


Respect and Struggles for Recognition: Kant and Honneth

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ENG Abstract: Philosophers and scholars often overlook Kant's foundational contribution to the concept of recognition, yet it proves challenging to develop a comprehensive theory without integrating Kantian moral philosophy, particularly his conceptualization of respect. In this regard, I draw upon the insights of contemporary philosopher Axel Honneth, who ambivalently acknowledges the influence of Kant's moral philosophy in shaping the conceptualization of the struggle for recognition. Unlike Honneth, I claim unequivocally, that any theory for the struggle for recognition needs explicit Kantian grounds.

Keywords: Kant, respect, recognition, Honneth, disrespect, morality.

ES Respeto y lucha por el reconocimiento: Kant y Honneth

Resumen: Filósofos y estudiosos a menudo pasan por alto la fundacional contribución de Kant al concepto de reconocimiento, pero resulta difícil desarrollar una teoría exhaustiva sin integrar la filosofía moral kantiana, en particular su conceptualización del respeto. Al respecto, me baso en las ideas del filósofo contemporáneo Axel Honneth, quien reconoce ambivalentemente la influencia de la filosofía moral de Kant en la configuración de la conceptualización de la lucha por el reconocimiento. A diferencia de Honneth, afirmo inequívocamente que cualquier teoría de la lucha por el reconocimiento necesita fundamentos kantianos explícitos.

Summary: Introduction. Exploring Respect and Recognition: Insights from Kant and Honneth. Understanding disrespect: Kantian Perspective. Conclusion: the importance of considering respect as the fundamental feeling in social struggles. References.

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Introduction

Recognition stands as one of the foundational concepts within political philosophy and social struggles, tracing its roots back to the eighteenth century. Unlike the contributions made by Johann Gottlieb Fichte and subsequently Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who emerge as pioneers in recognition theories, Immanuel Kant's significant influence often goes unrecognized. Without Kant's moral philosophy and his formulation of respect as an essential component of morality, the underlying motivations propelling struggles for recognition remain dormant. Therefore, I will direct attention to Kant's practical philosophy and the feeling of respect to illustrate that recognition requires moral ground rather than being solely a political or legal matter in a direct sense. Through this analysis, I intend to highlight the inadequacies of recognition theories and advocate for a transcendental moral approach to social struggles.

As elaborated in detail by Axel Honneth, one of the pioneers of contemporary recognition theorists, in his seminal work, *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas*, as well as in several other works, the historical significance of the feeling of respect within public and social spheres is evident through Enlightenment thinkers in English, French, and German contexts. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, albeit within a negative framework, refers to "amour propre" as a "pejorative" form of recognition, while David Hume discusses "sympathy," both emphasizing the importance of the feeling of respect. Yet it is the German-speaking tradition that gives proper place to respect and, consequently, to theories of recognition, with Hegel emerging as the figure who brought recognition into a political context and further developed the conceptualization of recognition relations. Honneth claims that Hegel "stripped of [recognition's] transcendental character and historicized [it], thus also enabling recognition to take on a gradual character" (Honneth 2021, p. 136).

Honneth builds and expands his theory, drawing from Hegelian philosophy as well as the psychological and anthropological ideas of contemporary Hegelian thinkers like George Herbert Mead. With a preference

for the Jena works of Hegel, namely the *System of Ethical Life* and *Realphilosophie*, Honneth adopts Hegelian misconceptions and criticism of Kantian moral philosophy, presenting an ambivalent approach toward Kant's contribution. While acknowledging subsequent improvements by Fichte and Hegel, I argue that Kant's groundbreaking influence has been overshadowed by Hegel's biased criticism, leading to an inadequate understanding of recognition theory.

Given the extensive scholarship on Fichte and Hegel, I will not provide a detailed account of their work here, as thorough investigations can be found in several other sources. Instead, I will focus on Kant's moral philosophy and his understanding of respect. Therefore, I will delve into the significance of respect and its crucial political role. My aim is to demonstrate that Kantian moral philosophy provides a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of social conflicts, which manifest as struggles for recognition or, as we might term them, "struggles for respect."

Indeed, Kant's philosophy marks a pivotal moment not only for German idealists but also for the broader philosophical landscape. While his Copernican revolution often overshadows his moral revolution, the latter is a crucial and integral component of his philosophical system, aimed at understanding human actions *in the world*. Kant revolutionizes moral philosophy by departing from previous appeals to empirical or cultural norms or transcendent explanations. Instead, he grounds moral actions solely on human reason and freedom. The challenge of establishing morality outside of religious or cultural contexts is evident. Yet Kant seeks to establish the transcendental structure of unconditioned morality. He introduces key moral terms such as moral law, freedom, maxim, duty, respect, universality, and humanity, which are intricately interconnected with his political approach. He regards humanity as a whole, as a species, and accords no privilege to any individual or group concerning moral law and moral feelings. Despite valid criticisms of Kant's empirical racism and gender discrimination, transcendental philosophy indeed paves the way for a democratic, egalitarian moral and political understanding. It attributes epistemological, moral, and aesthetic features to all individuals, emphasizing the capacities and powers inherent in every human being and thereby grounding the idea of equality.

Honneth acknowledges that it is Kant's moral philosophy and his conception of respect that catalyzed the emergence of the German philosophical concept of recognition. However, he sees this as a moment that requires sublation in the Hegelian sense (2021). He notes that Kant's notion of moral autonomy profoundly influenced thought from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, stating that it "began to culturally influence lifeworld beliefs, becoming a powerful everyday authority for the articulation of claims and demands" (Honneth 2014, p. 97)¹. Kant's moral philosophy had an immediate and profound influence on German idealists, regardless of whether they agreed with it or opposed it. Fichte, one of Kant's earliest contemporaries, acknowledged the significance of Kant's work, especially his moral philosophy. Fichte adopts transcendental philosophy and centers *freedom* in his own transcendental approach, further developing Kant's notion of respect into the concept of recognition. As Honneth emphasizes, this development influenced Hegel's conceptualization of the "struggle for recognition" (Honneth 2021, p. 98). Fichte defends and transforms transcendental philosophy by explicitly addressing the intersubjectivity of the "self" in his *Science of Knowledge* (Fichte 1991), and in his *Foundations of Natural Right*, he introduces the concept of mutual communication between subjects, which notably crystallizes in Hegel's examination of the conflictual "lordship and bondage" dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Fichte 2000; Hegel 1979).

Following Fichte's endeavors, Hegel situates the need for recognition as a rational necessity within an intersubjectivist and political framework. This need unfolds through various historical forms, including institutional mediations within the modern state, and is intertwined with family, civil society, and state structures. Honneth contends that Hegel departs from both Kant's and Fichte's transcendentalism, giving the Kantian concept of 'respect' an intersubjective and historical spin—ideas that I argue are already present in Kant's moral philosophy, political thought, and anthropology.

Following Hegel, Honneth delineates three forms of recognition: (i) unconditional devotion, which signifies the relationship based on *love* within the family; (ii) recognition of the person through *rights* in civil society; and (iii) recognition of the community through practices of *solidarity*. These distinctions are drawn from Hegel's *System of Ethical Life* and, with some nuances, his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. In his seminal work, *Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Honneth examines Hegelian conceptions of ethical life alongside Mead's psychological and empirical contributions, incorporating additional perspectives from Marx, Sorel, and Sartre to highlight the social and political dimensions of their ideas.

Honneth rarely refers to Kant positively and often overlooks Kant's influence on Hegel. He briefly acknowledges at the end of the book that his theory has a Kantian foundation, stating that "(...) insofar as we have developed it as a normative concept, our recognition-theoretic approach stands in the middle between a moral theory going back to Kant, on the one hand, and communitarian ethics, on the other" (p. 172). This approach oscillates between Kantian morality, which advocates universal respect for all and regards people as ends in themselves, and the historically situated ethical life, a concept also present in Kantian philosophy, as illustrated by Kant's views on historical progress toward moral ethical states, cosmopolitanism, and world citizenship. Honneth's approach only diverges slightly from the orthodox Hegelian view, which positions Kant's morality in opposition to Hegel's critique, arguing that Kantian morality is excessively individualistic

¹ Even though Honneth accepts the importance of Kant's understanding of moral autonomy in his work entitled *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, I strongly agree with Beate Rössler's criticism on the misconceptions and misunderstandings of Kantian claims by Honneth in this work. See Beate Rössler (2013). "Kantian Autonomy and Its Social Preconditions: On Axel Honneth's *Das Recht der Freiheit*." *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 33, 1, 14-18.

and ahistorical. Consequently, Honneth appears reluctant to firmly assert Kantian morality as the source of the various types of recognition.

My aim in this article is not to address Honneth's criticism of the atomism and ahistoricism of Kantian morality, which is inherited from Hegel and considers Kant's moral works in isolation. Instead, I intend to briefly highlight that direct answers to these criticisms can be found in Kant's anthropological, historical, and political writings. Kant discusses social moral progress in several of his works, including *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784), "Conjectural Beginning of Human History" (1786), *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), *Contest of the Faculties* (1798), and *Lectures on Pedagogy* (1803). Given Honneth's emphasis on historical and anthropological perspectives, which he positions as a departure from Kant, these texts clearly address the developmental periods of human beings—both as a species and as individuals—towards a moral, ethical, and ultimately cosmopolitan life, shaped by the technical, pragmatic, and moral predispositions of human beings (see *Anthropology*, AA 07:322). For Kant, human beings need to cultivate and civilize themselves, and to 'actively struggle' towards a society in which they recognize their worth (*Anthropology*, AA 07:325; *Pedagogy*, AA 09:444). As Sharon Anderson-Gold acutely underlines, by attributing both morality and moral imperfection for human species and individuals, Kant presents us with a resolution between determinism and freedom in his moral and historical understanding (1994). Moreover, as Pauline Kleingeld emphasizes, "the development of human rational faculties is a *learning process*" (1999, p. 66). Moral demands are not created in time, "but rather that they gradually come to be *fully understood*," thus, morality is not a creation but a *discovery* process. This perspective aligns Hegel more closely to Kant, thus addressing Honneth's critique. A close reading of Kant reveals that he envisions a gradual moral and ethical development toward a *better future*, a concept Honneth explores through the struggle for recognition. Kant's texts can be seen as a propaedeutic to Hegel's *System of Ethical Life* and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, where Kant's notion of the "striving of humanity toward its moral vocation" includes stages such as family, civil society, and state, all of which contribute to the realization of universal human and civil rights—a vision of a better future (see *CBHH*).

Indeed, it seems that over time, Honneth has become more receptive to recognizing Kant's role and the significance of his philosophy. This shift is evident in his more recent works, such as "The Irreducibility of Progress: Kant's Account of the Relationship between Morality and History," where he acknowledges the importance of Kant's ideas on future betterment and the causes of social conflicts. Nevertheless, he continues to reinterpret fundamental Kantian moral concepts through a Hegelian lens (2007b).

I will be content with the references provided above concerning Honneth's criticism of Kant. My aim here is to show that Kant's moral philosophy, particularly his understanding of respect, provides the foundation for struggles for recognition. Therefore, in the next section, I will focus on fundamental Kantian moral concepts, starting with his understanding of respect, to demonstrate that respect, moral freedom, humanity, and equality stem from Kant's moral and political philosophy and form the basis for recognition theories.

As I argue, these struggles are based on demands for equal moral treatment, which I suggest spring from the transcendental feeling of respect and intensify in its absence, that is, in cases of disrespect. Thus, I will begin by analyzing the feeling of respect and its relationship to Kant's moral formulas, such as the humanity formula and the kingdom of ends. This analysis will explore how these concepts collectively ground political demands and represent an ideal for ethical betterment. By reassessing Kant's role, I aim to highlight the foundational nature of his moral philosophy in contemporary recognition theories, showing how a deeper understanding of respect can illuminate and address key social and political challenges today.

Exploring Respect and Recognition: Insights from Kant and Honneth

Respect constitutes a cornerstone in Kant's moral philosophy, serving as a central concept with a transcendental function that extends beyond empirical meanings and is rooted in both personal and intersubjective grounds. With various dimensions—including respect for humanity, self-respect, respect for persons, respect and autonomy, love and respect, and dignity—respect has been a prominent subject in Kantian practical philosophy. While specific examples may be limited, recent discussions on Kantian morality and the feeling of respect have emphasized the significance of practical transcendental philosophy within the framework of recognition as well. Carla Bagnoli's recent work, "Kant on Recognition," offers a concise examination of respect and recognition with a focus on intersubjectivity, reflecting the growing interest in this area (2020).

Even though one can identify the types of recognition and struggles, as articulated in Hegelian terms, within family, civil society, and the state, I argue that the question of the grounds for the *demand* and struggle for recognition remains unanswered without the application of Kantian moral terms. Examining this issue provides insight into the necessity of moral awareness alongside legal regulations in societies. To illustrate the importance of this assertion and how it manifests, I will revisit Kant's foundational texts on respect and morality, examining how they establish frameworks for recognition theories.

As an a priori feeling that defies empirical definition, Kant distinguishes respect in its direct relation to moral law. In the *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals (Groundwork)*, Kant acknowledges the obscurity of the term in his famous footnote, yet he defines it as "the object of respect is [...] solely the law, and specifically that law that we *lay upon ourselves*" (AA 04:401n). Kant clarifies that respect does not derive from any external reason aside from the law itself, and in this sense, it is "self-effected" and irreducible to feelings of inclination and fear. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant reiterates that respect is "respect for the moral law" and conceives it as a feeling entirely grounded in morality, thereby referring to the unconditional. Respect for the moral law is exclusive to humans and directed towards humans, as the moral law appears to be valid only for the human species. Kant clarifies

Respect is always directed only to persons, never to things. The latter can awaken in us *inclination* and even *love* if they are animals (e.g., horses, dogs, and so forth), or also *fear*, like the sea, a volcano, a beast of prey, but never *respect*. Something that comes nearer to this feeling is *admiration*, and this as an affect, amazement, can be directed to things also, for example, lofty mountains, the magnitude, number, and distance of the heavenly bodies, the strength and swiftness of many animals, and so forth. But none of this is respect (CPrR, AA 05:76)².

Kant distinguishes humans from objects and other living beings based on morality, which emphasizes the freedom inherent in humans, liberating them from being mere automatons and predetermined beings, thereby making morality possible. Freedom, in moral behavior, is understood as the sole cause, a characteristic that renders human beings the sole agents responsible for their actions. As Allen Wood explains in his work *Kantian Ethics*, through the exercise of autonomous moral agency, humans ascend to a status imbued with intrinsic “worth” and “dignity.” This elevation is attributable to the moral imperative of our reason rather than conforming to the desires, inclinations, or wishes of our feelings (Wood 2008). Morality, similarly, assumes a universal and unconditional character, oriented not towards individual self-interest but rather the common good. Thus, Kant construes humans as endowed with the unconditional good. Consequently, the imperative to accord respect to others arises from the recognition of their status as fellow carriers of moral worth and dignity. Kant posits that all human beings inherently possess the capacity to apprehend and adhere to the moral commands of reason. In this schema, respect acquires a ubiquitous character, ingrained within the fabric of human consciousness. In the *Groundwork* Kant states:

What I immediately recognize as a law for me, I recognize with respect, which signifies merely the consciousness of the *subjection* of my will to a law without any mediation of other influences on my sense. The immediate determination of the will through the law and the consciousness of it is called *respect*, so that the latter is to be regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject and not as its *cause* (*Groundwork*, AA 04:401n).

This particular quote underscores the role of respect in consciousness and its function in limiting the self, as it identifies respect as an effect imposed on the self. In this regard, the feeling of respect imposes boundaries upon us, possessing the capacity to override our individual thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Even towards individuals whom one might perceive as adversaries, respect may be elicited due to their moral conduct, highlighting one of the aspects that reveals the *intersubjective* nature of the feeling.

The moral conduct of others serves as a catalyst for our appreciation of the value of morality, which enables us to claim two different kinds of respect: one towards moral law and the other towards persons who act in accordance with the moral law. This second kind of respect also reflects the moral law itself. Here I would like to recall Stephen Darwall’s seminal work “Two Kinds of Respect” where he distinguishes between *recognition respect* and *appraisal respect*. Recognition respect, he explains, “is this sort of respect which is said to be owed to all persons. To say that persons as such are entitled to respect is to say that they are entitled to have other persons take seriously and weigh appropriately the fact that they are persons in deliberating about what to do” (Darwall 1977, p. 38). On the other hand, appraisal respect, unlike recognition respect, focuses on exclusive objects, such as persons or features that manifest their excellence as individuals or in specific pursuits. Darwall explains, “such respect, then, consists in an attitude of positive appraisal of that person either as a person or as engaged in some particular pursuit” (ibid.). In “Kant on Respect, Dignity, and the Duty of Respect” Darwall delves into Kant’s terms *observantia* as recognition respect and *reverentia* for the appraisal respect that arises from the respectable deeds of human beings (Darwall, 2008).

From the highlighted features, one might recognize that respect for the moral law places us within an intersubjective framework. Kant suggests that each individual has the capacity to exemplify a value and has the right to demand respect from us. This reciprocal relation, as Bagnoli emphasizes in her work “Respect and Membership in the Moral Community,” is an intersubjective feeling that prompts us to recognize our existence as free and bound by others, driving us toward mutual recognition and enabling us to assert that autonomy presupposes intersubjectivity and membership in a moral community, without which morality is not possible (2007). Those who juxtapose Hegelian recognition against Kantian respect, starting with Hegel himself, thus incorrectly direct their criticism toward Kantian morality as an individual-based, atomistic approach that disregards intersubjectivity. I argue that Kant’s individual stance encompasses both “we” and “I,” as he regards humans as both a species and as particular persons, with the former, together with the latter, grounding the universality of morality. Respect serves as one of the feelings that enables us to consider others rather than succumb to our selfish desires, which reside in the “I.” Honneth also admits that Kant’s conception of “respect” enables us to distance ourselves from egocentric interests, as the respect we hold for others influences our nature and prompts immediate changes within us. Respect compels us to perceive all human beings as equals, recognizing each individual as a bearer of moral worth and as a member of humanity. Within this framework, all human beings deserve respect and are responsible for regarding others as worthy agents, thereby establishing respect as a foundational feeling in relations of recognition. Indeed, Honneth sees the

² One must be aware that, in relation to the feeling of the sublime in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (CPJ), nature also leads to the emergence of the feeling of respect within us. However, this respect, which is directed towards humans rather than nature itself, is felt by those who perceive the grandeur of nature and experience the sublime. Kant states: “The feeling of the inadequacy of our capacity for the attainment of an idea *that is law for us is respect*. [...] the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we show to an object in nature through a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the object instead of for the idea of humanity in our subject) [...]” (CPJ, AA 05: 257).

possibility of legal recognition in respect for persons and grounds his idea on social respect that holds individuals as equal agents, which in turn grounds legal recognition, in a Kantian formulation (1995, pp. 111-113).

What respect provides with these characteristics lies in a broader framework of Kant's practical philosophy. Therefore, one also needs to recall the moral formulas in the *Groundwork* where Kant utilizes moral maxims, famously the (i) formula of universal law or natural law; (ii) the formula of humanity as an end in itself; and (iii) the formula of the kingdom of ends, or autonomy. Kant defines the first principle in his famous statement: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (*Groundwork*, AA 04:421). As a recurrent formula in the *Groundwork*, universalization foreshadows the other formulas by highlighting the exclusion of personal interests and demanding the validity of moral behaviors for every rational agent. Although it underpins the other two formulas, universalization fails to provide us the sole criterion of moral conduct and requires "humanity" and "kingdom of ends" as its basic components, since one needs to regard humanity as an end in itself and precludes objectification of any kind. Kant states: "Now I say that the human being, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means to the discretionary use of this or that will, but in all its actions, those directed toward itself as well as those directed toward other rational beings, it must always at the same time be considered as an end" (*Groundwork* 4:428). The imperative form of this formula finds expression in Kant's following statement: "Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means" (*Groundwork* AA 04:429).

Directly related to the humanity formula, the kingdom of ends puts

[...] the systematic combination of various rational beings through communal laws. Now because laws determine ends in accordance with their universal validity, there comes to be, if one abstracts from the personal differences between rational beings, as likewise from every content of their private ends, a whole of all ends—(of rational beings as ends in themselves, as well as of their own ends, which each may set for himself) in systematic connection [...] (*Groundwork*, AA 04:432).

All human beings ought to be members of this "realm of ends," and it is the goal for the realization of "communal objective laws." Even though Kant situates it as an ideal, this ideal guides moral endeavors and is accessible to all rational beings, circularly connecting with the universal law formula. Kant states: "Do no action in accordance with any other maxim, except one that could subsist with its being a universal law, and hence only so that the will could through its maxim at the same time consider itself as universally legislative" (*Groundwork* AA 04:434). The kingdom of ends provides universality both as an objective and as a universal attribute to all human beings as rational beings. As John Rawls perfectly explains, the realm of ends supposes a "complete good" and refers to "the good attained when the ideal of a realm of ends is realized and each member both has a good will and has achieved happiness, so far as the conditions of human life allow" (Rawls 2000, p. 225). Thus, the realm of ends is the highest natural good that human beings could create with "the moral law within." From this principle, a social life where individuals are free and equal could only be possible on moral grounds where all people are considered equal moral agents as ends in themselves, who are worthy of respect and deserve to live in the kingdom of ends. In this regard, politics and morality implicitly display an inseparable structure, and the former should rely on the latter's use to flourish the feeling of self-esteem in human beings.

For a deeper comprehension of the intersubjective nature of respect and its direct relevance to political struggles, one must delve into *The Metaphysics of Morals*, particularly focusing on the section on the Duties of Virtue to Others. In §25, Kant states:

It is not to be understood as the mere *feeling* [respect] that comes from comparing our own *worth* with another's (such as a child feels merely from habit toward his parents, a pupil toward his teacher, or any subordinate toward his superior). It is rather to be understood as the *maxim* of limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person and so as respect in the practical sense (*observantia aliis praestanda*) (AA 06:449).

In section II of the Doctrine of Virtue in *The Metaphysics of Morals* entitled On Duties of Virtue Toward Other Men Arising from the Respect Due Them, Kant continues that "the respect that I have for others or that another can require from me (*observantia aliis praestanda*) is therefore recognition of a *dignity* (*dignitas*) in other men, that is, a worth that has no price, no equivalent for which the object evaluated (*aestimii*) could be changed" (6:462). Kant assumes that humanity itself carries that dignity, and he claims that dignity elevates humanity above all other "things." He concludes

[...] just as he cannot give himself away for any price (this would conflict with his duty of self-esteem), so neither can he act contrary to the equally necessary self-esteem of others, as men, that is, he is under obligation to acknowledge, in a practical way, the dignity of humanity in every other man. Hence there rests on him a duty regarding the respect that must be shown to every other man (*ibid.*).

Kant finds the denial of respect contrary to duty, even if one inwardly considers oneself superior in certain aspects, such as empirical characteristics. He even considers outward manifestations of disrespect an offense that ought to be avoided. He asserts that even to a vicious person, one ought not to withhold respect from them.

Respect for the law, which in its subjective aspect is called moral feeling, is identical with consciousness of one's duty. This is why showing respect for man as a moral being (holding his duty in highest

esteem) is also a duty that others have toward him and a right to which he cannot renounce his claim. This claim is called *love of honor*, and its manifestation in external conduct, *respectability* (*honestas externa*) (*MM*, AA 06:464).

Although he seemingly criticizes Kant, in his famous article entitled “The Idea of Equality,” Bernard Williams advocates that the idea of common humanity entails the recognition of self-respect, which is a characteristic of humanity, even though it is hard to define. Williams uses the term to identify “a certain human desire to be identified with what one is doing, to be able to realise purposes of one’s own, and *not* to be the instrument of another’s will unless one has willingly accepted such a role” (1973, p. 234). He rightfully states that empirical characteristics of human beings fail to provide an understanding of equality in humans; rather, it must be grounded in morality. Even though he considers it a vague term, he suggests that respect plays an important role here.

Despite acknowledging Kant’s influence on recognition theories, Honneth seems hesitant to emphasize the social facet of respect in Kant. He explicitly claims that Kant dismisses the social aspect of recognition or social esteem, stating, “social esteem or recognition plays absolutely no role whatsoever in Kant’s moral philosophy. He conceives of ‘respect’ in terms of a subject compelled by its peers to show respect, but not in terms of a subject that has or feels a desire to receive respect” (Honneth 2021, pp. 107-108). Honneth asserts that it was Hegel who introduced the idea of the “need for recognition” and evaluates Kantian respect as an “emotional stance that becomes almost inevitable once properly employ[ing] our powers of judgment on others. When we encounter another subject in this way, we must grasp it almost automatically as an exemplary embodiment of moral law” (2021, p. 109). Honneth, therefore, considers Kant’s conception of respect to have an ambivalent nature between empirical and intellectual grounds, which fails to reconcile them both. Drawing on Fichte and Hegel, Honneth’s claim on the irrelevancy of recognition in Kantian moral philosophy remains a claim that does not explicitly consider Kant’s perspectives in his works on morality and its direct relation to political writings.

Kantian respect possesses an intriguing and complex character that necessitates close examination in relation to humanity, dignity, the kingdom of ends, self-esteem (*reverentia*) and equality. Moreover, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant grounds the demand for respect, where he posits the reciprocal relation between subjects of respect. In this regard, I concur with Darwall, who provides a thorough examination of Kant’s respect, particularly in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, where he states: “we find also an idea that will be at the hearth of the ideal of equal dignity that Kant bequeaths to modern moral thought, namely, that every rational person has a fundamental authority to make claims and demands of one another as an equal and, specifically, that all have a claim to respect and consequently, a corresponding duty of respect” (Darwall 2008, pp. 187-188). Resonating with Williams, Darwall underscores that the claim of respect is a part of the dignity of persons and every person has the authority to demand respect, which is rooted in the equality of persons: “The respect we have the authority to demand is thus respect *as an equal*” (2008, p. 189). A close reading of *Metaphysics of Morals* reveals that Kant already considers the reciprocity and motivation problematized by Honneth, where Kant points to the motivation of the demand for respect (AA 06:462).

Paradoxically, Honneth’s ideas oscillate between Kant’s moral philosophy and Fichte’s and Hegel’s recognition theories. He appears reluctant to fully acknowledge Kant’s contributions, despite being aware that Kant’s moral theory, especially his conceptualization of respect, provides the groundwork for the struggles of recognition. As he admits, when considering Fichte’s “summoning,” there is “an interpersonal respect that Kant drew upon to explain our motivation to act morally already represents a necessary condition of understanding communicative utterances” (Honneth 2021, p. 119). However, in his effort to embrace Hegelian “historically given configurations” of recognition and intersubjectivity, Honneth overlooks crucial aspects of Kantian moral philosophy and respect that underpin those configurations as well as intersubjectivity. He argues that Hegel’s theory offers a social-theoretical expansion on the theories of recognition, which are already implicit in Kant’s moral and political philosophy.

Here we must question the foundation upon which different configurations of recognition are built. Acknowledging the existence of various forms of demand for recognition throughout history, we must also consider the characteristics that make these forms possible. I propose that the roots of these configurations lie in the transcendental feeling of respect and the *demand* to be respected in the Kantian sense of the term. We should view respect as an inherent *capacity to respect* that is present in every human being and its different *manifestations* throughout history and in diverse social contexts. This capacity represents the moral feeling, and historical developments reveal this capacity over time based on this moral feeling. History provides us with examples of avant-garde struggles, such as the defenders of women’s rights or advocates of anti-slavery in antiquity. Without acknowledging transcendental respect, we fail to explain several social phenomena in history, a concept that not only acknowledges but also firmly grounds the contributions of other philosophers like Fichte, Hegel, and Marx among others.

Understanding disrespect: Kantian Perspective

To comprehend struggles for recognition fully, it is imperative to scrutinize disrespect or the lack of respect, as the patterns of disrespect are a catalyst for the demand for respect and the politics of recognition. As Anna Elisabetta Galeotti asserts in her book chapter *Respect and Recognition: Some Political Implications*, “if respect is normally exchanged, as often happens and as it should, all goes on smoothly, and no one notices the presence of any claim. If disrespect is shown, the disrespected person feels hurt and resents the lack of respect” (2010, p. 85). In a historical context, Kant also places ills or evils as a stage in human vocation,

which drives humans into conflicts with each other as they dishonor human beings, which, according to Kant, only a “perfect civil constitution (the uttermost goal of culture) could remove” (CBHH, AA 08:116-08:117). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to consider disrespect in its direct relation with the struggles for respect and recognition.

It is not surprising that disrespect is a pivotal concept in Honneth’s recognition theory. He examines the forms of disrespect in his various works either under the title of disrespect or recognition, as recognition appears as a demand in the absence of the feeling of respect and rights that are grounded by respect, relatedly, equality. Indeed, before the term “disrespect” finds its place in the recognition theories, Kant presciently examines it as vices that violate the duty of respect. In the Doctrine of Virtue within *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant dedicates a section (§42-§44) titled On Vices that Violate the Duties of Respect for Other Men, where he elucidates the detrimental consequences of vices that contravene the respect every individual can “lawfully claim.” Kant’s treatment underscores respect as a feeling that underpins social structures, even though he does not directly use the expression. Here, he accentuates what Darwall terms “recognition respect” and critiques actions that violate it, and identifies these transgressions as *arrogance*, *defamation*, and *ridicule*, offering insight into each.

Kant does not provide a detailed account of vices, nor does he present extensive political examples, but he points to the damage that such actions may give rise to, which indeed triggers the questioning of behaviors lacking recognition respect. He begins with *arrogance*, delineating it as the inclination to always be superior. “*Arrogance (superbia* and, as this word expresses it, the inclination to be always *on top*) is a kind of *ambition (ambition)* in which we demand that others think little of themselves in comparison with us” (MM, AA 06:465). Kant regards arrogance as a severe disrespect, as it demands the respect it denies others. Arrogance signifies a refusal to recognize the equality, rationality, and moral agency of others, thereby denying their inherent dignity and worth as human beings. In essence, arrogance reduces others to mere means to an end, in direct conflict with Kant’s humanity formula. In this brief account of arrogance, one may infer the feeling of superiority and the ignorance of others by the person who feels superior, a feeling evidenced by current examples of white, privileged, European male individuals or white supremacists.

Kant not only addresses arrogance but also outlines another violation of the duty of respect, which he terms “defamation (*obtrectatio*)” or “backbiting.” Defamation entails an “immediate inclination, with no particular aim in view, to bring into the open something prejudicial to respect for others” (MM, AA 06:466). Kant places defamation as directly opposed to the respect owed to humanity itself, as it undermines respect for individuals and fosters skepticism towards it. He perceives such conduct as a threat to humanity and human understanding. Defamation entails the devaluation of humanity, potentially influencing individuals to question the worth of their species. In this context, Kant’s concepts regarding humanity as a species become prominent, as he suggests that even if the subject of defamation is true, it engenders a form of “misanthropy,” leading individuals to believe that the human race lacks value. Consequently, Kant advocates that any communication regarding immoral acts damages the concept of humanity. Instead of highlighting others’ moral failings, individuals should show respect and encourage them to strive to deserve it. It is not surprising to see defamation as one of the forms of contemporary disrespect theories, which is also employed by Honneth himself to explain the forms of disrespect that damage the reputation of individuals or groups.

After examining arrogance and defamation, Kant proceeds to identify ridicule as the third form of behavior that violates respect, defining it as “*wanton faulting* and *mockery*, the propensity to expose others to laughter, to make their faults the immediate object of one’s amusement” (MM, AA 06: 467). He views ridicule as a refusal to respect the dignity inherent in human beings. Thus, Kant unequivocally positions respect as a duty towards human beings, a reverence for the law itself.

However, it is notable that Kant’s examination of disrespect is relatively brief and limited, requiring further development and the contributions made by scholars like Honneth and others who have refined the exploration of this phenomenon. My objective here is to illustrate that Kantian respect possesses a reciprocal character, and the denial of respect engenders both social and individual problems, as hinted at by Kant in *The Metaphysics of Morals*. His inquiry furnishes us with the tools to assert that rejecting the demand for respect is tantamount to rejecting the humanity of the disrespected individual and undermines the principle of humanity within them. I concur with Darwall’s assertion that “every rational person has a fundamental authority to make claims and demands of one another as an equal and, specifically, that all have a claim to respect, and consequently, a corresponding duty of respect” (2008, p. 187). Thus, every human being is endowed with both the feeling of respect for others and a demand for the conditions of self-esteem or self-respect as respectable agents. This represents a fundamental transcendental characteristic of human beings, and the absence of this respect gives rise to conflicts in social life on every level. Under social and political conditions that fail to nurture these feelings, conflict becomes inevitable, a reality evident in contemporary social struggles where people demand respect for their identities, such as women, LGBTQ+, people of color, immigrants, and various “others.” Their demands converge on several common grounds, but above all, they center on respect. They articulate demands that strongly reference transcendental moral grounds, apparent in keywords such as “pride” or “be proud,” which point to the absence of respect and even manifest in serious forms of disrespect, such as insults, which make them feel ignored and disrespected.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in *The Struggles for Recognition: Moral Grammar of the Social Conflicts*, Honneth asserts that the fundamental justifications put forward by political objectors often manifest as forms of “disrespect”, indicating a denial of recognition (Honneth 1995, p. 131). Disrespect leads to structural exclusion from certain rights, whose basic characteristic is not institutional but rather social. Consequently,

individuals are deprived of equal participation in social life and thus lack equal moral status, resulting in the deprivation of social rights within a community rather than being subjected to the denial of legal rights.

As Honneth elaborated, the lack of respect implies that the people in question do not have the same degree of moral duty as other members of society. He stresses the importance of disrespect in ethical life and distinguishes three forms: (i) those directed at bodily integrity, such as torture and rape, which deny the person's will and freedom, (ii) exclusion from the possession of certain rights within a given society, and (iii) denigration of individual or collective life-styles (See Honneth 2007a "Between Aristotle and Kant" (1997), p. 136; Honneth 1995 pp. 131-139). These forms of disrespect include behaviors such as "insult" and "humiliation," which damage individuals' "positive understanding of themselves" and disrupt recognition in the intersubjective field, destroying the individual's self-confidence and leading to the loss of self-respect. In such cases, the individual experiences their honor or reputation as being underestimated in the social sphere.

In the 1997 article entitled "Between Aristotle and Kant" in *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Honneth admits that there is an internal connection between morality and recognition in the forms of disrespect. He illustrates that in bodily injury (such as torture), the person injured also experiences it as a moral injury. Similarly, in the case of fraud, it creates an injury by not being taken seriously as a person. In the forms of symbolic offense or humiliation, "it is the disrespect of personal integrity that transforms an action or utterance into a moral injury" (Honneth 2007a, p. 134). He takes the idea a step further and rightly claims that "every moral injury represents an act of personal harm" and asserts that one needs to consider self-respect and self-worth on Kantian grounds (*ibid.*). Here, Honneth rightly sees a connection between the types of moral injuries and the forms of recognition and admits that one needs to see the Kantian position to understand the justifications of moral attitudes. Honneth states:

True, we hold a common understanding of morality to result from the fact that we conceive of it as a collective institution for securing our personal integrity, but we can justify moral rights and duties themselves only with the help of general "reasons" that can be universalized and which regard the rights of other persons (*ibid.*, p. 138).

The claims of recognition, in that sense, lie in the fact that one needs to accept a universality that is prior to any set of practices. We ought to recognize all human beings as persons, and in this regard, universality is provided on the Kantian grounds of understanding humanity and respecting human beings. Honneth admits that "even a morality of recognition follows the institutions that have always prevailed in the Kantian tradition of moral philosophy: in the case of a moral conflict, the claims of all subjects to equal respect for their individual autonomy enjoy absolute priority" (*ibid.*, p. 139). Nevertheless, he concludes

[...] with regard to the description of what constitutes the structure of such a conflict, the conception developed here [in *Disrespect*] differs considerably from all Kantian premises: it is not duty and inclination that normally confront one another, but rather different obligations, which without exception possess moral character in the sense of lending expression to a different form of recognition in each case (*ibid.*, p. 141).

Seemingly, Honneth does not fully acknowledge the rightful status of Kantian morality, although he cannot entirely escape from it, as evident in his works referencing Kant. Even though he accepts the effects of transcendental feeling of respect, he refuses to place it at a central position, as illustrated in the phrase he uses above: "it is not duty and inclination that normally confront one another, but rather different obligations." These "different obligations" can be considered as different forms of inclinations, and the theory itself is well explained as the conflict between duty and inclinations, the latter of which can be historicized as Honneth, following Hegel, rightly would like them to be. Different historical settings, economic systems, social conditions, and cultural propensities may create different inclinations; however, none of them change the premise that human beings *demand* respect, and this demand, unless met, creates conflictual structures.

I do not deny that, in the Hegelian sense, even in the sense that Karl Marx puts it, ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) and laws contain and are shaped by relations of recognition, property, exchange systems, and labor. Yet as Honneth underlines with reference to Ernst Bloch, "the economic distress and political dependence would have never become a driving force of the practical revolutionary moments in history" (Honneth 1992, p. 196). Social struggles appear upon the denial of respect, or, in other words, "from the experience of disrespect, which manifests repeatedly and spontaneously" in the public (or private) sphere (Honneth 1992, pp. 196-197). And this conflictual status of history is already prevalent in Kant's political writings. In this regard, Honneth, in "The Irreducibility of Progress," admits that, in his late works on politics, Kant presents a social structure based on social conflict or social antagonism, which indeed paved the way to Hegel's understanding of history (2007b). Yet, I should note that Honneth considers it a de-transcendentalization of the subject, which indeed is not so much, as without the transcendental feeling of respect and human dignity, that is, moral guidance, which is transcendental, one cannot explain the striving and struggle for a better future.

Lastly, I will focus on one of his insightful works on recognition, where Honneth seems to endorse Kantian ideas on respect without hesitation: "*I-Axel Honneth: Invisibility: On the Epistemology of 'Recognition'*". In this work, Honneth examines Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* as an example of what one may call disrespect and explains the difference between cognition (*Erkennen*) and recognition (*Annerkennen*) along the axes of physical presence and social invisibility. Here Honneth acknowledges that Kant's concept of respect provides us with the moral core of recognition. He explains:

The Kantian formulation makes even clearer what is meant by the moral aspect of recognition to which I have [...] referred with terms such as 'confirmation', 'affirmation' and 'according social validity'. A de-centering takes place in the recognizing subject because she concedes to another subject a 'worth' that is the source of legitimate claims infringing upon her own self-love. 'Confirmation' or 'affirmation' thus means that the addressee is equipped with as much moral authority over one's person as one knows oneself to have in being obligated to carry out or abstain from certain classes of action (2001, p. 122).

In the struggles for recognition, those who feel invisible to certain social structures and to certain people indeed demand the affirmation of their worth and humanity and accordingly demand respect for their existence. Invisibility, in that sense, is a moral disrespect that "indicates the absence of recognition," akin to other forms of disrespect. In this article, Honneth, with reference to the book, refers to black people and servants who are treated as non-existent and face racist humiliation, which demonstrates the intention of ignoring the person as an equal, moral agent. In this context, Honneth even claims that "[Kantian] morality can in a sense even said to coincide with recognition, because taking up a moral attitude is possible when the other person is accorded an unconditional worth by which one's own behaviour is to be checked" (2001, p. 123).

As one may see, exclusion of Kantian morality does not adequately explain the concept of right or injustice, which are central to making rights-based demands based on respect. As Anna Elisabetta Galeotti puts it, "we can endow people with equal rights and still not regard them as our equals" (2010, p. 91). In fact, the idea that everyone has equal rights before the law and that civil society and ethical life are organized around these rights is insufficient to explain the struggles for recognition that occur on the basis of the demand for respect, and therefore on a moral basis. Legal and even economic equality do not suffice for people if they do not feel respected. It could even be argued that the demand for respect underpins the law itself and leads to its modification. The legal recognition of hate crimes at the end of the twentieth century and the subsequent expansion of their scope over time, as well as the fact that hate speech is no longer considered protected under the umbrella of freedom of expression, provide strong examples of this.

Conclusion: the importance of considering respect as the fundamental feeling in social struggles

In navigating the landscape of recognition theories, Honneth treads an ambiguous path between Kant's moral philosophy, particularly the concept of respect, and Hegel's conceptualization of the struggle for recognition. Through this article, I aimed to underscore the pervasive influence of Kant's ideas on recognition theories, extending beyond the contexts explored here, and to advocate for further examination of Kant's contributions.

Honneth's emphasis on historicity and his preference for Hegelian theory can also find roots in Kant's concept of respect, which rests on a priori grounds but is discovered through historical social developments. Across various periods and forms of struggles for recognition, explicit or implicit references to respect persist, highlighting the enduring relevance of Kant's ideas. Therefore, the nuanced relationship between Honneth, Kant, and the concepts of recognition and respect warrants deeper exploration.

Kant posits morality as a fundamental characteristic of the human species, serving as the beacon of the moral law within individuals. He views morality as pivotal to the progress of history towards the improvement of human life, albeit gradual and imperfect. Examining the history of social struggles reveals the signs of this progress, particularly in movements led by marginalized groups such as people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals. These movements, driven by demands for equality and respect, have shaped and reshaped societies over centuries and decades, influencing thought and behavior to construct a more equitable society.

From a Kantian perspective, social structures should be designed to cultivate and nurture morality in individuals, recognizing them as agents of respect and striving for what is "good for everyone." While critics may deem this perspective utopian, the absence of such aspirations breeds conflictual social structures, hindering the pursuit of a free and ethical life. Thus, without accounting for the fundamental moral structure and the feeling of respect, one risks misunderstanding social struggles and the concept of recognition altogether.

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