognition theory demands the successful end result or merely a fair procedure), but to insist, that regardless of the interpretive option that the reader might adopt with regard to the collision between self-respect and self-esteem, the tensions between self-respect and self-esteem have important consequences *vis-à-vis* recognition theory, the major one being that it is analytically impossible to achieve both self-respect and self-esteem in cases similar to the HC and the applicant example. As we'll see in section 4.C., such cases are very common.

4. Four Potential Objections.

The critique described in the previous section is significant *vis-à-vis* Honneth's version of recognition theory, which is, I believe, the most sophisticated version of this theory. Four objections can, however, be raised. In order to test the strength of the suggested critique, it is important to examine, and to reject, each of these counterarguments. These include, first, whether universal positive appraisal is possible; second, whether assigning

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[45] I am mindful here of S. Thompson's interpretation of Honneth's approach, described above in footnote 41.

different weights to the different levels of Honneth's theory is a proper solution to the offered critique; third, whether the collision between the different levels is frequent; and lastly, whether inauthentic positive appraisal can produce self-esteem.

4.A. Is universal positive appraisal possible?

Assuming that self-esteem is an important interest for all individuals, should it be coerced? Perhaps forcing people to positively appraise each other will result in equal, universal self-esteem of those positively appraised. In such a case the problem of unequal self-esteem will not arise. This, however, will violate an important part of individual liberties and will thus be rejected not only by many liberals but also by Honneth, following his description of the second level of his theory, which stresses self-respect. Furthermore, imposing such a duty would make it a legal norm rather than a freely given positive appraisal. Therefore it would become a part of self-respect and the ensuing legal rights, and not a part of self-esteem, according to Honneth's theory. I doubt whether such a step would achieve its goal. Self-esteem is, after all, connected to freely given positive appraisal for a reason, and the reason is precisely that the appraisal is freely given. Self-esteem will not follow equal treatment coerced by law, because it is the free decision to present someone with a positive appraisal that makes it so precious and frankly, rare. To return to the example of the HC and the applicant: even if the government were to create a legal norm forcing HCs to accept all candidates (in a combination of governmentally-owned business and heavy regulation of the market), I seriously doubt whether it would have provided the applicant with self-esteem. Why? Because it is the merit and uniqueness of a given applicant that make her/him worthy of the HCs attention and following, beneficial to an applicant's self-esteem.[46]

A different option, and a more realistic one, is to try to locate spheres of behavior in which a positive appraisal might be given to promote self-esteem without harming anyone's self-respect. Such cases should meet two criteria. First, they should be the result of an individual's free choice; otherwise, they will belong to the "self-respect" category rather than the "self-esteem" category. Second, they should not contradict most people's self-respect.

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[46] This point is not only analytical, but also psychological: it is unlikely that self-esteem can be derived from a treatment / allocation that applies to all (and see the quotation from Amos Oz at the beginning of this article).

Are there such examples? It seems to me that sensitivity to other people's beliefs can be a relevant example. For example, an employer can wish his employees not only a Merry Christmas but also a Happy Hanukah. Wishing Happy Hanukah will not harm the employer's self-respect and may well contribute to employee self-esteem. We will not claim that *not* wishing Happy Hanukah is a violation of the rights of the employees; after all, this is not a matter of self-respect, and therefore falls under the judgment of the employer, who is under no duty to wish anyone a Happy Hanukkah. However, we can make the case that this is a sensible thing to do. This is, of course, a relatively minor issue. I suspect that the contribution to self-esteem resulting from the positive appraisal (the employer thinks of the Jewish employees and recognizes their holiday) is rather minor, as no important resources (from the perspective of the employer or the employee) are involved. In more important cases, however— such as being hired by a highly selective firm; publishing in a competitive journal; or winning an important sporting event— the requiring of positive appraisal will reduce the self-respect of those forced (or even 'advised' to) to submit to the 'appraise positively!' requirement (but see sections 4.D & 5 for some potential but uncommon counter possibilities).

4.B. *Assigning different weights to self-respect and self-esteem.*

Even if universal positive appraisal is not likely (and see the next sub section), *and* we accept the argument that there is a deep tension between self-respect (emphasizing the 'freedom to choose not to positively appraise' aspect of it) and self-esteem (emphasizing the importance of positive appraisals to it), we can still attempt to resolve this tension by assigning different weights to the two levels in Honneth's theory. *Although* Honneth claims that all three levels are equally important,[47] we can offer a charitable version of his theory in which assigning different weights is allowed and indeed saves the theory from the suggested critique. I would, however, argue that the dilemma cannot be solved so easily. The reason is that in the same cases in which self-esteem is important, so too is self-respect.

For example, in the case of the HC and the applicant, the self-respect of the members of the HC is strongly connected to their ability to freely choose the most qualified candidate, while the candidate's self-esteem is strongly connected to the jobs/schools s/he is applying to. Whatever the end result is, one side will feel that his/her self-respect (the HC) or her/his self-esteem (the candidate) is reduced. So even if an external theorist would

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[47] Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?* p, 180.

artificially 'attach' different weights or importance to self-respect and self-esteem, that would not change the fundamental importance the actual participants in a social interaction such as the HC and the applicant, would attach to *their own, self-perceived,* self-respect and self-esteem.

We can, of course, imagine certain cases in which self-esteem can be provided easily. For example, if a parent purposefully loses to his child in a game, and the child gains self-esteem, the parent, who does not care, does not lose his or her self-respect. However, such cases are limited both in importance and in time: the child grows, and looks for other sources of positive appraisal, and the conflict between self-esteem and self-respect begins.

To conclude this sub-section, it is important to note that it does *not* attempt to define *a priori* self-respect as being more important than self-esteem (or vice-versa). However, given that Honneth's theory emphasizes both as important human interests, we can always hope that in reasonable, day-to-day occurrences, one becomes obviously more important than the other. We are usually not that lucky.

4.C. How common are the collisions between self-respect and self-esteem?

Suppose that we accept the logic of the argument presented, that there is indeed a deep tension between self-respect and self-esteem. Suppose we further accept that in such cases, achieving full and simultaneous recognition is impossible. The interesting question is now whether this scenario (represented by the HC and the applicant example) is a typical event, similar to many other day-to-day occurrences. Naturally, if this is indeed the case, the argument against recognition theory— that is, that universal simultaneous application of all the three levels of this theory is impossible— becomes more powerful and significant. Interestingly, Honneth briefly mentions the tension between the three levels of recognition in his more recent work, but does not provide an elaborate discussion beyond this acknowledgment.[48] I

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[48] Axel Honneth, *Disrespect, the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory,* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p, 141. Looking at secondary literature, C. McBride notes the tension as well, but does not push the argument far enough, focusing instead on cultural differences,. See "Demanding Recognition: Equality, Respect and Esteem", *European Journal of Political Theory* (2009), 8, pp: 96-108. R. Claassen also notices the tension, and applies it to the market, but argues (implicitly) that self-respect is more important than self-esteem, "The Status Struggle: A Recognition Based Interpretation of Positional Economy", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, (2008), 34, pp: 1021-1049, at 1037-1038.

shall argue that the HC and the applicant example is similar to many other events, and is typical in a liberal democratic state and society. Three main features of this example make it typical: 1) competition over limited resources. 2) The liberty to choose to positively or negatively appraise the activity of a given individual. I shall understand "appraisal" to include pursuing a certain behavior / option following a positive opinion of it, or rejecting this behavior / option following a negative opinion. And 3) the importance of positive appraisals from the surrounding society for one's self-esteem.

I shall briefly discuss these points. The reality of the scarcity of resources is clear in day-to-day life: from sporting events, to publications in academic journals, to job searches.[49] Persons command limited resources such as time, energy, and money. However they choose to spend them, some other option will not be chosen, often leaving someone else disappointed.[50] Moreover, a strong feature of liberal democratic norms is the ability of individuals to choose.[51] Editors choose one manuscript over another, consumers choose one product over another, employers choose this applicant and not the other one, and so on.

Scarce resources and freedom of choice, both commonplace features of everyday life, are significant *vis-à-vis* recognition theory, as Honneth himself acknowledges, but Honneth does not, or so I argue, dedicate an adequate discussion to the tension between self-respect and self-esteem.[52] Under liberal democratic norms, competition is unavoidable, and there will thus be 'winners' and 'losers' in many social interactions, with concomitant gains in self-esteem due to the positive appraisal *implicit in the act of winning itself* (that is, in being the 'chosen option'), and the likely ensuing positive appraisal by the

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[49] John, Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p, 24.

[50] Artificial attempts to prevent the situation of scarce resources are met with arguments for free transactions, not only from a normative perspective that supports the right to free exchange, but also because free transactions would make people better off despite limited resources, either by creating more resources or improving efficiency, or both. For the normative argument see: Amartya Sen, 'The Moral Standing of the Market', *Social Philosophy and Policy,* 3 (1985), for the efficiency argument see: Russell Hardin, *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford U.P. 1999), pp, 41-44, 59-60.

[51] J.S. Mill, 'On Liberty', in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, (ed) J. Gray, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), chapter 3.

[52] See Honneth's discussion of the centrality of the market to recognition, but without discussing the tension between self-respect and self-esteem, in Martin Hartmann and Axel Honneth, 'Paradoxes of Capitalism', in *Constellations* 13(1), (2006): 41–58, 53-54.

surrounding society given to the 'winners'. The liberty to choose, meanwhile, means that both the fact of competition and the fact of positive appraisal given to 'winners' are ubiquitous in western societies today.

Note that following Honneth's own approach, if we were to prevent one from freely engaging in the liberty to choose negative appraisal (in order to achieve equal social esteem), we would be violating Honneth's own theory, as the second level of his theory, that of self-respect, is strongly connected to liberal rights and liberties.[53]

The fact is that many everyday occurrences result in one side winning and one side losing. The outcome will be that one side (the "winner") will have more self-esteem than the other side (the "loser"). This is unavoidable in a society that maintains a significant constraint-free sphere for its citizens, the absence of which will contradict Honneth's own account of self-respect (and will cause a significant loss of individual liberty). It seems that the collision between self-respect and self-esteem is widespread and, *given* Honneth's own theory, unavoidable.

4.D. Can inauthentic granted positive appraisal lead to self-esteem?

The argument presented so far has two parts. First, to argue that simultaneous social achievement of self-respect and self-esteem is unlikely. Second, warning that attempting to force people to positively appraise other people will contradict the self-respect of the appraising side, and therefore will create contradictions within recognition theory itself. This warning however, seems to assume that inauthentic positive appraisal can create self-esteem. Under such an assumption, forcing (for example) the HC to positively appraise the candidate, by either providing false positive appraisal or more likely, by accepting him/her to their institution, will contribute to applicant/candidate self-esteem. In other words, there is a reason to be fearful of such a coercive scenario.

Although I am not aware of any direct discussion of this argument by Honneth, Galeotti argues that only *freely given* and *honest* (and therefore authentic) positive appraisal can bring about self-esteem.[54] She argues that anything short of authentic, sincere positive appraisal is paternalistic, treating the object of the appraisal as a child who cannot face rejection or criticism,

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[53] Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp, 133-4.

[54] A.E. Galeotti, "Respect as Recognition, Some Political Implications", in *The Plural States of Recognition* (ed.) M. Seymour, (Palgrave, 2010), pp: 78-97.

and therefore will not achieve its stated goal of providing that person with self-esteem.

If this is indeed correct, my critique of recognition will be transformed in an interesting way, as follows. While it may still be true that negative appraisals (done in a morally permissible way) may still reduce the self-esteem of the recipient of the appraisal, the warning I raise against forcing people to positively appraise other people losses its sting, as becoming unnecessary. Why? Because if only freely-given, honest, and positive appraisal can produce self-esteem in the person being appraised, then coercing (either by law or social norm) person X to positively appraise person Y cannot achieve its goal and is therefore as ineffective as it is irrational. Only freely given, honest positive appraisal, consistent with the self-respect of the person making the appraisal, is effective; and therefore forced positive appraisals do not bring about self-esteem, and therefore there is no need in warning against this form of coercion.

If this is indeed the case, recognition theory itself, I think, loses much of its importance, at least with regard to self-esteem. If inauthentic positive appraisal cannot achieve self-esteem, then the place of recognition theory becomes rather limited. It becomes, for one thing, a descriptive theory, solely *describing* what happens between two people when they assess each other in a given sphere of activity. In such a case, a negative appraisal by A toward a given behavior of B or an inauthentic positive appraisal given by A to B will *both* result in loss of self-esteem by B. There is no possible remedy as long as A really does not positively appraise B.

Given the aforementioned limitations, the *normative* aspect of recognition theory becomes a utopian theory, expressing how, in a perfect world, people would relate to each other. In such a utopia, individuals offer constant positive appraisals to all regardless of their achievements, and recipients internalize these appraisals regardless of whether they have "lost" in a given social situation.

I would reject the view that only authentically given positive appraisal can bring about self-esteem. First, in many cases the person being appraised does not know, and usually cannot know, if the positive appraisal is authentic. Second, inauthentic positive appraisal is so widespread, as is the self-esteem that many of us receive from it, that it is hard to imagine rejecting all of it.[55] For example, a professor grading a student's paper will almost always find

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[55] Or to claim that it is too paternalistic and/or harmful to the self-respect or self-esteem of the person being appraised.

some good things to say, even on badly written papers. A friend meets a friend and says, "You lost weight— you look great!" And so on. Inauthentic positive appraisal therefore can, and often does, produce self-esteem.

My argument is that while inauthentic positive appraisal *can* indeed produce self-esteem, in cases that involve pressures to perform it, it will contradict the self-respect of the appraising 'side', and will therefore create internal contradictions within recognition theory. The issue is therefore *not* that inauthentic positive appraisals cannot produce self-esteem, *but* that many times doing so will harm the self-respect (emphasizing the 'freedom to choose' aspect) of the appraising side and will thus contradict the goal of recognition theory: a society in which all three levels of recognition exist simultaneously.

I would argue, however, that there are cases in which inauthentic positive appraisal does not harm self-respect and does not create an internal contradiction between self-respect and self-esteem. Such cases (to be discussed in the next section) demonstrate that my objection to the argument that only authentic positive appraisal can produce self-esteem has prescriptive consequences. This leaves recognition theory with some space beyond that of either descriptive theory or a utopian theory or vision connected to its normative goal of universal social esteem.[56] In other words, the bottom line of my critique will not amount to the adoption of the objection (that only authentic positive appraisal can produce self-esteem), either analytically or prescriptively.

A different difficulty is to describe ways that will prevent inauthentic positive appraisals from becoming a part of self-respect (and the ensuing legal norm) for which all are eligible. If this happens, no self-esteem will follow, since, as discussed above, forced, mandatory positive appraisals do not lead to self-esteem. But I think we can locate social occurrences that are short of mandatory legal norms, but still inauthentic, that can bring about self-esteem. To return to our example (and without endorsing this specific 'solution' to this scenario), the members of the hiring committee can think that the mentioned candidate is not the most qualified, but still accept her/him following other considerations (for example, suggestions within their institution[57] to accept more applicants of a certain background, that are still

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[56] Recognition theory has also an important contribution with regard to our understanding of self-respect, discussed in sections 1 and 3.a. However, as noted in section 3.a., this contribution has been internalized by central liberal theorists.

[57] This hints at the possibility of reciprocal relations of esteem, or even a market in esteem, at least between institutions, although probably not between an institution and an

short of a legal norm). The applicant, not knowing the true motive, will gain self-esteem.

5. Recognition's Comeback: Self-Esteem vs. Self-Respect (Round 2)

This article has so far introduced a critique of recognition theory. However, this critique does not mean that recognition theory has no merit. There are of course points in recognition theory that remain important even as we will take into account the critique presented in this article, of the tension between self-respect and self-esteem. For example, the function of recognition theory as a social theory, *not* a normative theory (i.e. its function in explaining certain phenomena in a given society, rather than offering a standard of conduct to which a given society ought to compare itself), remains important and is not influenced by the critique offered above. This point (and others) are well-covered by Honneth himself and others and I shall not comment on them here.[58]   However, recognition theory is also significantly important in a way that is directly relevant to the critique offered in this article.   This is the contribution of recognition theory to our assessment of *some* collisions (to be discussed below) between self-respect and self-esteem.

Let us return to the example of the HC and the applicant. Suppose again that the members of the HC read the applicant's file and decide that the applicant's file is not strong enough to justify hiring. This time, however, let us suppose that a given HC mentions this case to their direct manager. The manager, in return offers a particular insight.   The manager says, 'let's take this case to be an example of a wider issue and assume that the decision concerning this case should follow our intuition about the larger category to which this case belongs. If this is true, then your (the HC) response should change. Why? Because it is no longer a case of your (the members of the HC) self-respect ('free choice') vs. the applicant's ('the need for positive appraisals aspect of') self-esteem, *but* the members of the HC's self-respect vs. the self-esteem of the many other people who happen to belong to the

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applicant, see Geoffrey Brennan & Philip Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*, (Oxford U.P. 2004), 58-64.

[58] On recognition as social theory: Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp, 160-170. On recognition and self-respect (another important point in recognition theory less affected by my critique, but see the conclusion), see: Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp, 133-134, and Joel Feinberg, 'The Nature and Value of Rights' *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 4 (1970), pp, 243-257, at 252-3.

recognized group to which the applicant belongs. Very seldom do the members of this group see members of their group, or anything that was produced by a member of their group in prestigious spaces such as the highest positions of the government/business world, or celebrated in the reading lists in universities. What is important in this situation is not the applicant himself/herself, but rather what the quality of the applicant (proven by his/her acceptance by the HC) symbolizes. Whether by psychic association or concrete example, the HC's decision proves to the applicant and other members of his/her group that they are capable of succeeding in this firm or, for that matter, in any other sphere of activity.[59]

What is the right response to the argument of the manager? In this case, I think we should separate two possible scenarios. The first scenario is that the HC members accept the argument presented by the manager and agree to accept the applicant. In such cases, in which the person providing the positive appraisal agrees to grant an inauthentic positive appraisal, the collision between self-respect and self-esteem does not arise, and recognition theory makes a normative and prescriptive contribution to a given situation (beyond what most liberal theories would suggest). I would still insist, however, that even in such cases, there are further considerations, for example, the interests of other people may be relevant: other applicants obviously, co-workers, shareholders, clients etc. Furthermore, the applicant himself/herself may have a variety of interests in this scenario, because "recognition" policies may backfire in various ways, e.g., by shielding the applicant from "real" appraisals.[60]

It is difficult to measure such conflicting interests, but unless we count some of them as harming the self-respect of the parties *not* directly involved

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[59] Adeno Addis, 'Role Models and the Politics of Recognition' *University of Pennsylvania Law Review,* 144, 4 (1996), pp: 1377-1468, at 1431-1467, J.S. Mill, 'The Subjection of Women', in *On Liberty and Other Essays.* (ed.) J. Gray, (Oxford: Oxford U.P. 1991), pp, 518-519, Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). See also the analysis provided in section 1 above.

[60] Clifford Orwin, 'Charles Taylor's Pedagogy of Recognition', in *Canadian Political Philosophy*, (eds) R. Beiner and W. Norman, (Oxford: Oxford U.P, 2000), pp, 232-249, Arthur M, Schlesinger Jr. *The Disuniting of America* (New York: Norton, 1992), pp, 73-101.

in the recognition practice described,[61] they do not involve the central subject of this article, which is the collision between self-respect and self-esteem.

The other possibility is that the members of the HC understand the general issue of self-esteem of the larger group to which the applicant belongs but still insist that this general concern ought not to use their self-respect as a means to an end. The HC members' self-respect and free judgment are the important variables here. The HC members might further claim that they do not intend to harm the applicant's group members, that they do not discriminate against the applicant, and that the larger, external by-product of their decision should not be considered relevant as it is simply too peripheral to this particular case. In such a case, the dilemma is powerful, and whether the HC members are correct or not is an interesting question. It is certainly not an issue for governmental policy (which, as explained above, will fail to produce self-esteem anyway). Auxiliary arguments about such cases may be sufficient to make the HC decision— to choose *not* to hire 'our' applicant— perfectly legitimate (for example, the interests of other applicants may suffice).

A last word is that *even if* the HC members unwillingly yield to the manager's pressure, full recognition of all three levels, applied to all the participants, is impossible. Given that the HC members do not positively appraise the applicant's file, *and* that they are not persuaded by the manager's arguments, either the self-respect of the HC members or the applicant's self-esteem will be reduced.[62]

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[61] As noted in section 4.D. I do not argue that inauthentic positive appraisal harms the self-respect of the person receiving the appraisal, unless (arguably) the gap between the appraisal and the actual achievement is so significant as to make it useless in any case.

[62] In some cases, arguments similar to the one offered in section 5, regarding the representative function of recognition, may be heard in the context of affirmative action. I want to simply suggest that affirmative action and recognition are best dealt separately, for various reasons: *first*, affirmative action policies are usually justified following past wrongs, an issue that does not exist in recognition cases; *second*, affirmative action policies are limited in time (usually, until the ongoing effects of past wrongs wither away), recognition style policies are not limited in time; *lastly*, while affirmative action issues can be dealt through the legal system, self-esteem issues cannot. As discussed above, legislation falls under the domain of self-respect, while self-esteem is the result of freely given positive appraisals. Because issues of recognition and issues of affirmative action differ substantially, it is better to separate the discussion of the two issues, and therefore I shall not discuss affirmative action policies.

Conclusion: A problem with no solution?

What are the consequences of the argument presented in this article, that self-respect and self-esteem often collide? Three are most salient.

A. That a recognition theory that includes self-respect (emphasizing the 'freedom to choose not to positively appraise' aspect of it) *and* self-esteem (emphasizing the importance of positive appraisals to it), *and* advocates full and simultaneous recognition as a normative goal is self-contradictory. Such theories (including, but probably not limited to, Honneth's theory) face difficult problems of prioritization. Without further argumentation for either self-respect or self-esteem, they fail to provide clear normative tools that are capable of assessing given societies and policies. Importantly, these internal tensions will weaken the prescriptive aspects of recognition theory.

B. If recognition theory, at least in its normative aspects, waives its commitment to self-esteem, and satisfies itself with its contribution to the category of self-respect and its ensuing legal rights, it faces the danger of becoming redundant, simply another version of liberalism's equal rights. This is so because Honneth integrated much of liberalism's equal rights discourse into his recognition theory (through his "self-respect" level, as discussed in Section 1), and because major liberal thinkers adopted "recognition" style discourse while discussing self-respect (as discussed in section 3.a.).[63]

C. It is true that low self-esteem, as an empirical description, may indeed be the outcome of negative appraisals, in many day-to-day cases: a student who hopes for an "A" gets a "C"; a job applicant is not hired; an academic fails to publish in an important journal, and so on. This brings to mind that the "self-esteem" part of recognition is relational. Individuals will understand their achievements, or abilities, in relation to others in a specific sphere of activity, which in many cases will not mean being the Michael Jordan or John Coltrane of any sphere of activity. What is notable in this

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[63] Accordingly, it is possible to divide some of the literature on Honneth as following one of two strategies: either making positive appraisals a part of legal rights (Van Leeuwen), or classifying positive appraisals (and the ensuing self-esteem) as a part of individual liberty (Maclure, McBride). See: B. Van Leeuwen, "A Formal Recognition of Social Attachments: Expanding A. Honneth's Theory of Recognition" *Inquiry*, (2007) 50, 2, pp: 180-205, J. Maclure, "The Politics of Recognition at an Impasse?" *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, (2003), 36,1, pp: 3-21, C. McBride, "Demanding Recognition: Equality, Respect and Esteem", *European Journal of Political Theory* (2009), 8, pp: 96-108, at 101-102. Lastly, some scholars are undecided between these two options: Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*, pp, 76-7.

conclusion is that it follows the liberal emphasis on self-respect and individual liberty (especially the right to choose), *but also*, to a certain extent, Honneth's own theory, following the weight his recognition theory places on self-respect. This may sound like a cold conclusion. However, in a society that protects the freedom to negatively appraise, this conclusion is unavoidable.

The final word is that recognition theory is uncomfortably locked between the redundant and the self-contradictory. If it retains its emphasis on self-esteem, it is self-contradictory, and if it waives it, it becomes close to being redundant *vis-à-vis* liberalism's equal rights. It seems to me that excluding the few cases discussed above, in which self-esteem does not contradict self-respect (Sections 4.b and 5), recognition theory would better serve its own goals through its less ambitious contribution to self-respect, and through its function as a social theory. Aiming to achieve *both* self-respect and self-esteem will, unfortunately, bring about an undesirable result more often than not: achieving one will harm the other.

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