

## Chapter 1

# Misrecognition and Ambivalence

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### **Introduction**

There are circumstances in which good reasons to recognize do not lead to practical acts of recognition. At an individual level, although I may know that I should recognize you, I nevertheless fail to do so. For instance, in spite of my awareness that you have a strong claim on me to care for you, I do not provide you with that care. When you are ill in hospital, I may find excuses not to visit you. Or, at a collective level, one group accepts that another should enjoy a particular right which they do not currently possess, and yet it does not take the action necessary to secure the other that right. In an interesting and important range of cases, good reasons for recognition may be outweighed by other factors, so that one party does not give the other party the acknowledgment it deserves. These failures of recognition, we would suggest, can be understood as instances of misrecognition. Our aim in this chapter is to examine certain

reasons for such misrecognition. We are guided by the hope that, if the reasons for such failures of recognition are better understood, then it will be possible more effectively to identify the conditions necessary for success. In other words, such an understanding will make it easier to specify the circumstances in which having good reasons for recognition leads to recognition in practice.<sup>1</sup>

There are, of course, various types of reasons for such failures of recognition. One type of reason is simple ignorance. I may not offer to care for you since I do not know that you are in need of such care. Perhaps because you are ashamed to admit your dependency, you may not be able clearly to articulate your needs to me. But, if you did so, then I would offer you the appropriate care. Another type of reason for misrecognition is self-interest. One group may know that another deserves its recognition, but, since granting such recognition would disadvantage that group, it fails to do so. If the first group did not stand to lose something by recognizing the deserving other, then it would readily provide it with the appropriate acknowledgement. In this chapter, we put aside these first two sorts of reasons for misrecognition in order to focus on a third. This sort of reason is to be explained by reference to what may loosely be called ‘psychological’ factors. Here it is the psychic capacities of individuals and groups which inhibit their ability to give others the recognition that is their due. In order to

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<sup>1</sup> With this phrase, we put aside all-too-familiar cases in which two parties disagree about what constitutes good reasons for recognition. In these cases, one party thinks it has good reason to be recognized, but the other party disagrees. Such disagreement is, of course, a central aspect of political struggles for recognition. But we think that the cases in which we are interested, where agreement on reasons for recognition still fails to lead to practical acts of recognition, are both important and generally overlooked.

understand this sort of reason for misrecognition, we shall refer to the work of a number of psychoanalytical thinkers, including Freud, Klein, Winnicott and Bion. Drawing on their work, we place the notion of ambivalence at the heart of our account of the psychological reasons for misrecognition. Ambivalence, according to our interpretation, is to be understood as the constant conjunction of conflicting affects which a subject has toward its object. To take the prototypical case, against a sentimentalized idea of love, an appreciation of ambivalence would enable us to accept that the mother simultaneously loves and hates her child. Put in these terms, then, our central thesis is that the idea of affective ambivalence can provide the basis for an explanation of an important type of reason for misrecognition. If this is right, then it follows that an appreciation of the significance of such ambivalence will make it possible to spell out the circumstances in which psychological factors do not present obstacles to recognition.

It was noted in the introduction to this book that different accounts of recognition give different reasons for recognition. For Nancy Fraser, there is good reason to recognize people who are unable to participate on a par with their peers since they lack the necessary social standing. The practical task in this case is to overcome the inequalities of status, such as those which result from sexism and racism, in order to secure parity of participation (Fraser 2003). On Charles Taylor's account, people have good reason to be recognized if their capacity for rational autonomy or their capacity to create a distinctive identity cannot be exercised. Here what is needed is to guarantee all individuals' basic rights and to give each group a fair opportunity to defend its cultural identity (Taylor 1995). According to Axel Honneth, people ought to be recognized if

they need to be cared for by their significant others, or if their fundamental rights are denied, or if the value of their way of life is overlooked. Recognition, in this case, requires the sustenance of a web of relations of care, the maintenance of a system of individual rights, and the preservation of a horizon of value in which contributions to societal goals can be appropriately valued (Honneth 1995).

In this chapter, without denying that Fraser and Taylor – and many others – have valuable insights to offer, we shall take Honneth’s account of recognition as the springboard from which our argument will be launched. As we have just mentioned, Honneth identifies three forms of recognition: we love our significant others by responding appropriately to their concrete needs; we respect all others by obeying the laws which treat them as rationally autonomous agents; and we esteem particular others by endorsing a set of values which enable the contributions that they make to shared goals to be duly acknowledged. The first mode of recognition, which has a special place in Honneth’s account, is of greatest importance for our argument here. He contends that love is the first mode of recognition in the sense that it is ‘conceptually and genetically prior’ to respect and esteem (Ibid: 107). It is conceptually prior since it provides the basis for our understanding of the other two modes of recognition, and it is genetically prior since individuals must first be able to love if they are then to be able to respect and esteem others. As Honneth says, love is the ‘basic requisite’ for the other modes of recognition (Ibid: 176).<sup>2</sup> Since Honneth’s account of love as recognition draws on

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed account of Honneth’s conception of love as recognition, see Thompson (2006a: ch.2) and Yar (this volume).

object-relations psychoanalysis, it provides a very suitable basis for our own argument. Also drawing on psychoanalytical sources, we aim to show that his account needs to be supplemented by our idea of affective ambivalence. Although Honneth is aware that there is a struggle for recognition even in the intimate relations between significant others, we believe that he underestimates the role which affective ambivalence plays in all types of relations of recognition.

Given that our declared aim is to bring a psychoanalytical perspective to bear on the issue of misrecognition, it may seem odd for us to begin our argument with a discussion of Aristotle. We do so in Section 2 since his account of *akrasia*, which can be translated as incontinence, weakness of the will or lack of self-mastery, provides an interesting and important way of explaining why someone who knows what it is right to do may nevertheless fail to do it. Then, by pointing out the limitations of Aristotle's explanation of *akrasia*, we begin to make the case for a psychoanalytically inspired explanation, one which centres on the idea that the self may be permanently divided against itself. With this account in mind, in Sections 3, 4 and 5, we discuss each of Honneth's three modes of recognition in turn. In each case, we suggest how certain affective forces may derail recognition, and we also suggest how it may be possible for them not to do so. To put it in the briefest possible terms, we contend that for love to succeed hatred must be thwarted, for respect to be shown narcissism must be conquered, and for esteem to be expressed envy must be overcome. In Section 6, our conclusion is that for recognition to succeed, the ambivalence of affect must be taken into account. Our argument will be that by doing so, it will be possible to transform and utilize the energy of negative affects so that misrecognition can be overcome.

## The Problem of Akrasia

Aristotle, in Book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is the first philosopher to conduct a systematic investigation into the problem of akrasia. On his account, although the akratic individual knows what it is right to do, he nevertheless fails to do it. In his analysis of this phenomenon, Aristotle is in part responding to Socrates who famously denied the possibility of akrasia. In Plato's *Protagoras*, he states that no-one 'who either knows or believes that there is another possible course of action, better than the one he is following, will ever continue on his present course' (358b-c). Aristotle suggests that this view 'plainly contradicts the observed facts' (*Ethics*, VII, 2), and, since he wishes to stick as closely as he can to as many of these facts as possible, he is determined to investigate the phenomenon of akrasia more closely.<sup>3</sup>

In his analysis, Aristotle is strongly influenced by Plato's division of the psyche into three parts – namely, reason, emotion (or spirit) and appetite. Using this tripartite division, he suggests that akrasia occurs when reason is derailed either by emotion or appetite, and he makes particular reference to the emotion of anger and the desire for pleasure as factors which may cause a man to fail to do what he knows is right. On the

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<sup>3</sup> It may be noted that there is a very extensive literature discussing both Aristotle's account of akrasia specifically, and the weakness of the will more generally. For the purposes of our argument here, however, we do not need to delve into the many interesting issues raised in this literature.

emotions, he declares that ‘there is a sort of man ... whom passion masters so that he does not act according to the right rule’ (*Ethics*, VII, 8). So far as appetite is concerned, he states that ‘the incontinent man fails to abide by the rule because he delights too much in [bodily things]’ (*Ethics*, VII, 9). In addition, Aristotle makes a further distinction between the weak and the impetuous man. Although the weak man exercises his reason in order to determine what it is right to do, he nevertheless acts wrongly. The impetuous man, by contrast, fails to deliberate at all, and so acts wrongly since he is guided by his impulses rather than by considered reason. This man will probably experience regret if, after his hasty action, he deliberates about what he should have done. As Aristotle says, ‘the incontinent man is likely to repent’ (*Ethics*, VII, 8).

Given this analysis, Aristotle thinks that the nature of the problem is clear: akrasia is the result of a lack of virtue. Such a lack means that reason can be overwhelmed by appetite or emotion. In the virtuous man, by contrast, the three parts of the psyche are in the correct alignment. In particular, since reason is the master of both appetite and emotion, we can say that such a man is master of himself. Aristotle suggests that this man will possess *phronesis* – practical wisdom – and so cannot be akratic: ‘Nor can the same man have practical wisdom and be incontinent; for it has been shown that a man is at the same time practically wise, and good in respect of character. Further, a man has practical wisdom not by knowing only but by being able to act’ (*Ethics*, VII, 9). In other words, a practically wise man not only knows what it is right to do, but also has the qualities of character needed in order to be able to act on this knowledge.

Does Aristotle's analysis help us in our current inquiry? Can it explain why one party may fail to recognize another, despite knowing that it has good reason to do so? To begin with those instances in which reason is derailed by appetite, we may think of a range of cases in which the failure to give appropriate acknowledgement to another is rooted in self-interest. As we suggested above, one party may fail to recognize another since it is not to their advantage to do so. For instance, to recognize you might require me to accept your right to political representation; but it could follow that if you are granted that right, my own influence over the political process is diminished. Or, in order to recognize you, it may be necessary for me to endorse a set of values which ensure that your contribution to societal goals is appropriately valued; but, as a result, I could feel that my own contribution is less highly valued.<sup>4</sup> Or, finally, to recognize you it may be appropriate for me to be responsive to your expression of your needs; but, if I do so, I may be less able to attend to my own needs. It would appear that these cases fall into Aristotle's category of *akrasia* as a result of appetite. That is to say, I fail to recognize you although reason dictates that I should, since to do so would require me to deny myself something that I want. As we have said, however, for the purposes of our current argument we are going to put aside failures of recognition which are rooted in reasons of self-interest.

If we turn now to those instances in which reason is blown off course by emotion, we can think of a range of cases in which one party's failure to give the other

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<sup>4</sup> See Cillian McBride (2009) for an account of esteem as a positional good.



appropriate acknowledgement is caused by the action of certain affects. Indeed, it is precisely this range of cases which is of interest to us in this chapter. To take one of Aristotle's own examples, we think he is right to suggest that anger may prevent one party from acting justly to another. For instance, if I make the over-hasty judgement that you have insulted me, I may seek revenge. On reflection, however, I may come to realize that what appeared to be an unwarranted insult was in fact a painful but important truth about me which you sincerely thought I needed to hear. To take a more overtly political example, an angry mob might spray-paint 'paedo' on the front door of a house of a person it believes to be a paedophile, only to realize later on that she is in fact a paediatrician.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note, however, that Aristotle does not endorse a simple account of the relationship between reason and emotion in which reason, which can be entirely without affect, can and should master affect, which is utterly without reason. In particular, he emphasizes that affective states can have cognitive content. For example, he defines anger as the 'desire, accompanied by pain, for revenge for an obvious belittlement of oneself or one of one's dependants, the belittlement being uncalled for' (*Rhetoric*, II, 2: 1378a31–33). It follows anger can be the appropriate response to our having being unfairly insulted by another.<sup>6</sup> Our argument in this chapter, then, can be seen as an extension of this aspect of Aristotle's thesis.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For further details of this case, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4719364.stm>; last accessed 20/05/2010.

<sup>6</sup> For a further elaboration of Aristotle's account of anger, see Thompson (2006b: 129-33).

<sup>7</sup> In our previous work, we have sought to defend what we have called 'a passionate rationality' (Thompson and Hoggett 2002).

Having said this, however, we disagree with Aristotle's proviso that our experience of an emotion such as anger should never be so strong as to overwhelm our reason. He makes this proviso since he believes that only if reason ultimately remains the ruler of the emotions, can the self remain its own master. For us, in sharp contrast, such self-mastery is an impossibility since the self is never completely at home; it is always to some extent divided against itself. It is at this point, then, that we turn from Aristotle's account of a unified self, to Freud's account in which the self is always in conflict with itself. While Aristotle believes that a man can be his own master, Freud denies that the ego can ever be master in its own house (Freud 1923). Against Aristotle's suggestion that the three elements of the soul can be brought into harmony, Freud is adamant that the absence of inner harmony is central to the human condition. Thus, in Freud's scheme, the ego is constantly having to mediate between the demands of the id (which bears some comparison to Aristotle's 'appetite for pleasure' and raging anger) and the super-ego (which is absent from Aristotle's system, since, for him, it makes no sense to think that what is right and what is conventionally correct could come apart). This is illustrated in many of Freud's early cases. In Dora's case, for example, she finds herself caught between an awakening sexuality, aroused in part by an older seducer, and a conscience for which such thoughts and feelings were impermissible (Freud 1905). As it has evolved, psychoanalysis has taken Freud's view of the decentred nature of subjectivity still further. Nowadays psychoanalysts speak in terms of 'different parts of the self' engaged in complex relations with each other (Bollas 1987: 1-2). Indeed, these parts of the self can also be projected into others via projective identification, so that a part of the self becomes located in another person,

group or ideal as, for example, when we attribute competitiveness to our colleagues rather than acknowledge it in ourselves.

Building on this account of the divided self, it is important for our current thesis to emphasize that, for Freud, the psyche is founded on contradictory affects. As we put it earlier on, the self experiences a constant conjunction of conflicting affects toward its object. For the early Freud, the battle was between love and hate. For the later Freud, the conflict was between Eros, a unifying life force, and Thanatos, its opposite. After Freud, Klein argued that the principal line of conflict was between envy and gratitude. Psychoanalysis has itself struggled to overcome a dualistic theory of the psyche in which ambivalence is construed in terms of a 'non-dialectical opposition' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 28). Contemporary theory prefers to see this psychic tension less in terms of a binary opposition and more in terms of a tension which can be held or contained. In Kleinian theory this is what differentiates two fundamentally different 'states of mind'. In the pre-ambivalent state the tension is dealt with by splitting objects of love from objects of hate, whereas in the depressive position the connections between love and hate, the loved and the hated, negative and positive, can be more easily tolerated. In the rest of this chapter, then, our aim is to show how the inability to contain ambivalence can help to explain why certain failures of recognition may occur. To be specific, we shall demonstrate that the profound ambivalence that we have to others can prevent us giving them the love, respect and esteem that is their due. At the same time, however, we also want to show how, by facing up to such ambivalence, the power of negative affect can be harnessed in the service of recognition.

## Love and Hate

As we said in the introduction to this chapter, love has a special place in Honneth's account of recognition. Indeed it is in a sense the primary mode of recognition since, without it, respect and esteem are impossible. If individuals are loved and cared for by their significant others, then they are able to develop the basic self-confidence which forms the basis of their ability to respect and esteem other people. However, we believe that there is a over-simple developmental story in Honneth's account of love, according to which, under all usual circumstances, parents love their children, those children acquire self-confidence, and then when those children become adults they are able to respect and esteem their fellow citizens. Under normal conditions, it appears, being loved in childhood provides an emotional inoculation which ensures that adults will have the self-confidence they need to take appropriate recognitive attitudes to others.<sup>8</sup> It is revealing, we would suggest, that when Honneth considers the conditions that may undermine self-confidence, he focuses on threats to the physical integrity of the self, singling out torture and rape in particular (1992: 190; 1995: 132). What is missing from this account is a whole range of less serious but all too common circumstances, ranging from poor parenting to abusive adult relationships, which may undermine an individual's self-confidence. Building on this last point, we want to argue in this section

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Anthony Giddens who, in his version of Erik Erikson's notion of 'trust', contends that it is 'the main emotional support or *protective cocoon* which all normal individuals carry around with them as the means whereby they are able to get on with the affairs of day-to-day life' (1991: 40).

that Honneth does not take sufficient account of the continuing presence of love's opposite – that is to say, hatred – in the affective attitudes that individuals take to their significant others.

To make this point, we shall begin by drawing what is admittedly an exaggerated contrast between a romanticized conception of love, and the account we favour which emphasizes the centrality of affective ambivalence to this emotion. According to a romanticized conception of love, it is constant and unwavering emotional force. A good example of such a conception can be found in Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology, in which is located a notion of love as 'unconditional positive regard' (1961: 283-84). In taking this attitude to another, we accept and value another person no matter what they might say or do. In sharp contrast, according to psychoanalytical thinkers such as Klein, Winnicott and Benjamin, the love between mother and child constantly co-exists with a hatred which can never be eradicated. As each party in this relationship will always have good reasons to hate the other, such hatred can only be temporarily vanquished. However, we must emphasize that this is not a shortcoming in relationships of love. It is our contention that love is enriched by hatred that is worked through, by hurt that is forgiven, by ruthlessness that is endured. As we shall suggest in our conclusion, a hate which is temporarily overcome deepens and enriches the quality of the care that can be provided. To put this in the terms of our current argument, the overcoming of hatred enriches the recognition that is given to the other.

Let us consider the situation in a little more detail. D. W. Winnicott, in his well-known paper 'Hatred in the counter transference' (1949), suggests that the mother has many reasons to hate her baby. She endures broken nights' sleep, lacks time for herself, and so on. And yet, despite these reasons, the mother continues to love her baby. Developing this idea, Jessica Benjamin (2004) suggests that the relationship between mother and child goes through phases of breakdown and repair. Breakdown occurs when the mother's patience runs out and she becomes irritated with the child, and repair happens when they manage to re-establish their loving relationship based on their concern for each other. Indeed, ambivalence is part of the experience for both mother and child. From the child's perspective, we could say that he has a devouring affection for his mother. This draws attention to the destructiveness that inheres in appetite, particularly evident in the modern act of consumption. In our terms, this pattern of contrasting phases is the working through of ambivalence. Such a process enables a shift from ruthlessness and ambivalence to ambivalence and concern. According to Winnicott, such a shift may be accomplished if (1) the mother is able to survive the infant's attacks without retaliation or withdrawal, and (2) the infant has a growing confidence in the existence of opportunities for 'contributing-in', that is, for giving, for making reparation. Generosity depends not just on the capacity to give but also on the capacity to receive.

In this case, we need to try to identify the necessary conditions for a mature love, one which does not depend upon the suppression of aggression. When does it triumph? When does it overcome hatred? And also when does such a love fail? Why does it do so? Following her mentor, Carl Abraham, Melanie Klein argued that the

capacity to be aware of and tolerant of ambivalence is an achievement, one which alters the quality of both the love and the hate that we feel (Klein 1952). In the 'pre-ambivalent' state of mind, when hatred is aroused so also is persecutory anxiety. The mother, driven to distraction by her child, begins to feel as if the child is persecuting her. She takes it personally, as a calculated, spiteful attack: 'Why is my child doing this to me? What have I done to deserve this? It's not fair'. If such anxiety is too strong, she may withdraw or be driven to retaliate, seeing her own violence as a defensive reaction to the offensive unleashed by her infant persecutor. However, a young baby cannot in reality 'have it in' for his mother; indeed at this age he barely has the ability to conceive of an 'other' at all. In such situations, then, the mother feels persecuted by her own hateful self that she has projected into her infant. Here Klein would say that the less the capacity of the mother to accept and tolerate the loving and hateful parts of herself, the more she will be driven to project the latter into the other when the grounds for hatefulness are accumulating (when, for example, the child is expressing its needs at three o'clock in the morning).

Following Klein, our thesis is that such an imagined persecution – provoked by the other in their state of neediness – is immanent in all relations of interdependency. For Honneth, as we have seen, love is responsiveness to the needs of the other. To be interdependent implies that the other's needs must at times take precedence over one's own. Winnicott's vignette is therefore the primary empirical prototype for all interdependent relationships, between individuals and groups, and therefore between imagined communities, including nations. For interdependency to be successfully sustained, the needs, demands and complaints of each party must be respected and

responded to – that is, they must be given recognition – by the other, rather than be seen as an intrusion, an expression of malign intent, or an attack on one’s self, one’s freedom, one’s own rights, etc. We believe, although we do not have space to argue it here, that such interdependency underlies a range of political phenomena, ranging from the solidarity manifest in systems of collective welfare to acts of collective recognition in international relations (Wendt 2003). In all of these cases, in order to enter relations of interdependency, each party requires the capacity to contain its own destructiveness without exporting it into the other individual or group.

### **Respect and Narcissism**

Having argued – and hopefully demonstrated – that it is necessary to take account of the ambivalent character of love, we now turn to consider Honneth’s second mode of recognition. For him, respect is an attitude in which one acknowledges the rational autonomy of other persons. If I respect you, I treat you as a person capable of exercising your reason in order to determine how to live your life. As Honneth puts it, I regard you as ‘capable of acting autonomously on the basis of rational insight’ (1995: 114). In modern political systems, respect for others is typically demonstrated by compliance with the law: ‘In obeying the law, legal subjects recognize each other as persons capable of autonomously making reasonable decisions about moral norms’ (1995: 109). In this section, our argument will be that the idea of affective ambivalence may also be applied to respect. In this case, we shall contend, narcissism is the affective



state that is the constant companion of respect, and it follows that respect is achieved when narcissism is contained.

Now, the state may regard certain groups – such as the criminally insane – as lacking such autonomy, and it may thereby withhold basic rights, such as the right to vote, from them. Hence, as Honneth observes, one part of the recent history of social conflict involves the struggle of groups, such as women or indigenous peoples, to be recognised as rationally autonomous subjects, rather than be treated as immature inferiors who need to be looked after by their mature superiors. However, such struggles for recognition are only partly a matter of obtaining formal rights. In practice, there is often a gap between the formal and the substantive rights of particular groups. The reality is that in many liberal democracies the concept of the rationally autonomous subject has been used in a normative way to construct a ‘deficit’ model in which the welfare subject is ‘constituted in a child like way as someone lacking the capacity to make reasonable judgements about themselves and the others that they have responsibility for’ (Hoggett 2008: 66). In education, health and social care, the professional or public official is constructed as the ‘one who knows’, in contrast to the welfare subject who becomes ‘the one who is known’. Anna Yeatman (2007) sees this as a form of patrimonial authority which is concerned with the exercise of patrimonial will over ‘dependents’.

When such patrimonial authority is challenged, it can often assume quite prejudicial and vindictive forms. Consider the example of a social worker dealing with a

difficult client. The social worker may feel strong ambivalence about her. On the one hand, he wants to treat her with respect. On the other hand, if the client has a history of drug abuse, anti-social behaviour or problematic ways of caring for her own children, the social worker may find it hard to resist feeling that, as a member of the undeserving poor, this client does not merit such respect. Indeed, the client may be difficult to work with and abusive towards anyone – whether family or officials – who seek to offer help. Thus the public official may have many reasons to feel irritated, frightened, or contemptuous towards the client and, like the mother in Winnicott's analysis, may often take the client's abuse of him personally. In such circumstances, the public official may withhold recognition and adopt a patronising attitude towards the client which assumes she is incapable of rational autonomy. This is an unforgiving stance.

In contrast, if the official can contain his own negative feelings, then he is more likely to be able to take a more generous stance and to sustain respect for his client.<sup>9</sup> In Hannah Arendt's terms, this attitude is more forgiving: the official is able to see that the badness of the other may not be inherent to her, and that she may be 'more than whatever she has done or achieved' (Arendt 1968: 248). Such a stance recognizes the alterity of the other and seeks to establish forms of relatedness which respect this difference. In this case, we approach the other as if they were capable of rational

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that in contemporary psychoanalysis, 'containment' is a technical term. Originating with Wilfred Bion (1972), it describes the capacity to hold on to powerful feelings without suppressing them or getting rid of them by projection or enactment. To contain conflictual feelings, one must be able to hold the tension and use this psychic energy for thought, for 'thinking under fire' as it is often described. We shall say more about this idea in our conclusion.

autonomy even if at that moment their behaviour does not seem to warrant this assumption. In other words, we recognize that the other may often act in a self-destructive way, in a way which is against their self interest and the interest of others, because of their frailty, powerlessness, or vulnerability, and yet we insist that they are capable of acting differently and hence we avoid treating them in a patronising or humiliating way. However, to return to the example of the social worker, this does not rule out the possibility that the official may have to act against his client's interests (by, for example, taking her children into care). To return to Winnicott once more, the resort to firmness, the insistence on respect for boundaries, and so on, are not incompatible with respect. While this example of the relationship between the social worker and his difficult client may seem extreme, our suggestion is that the tendency to regard poorer people, the frail and vulnerable, and children and young people as somehow 'autonomy deficient' continues to characterise the way in which welfare policies are designed and delivered in liberal democracies.

If Honneth's first mode of recognition finds its prototype in maternal love, then perhaps the second mode, embodied in the relation between the state and the citizen as the subject of law, finds its prototype in paternal love. Psychoanalysis considers paternal love in the context of the Oedipal drama and the struggle between the generations. It focuses specifically on the ability of the father to offer a model of good enough authority, one based neither upon paternal absolutism nor abnegation and impotence. Paternal absolutism, captured brilliantly by Michael Hanecke in his film *The White Ribbon* (2009), either crushes the next generation or offers the consolation of identification with the aggressor. In this case, then, adulthood can be entered only so

long as the child takes the authority into himself, becoming a narcissistic extension of the father and thereby adopting his stance towards the next generation in turn. In contrast, the ‘good enough authority’ recognizes the other as a person capable of exercising agency.<sup>10</sup> This is equivalent to the recognition that when the other acts differently to me, they may not be acting irrationally, but simply acting in a way which is different to how I imagine I would act in such circumstances. There is good reason to believe that in asymmetrical group relations, such as in the relation between the liberal state and its citizens, authority must constantly challenge its own assumptions regarding the other if it is not to treat the other narcissistically as a screen for its own projections, so that it is seen as undeserving, ‘feral’, feckless, etc. Our conclusion, in a phrase, is that respect can only be expressed when narcissism is contained. That is to say, Honneth’s second mode of recognition – the acknowledgement of the rational autonomy of the other – can only be achieved and sustained if the other’s alterity and capacity for agency is the foundation upon which the state’s relations with its citizens is built.

### **Esteem and Envy**

What finally of Honneth’s third mode of recognition? Here his suggestion is that every society has a set of ‘ethical goals and values’ that constitute its ‘cultural self-understanding’ (1995: 122), and that esteem is a function of one’s contribution to those goals and values. As he puts it, ‘one is given the chance to experience oneself to be

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<sup>10</sup> For an exploration of this idea of ‘good authority’, see Hoggett, Mayo and Miller (2008: ch. 7).

recognized, in light of one's own accomplishments and abilities, as valuable to society' (1995: 130). In other words, individuals who identify themselves with a particular group may enjoy esteem if the contribution which that group makes to shared societal goals is appropriately acknowledged. In this section, we want to argue that the idea of affective ambivalence may also be used the better to understand the necessary conditions of esteem. To be specific, we shall claim that Honneth overlooks the significance of envy as the affect in tension with esteem. Our thesis, therefore, will be that esteem can only be achieved if and when the opposing affect of envy is contained.

Let us begin with a small vignette. In a study of racism and populism in East London which Hoggett conducted in the early 1990s, he examined the relations between the traditional white working class of Tower Hamlets and the emergent Bangladeshi community in the area (Hoggett 1992). Racial attacks on the Bangladeshi minority had increased in intensity, and the National Front had just won a local ward election – marking the first time that an openly fascist organization had claimed such a victory in the UK since the 1930s. As Hoggett noted, '[t]he resentment the whites felt toward the Bangladeshi community was made poignant by the fact that the latter community had many characteristics – extended and intensive kinship networks, respect for tradition and male superiority, a capacity for entrepreneurialism and social advancement – that the white working class in the area had lost' (Hoggett 1992: 354). Our suggestion is that, in this case, the local whites' harassment of the members of Bengali community should be understood as envious attacks on those who represented their lost powers – or, in Slavoj Žižek's words (1993) – those who had stolen their enjoyment. While those whites who harassed Bengalis may have thought that they did so because they felt that

their way of life was threatened by ‘incomers’, it was clear that they were also motivated by a desire to attack what they had lost but still valued.

In order to understand the group dynamics at work here, it will be useful to return once more to psychoanalytical theory. In this field, the most important account of the role of envy in psychic life is that of Klein. She takes her definition from Crabb’s *English Synonyms*: ‘envy is pained at seeing another have that which it wants for itself ... The envious man sickens at the sight of enjoyment. He is easy only in the misery of others’ (Klein 1957: 182). For Klein, envy lies at the root of human destructiveness. It is an attack on all that is good and life giving. Citing Othello, she describes it as ‘the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on’ (1957: 182). In an analysis strikingly similar to Klein’s, Max Scheler argues that the powerless person feels envy toward the good that the other possesses but he or she has been denied. According to Scheler, to relieve such tension, the envious person engages in ‘an illusory devaluation of the other man’s qualities or ... a specific blindness to these qualities’ (1992: 126). As Simon Clarke (2006) notes, the envious person seeks to damage or spoil the very thing that she desires. In this way, Scheler argues, values become inverted, and the objects of desire become devalued. Thus, in London’s East End it is the very values of family, community and enterprise now embodied by the Bangladeshi which become denigrated.

With this psychoanalytical account of envy in mind, let us return to Honneth’s conception of esteem. For him, for one party to esteem another involves positively

appreciating their contributions to shared social goals. We would suggest that there are circumstances when esteem would be the appropriate response to another's call for recognition, but instead envy leads to a desire to devalue and perhaps even to destroy the other. How can such envy be overcome so that esteem can be secured? Again psychoanalysis can provide us with insights here. Following Freud, we want to argue that the overcoming of envy may provide one of the foundations for group solidarity. We can consider the familial prototype of relations between groups in society in terms of sibling dynamics (with the state unconsciously performing the role of the maternal and paternal authorities). As Freud puts it, 'if one cannot be the favourite oneself, at all events nobody else shall be favourite' (Freud 1921: 117). The siblings resolve the problem of their rivalry by the formation of a contract, a contract in which each of them is guaranteed equal valuation and worth. According to Freud, 'what appears later on in society in the shape of *Gemeingeist*, *esprit de corps*, "group spirit", etc. does not belie its derivation from what was originally envy' (Freud 1921: 117). In multicultural societies, the feeling of one group that another group is being favoured by, for example, being granted special privileges by the state, is a recurring manifestation of such sibling-type dynamics. Hence solidarity between erstwhile rivals requires envy to be contained and overcome. What Freud calls the 'social feeling' is therefore based on the reversal of hostile feelings and their replacement by an identification. As he puts it, 'social justice means that we deny ourselves many things so that others may have to do without them as well' (Freud 1921: 118). In other words, the social contract is based upon the containment of envy and its transformation into an identification with one's fellow sibling citizens.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that demands for recognition – whether in the form of love, respect or esteem – may be undermined by ambivalent affects. Love may be undermined by hatred, respect by narcissism, and esteem by envy. In this case, it is important to understand that just as love needs hatred to be overcome, so respect needs narcissism to be overcome, and esteem needs envy to be overcome. However, it must be appreciated that overcoming a negative affect is not the same as suppressing or mastering it. It is not impossible permanently to defeat such an affect. Indeed, in ending our chapter, we want to emphasize that there are important reasons why we should not try to do so. To explain this point, we need to say a little more about the psychoanalytical concept of ‘containment’. To focus on what we have called the prototypical case, if the mother can contain her hatred, then she can use this negative affect in a creative way. She can get a grip on herself and her own reactions, particularly that baby part of herself which feels got at and persecuted by her infant. She can use the energy in her aggression to re-find her strength and her capacity to endure, to tough it out, to survive her infant’s attacks upon her. She can use the same energy to help find clarity of mind and to act firmly and decisively, but without maliciousness. In short, by containing her negativity, she is able to combine it with her love, creating a psychoanalytic version of ‘tough love’. Similarly, to take the case of esteem and envy, we are not arguing that a relationship of esteem can only be established and maintained if feelings of envy are permanently mastered or even eliminated. On the contrary, our thesis is that such a relationship is energized by an envy which is contained and transformed. In the case of all three modes of recognition, then, it is vitally important



that the ambivalence of affect is appreciated. Only by doing so, we believe, can the energy of negative affects be transformed and utilized so that misrecognition can be overcome.

Extending this idea a little further, our final thought is this. We have suggested that it is necessary to acknowledge that recognition cannot always be sustained. It is inevitable that breakdowns in relationships of recognition will occur, and that such relationships will then need to be repaired. In this context, Winnicott talks about the necessity of disillusionment: it is important that the infant slowly comes to realise that mum isn't perfect, since only by doing so can he change, and so their relationship evolve. Here we can see that repair does not return a recognitive relationship to the *status quo ante*; after repair, the relationship is not was it was before its breakdown. Rather, successive stages of breakdown and repair are necessary if such a relationship is to develop. In this sense, we might say not just that negative affects must be transformed if misrecognition is to be overcome, but more strongly that misrecognition, since it fuels the development of relationships of recognition, has positive potential in its own right.

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