

Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea, by Axel Honneth. With commentaries by Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss, and Jonathan Lear, edited by Martin Jay. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xii + 168. H/b \$29.95.

Axel Honneth's latest book in English translation is a revised version of his Tanner Lectures given in Berkeley in 2005, together with the exchanges that followed with Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss, and Jonathan Lear. There is also an introduction by Martin Jay setting the topic in its historical context. In the area of social theory, the concept of reification was introduced by the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács in 1923 in his influential work, *History and Class Consciousness* (wrongly dated 1925 on p. 17). He uses it to describe the way in which in capitalist society human activities take the form of relations between things, particularly in the instrumental relations of the market. This is often regarded as a remarkable anticipation of Marx's concept of alienation which did not become known until Marx's early writings were first published in 1932. Honneth says that he is going to develop Lukács's notion of reification and use it to provide a basis for social critique. However, it quickly becomes clear that Lukács serves only as a jumping off point. Honneth's focus is mainly on the concept of 'recognition', which has always been the main topic of his work. He drops all reference to Marx and capitalism, and turns instead for inspiration to Heidegger, Dewey, Cavell and the child psychoanalyst Winnicott.

Honneth starts from the Hegelian thought that the self is constituted and develops only by being recognized by another. Reification occurs when this is 'forgotten' or 'denied' and others are treated as mere things. Honneth then extends this to include the way we relate to objects and to ourselves. Our primary relation to things takes the form of 'concernful engagement' or 'care' (*Sorge*), as Heidegger puts it. We initially come across things as 'ready-to-hand' in the world around us. However, this is 'forgotten' when things are treated as purely external objects over against the self as an observing subject. 'The things we encounter in our everyday dealings with the world must ... be regarded as entities to which we relate in an inappropriate way when we apprehend them merely neutrally and according to external criteria' (p. 61). This 'inappropriate' relation is reification which is neither an epistemological error nor a moral fault. As Honneth interestingly points out there are similar themes in the work of Heidegger, Dewey and Cavell, though none of them use the term 'reification'.

Reification also occurs in the self's relation to itself. Honneth draws on the work of Winnicott to argue that the self develops through having an exploratory and playful way of relating to its own faculties and desires. He criticizes two familiar accounts of self-relation in the philosophy of mind as examples of reification. The first he calls 'detectivism' (following Finkelstein). According to this, the self discovers its own mental states as though they are inner objects to which it has privileged access. At the opposite pole, a Nietzschean 'constructivism' portrays the self as the author of its own mental states. Both theories are

unsatisfactory philosophical accounts of the way the self relates to itself and can be criticized as such. However, Honneth also subjects them to 'ideology critique' in which 'we ... regard them not as deficient descriptions of the original mode in which we relate to our mental life, but as appropriate descriptions of deficient modes of self-relationship' (p. 72).

Again, the 'deficiency' involved is not a philosophical error, nor is it a moral fault for which individuals should be held responsible. Like Lukács, Honneth sees it as a form of social pathology, as a social condition with social causes. However, he criticizes Lukács's 'totalizing' Marxist analysis which traces it to the all pervasive and corrupting influence of the market. This grants undue importance to economic factors, according to Honneth, and fails to account for sexism, racism, and many other kinds of reification. In any case, commercial relations are not reifying, he argues, in that they involve treating those engaging in them as legal persons with rights, and not as mere things.

Lukács is less simplistic than this suggests. Moreover, Honneth himself has little better to offer. The examples he cites in the lectures are bewilderingly disparate. They include the intense rivalries of sporting competition, in which friends can forget their friendship, the dissimulation required in job interviews, people trafficking, and racism (pp. 59, 79–81). None of these, he asserts, can be explained by capitalism. Rather, he maintains, either institutional pressures may lead people to 'forget' the recognition that is due to the other, and/or a reifying ideology such as racism plays a role (pp. 60, 79). As social critique this is disappointingly sketchy.

There are more serious problems, however. These are pointed out by the commentators, all of whom make a similar criticism, as Honneth himself observes (p. 147). Lear puts the case trenchantly. He argues that Honneth's notions of recognition and reification are ambiguous. On the one hand, Honneth presents recognition as a constitutive precondition for the existence of the self. It is an essential requirement for relations between self and others, and self and world; it is an ontological feature of the self. One of the most compelling aspects of Honneth's lectures is his presentation of this argument.

However, Honneth also wants the concept of recognition, and the associated notion of reification, to provide a basis for social criticism. The ontological notion of recognition, as Honneth presents it, cannot do this. If recognition is an essential precondition for the very existence of the self, then it cannot provide the basis for a critical concept, since no way of relating, no matter how extreme, will fail to qualify as a form of recognition. Even the most indifferent, hostile or brutal ways of being towards others and the world will constitute forms of recognition. So his critics argue. To generate a critical notion, Honneth must surreptitiously adopt an evaluative conception in which some forms of relationship are valued positively, and treated as recognition in this evaluative sense, and others as 'deficient'. Thus, Honneth is criticized for tacitly assuming that recognition is a positive phenomenon, involving sympathy, concern, and love. Anger and hatred, conversely, are treated as

forms of reification entailing a ‘forgetting’ of recognition. This whole picture is questionable, moreover, not just because it has a hidden evaluative element, but also as an account of the self. Love may not be all we need. Lear argues that an ability to relate negatively as well as positively—to hate as well as to love—is needed for the self to flourish. Similarly, Butler maintains that anger and aggression as well as love and sympathy, must be seen as forms of recognition through which the self can develop.

In his ‘Rejoinder’ Honneth claims that his critics have failed to understand him. To reify is not just to contravene an ethical norm. It is a denial of what he terms ‘elementary recognition’ (pp. 148 ff.). This is not an evaluative notion, it is an essential feature of all human relationships. It is a prior condition—a ‘kind of transcendental condition’ (p. 152)—for moral attitudes. These arise only in the context of specific social relations. Honneth concedes (p. 147) that he did not make this clear in the original lectures where the notion of ‘elementary’ recognition is mentioned only once, in a footnote (n. 70). He also concedes that some of the examples he uses in the lectures are misleading (p. 155). Reification is an exceptional and ‘improbable’ (p. 154) phenomenon, it occurs only at ‘the zero point of sociality’ (p. 157), such as in genocide, war, and the sex trade. His concern with the notion, he says, began from the attempt to understand the “‘industrial’ mass murder’ of the last century (p. 158).

Even with these clarifications, however, Honneth fails to deal satisfactorily with the objections of his critics. Reification, he says, is a condition in which ‘all attentiveness for fellow human qualities is lost’ and in which people are treated ‘as lifeless, thing-like objects that deserve to be murdered’ (p. 156). This well illustrates the problem. A lifeless thing cannot be murdered. Even the most minimal forms of sociality—even war and genocide—involve recognition in the ‘elementary’ sense. As his critics argue, for the purposes of social critique Honneth must appeal to an evaluative standard that the ontological notion of ‘elementary’ recognition cannot provide.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that it would be a mistake to dismiss the concept of reification altogether. Lukács and the Hegelian tradition offer more fruitful resources than Honneth suggests. For Honneth there is an ‘elementary’ form of recognition, an ontological core, on top of which contingent social forms develop. Alternatively, however, these aspects can be seen as inseparably united, with the self as constituted and developing in and through its relations. Recognition can then be regarded both as essential for the self, and also as present in different degrees in different kinds of relation. It is present only minimally in asymmetric relationships of the ‘master-slave’ type. However, it can also take the fuller and more developed form of equal and mutual recognition. Provided this is not separated off and treated as a merely contingent possibility for the self, it can serve as an inherent standard against which reified and ‘deficient’ forms may be criticized. For Hegel, friendship and love between individuals function in this way, and so too does the idea of a community of free and equal individuals. Similar ideas are involved in

Lukács's account of the overcoming of reification in a future society, and in Marx's concept of alienation and its overcoming. Arguably, Honneth is too quick to reject Lukács's approach. Perhaps these ideas offer a more promising basis for social criticism than the Heideggerian ontological idea of 'elementary' recognition that Honneth is pursuing. Despite these doubts, however, these lectures draw on an impressively wide and varied range of ideas. They are continually engaging, thought provoking, and—rare blessing—a pleasure to read. Without doubt they will stimulate lively discussion of these important issues.

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SEAN SAYERS

Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge, by Jennifer Lackey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xii+295. H/b £35.00.

Learning from Words is the first monograph on testimony since Coady's *Testimony* was published in 1992. It brings together, and adds to, the papers that Lackey has already published on this topic. By doing so it presents a sustained, and engaging, argument for a distinctive epistemological position.

Lackey argues for two principal claims. The first is that testimonial knowledge and justification are a collaborative product. She labels this view *dualism*, and it consists of combining the reductionist idea that the acceptance of testimony must be justified by other things an audience believes with the non-reductive claim that testimony is nevertheless irreducible as a source of knowledge and justification. How this combination should be understood then requires reference to Lackey's second principal claim, which is the rejection of what she terms the *belief view of testimony* and the endorsement of the *statement view of testimony* in its place. We should focus on testimony as a statement, and not as an expression of belief. She favours this statement view because we can supposedly imagine cases where reliability in belief and reliability of testimony come apart ('consistent liar' discussed further below), so we should not, as audiences and theorists, be interested in the sincerity and competence of a speaker as believer as such, but should focus on the competence of a speaker as a producer of reliable testimony. An immediate worry with her position, however, is how this focus on testimony as a statement is compatible with Lackey's desire to make the category of testimony broad enough to include non-verbal communication. In arguing, to my mind correctly, against