



WERT URTEILE JUDGING VALUES

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The Importance of Values for Social and Political Integration in Europe

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Social cohesion is vital to every society, yet our era is increasingly challenged by growing inequalities and social fragmentation. This holds true for Europe as well as for the United States. As the gap between rich and poor widens, so does the gap between cultures. In the United States, Christians have launched a renewed attack against abortion, homosexuality and the separation of church and state. In Europe generous social welfare systems and labor standards, already under strain from an aging population, may wilt further from exposure to the winds of globalization. And, as the European Union continues to admit new member states, it must now contend with greater wealth disparities, more baffling cultural differences and more varied types of taxation and welfare.

In this paper I will focus on the recent debate that has been taking place within the Frankfurt School, and its shift away from a value-neutral position to a position focusing on values and recognition. Axel Honneth, who can be seen as the third representative of the Frankfurt School after Adorno/Horkheimer and Habermas, points out that it would be wrong to speak, as Habermas or Luhmann does, of capitalism as a system of economic procedures free from inherent norms and values. Not only capitalism, but our modern democratic system itself is based on fundamental values that have led historically to a long and profound transformation of society. In *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth shows that a long struggle for recognition was necessary to realize the fundamental values of modern democracies.¹ But what are these fundamental values? In the eighteenth century, the fundamental value of personal freedom was approved, at least in some countries such as England, and realized in the form of the liberal rights of freedom (also called negative rights) protecting everyone's freedom, life and property from the infringements of the rulers; in the nineteenth century the value that everyone should participate in political decisions was introduced as the positive right to

¹ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.



voting and assemble; and, in the twentieth century the idea that everyone should have enough to eat and to live on, in order to be able to take part in political decisions, was established together with the social right of fair distribution. This fundamental change of values went hand in hand with a great shift taking place within society itself, a shift from a traditional system of rights to a post-traditional one. In a traditional society the dignity of a person derives from that person's position in society, his or her social recognition. The social role endows certain rights and duties. In post-traditional societies the dignity of a person is connected to his or her autonomy. Autonomy means following only those norms and rights that we have all agreed upon together. In post-traditional societies the system of rights must be seen as the expression of the generalized interests of all members of society, in such a way that exceptions and privileges are no longer accepted. The idea that members of society have to follow only those norms and rights they have agreed to as free and equal persons, means also that they have to recognize each other as persons who are able to decide autonomously on moral and legal norms. That means that subjects in modern systems of rights recognize each other as being able to make rational decisions; in other words, they reciprocally recognize their imputability. But how to judge the imputability of a person? If we say, with Kant, that every person is an end, this does not yet say how this universal claim can be applied concretely.

In *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth points out that it is exactly in this area of concret applications that struggles for recognition take place. The emergence of new ideas and values does not yet mean that they are realized in general, because certain groups claim them only for themselves, excluding all others. A long historical process was necessary, in which there occurred a broadening of what could be seen as a legitimate individual legal and moral claim. To demonstrate this process Honneth refers to T.H. Marshall. Marshall points out that the big difference between traditional rights and modern rights lies in the uncoupling of individual rights from social status and social recognition. The principle of legal equality means that no exceptions and privileges are allowed any more. To be equal means to be a fully adequate member of the political community. If we look at the historical situation in the nineteenth century we find that the right to participate in political decisions was confined to a man with a certain income and property. Marshall argues that rights to political participation as well as social rights were brought into being and broadened by forces fighting for the idea that all people should be full members of a political community. What stands behind all this is the idea that everyone should be able to participate in political decisions. Therefore, every kind of exclusion should be eliminated. Poverty, not having enough material resources to be able to participate in political decisions, has to be overcome too. Thus, social rights are necessary to guarantee that everyone can be an adequate person in the community. Marshall sums up his historical overview with the following thesis: "The urge forward along the path thus plotted is



an urge towards a fuller measure of equality, an enrichment of the stuff of which the status is made and an increase in the number of those on whom the status is bestowed.”²

Honneth argues that people suffer from the experience of misrecognition and disregard if they are excluded from certain rights. It is his conviction that a struggle for recognition is possible within the legal sphere. Social conflicts and struggles intend to widen the material content as well as the social reach of the status of a legal person.³ It is not possible to develop self-esteem if one lives without individual rights. “Having rights enables us to ‘stand up like men,’ to look others in the eye, and to feel in some fundamental way the equal of anyone. To think of oneself as the holder of rights is not to be unduly but properly proud, to have that minimal self-respect that is necessary to be worthy of the love and esteem of others. Indeed, respect for persons may simply be respect for their rights, so that there cannot be the one without the other; and what is called ‘human dignity’ may simply be the recognizable capacity to assert claims.”⁴ Honneth uses the example of the black civil rights movement in the United States, which argued that legal recognition is a necessary prerequisite for self-respect. The same is true of the women’s liberation movement and its claim for equal rights and the gay rights movement fighting for the right to free sexual orientation and for equal rights concerning same-sex partnership.

When we look at a statement of the European Commission, that “through modernisation, we will preserve our values,” we can understand this statement as an invitation to think over and work over our fundamental values in order to maintain them. As the example of the fundamental value of legal equality has shown us, it was a historical process of modernization that led to the transformation of large parts of society. Women and black people are no longer excluded from political participation and many countries of the European Union have accepted same-sex partnerships.

At the very moment that the fundamental value of equality seems to be realized in the legal sphere, inequality rises in the socio-economic sphere. In *Redistribution or Recognition?*, his discussion with Nancy Fraser, Honneth points out that it is not enough to call for redistribution, but to look for the reasons that make redistribution necessary. It is due to certain values that material distribution functions. Capitalist society, according to Honneth, was organized from its beginning in a very hierarchical way, one with an undoubtedly ideological character: what was valorized as personal achievement, as work, was valorized according to a system of values focused on the male citizen. What was called “work” was in

² Ibid., p. 118.

³ Ibid., p. 118.

⁴ Joel Feinberg, “The Nature and Value of Rights,” cited in Honneth, op. cit., p. 120.



fact the consequence of a group-specific value setting, excluding all those activities that were necessary to reproduce society such as housework, child-rearing, taking care of old people and so on. For Honneth, the social order of contemporary capitalist societies contains material repressions in the way that its ideological structure valorizes types of activity and work and determines the resources people gain for their individual lives—and this of course not only in the case of gender but also in the case of race, ethnicity, class and so on. The institutional framework that valorizes activities and work is not value-neutral, but the consequence of a process in which certain groups have asserted their interests. To understand this better, Honneth contrasts the modern capitalist system and social order with traditional social orders such as feudalism or other premodern societies in which rights were directly derived from the honor or status a person had in this society. Legal respect and social recognition were directly linked. The social hierarchy determined not only social recognition, but also the subjective legal rights of a person. In post-traditional societies, such as modern democracies, legal recognition “splits off from the hierarchical value order insofar as the individual was in principle to enjoy legal equality vis-à-vis all others.”⁵ This, according to Honneth, led to a revolution in the moral order of society: every single individual should now be respected by all other members of society as having equal rights. At the same time a new hierarchical order of social values was established: social recognition was no longer bound to descent but to personal achievement. For Honneth this new social order contained from the beginning elements of material violence. What is judged and valorized as achievement decides what resources people get to live on. Thus, a new status hierarchy comes into being containing all those capitalist values that determine the hierarchy of social recognition and the distribution of resources. For Honneth this all shows that it is important to take into account the cultural values that flow through the principle of achievement and competition into the institutional constitution of the economic sphere.⁶ He points out the suffering people are drawn into by referring to Pierre Bourdieu’s study *The Weight of the World* “the ‘feminizing’ of poverty, which primarily affects single mothers with limited job qualifications; long-term unemployment, which goes along with social isolation and private disintegration; the depressing experience of the rapid disqualification of job skills that had enjoyed high esteem at the start of a career ...; the immiseration of the rural economy ...; and finally, the everyday privations of large families.”⁷ Besides this, Bourdieu regrets that the category of the social now has the image of being antiquated and thus nobody wants to speak about it. Neither Bourdieu nor Honneth mentions the situation in Eastern Europe. Thus, it would be interesting to apply their studies to the transformation process that has been taking place for the

⁵ Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb and Christiane Wilke, London: Verso, 2003, p. 140.

⁶ Ibid., p.140.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 118-19.



past fifteen years in Eastern Europe. I think that here we will find the same phenomenon Honneth and Bourdieu are talking about: if social problems reach a level where they attain public attention, they become part of those social movements that deal with conflicts arising around claims for cultural recognition. These so-called “identity politics” follow the interests of groups seeking recognition for their claims, mostly ethnic groups, women or homosexuals. “The ‘new social movements’ idea is, however, problematic and obscures the greater significance of identity politics. Without much theoretical rationale, it groups together what seem to the researchers relatively ‘attractive’ movements, vaguely on the left, but leaves out such other contemporary movements as the new religious right and fundamentalism, the resistance of white ethnic communities against people of color, various versions of nationalism, and so forth. Yet these are equally manifestations of ‘identity politics’ and there is no principle that clearly explains their exclusion from the lists drawn up by NSM theorists.”⁸ Honneth rejects the assumption that a critical theory should be orientated normatively by social movements. This would mean narrowing the whole spectrum of social unease and suffering to those social movements that have succeeded in obtaining attention. Social unease and suffering have for Honneth a normative core: they contain the experience that something unjust has been done by society. The procedural model that Jürgen Habermas presents is not sufficient for Honneth: it would require new categories in order to adopt the normative point of view from which subjects judge and valorize their social order. Basic notions and values should be orientated on a theory of recognition, where the denial of social recognition, the phenomenon of humiliation and disregard form the core of all experiences of injustice.

This is not the place to discuss the difficulties in which Honneth gets involved by trying to find new categories for measuring the unease and suffering of people and the strategies it would need to reverse the increasing deterioration taking place across the whole of Europe, but I think that he poses questions that are of immense importance to the future of the European Union—above all, the question of which values we want to realize in the future. In an article titled “The Revolt of the Superfluous,” Ulrich Beck recently posed the question: What happens to all those who are excluded from the brave new world of globalization? The new globalized rich don’t need the poor any more, in order to get rich. They are simply superfluous, useless and this is something that happens not only in Africa but in the heart of Europe.

Jürgen Habermas sees a way out of this threatening scenario in a strong European Union with its own constitution. In his June 2001 article in *Die Zeit* he makes it clear that the Maastricht intergovernmental agreement is not strong enough to create the power for a consolidation that

⁸ Craig Calhoun, *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, cited in Fraser and Honneth, op. cit., p. 121.



only “a political act of foundation” can bring. A strong Europe is needed to defend its culture and way of life, threatened more and more by a neoliberal paradigm that does not fit into the normative self-understanding of the European people. For Habermas the neoliberal paradigm is characterized, first, by the anthropological idea of man as a rational entrepreneur, who deploys his own capacity for work; second, by the social and moral idea of a postegalitarian society that accepts marginalizations and exclusions; third, by the economic idea of a democracy that reduces citizens to members of a market society and the state to a public services enterprise for clients and customers; and fourth, by the stragic belief that the best politics are those that are carried out by themselves, automatically. In his article “Remarks on Dieter Grimm’s ‘Does Europe Need a Constitution?’” he sees the greatest danger as coming from global networks and markets contributing more and more to the fragmentation of public consciousness.⁹ If these systemic networks don’t get strong political institutions on their side, it could lead to a paralyzing fatalism and to mistrust of political consciousness and action. The postindustrial misery of those who are superfluous—the Third World in the First World—would lead to the moral erosion of the whole community. Only a strong Europe can handle this threat and is powerful enough to develop new visions. Economic reasons are not sufficient to motivate people; this needs, as Habermas says, orientation on common values. The disapproving attitude of the population toward the European Union, can only be surmounted, if the European project is no longer a project only for experts, but a project discussed in a broad political arena. For this it would be necessary to create a European civil society, to construct a European public sphere and to create a political culture that all Europeans share.

But what are these common values that could motivate people to engage in a strong Europe? How should the social integretaion of Europe take place? What are those common values Habermas speaks of? These questions are not so easy to answer, because Habermas modifies his position concerning values over the course of his work. In *Between Facts and Norms* he defines values as intersubjectively shared subjective preferences, but in his later work he distinguishes values from preferences: What is valuable and authentic for us is imposed on us and must be distinguished from bare preferences by a binding quality that transcends the subjectivity of needs and preferences. It is the feeling of being moved by and attracted to something that characterizes the experience of values.¹⁰ But what are we moved by? In *The Theory of Communicative Action* he argues that social integration that is no longer guaranteed by a sacral ritual praxis can be achieved by communicative action. The authority of the sacral is replaced by rational consensus. The banishing power of the sacral is transformed into the binding power of norms that can be criticized. This almost utopian and optimistic position is

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, “Remarks on Dieter Grimm’s ‘Does Europe Need a Constitution?’,” *European Law Journal*, 1, Nov. 1995, 303-307.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

retracted by him in his later works. The assumption that religious world-views can be replaced by an universalist ethics of responsibility subsides into the realization that argumentative consensus contains only a weak power of rational motivation. Because of its weak motivation this morality needs to be supplemented by law, which has the power to compel. Law is obligatory, universal and intersubjective.¹¹

From 1988 on, Habermas distinguishes between the pragmatic, the ethical and the moral use of practical reason. Pragmatic questions arise from the point of view of someone who looks for the best means to reach certain ends and preferences. The actor acts rationally, if he acts in accordance with certain reasons and knows about this. Ethical questions arise from the perspective of members of a certain community, who want to make clear which way of life they want to share and which ideals and values they want to guide their lives. Ethical questions are placed around a common ethos: it is important to know how we should understand each other, how we shall live our lives, how to orientate in the community and how to know what is the best for our lives with respect to the intersubjectively shared tradition we inhabit. The attractiveness of values is not something we can choose easily, as we can do with preferences and ends. Habermas warns us not to mix up values and interests. Conflicts arising from different interests can be solved through compromise. Ethical conflicts arising around different values cannot be solved in the same way. This would hurt the identities of those expressing their way of life and self-understanding through these values. Relations of values can be changed only by discourses about the self-understanding of people, not on the way of finding a compromise. Fundamental values, which are constitutive for the identity and thus for the self-understanding of the members, are not negotiable. The mixing up of fundamental values and interests is a grave mistake, Habermas points out. What enters into the definition of identity is not subject to compromise. Infringements of this kind would be an attack against human dignity and thus would be not permissible for legal reasons.

In moral questions it is the normative perspective from which we examine how our living together is regulated in the common interest of all. A person assumes a moral perspective when he or she acts like a democratic legislator and checks if the praxis that would follow from a hypothetical norm could be accepted by all other co-legislators. From the moral point of view all the ends, preferences and values are brought under examination. Thus, Habermas distinguishes between moral questions, dealing with problems of justice, and ethical questions concerning self-understanding. Questions of justice look for norms that are good *for all* in the same way, whereas questions of self-understanding deal with who we are: our identity. The latter contains values in which we express what would be a good life *for us*. In both cases, we maintain a distance from current praxis, but from the ethical standpoint the distance we

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

maintain need not be as great as it has to be when we assume the moral standpoint. Dealing with ethical questions we remain within our cultural horizon. When we answer moral questions we have to decide in a broader horizon, one including those who do not belong to our social and cultural environment, to consider those who are foreigners separated by geographical, historical, cultural or social distances. Habermas assumes that it is possible to come to a decision that is good for all. Discourse opens up a wider horizon in which it should be possible to find a solution that is accepted by all, without being forced to solve the conflicts of values on the ethical level.

Habermas is deeply skeptical about the contribution of values to the social integration of modern societies. Universalist morality and, where this is too weak, modern law, is for Habermas the best way of integrating modern societies. He thinks that law is very well suited for the social integration of economic societies, because it refers to the actions of individuals pursuing their special interests. But law also has to consider the needs for a social integration that is realized best by a communicative process guaranteed by the liberal and political rights of citizens. In *The Genealogy of Values*, Hans Joas criticizes Habermas for arguing that a moral community is constituted *only* by the negative idea of doing away with discrimination and suffering and by inclusion of the marginalized into a reciprocal consideration.¹² Habermas, however, would still have another approach to morality and law. In *Between Facts and Norms* he speaks about morality and law as guarantees in case of the failure of the socially integrative efforts of all other institutions. This lets us know that morality and law should not stand in the foreground of social action. Of course, Joas admits it would not be possible to rely only on integration by common values, and of course these bonds always have to be corrected due to the universal claim of the normative, but it is important to see that we need the reproduction of values as much as we need the procedural rationality of rights. The reproduction of values is not automatically guaranteed by relying on the weak motivation of rational consensus and the legitimating effect of civic freedom. Social solidarity can be regenerated in the forms of communicative practices, but not only in them.

Thus far in the discussion we have seen that Honneth and Habermas take quite different positions concerning the importance of values for the social and political integration of Europe. Habermas sees the importance of values for the self-understanding and identity of people but is skeptical about their contribution to social and political integration. Honneth, on the other hand, points out that we have to do with values on all levels: even the modern democratic system itself is based on fundamental values that have historically been modified and modernized in the way we have already seen. And the capitalist system itself is not as value-neutral as people want to make us believe.

¹² Hans Joas, *The Genealogy of Values*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001.



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After all, what can we say about the importance of values for the social and political integration of Europe? Why should people feel motivated to vote for a European constitution? If we look at the great majority of the European population we find most people occupied with questions concerning their way of living, how can they lead a good life? Will Europe bring them a better life? Most are fearful about their future standard of living, most feel that things are getting worse. We can classify all of these under what Habermas calls “ethical questions,” because ethical questions deal with the identity and self-understanding of people and, as we have learned, this category of the ethical, dealing with values, must not be mixed up with the category of the pragmatic, dealing with interests. While people in the economic field are mostly motivated by their interests, social and political integration needs more than a compromise on interests. Social and political integration touches the level of identity and values. As Habermas says, love or recognition cannot be exchanged for money, one’s mother tongue or religious confession cannot be exchanged for job positions. It needs a common self-understanding, a self-understanding that can be found only in “discourses of self-understanding,” as Habermas calls them. Is it enough to create a European civil society, to construct a public sphere and to create a political culture, as Habermas instructed us, to overcome the disapproving attitude of the population towards the European Union? What does Europe stand for? Is it the neoliberal paradigm that will get the upper hand, as many people fear, or is it on the contrary the European Union that can save us from this threatening scenario, as Habermas believes? It is up to the European people to make up their minds which values they want to guide their lives. The great majority of the European population does not even know on which fundamental values the European Union is based or should be based in the new constitution. Until now, the European Union has failed to open a discussion about values. People in France and the Netherlands have rejected the European Constitution, afraid that the European Union would realize the neoliberal paradigm. If we look at the latest European Social Survey we learn that only two out five people in Austria, that is, less than half, are content with how democracy functions in Austria, and in the Czech Republic, Italy and Poland the number is even lower. Far from being proud of what has been attained, far from being aware of the fact that modern democracies are based on the participation of all of us, people feel more and more powerless and helpless. And as concerns the belief in the democratic structures of the European Union, the situation is even worse than on the national level. What is needed now is a Europe-wide discussion on what we want the European Union to be for all of us and of what visions we have about the future of the European Union. Values play a crucial role in this process as they influence our identity and self-understanding and, thus, are essential for the social and political integration of Europe.