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### Normative Validity, Cultural Identity, and Ideology Critique

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# Normative Validity, Cultural Identity, and Ideology Critique

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**ABSTRACT:** Following a critical reconstruction of the shift from norms of communication (Habermas) to norms of identity formation (Honneth), and thus from conditions of argumentation to conditions of recognition, the paper argues that a non-foundationalist critique of ideology must be based on a theory of motivation and social mobilization.

**KEYWORDS:** ideology, critique, identity, recognition, norms, needs, values, Habermas, Honneth

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Why do poor “value voters” in the American South, for instance, systematically vote against their economic interests in spite of full critical exposure to political alternatives, and what does this tell us about the nature of ideology and the connection between ideology and cultural identity? Why do individuals who are fully committed to the principle of individual rights deny these to gay couples or cultural minorities? Why is health care regarded as a matter of personal responsibility and not as a right?

Ideology was once defined as false consciousness and distortion of social reality (Marx 1970). However, the success registered by the critique of objectivism in social science (Winch 1960; Geertz 2000), drawing on the critique of representationalism and foundationalism in epistemology (as effected by hermeneutics or pragmatism), has led to a positive reassessment of its epistemic status (Ricoeur 1986). What once was distorted representation now is just a form of cultural symbolization that is constitutive of social reality. If we accept the consequences of this critique, it will necessarily follow that, when everything is ultimately ideological, nothing really is. But does this mean that the traditional notion of ideology has become obsolete (Bell 1960)? Granted anti-foundationalism, anti-representationalism, the inevitable circularity of any form of justification of beliefs and their implications for social epistemology, does this also mean that no operative criteria are available for ideology critique and therefore that critique itself is subject to the same kind of epistemological indeterminacy that necessarily reduces it to the status of one practice among others?

Three different kinds of questions need to be answered before one can address the question of ideology critique. First, what exactly is an ideology and, derived from this,

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what is the criterion used to define something as ideological? Second, how do ideologies operate? Third, is it possible to answer both sets of questions within the same explanatory framework, perhaps by extracting the criterion of the ideological from an account of how ideologies operate?

Based on a critical reconstruction of the shift from norms of communication (Habermas) to norms of identity formation (Honneth), and thus from conditions of argumentation to conditions of recognition, this paper argues that an answer to the first set of questions that accepts the consequences of the hermeneutic/ pragmatic turn must be as follows: An interpretation of social reality is exposed as ideological in the traditional sense of this word when its account of what should hold as valid norms and desirable values is incommensurate with the agents' self-understanding as meaningful authors and subjects of that account. The clearest phenomenal indicative of this incompatibility is the failure of ideological interpretations to motivate agents to integrate in available or proposed forms of socio-cultural life. What should count as ideological is therefore revealed not by a theory of truth or normative validity but, rather, by the empirically verifiable degree of wilful participation in the collective projects of a community or culture. Only after the motivational deficit of a self and world interpretation is empirically exposed can ideology critique identify the broken links in the process of normative identity formation and propose alternatives that summon a superior power of collective motivation, as testified to by their superior capacity for social mobilization.

The second question could be answered in the following way: Ideologies express changes in the conditions of identity formation of individuals and groups that lead some to accept or reject norms based on values they consider to be their own, even though their needs, whether they realize this or not (and especially when they don't realize it), might be better served by an alternative set of values. The change in the conditions of identity formation is explained through the motivational pull of the values endorsed, which expresses the degree of value convergence of individuals and groups that is achieved through processes of acculturation that take shape around, and at the same time validate, historically contingent, but socially prevalent forms of recognition. Convergence can be realized through manipulation (such as propaganda) or through other forms of persuasion that do not aim at explicitly deceiving recipients (proselytism), but this is a secondary feature of ideologies that can be easily addressed by a theory of truth or by an examination of claims to truthfulness.

Third, the advantage of this explanation is that the same mechanism that explains how ideologies operate (value-guided identification through acts of recognition that privilege certain values) is used to derive the criterion of what constitutes the pathological aspect of the ideological: experiences of identity deficits through misrecognition. In both cases, the explanation is provided exclusively from within the standpoint of the first person accounts of experiences of (mis)recognition of identity claims that reflect value-oriented needs. The practice of ideology critique must therefore take its clue from a learned sensitivity to phenomena of misrecognition.

There is a further question that may have to be raised here: What values will be admitted as worthy of recognition? This question need not be answered at this point. The question is important, but not for such a minimalist conception of ideology critique. The legitimacy of embracing a value independently of its function within a cultural tradition or of the need it is supposed to help satisfy or regulate is irrelevant to whether an

ideology integrates or not, whether it preserves or distorts identity. Rather, the question is important for distinguishing acceptable values from those that are not acceptable beyond the limited meaning horizon of one's biography or the historical and socio-cultural context. Such a contrastive perspective that could help one articulate an internal critique of values with context-transcending aspirations may be developed from a standpoint that is made available by a weak theory of moral progress toward greater individuality and social inclusion. (Honneth 2002, pp. 505, 516) But this need not be part of an ideology critique.

## 2. IDEOLOGY AFTER THE HERMENEUTIC/ PRAGMATIC TURN

In this section I offer a very general account of what is involved in the turn away from the traditional notion of ideology as false consciousness and distortion of reality and toward a view of ideology as constitutive of social reality and culturally integrative in order to isolate what is useful for working out a conception of ideology critique that is compatible with the conclusions reached after the hermeneutic turn in social science. I base this account on a succinct examination of Paul Ricoeur's theory of ideology (and utopia) as well as on several supplementary hypotheses drawing on Taylor's expressivist theory of the self as self-interpretation and value-oriented acculturation.

The traditional understanding of ideology as false consciousness and distortion of reality is developed from Marx's original theory. (Marx 1970) Marx gives two answers to the questions raised above. To the question "What is ideology?" he responds: it is the inverted representation of social reality that is internalized by individuals and groups as false consciousness. This answer is clearly indebted to a social epistemology that refines the representationalist model of knowledge acquisition of the original French *idéologues* (Destutt de Tracy, Maine de Biran) who in turn adopted Locke's and Condillac's theory of sensations to explain the genesis of social and political ideas (Dierse 1971, pp. 158-9). To the question "How does ideology operate?" Marx answers with an account of how ideology expresses the interests of the dominant class and the norms and values through which these interests are regulated. This also explains how false consciousness displaces true consciousness, which in Marx's later theory is revealed by science, or the contradictory of ideology.

Leaving aside the incoherent synthesis that plagues this model of explanation (in this crude and reductionist account), which mixes up causality and expression, real life and forces of production, legitimate and illegitimate interests that are both real as well as distorted, what we notice is that the theory of ideology as interest-based domination draws its normative strength from the epistemology that underlies it. The promise of finding a way to distinguish true from false representation carries over to the account of domination, which then justifies Marx's belief in a critique of ideology that operates through a non-distorting and therefore liberating science. The two additional features of ideology, the fact that it is a totalizing system of representation and the fact that it is socially generalizable (which I interpret as residuals of the Kantian attributes of universality and necessity) are also supported by the same, underlying epistemology.

What happens to the normative thrust of the critique of ideology if, in the wake of the hermeneutic turn, we discard the epistemological component and, instead of consciousness and un-interpreted social reality, we refer, as Ricoeur advocates, to "belief-

system” and “symbolized structures of action” (as in Geertz)? What if the expressive-causal account of how interests are reproduced in false consciousness is replaced by a Weberian theory of legitimacy deficit and motivation? And what if the cognitive medium of a theory of representation is abandoned for the evaluative language in which individuals interpret reality in terms of their position within a horizon of meaning that is structured by their orientation toward a “hypergood” (Taylor 1989, pp. 91-2)? The result is that ideology can no longer be understood as having a primarily distorting function. Rather, ideologies aim at maintaining (or perhaps restoring) the more primordial system of beliefs within which individuals operate. Ideologies therefore integrate socially by preserving identity, and ideological distortions are reducible to pathological, that is, non-integrating forms of identification that undermine identity itself. (Ricoeur 1986, pp. 254-9, 14-17)

Following this change in epistemic status after the hermeneutic turn, ideology can raise a claim to normative legitimacy that hitherto was unavailable to it. Freed from suspicions of a monopoly over the production of false consciousness, ideology’s claim to legitimacy is henceforth redeemed by its ability to provide interpretations of social reality with a strong normative import from the parochial perspectives adopted by groups of agents (whose specific practical interests and value ascriptions ideology alleges to express) and then mobilize these interpretations in order to justify the agents’ demand that they be recognized as full-fledged individuals. The latter means that the agents’ interests and value preferences are validated normatively and institutionally at the level of their socio-economic and political integration in the various systems of modern life.

As the traditional distinction between philosophical or scientific discourse and ideology collapses in the broken mirror of disjunctive claims to normative validity, the critique of ideology is forced to acknowledge the multifaceted competition for legitimacy among the various contingent interpretations of what constitutes desirable contexts of social life. Taking into account this shift, from the objectively valid representation of an independently constituted social reality, to self-interested, value-based interpretations that are articulated in the practical context of social interaction, the critique of ideology is called upon to decide in cases of conflicts over rights or socio-economic entitlements by adjudicating among claims to normative validity that are raised in the name of competing and potentially incompatible value-guided interpretations of social reality.

This proves to be a challenging task. The conflict over rights in modern societies is usually settled procedurally, by appeal to neutral principles of justice that are alleged to yield objective criteria of claim-evaluation with universal jurisdiction. In the absence of these, deciding a conflict between competing interpretations—and thus addressing social conflict itself—can only confirm the degree of social acceptability of perceptions of successful self-realization, based on acquisitions of contingent symbolic goods and on the context-dependent recognition of desirable socio-cultural status. As I indicated above, the result is the disappearance, for instance in the relativistic bin of identity politics and the ethically unassailable claims to cultural authenticity, of any hope to secure the validity of a particular normative arrangement beyond the vernacular of existing values and social practices. But does this entail, then, that no criteria are available to distinguish between legitimate interpretations and illegitimate ones, and thus to indirectly ascertain the legitimacy of ideological discourses?

## NORMATIVE VALIDITY, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

This need not be the case. The fact that ideologies are forms of collective *self*-interpretation, that is, projections of aspirations with exemplary value that provide the narrative background for the agents' various claims to normative validity, and the fact that self-interpretations link value and needs in the concept of a self indicates that the answer to the question raised above must be negative. Thus conceived, ideology too must satisfy standards of legitimacy, except that these standards no longer overlap with independently justifiable normative states that could be summoned by the self-transparent subject to confer objective status upon the ideological interpretation of social reality. Rather, the standards must be seen as being incorporated in the self-interpretations adopted by the social agents, and, in a slight departure from Weber, they must be seen as expressing a relation of motivation between ideological accounts of social reality and selves.

If we adopt this view, which is suggested in the philosophy of Ricoeur and Taylor, an ideology may be exposed as pathological not by a theory of truth, or by an account of the truth-conditional justifiability of claims to normative validity but, rather, by a motivation theory of social integration. At the center of this conceptual alternative lie: (i) a view of ideology as motivating discourse leading to social integration under the normative framework that is articulated under the guidance of value preferences in the ideological interpretation; (ii) a notion of criterion of ideological legitimacy that is empirically measured in terms of social participation—the agents' affective response to the world and self-images developed in the ideological discourse; and, finally, (iii) a conception of “internal” critique of ideology whose effectiveness is empirically verified by the same criterion, that is, by the power to motivate social agents to engage, individually or collectively, in alternative socio-political and cultural projects, based on polemical descriptions of what the desirable contexts of social life must actually look like.

Ricoeur appears to endorse this account except that, instead of reaching within the interpersonal dynamic that is generated by the raising of claims to identity recognition (whose importance he nevertheless fully acknowledges, Ricoeur 1986, p. 263), he steps outside it by means of a “transcendental component,” utopia. (Ricoeur 1986, p. 251) The distinction transcendent-transcendental (or regulative-constitutive) notwithstanding, this return to cognitivism (Celikates 2006, p. 29) seems to be undermined by the way in which Ricoeur defines utopia in relation to ideological distortion: utopia is just as pathological as ideology, except that its pathology is escapism. This would be an interesting suggestion if it weren't so difficult to see how escapism could do the work of a critique of ideology. Furthermore, whenever we call something pathological, we do so in relation to a state of affairs that is considered “normal.” True, Ricoeur claims that ideology and utopia are pathological with respect to one another, but this explanation (i) cannot show why only utopia (and not something else) is pathological with respect to ideology; (ii) if we understand utopias as pathological reactions to a pathological form of ideology that are developed in response to the latter—as Ricoeur also indicates, perhaps in anticipation of (i), when emphasizing the cultural aspect of utopia (Ricoeur 1986, p. 251)—it would seem that an understanding of something as pathological preexists the construction of utopian fantasies, which brings us back to the initial objection—what is the “normal,” whose possibility utopia discloses in relation to ideology?

### 3. HABERMAS: DISTORTED COMMUNICATION, NORMATIVE VALIDITY, NEED INTERPRETATION

How can one maintain a hermeneutically informed conception of ideology without appealing to a criterion of what is pathological in ideological forms of identity maintenance and social inclusion that is either semantically redundant or inoperative? In this section I turn to Habermas's theory of ideology in order to show that the procedure for testing claims of normative validity in practical discourse discloses a regulative ideal of undistorted communication that is both grounded in linguistic practices and thus compatible with the requirements of a culturally constituted identity, as well as sufficiently detached from these practices for it to provide a valuable locus for critical self-reflection. In this way, Habermas comes closer to defining an immanent-transcendent utopian moment in everyday communication that is not itself pathological. (Cooke 2004, pp. 415-6) I also argue, however, that Habermas's theory of communicative action can provide the appropriate framework for evaluating the validity basis of regulative speech only if the question of value-oriented needs-interpretation is assumed (or considered settled). Participants in communication regard their value-preferences as either non-controversial or susceptible of generalization across cultural, social, or historical boundaries. The point here is that a theory of distorted communication that relies exclusively on the elucidation of the conditions of normative validity (as in principle U, which formalizes the ideal standpoint of communicative competence in practical discourse) is unable to capture the potential for false normative consensus that is produced by a preliminary shift in self-identification on the basis of an ideologically manufactured, cognitive convergence toward what Taylor called hyper-goods (non-negotiable super-values). This may well be the level on which ideology operates.

Second, because agreement about norms assumes self-transparency about one's value-guided need-interpretation, as well as a fundamental convergence on consensus supporting values—such as species solidarity or respect for personal integrity and well being (Rehg 1994, pp. 136-7)—Habermas's great tool for criticizing claims to normative validity and thus for exposing what is pathological about regulative speech cannot identify what is ideological from within his theory. Since distortions in communication are not necessarily ideological, what is ideological is defined in Habermas by means of a social theory of modernity that presses its conclusions onto a model of argumentation that is called to do the work of ideology critique. If I understand him correctly, Bohman, before endorsing methodological pluralism as a solution to this problem (Bohman 1999, pp. 65-7), reacts to precisely this separation in his attempt to disclose the “internal violations of ideological speech” as a pathological feature of communicative rationality itself. (Bohman 1986, p. 341)

Habermas seems to have a theory of what is ideological (pathological communication) and another theory of how ideologies operate (internalization in speech of external forms of speech organization). This difficulty is compounded by another tension in Habermas' own understanding of ideology. Habermas pairs the account of how the external organization of speech affects the internal structure of speech in systematically distorted communication to a substantive explanation of how latent strategic action replaces communicative action, which is supplied by the theory of the

## NORMATIVE VALIDITY, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

rationalization of the lifeworld and the functionalist description of how system integration replaces social integration. However, the conclusion reached in this theory of rationalization is that the differentiation of system from lifeworld and the differentiation of spheres of validity with domain-specific rules and norms within the lifeworld render the traditional concept of ideology obsolete. Its place is taken by “fragmentation of consciousness.” If so, it is hard to see how ideology can still be presented as *distorted* communication. The word “latent” that Habermas attaches to the expression “strategic action”—which is meant as a functional equivalent of “fragmented consciousness”—seems insufficient to establish a strong connection between these two different conceptions of ideology.

To illustrate these problems, I will very briefly discuss the main arguments about ideology from the *Theory of Communicative Action* and *Reflections on Communicative Pathology* before settling on the other possible understanding of what ideology in Habermas is and how it works, which is disclosed by William Rehg’s reconstruction of the material presuppositions of U—the universal principle of practical or moral discourse.

In the first work, which echoes conclusions reached in *Legitimation Crisis* (Habermas 1992, pp. 48-50), Habermas maintains that traditional bourgeois ideology is no longer capable of covering up the potential sources of structural violence and social conflict in a disenchanted, rationalized life-world. The reason for this can be discerned from the very logic of cultural rationalization that leads to culture losing “the properties that made it capable of taking on ideological functions.” (Habermas 1987, p. 353)

When this happens, the competition between system and social integration produces functional equivalents for ideology formation. These, however, do not supply legitimizing interpretations that can bridge the gap between authority and belief, but “prevent holistic interpretations from coming into existence [...] Everyday consciousness is robbed of its power to synthesize; it becomes fragmented. (Habermas 1987, p. 355)

As a result, the lifeworld becomes colonized by the autonomous subsystems of expert culture.

However, in the same place in the *Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas also describes several phases in the historical development of the traditional, bourgeois (or religious-metaphysical) ideology that may after all make a return. These are “visionary desires for a moral or aesthetic renewal of the political public sphere” (Habermas 1987, p. 354) that could be described as forms of resistance to the process of rationalization and loss of meaning. They may be triggered by the inability of the administrative and economic systems to forge consensus through money and power in situations of economic crisis when welfare states are subject to strains that can no longer be sustained by economic growth or by existing bureaucratic means of channelling political participation. (Habermas 1987, p. 351) They may also be caused by exceptional political or geo-climatic events that challenge the cultural system to produce unifying and synthesizing interpretations that may suspend the process of social learning and reorient it toward utopia. This opens a gap that could only be filled in by the constitutive function of ideology, even if ideology can no longer provide the totalizing dimension of earlier, religious and metaphysical interpretations in a still differentiated lifeworld. In this case, there may well be a place for a critique of ideology that is not limited to a critique of reification. (Bohman 1986, pp. 348-9)

This brings us to another explanation of ideology in Habermas that emerges from his earlier work on distortion and pathologies of communication, first in the context of his debate with Gadamer, and then in his investigation of systematically distorted communication within the framework provided by formal pragmatics. This explanation does not necessarily displace the one provided in terms of the theory of reification, but in at least several respects it may hold independently of it.

Just like hermeneutically minded philosophers (Ricoeur), Habermas locates his analysis of pathologies of integration not in forms of consciousness, but in the structure of language itself (practical consciousness, in Marx). More specifically, Habermas focuses on speech acts, which express the link between linguistic form and communicative action as the connection between the content of an utterance and its illocutionary force. As is well known, Habermas distinguishes three modes of language use, or what he calls expressive, constative, and regulative speech acts, each of which is subject to a type-specific communicative distortion. (Habermas 2001a, pp. 145-56) It is in this context that one can analyze the potential for ideological formation, and especially with respect to regulative speech, that is, the kind of linguistic interaction in which the agents raise and redeem claims to normative validity. (For reasons that I cannot fully explore here, expressive and constative speech acts play an important yet supportive role to the regulative; falsehood and insincerity may contribute to false consensus but they cannot on their own forge the kind of false agreement over norms that leads to the system driven integration that is characteristic of ideological distortions of communicative action.)

Distortion means that

speech become subject to an external organization that resolves the steering problems [of a linguistic system of communication—RN] that crop up. (Habermas 2001a, p. 144)

When these problems reach the internal structure of speech consisting in the “universal pragmatic regulation of sequences of speech acts”—which does not require any backing by external norms—we are faced with systematically distorted communication. In ideological uses of speech, the distortion of speech acts affects their validity basis. Distortion at this level violates the conditions of reaching understanding in ways that lead to strategic uses of language—action oriented by success—that do not “ostensibly violate the commitment to consensus.” (Habermas 2001a, p. 145) In such cases, the violation of the transcendental presuppositions is not manifest; we are “dealing with conflicts that can be neither openly carried out nor resolved consensually, but that smolder on with the effect of distorting communication.” (Habermas 2001a, p. 155)

Habermas develops his analysis of systematically distorted communication on the example of conflicts of identity that arise from “repressed threats” to group or ego identity:

An identity can be secured only by means of interpersonal relationships [...] If an identity is threatened by the withholding of recognition, it is often defended in a paradoxical manner [...] by apparent recognition. (Habermas 2001a, p. 156)

This is achieved through strategic uses of the means of communicative action that do not eliminate the conflict; instead, “the pressure of identity conflicts is shifted onto the

internal organization of speech [...] where it remains unresolved.” (Habermas 2001a, p. 164) False consensus is maintained by tacitly violating the validity claims that are mutually recognized. As a result, conflicts of identity “smolder within distorted communicative structure.” What is interesting, though (and I shall return to this point below), is that these conflicts both cause distortions and are produced by these in deviant formative processes. Habermas’s example refers to “families with distorted communication structures.” (Habermas 2001a, pp. 169-70)

Two points need to be made here. First, rationalization and pathologies of communication are two different theories that seem to presuppose either system or group and agent intentionality (or both) in order to explain strategic action on the model of systematically distorted communication. Of these two, only the latter seems justifiable. But even in this second case, Habermas’ analysis is limited to processes of personal identity formation in families, not to collective identities. Perhaps this analysis could be expanded to groups on a psychoanalytic interpretation that draws on Freud’s famous essay on group psychology and the analysis of the ego and the left-Freudian development of Freud’s insights. (Wilhelm Reich’s analysis of the mass psychology of fascism seems to take a promising step in this direction.) This would be useful because ideological forms of distortion primarily operate at the group level. However, even though Habermas leaves open the possibility of extending the analysis of defence strategies from family dynamics to collective identities (Habermas 2001a, p. 156), it is by no means certain that he would endorse a psychoanalytic application of his analysis in the manner suggested above. Were this feasible, one could perhaps reduce the notion of collective intentionality in the case of groups (cultural or national) to the idea of the autonomous logic of operation of cultural traditions (which according to Habermas is replaced in modernity by the steering capacities of systems), as understood by hermeneutics (Gadamer) or poststructuralism (Foucault). In this case, one could dispense with the burdensome notion of intentionality even if the price to be paid would be the weakening of the notion of ideology as passing off strategic action for communicative action.

Second, and in relation to this very last point, it would be useful to expand the explanation of how external organization penetrates the internal structure of speech in the production of communicative pathologies of speech acts by reaching beyond (or beneath) the structure of social interaction within groups. As we saw, Habermas himself suggests this possibility when he refers to family histories and the reproduction of patterns of distortion across generations. Defining, as suggested above, cultural traditions as providing the content for autonomous forms of collective agency would explain how (i) the internal possibilities of a symbolized language that captures the value orientation of individuals and the interpretation of their needs and interests, and (ii) the quasi-autonomous processes of meaning constitution in cultural traditions exert an intra-linguistic pressure that may be seen as mirroring and thus gradually replacing the external pressures that are generated by formal role playing in situations of social interaction. The potential of this proposal to throw light onto how ideologies operate becomes clearer when we turn to the presuppositions of the principle used to examine the claims to normative validity that are raised in regulative speech (U).

Principle U is a rule of argumentation whose observance allows the participants in a practical discourse to reach rational consensus over what should count as moral norms. It states that “*All* affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general*

observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation.” (Habermas 1990, p. 65) Habermas continues, “By entering into a process of moral argumentation, the participants continue their communicative action as a reflexive attitude with the aim of restoring a consensus that has been disrupted. Moral argumentation thus serves to settle conflicts of action by consensual means.” (Ibid., p. 67)

The key word here is “interest.” Habermas assumes that interests can be expressed and adopted as moral norms if certain conditions of argumentation are preliminarily met. Just like the Kantian categorical imperative, from which it departs in many respects, U warrants that a certain candidate norm fulfills certain conditions, which are specified as conditions of uncoerced agreement (undistorted communication). The content of the norm, however, just like the subjective maxims that are submitted to the test of universalization in Kant, could be any subjective maxim (or interest) that the agent forms independently of the context in which the maxim is tested. And these interests, the needs and wants of an individual, are interpreted in the light of intersubjectively constituted cultural traditions, that is, within a system of values that gravitate around some hypergoods (Charles Taylor). In this respect, discourse ethics is not formalistic (despite the fact that it does not generate its own ethical contents) even as it takes a context-transcendent leap.

In his careful explanation of the derivation of U, William Rehg remarks on the importance of assuming value-oriented need interpretations as a constant in the argumentative redemption of claims to normative validity:

[M]oral discourses would seem to depend on the results of evaluative discourses in which participants get clear about their needs and interests [...] [W]hether one finds the consequences [...] of a norm's general observance acceptable depends on how one understands certain interests, which in turn depends on one's need interpretations and the values through which needs are expressed. This means that moral argumentation cannot avoid at least drawing its terms from such interpretations, or using terms which occupy certain positions in such interpretations. As far as the norm itself goes, if it is to resolve conflicts between interests, it must give priority to an 'interest-regulating value' [...] (Rehg 2002, p. 145)

According to Habermas, U guarantees that the values themselves are brought out into the open and scrutinized before they could be selected as contents of universal norms. But, due to their different nature, values are not directly subjected to the same process of validation as norms. There are, of course, in-built provisions in U (assumptions 6-10, in Rehg 2002, pp. 150-2) whose role is to make sure that all participants' interests and value-orientations are recognized in terms that are accessible to all and accepted by all. But these provisions assume that individuals know what their interests are, that is, that they are autonomous and self-transparent agents. These provisions seem unable to detect instances of false value convergence in groups that hide the disconnection between individual needs and the values in terms of which these are interpreted.

If we accept this, then we have no choice but to shift the analysis of ideological distortion from conditions of argumentation to conditions of identity constitution in light of values and interpreted needs, just like the hermeneutic/expressive conception of ideology suggested. Consensus may well satisfy the conditions of undistorted argumentation, but only because value convergence is already linguistically secured

## NORMATIVE VALIDITY, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

within the cultural traditions to which individuals belong and within which they interpret their needs. On this view, individuals who are caught up in ideological distortion presumably consent to norms only because they subordinate their needs to the interpretive demands of the value horizon of their social group and cultural tradition.

The change in the conditions of identification that privileges a set of values (hypergoods) and thus impacts the choice of norms is not necessarily attributable to the intentional, distorting speech acts of an individual or group of individuals who aim to manipulate others for purposes of group or personal domination. Rather, this is attributable to the impersonal pull of the cultural traditions that operate over the heads of specific executive agents, where the latter act more as cultural enforcers—keepers of the tradition—even as they channel this pull in directions that favor their immediate strategic interests. In the latter case, the mechanics of ideological distortion is explainable through the deliberate use of symbols, images, and other rhetorical devices in an effort to either shift focus to cultural solidarity with certain value sets, or to refuse addressing issues of legal rights outside the agreed upon framework of uncontested values. This seems to be the explanation for why American value voters reject norms that may better serve their interests, or for why they refuse to frame the discussion of gay rights, etc. in the legal language of moral normativity.

### 4. HONNETH: IDENTITY, RECOGNITION, AND IDEOLOGY

In this section I try to see if the individual strengths of the previous two approaches to the problem of ideology (and its critique) could be synthesized by appeal to Honneth's normative conception of identity formation through recognition. Honneth seems to provide a superior way of matching the phenomenologically superior description of experiences of identity formation through (mis)recognition (which fully captures the value-orientations of individuals and groups) with the formal adequacy of a model of social integration that still maintains a differentiation between the normative and the evaluative, rights and goods, ethics and morality. What Honneth's theory provides is, therefore, a superior framework for deciding questions of normative validity from the phenomenologically accessible standpoint of agents who raise claims to identity recognition. All other norms, and the values they allegedly express are thereby subjected to a process of intersubjective validation that ties together the demands of identity formation and those of social integration without the extra mediation provided by the formal analysis of normative rightness in practical discourse. It is in this context that I also suggest a way in which the practice of ideology critique could gather empirical evidence in favour of its hypotheses based on learning how to discern, from the affective responses provided by others to what these take to be forms of systematic disrespect, the signs of social misrecognition. The experience of misrecognition undermines any ideological claim to social integration through the adoption of cultural or value-based identities that either ignore or misinterpret needs which agents deem essential to their "flourishing" (self-realization).

Recognition refers to the socially situated and historically evolving intersubjective processes whereby the content of ethically and morally/ legally binding norms is validated during practices of offering and accepting identity claims by agents. The word "identity" here is used to cover the semantic content of several related notions such

as personhood or selfhood, to the extent that these notions convey the idea of human agents practically relating to the contents of their own personality. Another word that Honneth increasingly uses in his more recent work as a synonym for identity is “autonomy” (Honneth 2002, p. 511), where the autonomous person is the one who can identify without reservations with her own desires and capabilities. The force of the norms in question is expressed in the demand to have one’s identity recognized, while the content of the norms is drawn from what agents consider to be necessary for the development of a positive relation to oneself.

Even from this very brief account it becomes clear that Honneth is trying to recapture the implicit recognitive dimension of communicative action while “replacing Habermas’s universal pragmatics with an anthropological conception that can explain the normative presuppositions of social interaction.” (Honneth 1999, p. 330) Agents, Honneth maintains,

experience an impairment of what we can call their moral expectations, that is, their ‘moral point of view,’ not as a restriction of intuitively mastered rules of language, but as a violation of identity claims acquired in socialization. (Honneth 1999, p. 328)

This move away from the universal pragmatics of language and toward anthropology represents an attempt by Honneth to retrieve a pre-theoretical standpoint for critical theory in the experiences of injury to identity—an “anthropology of transcendence” (Heidegren 2002, p. 437)—while also holding to a view of recognition as “habituated behavior that takes place in a historically emergent *space of moral reasons*.” (Honneth 2002, p. 503) If we try to reformulate this in the language used throughout this paper, one would have to say that needs must be seen as interpretable in light of the historically evolving values or self-images of the lifeworld, where the latter is understood as a kind of second nature into which individuals are socialized. However, recognition (or misrecognition) confirms or disrupts this process of socialization with a force that transcends the motivating power of any available interpretations thus neutralizing the capacity for ideological self-deception. This motivating force is what a norm backed by rational consensus allegedly lacks. (Bernstein 2005, p. 308)

Honneth identifies three basic forms of recognition, each corresponding to a specific type of self-relation whose disruption leads to matching experiences of moral injury.

(i) The first type of moral injury and the corresponding experience of disrespect is a result of violence to a person’s body: “The physical maltreatment of a subject represents a type of disrespect that does lasting damage to the subject’s confidence, acquired at an early state, that he can coordinate his own body autonomously. Hence one of the consequences, wedded to a type of social shame, is the loss of self-confidence and trust in the world, and this adversely affects all practical interactions with other subjects, even at a physical level. Through the experience of this type of disrespect, therefore, the person is deprived of that form of recognition that is expressed in unconditional respect for autonomous control over his own body, a form of respect acquired just through experiencing emotional attachment in the socialization process. The successful integration of physical and emotional qualities of behavior is thus shattered post facto from without, crippling the most fundamental form of the practical relationship to self, namely, confidence in oneself.” (Honneth 1992, p. 190)

Symmetrically,

What corresponds to the first type of disrespect is a relation of recognition, which, because it enables the individual to develop this bodily-related self-confidence in the first place, takes the form of emotional attachment of the sort that Hegel, the Romantic, sought to express in the concept of 'love.' As needs and emotions, in a certain sense, can only receive 'confirmation' by being directly satisfied or answered, recognition in this case must itself take the form of emotional approval and encouragement. This relation of recognition thus also depends on the concrete physical existence of other persons who acknowledge each other with special feelings of appreciation. The positive attitude which the individual is capable of assuming toward himself if he experiences this type of emotional recognition is that of self-confidence. (Honneth 1992, p. 193)

(ii) The second level of injury and recognition:

For the individual, having socially valid legal rights withheld from him or her signifies a violation of the person's intersubjective expectation that he or she will be recognized as a subject capable of reaching moral judgments. To this extent, the experience of being denied rights is typically coupled with a loss of self-respect, of the ability to relate to oneself as a partner to interaction in possession of equal rights on a par with all other individuals. Though the experience of this type of disrespect, therefore, the person is deprived of that form of recognition that takes the shape of cognitive respect for moral accountability. The latter, for its part, was only painstakingly acquired in the interactive processes involved in socialization. (Honneth 1992, p. 191)

Symmetrically:

[The second type of] disrespect must be paired with a condition of mutual recognition in which the individual learns to see himself from the perspective of his partners to interaction as a bearer of equal rights [...] [I]n contrast to intimate relationships, this type of relation of recognition is invested with a primarily cognitive character: ego and alter mutually recognize each other as legal persons, in that they share a knowledge of those norms by which their particular community superintends the rights and responsibilities to which they are equally entitled. The positive attitude that a subject can assume toward himself if he experiences this kind of legal recognition is that of fundamental self-respect. He is able to consider himself a person who shares with all other members of his community the qualities of a morally accountable active subject [...] [T]he condition under which rights are recognized inherently entail a principle of universalism, which unfolds in the course of historical struggles. (Honneth 1992, p. 194)

(iii) Lastly, what corresponds to Charles Taylor's notion of misrecognition (Taylor 1994, pp. 25-6):

[The] third and final type of degradation [...] entails negative consequences for the social value of individuals or groups. Only when we consider these, as it were, evaluative forms of disrespect, namely, the denigration of individual and collective life-styles, do we actually arrive at the form of behavior for which our everyday language provides such designations as 'insult' or 'degradation.' The 'honor,' 'dignity' or, to use the modern term, 'status' of a person can be understood to signify the degree of social acceptance forthcoming for a person's method of self-realization within the horizon of cultural traditions in a given society. (Honneth 1992, p. 191)

And, symmetrically, the recognition of cultural features that confirm an individual's belonging to a group:

[T]he counterpart to [the third kind] of disrespect is a relationship of recognition that can aid the individual in acquiring [...] self-esteem—a condition of solidarity with, and approval of, unconventional life-styles. This condition would enable the subjects to find recognition based on mutual encouragement given their special characteristics as persons whose individuality has been formed by their specific biographies [...] The positive attitude which a subject can assume toward himself if he receives recognition in this form is that of acquiring esteem for himself [...] (Honneth 1992, p. 195)

This analytical scheme is both sufficiently wide to include many subsets of recognition that may form across these boundaries, as well as internally flexible to capture the value pluralism of modern, multicultural societies. It can be developed in many ways, by acknowledging, for instance, the importance of non-legal rights that are accorded persons with whom we normally relate according to the first type of recognition (such as the rights we grant children to watch TV past bedtime). (Ikaheimo 2002, pp. 452-6) It can also accommodate the feelings of love (first type of recognition) for persons we esteem, such as movie stars (third type of recognition). Or it can be construed in such a way as to bestow legal rights upon particular cultural groups whose contribution to the maintenance and development of the legal order of a nation-state is particularly valued (ethnic rights). What is important in the present context of discussion is that no dimension of one's relation to self is a priori designated as more important to one's identity than others, even when, practically, the intensity of one particular type of moral injury obscures the presence of others. Thus Honneth's introduction of three levels of recognition based on three possible types of self-relation keeps the analysis of the articulation of legal norms (rights) separate from the one that focuses on values. The latter is rooted in different kinds of self-experience that yield different claims to personal integrity, each corresponding to type-specific experiences of moral injury.

It is appropriate at this point to attempt to answer the question of what ideology is and how it operates using the theory of recognition. Ideology signals a rhetorically induced shift in agent identification from one level of recognition to another that on the one hand ignores or covers up ego-needs and interests that cannot be accommodated at a particular level of identity formation and on the other hand reinforces one type of identification at the expense of others by selectively prioritizing those identity claims that are consistent with cultural traditions. This shift operates both across forms or levels of recognition as well as with respect to the particular claims to identity that may be concomitantly raised at a specific level. When the value voter in the American South is granted the right to bear concealed arms in public spaces instead of the right to free education; or when she is encouraged to identify with an individualistic conception of legality or morality that prevents her from claiming a greater share of the available social benefits or economic entitlements; or when Jesus is presented as the patron of good business, or when he is enrolled on the side of global warming deniers; or when Middle Eastern citizens are instigated to respond to ethnic or religious symbols instead of voting on economic or legal issues—in all these cases we deal with a refusal to grant specific rights that respond to certain individual or group needs on the ground of one's identification with a particular ethos. Moral or legal norms in this case serve as enforcers of value identifications, and the consensus over the former is reached without much controversy because of a pre-existing, ideological value convergence that reduces one's identity to what is recognized by the socio-cultural group.

## 5. HONNETH: MISRECOGNITION AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

It may be legitimate to ask at this point, as Nancy Fraser does, if a recognition model of identity as Honneth's is not affected by a culturalist deformation that privileges collective forms of group identity formation that overlap with the dominant cultural values that orient the interpretation of individual needs. (Fraser 2001, p. 24) This has important consequences for the analysis of ideology proposed here because it suggests that Honneth's theory is, just like Ricoeur's and Taylor's, unable to maintain the distinction between what is recognized by a cultural group that subscribes to certain values and what an individual member of that group actually needs.

Fraser's serious objection clearly applies to Charles Taylor's theory of recognition but not to Honneth's. The reason why the culturalist deformation affects Taylor is that Taylor's theory of the self, which is premised on the notion that a subject's orientation to value is constitutive of its identity, as well as Taylor's strong value realism favor a conception of recognition that necessarily lends itself to such deformations. Taylor's theory of recognition is based on what I call, following Arto Laitinen, a response-model, according to which acts of recognition are responses to the evaluative qualities possessed by the recognizee. It is also, in this sense, a representationalist theory because it presumes that the symbolic weight accorded to responses to evaluative qualities is based on the perceived value of such qualities in the recognizer, as well as on the recognizee's perception of value. Most importantly, the question of identity formation in Taylor is already settled even before recognition of cultural identity is called for to provide additional institutional confirmation to a form of personal identity that is already in place. The reason is that, in Taylor, the normative process of subjectivity-formation is coextensive with the process of acculturation of an individual. Consequently, Taylor's conception of recognition is tailored for a specific understanding of subjectivity and personhood, which privileges the collective and cultural dimensions of identity at the expense of those formative experiences that are not reducible to these. The main culprit for this seems to be the oversized influence of the hypergoods in the constitution of selfhood. This can be clarified in two ways:

Taylor's strong realism with respect to values, although non-Platonist and therefore compatible with an anti-foundationalist response to the relativism engendered by non-mitigated value-pluralism, is paired with a cognitivist explanation of the self's orientation to value. And the problem with this particular form of cognitivism is twofold. First, it reduces value-orientation to value-perception, which is consistent with a Platonist epistemology. The goods are "accessed," says Taylor, and when we access them we "move closer to them." (Taylor 1989, pp. 91-8) As a result, and this is the second issue, it blurs the distinction between understanding what is good and having reasons for action. (Anderson 1996, p. 33) Endorsing a good is thus synonymous for Taylor with being moved by it. (Taylor 1989, p. 73) This contributes to the excessive motivational psychologism that plagues his version of recognition. As well, it further weakens value pluralism on account of the fact that knowing what is good necessarily introduces ranking priorities that practically result in the hypostatization of one, cognitively privileged value (the hypergood) at the expense of others. More importantly, these rankings, because they

are accompanied by an implicit expectation of cognitive convergence, always apply to all, thereby preventing further intra and inter-group differentiation.

The second aspect pertains to the link between the emergence of subjectivity and the constitution of the hypergoods. Taylor's notion of a self is coextensive with an expressivist account of what it means to desire a good, provided in the form of an explanation of the human capacity for qualitative evaluation. This, however, is only conceivable if the evaluation of desires is seen as culture-based, and therefore as a communally constituted experience. Consequently, the individual cannot desire what is not already endorsed by her reference group; and the hypergoods must be goods that the entire group ranks highest in its order of preferences based on the similarity in value perception that must result from the processes of acculturation. The constitution of identity for Taylor, therefore, just like the articulation of a self, is seen as a reflective process that strengthens group identification based on the necessary value-convergence of acculturated individuals.

By contrast, for Honneth identity formation cannot be separated from the recognitive processes that actualize the evaluative potential of a person. Unlike Taylor, Honneth articulates a mixed theory of recognition, one that incorporates elements of both attribution of qualities as well as response to these, which is therefore neither purely representationalist, nor radically constructivist. In the words of Arto Laitinen, Honneth's notion of interpersonal recognition is both a response to value and a precondition of personhood. (Laitinen 2002, p. 263) Against a socially constructivist conception of identity, Laitinen suggests that Honneth's theory of recognition must be understood as articulating a response to evaluative qualities that are already present in the individual. However, recognition is also constitutive of personhood and thus attributive with respect to identity. On this view, identity could not be established unless these features were actualized interpersonally. (Laitinen 2002, pp. 473-4) Because recognition is attributive as well as responsive, some values that take hold and inform the belief-system of an individual or group are further reinforced through their exclusive recognition at the expense of values that have no direct impact on the needs of individuals.

Honneth subscribes to this interpretation of his theory but he also amends it in some important respects. (Honneth 2002, p. 510) First, and in order to avoid an ontological construction of value realism that would radically undermine value pluralism, he conceives the evaluative features as historically alterable properties of a lifeworld. Second, and in order to avoid the relativism favoured by *this* understanding of value, he adds that the evaluative qualities to be recognized must be seen as advancing individuality and inclusion, which can only be explained in terms of a trans-historical standard—an ideal of self-realization—and a notion of moral progress that can complement it. It is here that the analysis of moral injury finds its proper context. For it can explicate the demand for recognition in terms of the tension between this ideal and the concrete evaluative features that claim to capture it. This can only be achieved if one regards

the three relations of recognition...as the result of a historical learning process: in our lifeworld; we, the children of modernity, have learned to perceive in other human subjects three potential evaluative qualities to which we can respond appropriately with the relevant recognitional behaviour [...] (Honneth 2002, p. 512)

## NORMATIVE VALIDITY, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

The key to understanding the difference between Taylor and Honneth, in addition to the differentiation between forms of recognition that cannot be reduced to one another, is the central role played in the latter's theory of recognition and identity formation by the analysis of phenomena of moral injury (or what Honneth calls the evaluative qualities' "social and experiential reality") in the actualization, through recognition, of the potential evaluative qualities that a human agent acquires in the lifeworld. (Honneth 2002, p. 513) Honneth's emphasis on the analysis of phenomena of moral injury, I argue, undermines Taylor's exclusive reliance on value-perception as the ground and standard of identity formation (as well as Nancy Fraser's appeal to a status theory of recognition as the answer to the problem of false consciousness). It also clarifies the status of ideology critique.

A phenomenological analysis of moral injury would have to emphasize not only the fundamental ontological continuity between subjects and persons with established socio-cultural identities, but also the essential discontinuities that necessarily play a role in the ethical constitution of a self, the self-altering moral crises that allow subjects to say "I" only by saying "no" to collective projects of constructing personal identity. Thus Taylor's account of how a self becomes a person while acquiring the collectively shared features that come with membership in a recognized group must be supplemented by an account of how a person becomes a subject through the negative experiences of a self that is denied particular forms of individual recognition because she is exclusively identified with those very features that were acquired through membership in cultural groups.

What helps this differentiation, the 'transcendent' in Honneth's formally differentiated anthropology along types of recognition, is moral suffering itself. As Jay Bernstein says, "Moral injury is objective; it can break out in explicit social suffering, or historically just as surely, via the same mechanism that create it, be silenced." (Bernstein 2005, p. 318) Suffering or felt injury in the context of one's identification with values is always filtered through interpretations that secure meaning by appealing to forms of recognitions that agents feel entitled to claim. It is often the case that such suffering is linked to expectations of recognition that cannot be secured normatively (as in psychopathologies). It is also possible that certain kinds of suffering are not expressions of moral injury, for they are not induced by refusals to grant recognition, in spite of the agent's conviction that this be the case. And clearly not all types of misrecognition are socially relevant. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of suffering itself does not disappear. What changes is how injury itself is interpreted (or misinterpreted), what kind of meaning it receives, or how the psychological energy is channelled. Ideology often supplies the meaning by exacerbating cultural discomfort or by inventing misrecognition where there is none; but it cannot make suffering, and its sources in misrecognition, disappear. Moreover, the differentiation of misrecognition along different types of relations to self as well as the social and interpersonal dynamic of relations of recognition ensure that no ideological channelling or manipulation of suffering can be maintained indefinitely and without disruptions caused by actual sources of misrecognition.

If we accept this, a critique of ideology that is normatively guided by the theory of recognition should take its clues from a phenomenological analysis of moral injury and suffering, whose presence is revealed empirically by phenomena such as social apathy, lack of participation, poor communal mobilization, that is, by the social signs of ideological demotivation. (This should not exclude the examination of violence itself, for

lack of social motivation often creates conditions for aggressive behaviour or other violent forms of psychological compensation, whether individual or collective.) Pierre Bourdieu's *La misère du monde*, with its emphasis on first person accounts of social suffering, strikes me as one very good example of how this should be done.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this paper I tried to articulate a minimalist conception of ideology critique that combines the hermeneutical/ pragmatic insights into the nature and function of ideology with the formal capacity for reconstruction of claims to normative validity that is offered by Habermas. I argued that these two dimensions are preserved in Honeth's theory of recognition and identity formation, which could be used as the blueprint for working out a notion of ideology critique that can navigate its way around both the Scylla of cultural relativism and the Charybdis of epistemic or normative foundationalism. The gap between consensus over norms that is reached through argumentation and false consensus, where the latter is forged at the level of one's cultural identification, is bridged by grounding the analysis of ideological distortion in the analysis of formally differentiated experiences of misrecognition, that is, in the first person experiences and accounts of the agents who raise claims to recognition at the different levels of their differentiated relation to self.

[Link to commentary](#)

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## NORMATIVE VALIDITY, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

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