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MORAL RECOGNIZERS AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE: EXPANDING AXEL HONNETH'S THEORY OF RECOGNITION¹

abstract

The paper draws on Axel Honneth's recognition theory to explore the notion of experiences of social injustice. It proposes revisions to this model, aiming to expand the recognition frame and its concept of social injustice experiences. While Honneth's theory traces the origin of experiences of social injustice to socially engendered disrespect, the paper finds that it stops short of exploring the role of conferring due recognition for moral self-development and its relevance for social justice. The term self-confirmed moral recognizer is proposed to denote the positive self-relation enhanced by conferring due moral consideration. Co-determination is identified as a basic social precondition of it. The paper argues that absence of co-determination creates barriers to the (moral) self-development of recognizers, leading to specific experiences of social injustice, particularly within the realm of work.

keywords

Axel Honneth, moral recognizer, social injustice, work

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1. Introduction

Axel Honneth's recognition theory clarifies the phenomenon of social injustice, highlighting the role of socially engendered misrecognition in generating experiences of injustice. Drawing on Honneth's theory, this paper aims to present new perspectives on how the recognition framework can identify instances of social injustice in contemporary societies. Section two establishes the foundation by outlining the key premises of the recognition framework. Three elements of Honneth's theory play a pivotal role: the emphasis on recognition in identity development, a view of society as an order of recognition that reveals the social conditions for self-development, and a concept of social justice tied to promises of recognition derived from underlying recognition principles in social spheres. Together, these concepts suggest that social injustice arises when societies consistently fail to fulfill their promises of recognition, creating barriers to self-development.

Section three proposes revisions to Honneth's recognition model, addressing all three mentioned elements. In 3.1., I argue for the enhancement of Honneth's recognition-based self-development model. While the standard model focuses on received recognition, I argue that conferring due recognition is an equally fundamental condition. This neglected self-relation is aptly named *self-confirmation as a moral recognizer* because it is enhanced by conferring due recognition on others for their morally valuable attributes. In section 3.2, I identify some of its fundamental social preconditions. I propose that social orders can hinder self-development not only by denying basic forms of recognition, as in Honneth's standard model, but also by impeding individuals from conferring due recognition on others. In section 3.3, I suggest that social barriers to self-confirmation as moral recognizers may constitute a form of social injustice, at least in contemporary societies. Due to space constraints, I provide reasons only for the more modest thesis that a recognition-based account of the world of work must presuppose that self-confirmation as moral recognizers is a foundational premise, leaving the question open for other social spheres.

2. Axel Honneth on recognition and social injustice

Axel Honneth contends that "what subjects expect of society is above all recognition of their identity claims" (2003, p. 131). Experiences of social injustice can arise when the social order fails to provide the necessary conditions for meeting these expectations. Honneth's recognition theory supports this thesis through three key aspects: the recognition-based model of identity development, the concept of societies as orders of recognition, and the intimate link between basic expectations of recognition and the promises of recognition that uphold social orders.

Concerning the first aspect, Honneth (1996) emphasizes the crucial role of recognition in the development of personhood. Conceptually, he draws from Hegel's theory of subjectivity formation in his Jena writings to formulate an intersubjective approach to self-development. The main idea is that practical self-identities do not form in isolation but rely on intersubjective relations. Specifically, self-worth hinges on a particular class of intersubjective relations—recognition. They involve practical acts that confirm a person's value beyond mere cognitive acknowledgment of their attributes (Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007). Being recognized confirms individuals in various dimensions of their personhood, enabling them to develop a sense of self-worth in validated aspects such as needs, the capacity for autonomous judgment, or specific abilities (Honneth, 1996). As individuals depend on recognition for a robust sense of self, they are also inherently vulnerable to moral injury in the form of disrespect. Honneth (1992) uses *disrespect* to describe acts and practices that negate a person's worth, undermining positive self-identification and causing psychological harm.

Not all instances of withheld recognition necessarily harm individuals at their core. For instance, feeling offended when a neighbor neglects to greet us may lead to the perception that due recognition is lacking. However, it would be unreasonable to argue that even such commonplace forms of disrespect deeply affect our moral fiber. Furthermore, suggesting that such experiences constitute social injustice risks trivializing the concept of injustice. Therefore, the recognition theory needs to clarify the notion of *fundamental expectations for recognition* to establish a connection between recognition and experiences of social injustice.

Honneth has tested two main strategies to solve this problem. Honneth (1996) emphasizes the deeply-rooted, anthropological character of recognition suggesting that there are fundamental expectations for recognition applicable to all individuals, irrespective of their socio-cultural background. The implication is that social orders engender experiences of social injustice when they render the violation of anthropologically rooted expectations morally unproblematic. For example, self-confidence in one's body is a fundamental requirement for practical self-development, indicating the essential expectation of care and love. Honneth (1996) states that this expectation is not culturally contingent but a constant anthropological factor. Correlatively, acts of rape, involving a complete disregard for the personhood of the victim, result in not only physical but also profound psychological harm, regardless of the social context in which they occur and the socialisation process to which the individuals have been subjected. Fraser (2003) and McNay (2008), among others, criticize Honneth's anthropological stance for not adequately addressing the social-historical embeddedness of human subjects and their moral expectations.

Honneth refined his argument toward a more socially and historically nuanced perspective. Honneth (2003) posits that while the need for recognition is a basic human requirement and a precondition for positive self-identification, its content is "always shaped by the particular manner in which the mutual granting of recognition is institutionalized within a society" (p. 136). According to this perspective, various social spheres can be distinguished based on the underlying recognition principles. These principles, in turn, shape the social-moral grammar that dictates how one can secure social confirmation (Honneth 2003; 2004). The differentiation of social spheres into spheres of recognition correlates, in turn, with the differentiation of specific possibilities of social recognition and self-valuation (Honneth, 2003, pp. 136-7). For instance, the sphere of personal relationships embodies, in virtue of the love relationships constituting it, the promise of developing self-confidence regarding one's needs and desires. Therefore, Honneth now holds that basic forms of recognition refer to those that are essential for individuals to positively identify with valuable dimensions of their existence across all aspects of personhood, discernible within a recognition order (2004, p. 136).

With the foundational principles of the recognition framework in mind, the link between social justice and recognition becomes visible. As Honneth (2004) emphatically claims, the reference point of social justice should be “the quality of social recognition relations” (p. 356). Participants to recognition-based social spheres are in their right to expect that dimensions of their personhood – valuable in light of the recognition principles underpinning social spheres – receive confirmation. When societies fail to uphold the promises for recognition they embody in regard to all participants possessing valuable attributes, they violate legitimate expectations. This happens when institutionalized interpretations of recognition principles are unilateral inherently devaluing the social standing of certain groups in favor of others. The resulting experiences of disrespect go beyond mere injury; they become experiences of social injustice.

Three elements of Honneth’s theory of recognition converge to support the idea that experiences of social injustice stem from damaged social recognition relations. Firstly, recognition transcends mere fulfillment of needs or desires; it serves as a prerequisite for developing a robust sense of self. As Honneth (2007b) argues, without a basic sense of self-worth, an individual lacks the essential conditions for leading an autonomous life. For instance, without the confidence that one’s needs and desires matter, enabling them to serve as grounds for action without shame, or the confidence that one’s judgments and choices are worthy of pursuit, the autonomy necessary for shaping one’s life freely is severely restricted (Honneth, 2007b). Secondly, the concept of social orders of recognition suggests that recognition relations can be socially embedded in various configurations, determining how and on what grounds individuals can secure the social preconditions for self-development or be denied access to them. Lastly, the idea of socially embedded promises for recognition underpinning a social order, along with the various social spheres it encompasses, forms the basis for understanding social injustice as a systematic failure of a society to uphold its promises for recognition.¹ These elements provide a foundation for further development, as explored in the following.

3. The recognition frame expanded

3.1. *Self-confirmed moral recognizers*

The discussion of Honneth’s theory has primarily focused on the experience of receiving recognition, which serves as the standpoint from which social injustice is conceptualized within the recognition frame. However, it is essential to note that recognition acts can also be considered from the perspective of the person conferring recognition. In this context, the act represents a positive valuation of another person. While Honneth (2001; 2002; 2007a) addresses this aspect when discussing the relation between recognition and morality, he does not fully explore the implications of conferring recognition on self-development, as shown in the following.

Conferring recognition plays a central role in safeguarding the personal integrity of others, facilitating their process of self-constitution. Acting in a recognitive manner becomes a moral act when it constitutes an appropriate response, and grounded in good reasons (Honneth 2002; 2007a). The immediate reason for due recognition is the valuable attributes of the person that the act aims at (Honneth, 2002, p. 513). However, a more detailed explanation must consider that the primary phenomena are relations of mutual recognition in which specific attributes of participants are highlighted as relevant and valuable based on reasons internal to the relationship itself. Honneth, following Hegel, distinguishes three fundamental practical self-

¹ This simplified presentation omits Honneth (2002) thesis on the revisability of recognition norms and moral progress, which, while important, is peripheral to this paper’s main argument and excluded due to space constraints.

relations that individuals can develop in the context of modern societies, each corresponding to three relations of mutual recognition: self-confidence regarding the worthiness of one's needs and desires, self-respect regarding the value of one's capacity to act based on reasons, and self-esteem regarding the worthiness of one's particular abilities and talents. The three corresponding relations of mutual recognition are love, mutual respect, and solidarity, respectively. Each of these relations emphasizes certain attributes of the participants as relevant and valuable. For example, in love relationships the needs and desires of participants take center stage, and the appropriate attitude is one of caring for the lovely nature of one's significant other. Overall, despite their differences, the moral dimension of recognitive acts is twofold. They serve as appropriate responses to the valuable attributes of others that become relevant within the relations of mutual recognition and mediate the addressee's positive practical identity development. Additionally, we can refer to "duties" in such instances as "an internally felt demand" arising from the recognition relation in question (Honneth, 2007a, p. 140).

Honneth clarifies the link between recognition and morality, but his explanation falls short of exploring the subjectivity of the agent conferring recognition. He does not delve into the role that conferring due recognition might play in self-development processes. Consequently, a second path toward self-recognition remains unexplored, along with an additional way, besides experiencing disrespect, in which failures in recognition dynamics can contribute to self-deprecation.

The second path becomes evident when we realize that fulfilling one's moral intentions, not just being recognized for one's valuable attributes, serves as a distinct source of self-recognition. The caring friend offering friendly consideration to assure the other party of their lovely nature secures self-recognition as a good friend. This form of self-recognition is not reducible to the one mediated by the love one enjoys from the significant others, which reassures them of their lovely nature. True, as with enjoying recognition for one's valuable attributes, self-recognition grounded in conferring due recognition depends on mutuality. It is not achieved through one-sided recognition based solely on personal considerations. Without mutuality between participants, the role of recognitive acts in fostering positive self-identification can be distorted. For instance, intimacy is appropriate in friendship, but outside such a relationship, similar intimate behaviors can be inappropriate, and felt as aggression. One-sided recognition might fail to help others develop self-worth and does not justify positive self-recognition. Granted this caveat, the main point remains that conferring due recognition under conditions of mutuality opens the possibility of a second type of recognition. Enjoying the love of friends is necessary for a thriving friendship, but so is being a good friend; they are not identical. More generally, the positive self-relationship that arises from conferring morally due recognition to others, irreducible to self-confirmation based on validation from others, can be termed, for lack of a better phrase, *self-confirmation as a moral recognizer*.

This species of self-confirmation is further illuminated when considering the self-deprecation opposite to it. Because persons can (re)affirm their moral character by conferring due recognition, failure to respond appropriately can adversely affect their self-worth. We might experience guilt, remorse, and, usually associated with them, shame when treating someone poorly is attended by the consciousness of having committed a moral injury. Harming friends may lead us to view ourselves as bad friends, unworthy of their friendship. Continuing to enjoy their friendship without acts of redemption becomes a source of suffering, as their friendly gestures cannot touch us in the same reassuring way as they used to, becoming reminders of our unworthy acts. We might even feel unworthy of their friendship, lowering our sense of self-worth. This form of self-deprecation is distinct from the

sense of humiliation emphasized by the standard model of recognition, both in the feelings that accompany it, such as guilt or remorse, and in its origin in one's own immoral acts, rather than the disrespectful acts of others.

The disclosure of a second path to self-recognition enhances the recognition framework in two ways. First, the notion of recognition-based self-development is enriched by acknowledging self-confirmation as a moral recognizer as a distinct and essential condition of self-development. Ikäheimo (2007) suggests that recognitive attitudes like respect and love towards others contribute to personhood development of the recognizer (p. 239). The proposed account aligns with Ikäheimo by acknowledging that conferring due respect to others is a distinct source of self-respect and that freely conferring love is a distinct condition of positive self-confirmation as a recognizer. It also suggests that conferring due esteem should be considered an additional source. Beyond this, a developed version of the proposed account would suggest that the capacity to confer due recognition involves not only responding to others' valuable attributes but also identifying the appropriate type of recognition in context. For instance, treating a friend in emotional distress with the distance of respect for fully autonomous persons might evade our responsibility to show love and care. In such cases, self-confirmation as a moral recognizer might involve showing care and love rather than respect divorced from affection.

Second, the proposed account highlights the overlooked connection between recognition and phenomena like moral self-reproach and concern for others within the recognition frame.² In mutual recognition, one benefits not only from receiving recognition but also from affirming oneself as a moral recognizer. Failing to provide due recognition can result in moral self-deprecation.

3.2. *Essential social conditions of self-confirmation as moral recognizers*

The thesis defended further on addresses contemporary societies, arguing that social injustice experiences linked to damaged social recognition relations can occur not only when social arrangements normalize disrespect but also when they hinder recognizing others. To support this, we must demonstrate that the connection between recognition and social injustice, outlined by recognition theory, applies to the second path of self-development. Firstly, self-confirmation as a moral recognizer must depend on specific social conditions. Secondly, its realization must be a foundational aspect of the normative order in contemporary societies. Conversely, social barriers to its realization could generate specific experiences of social injustice. This section addresses the first task, while the next section tackles the second.

I show that self-confirmation as a moral recognizer depends on social preconditions and specify them, by examining an illuminating protest.

In 2018 Microsoft Workers 4 Good, a coalition of Microsoft employees, protested the company's decision to produce "warfare technology" and expressed their grievances in an open letter. The following paragraphs of their letter give us an idea of what is at stake:

In November, Microsoft was awarded the \$479 million Integrated Visual Augmented System (IVAS) contract with the United States Department of the Army. [...] The

² The theme of moral self-deprecation is often overlooked in recognition literature, with exceptions like Cavallo (2021). He distinguishes social shame, which arises from not meeting societal standards, from moral shame, which stems from failing personal standards derived from ego ideals. Cavallo's approach, focusing on ideals the ego endorses as theirs, is problematic as it doesn't ensure their moral quality. Consequently, it's unclear why failing to uphold these ego ideals results in moral shame. In contrast, the proposed account identifies specific ego ideals—conferring *due* recognition—violation of which leads to moral self-deprecation.

application of HoloLens within the IVAS system is designed to help people kill. It will be deployed on the battlefield, and works by turning warfare into a simulated 'video game', further distancing soldiers from the grim stakes of war and the reality of bloodshed. [...] There are many engineers who contributed to HoloLens before this contract even existed, believing it would be used to help architects and engineers build buildings and cars [...] These engineers have now lost the ability to make decisions about what they work on, instead finding themselves implicated as war profiteers (2019).

The revisions to the recognition frame discussed so far, which distinguish two paths to self-recognition, help clarify the motivation behind the protest. Positive self-identification relies on more than just receiving recognition; it also involves appropriately acknowledging others. The workers feel morally obliged toward those impacted by their work, as suggested in their letter. Assuming that self-confirmation as a moral recognizer is crucial for developing a positive self-identity, it becomes understandable why awareness of the potential harmful impact of their work negatively affects their self-perception. While the workers acknowledge potential personal benefits, such as remuneration, they find it morally unacceptable. They recoil at the prospect of becoming "war profiteers." Yet, their protest extends beyond self-reproach. When workers confess that they did not know what the real finality of their work was, when they denounce those they believe misled them, they target a party that is neither themselves nor those impacted by their work. Their protest targets those within the company that have the authority to decide what is to be produced, thus determining the impact of the workers' labor on the others. They believe that the company's decision to use the technology they helped develop for warfare entails they have *been made accomplices* to the moral injury of others. It is against this condition that they protest.

Faced with this situation, they have two main options. They might cope by losing any moral interest in the finality of their activities. In this case, however, they must also accept the risk of being made accomplices to moral injury. The second option is to hold fast to the self-recognition possibility grounded in their action context and react against the social and institutional context exposing them to moral risks. Whether the protesters are accurate in their belief that the weaponization of the technology they helped develop leads to further dehumanization is irrelevant. Even if their assessment is incorrect in this instance, the *risk* of being made accomplice persists because the company might make future decisions equivalent to causing moral harm to others, and the workers would contribute to realizing these decisions.

The protest shows that moral self-reproach, stirred either by the awareness of having contributed to or being at risk of contributing to moral injury of others, can play a central role in motivating a critical attitude towards one's condition. When moral risk defines the condition of many, the consciousness of moral self-reproach might become a shared experience. This creates the possibility of a peculiar form of struggle for recognition motivated by the guilt-stricken consciousness of potentially or actually contributing to the perpetuation of disrespect. The workers found themselves at risk of becoming "war profiteers," implying, in their view, that they have been made accomplices to the moral injury of others. Their critique represents a reaction against this situation.

However, the struggle does not end with denunciation. Deeming their situation unacceptable, the workers demand a "voice" in determining how their work is used, asserting they "did not sign up to develop weapons" (Microsoft Workers 4 Good, 2019). Therefore, the protest becomes an effort by a party lacking the power to shape the purpose of its actions, and thus demonstrate moral responsibility, to regain or attain for the first time a status previously

reserved for another party that has the authority to implicate it, to determine the purpose of the first party's actions. Without a 'voice' and lacking the status of agents determining the impact of their actions on others, confirmation as moral recognizers remains inaccessible to them in a specific way, and the risk of being implicated as accomplices persists.

The dynamics illustrated by the workers' protest can be clarified further by pointing out the *specific* way in which the condition placing one at risk of *being made* accomplice arises when the possibility of self-confirmation as moral recognizers is closed down. Changing the perspective, the condition of being made an accomplice to moral injury provides insights into identifying social preconditions for self-confirmation as a moral recognizer, especially in cases like the protest we are considering.

Relevant here are actions involving entities deserving moral consideration. This holds true for actions that make one an accomplice, contributing to the moral injury of others, since moral injury can only occur towards morally valuable beings. The moral suffering inflicted on them by their (immoral) act, once the accomplice becomes aware of the moral injury they have done to others, highlights the propensity towards self-confirmation as a moral recognizer that the act frustrates. Such instances, however, only clarify that being accomplice negates this specific possibility of self-development. We want to understand it in regard to *being made* accomplice to moral injury. For this, it is crucial to recall a point made when analyzing the relationship between conferring due recognition and selfhood: recognizers can achieve self-confirmation when their actions are, at a minimum, guided by the intention to recognize the other. Having one's actions guided by personal intentions is precisely what the condition of *being made* (accomplice) negates since it presupposes exclusion from the decision-making process determining the purpose of one's activity. The exclusion represents the distinctive mark of being *made* accomplice that distinguishes it from being an accomplice. In the case of *being made*, the agent engages in morally relevant action or activity but does not shape its finality. Self-confirmation as a moral recognizer is not attainable here because the moral worthiness of the other cannot be the true basis for action when one does not determine the purpose predefining their actions.

The condition of being made an accomplice to moral injury provides important guidelines for identifying social preconditions of self-confirmation as a moral recognizer. In social activities, where actions are collaborative, the potential for achieving it hinges on institutional arrangements that grant the authority to co-determine the purpose of one's activity and, consequently, assume moral responsibility. As argued by Lisa Herzog (2018), an organization's institutional structure regulates activity coordination but does not negate its moral relevance; however, the organization's culture can vary in its support for moral agency (p. 19). Taking a cue from Herzog's argument, I suggest that, since self-confirmation considered here requires autonomy to respond appropriately to the moral status of others, an organizational context is supportive when it allows agents to co-determine the purpose of their activity. Conversely, if institutional arrangements deprive individuals of the power to shape the purpose of their activity, they are denied the status that would warrant them the right to decide the impact of their actions on others. The institutional context shuts down the possibility of self-confirmation inherent to the activity in question by preventing agents from establishing due recognition of the building foundations of their activity. In positive terms, co-determination or at least having a real 'voice' is a key social precondition for achieving self-confirmation as moral recognizers.

3.3. *Moral recognizers and social injustice*

Honneth's theory asserts that a link between recognition and social justice emerges when social interactions are governed by recognition principles from which legitimate

expectations for recognition can be derived. By implication, social injustice originates in social arrangements that fail to uphold these principles. Therefore, the significance of self-confirmation as moral recognizers for personhood development and its social dimensions are necessary but not sufficient to claim that social barriers to its realization can engender specific experiences of social injustice. It is necessary to reclaim this possibility of self-confirmation as a promise derived from the socially embedded principles of mutual recognition. Even when limited to contemporary societies, this task exceeds the scope of this paper. Instead, I aim to offer reasons why the idea that self-confirmation as a moral recognizer represents a socially embedded promise is not entirely implausible, particularly within the realm of work—the contemporary social sphere relevant to protests like the one discussed in this paper. As in earlier sections, I draw on Honneth’s theory of recognition.

The recognition-based conception of social injustice can acquire content only if it is possible to articulate and make explicit the recognition order of society. Honneth (1996; 2003) has substantially contributed to this by outlining a conception of modern societies consisting of three fundamental spheres of mutual recognition: intimate relationships, the law, and individual achievement.³

I focus on Honneth’s account of the sphere of individual achievement as it is most relevant to the proposed argument. Interaction within this sphere is directed towards realizing shared values (Honneth, 2003). In this context, the moral grammar of recognition dictates that participants making valuable contributions are owed social esteem, which extends to the specific attributes of individuals, such as skills and aptitudes, that facilitated the contributions. Possessing particular attributes and talents is a fundamental aspect of personhood; therefore, esteem is essential for individuals to cultivate a sense of self-worth in relation to this core aspect of themselves (Honneth, 1996). Additionally, Honneth (2003; 2010; 2022) identifies social labor as the activity through which individuals in contemporary societies contribute to shared values by supporting the material and symbolic reproduction of social lifeform. In this context, social labor emerges as the central activity through which individuals become aware of the intersubjective value of their specific traits and capacities by employing their abilities in socially valuable ways.

The conceptualization of the world of work as a distinct sphere of recognition provides a fresh perspective on phenomena typically analyzed through norm-free economic lenses. Honneth (2003; 2010) argues that wages earned for work-based contributions are not solely determined by economic factors like the wage-price mechanism but also reflect the level of social esteem associated with various contributions. Importantly, Honneth does not claim that socially entrenched valuation schemes of social contributions are inherently fair. His point is that the problem of fair distribution of socially produced wealth is, ultimately, a problem of normative resolution that cannot be settled solely by presumed norm-free economic factors. He holds that the normative grammar of esteem plays a role in this matter.

More to the point, the social-recognition model outlines conditions that the social organization of labor should meet to uphold the promises of recognition. For instance, Honneth (2010) argues that the division of labor should allow for sufficiently complex work activities, enabling workers to develop and utilize a basic set of skills to secure the social visibility of their work. This account anticipates forms of social injustice in this sphere, such

³ Honneth (2014) proposes a revised notion of modern social order based on freedom spheres. As Deaconu (2023) argues, Honneth’s revisions do not constitute a radical departure from his early account. Crucially, the assumptions of his early account that interest us persist in his recent account. For instance, the concept of *social freedom*, central to Honneth (2014), remains closely tied to the notion of mutual recognition spheres. I shall focus here only on Honneth’s earlier account.

as when specific contributions are devalued or ignored due to entrenched interpretations of what constitutes a socially relevant contribution. Drawing from feminist critique, Honneth (2003; 2022) highlights the role of gender-based valuation schemas in contemporary societies that devalue occupations considered “feminine”. Honneth (2010) also argues that social injustice may arise when changes in the organization of work result in deskilling or the fragmentation of work activities, leading to a loss of social visibility and prestige.

However, Honneth’s depiction of the modern world of work does not acknowledge moral recognizer self-confirmation as one of its fundamental promises. Consequently, his account of social injustice experiences in this sphere does not incorporate the idea that barriers to this form of self-confirmation might lead to specific experiences of social injustice. These omissions are unsurprising, given that Honneth does not delve into the ethical importance of granting due recognition for self-development.

The omissions are significant because, as J. Ciulla (2011) shows, work pursued for immoral purposes loses its meaningfulness and ethical value. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the recognition paradigm once the relationship between self-development and moral conduct is acknowledged. Social esteem, expressed through wages, is warranted for one’s work contribution *if* the work is morally acceptable. Conversely, work that inflicts moral harm should not be met with esteem but with moral denunciation, even if it involves highly skilled tasks utilizing the workers’ talents and abilities. Hence, the moral grammar of esteem, revealing the importance of work for self-recognition, presupposes the moral validity of the work. Recognition of one’s talents and high compensation cannot mitigate moral distress due to work being, or being perceived as, morally questionable, as exemplified in the case discussed in this paper. Despite the engineers receiving recognition and fair wages for their contributions to innovative technology, their moral suffering due to perceived lack of moral validity was not mitigated. The shock of discovering that they might become “war profiteers” attests to this. Additionally, concerns about the humane organization of work make sense only if the work is morally justified and should exist in the first place. Work that is organized humanely but is immoral should not be praised for its ethical benefits to workers but denounced. More generally, Honneth’s conception of labor assumes that work is directed toward realizing shared values, ensuring the reproduction of valuable dimensions of the lifeworld. However, these values are only deemed worthy if they are morally acceptable.

In short, the recognition-based understanding of the world of work as an achievement sphere underpinned by principles of recognition holds the promise of specific personhood developments like self-esteem. However, for labor to be a valid source of social esteem, it must be morally acceptable. Engaging in morally acceptable work establishes the basis for social recognition of the moral character of one’s contribution, which opens up the possibility of self-confirmation as a moral recognizer. The prospect of work-based self-confirmation depends on the social prerequisite of co-determination, as discussed in the previous section. The awareness that the promise of becoming a socially visible moral contributor is invalidated by the lack of these social preconditions might lead to specific experiences of social injustice.

4. Conclusion The paper proposes revisions to expand the recognition frame. Honneth’s account is revised by asserting that conferring due recognition, in addition to receiving it, is crucial for personhood development, introducing the notion of *self-confirmed moral recognizer*. Secondly, social orders can impede self-development not only by denying basic forms of recognition but also by hindering the possibility to confer recognition to others. Thirdly, within the sphere of achievement, the promise of self-confirmation as a moral recognizer is derivable from the prerequisite that socially significant work is morally valid. Expanded along these lines, the recognition frame highlights the potential shortfall in contemporary societies to uphold the

commitment that moral autonomy matters; it provides the normative framework to reveal socially engendered risks of moral self-deprecation as potentially revealing instances of social injustice. Experiences of injustice stemming from disrespect are not identical to those arising from instrumentalisation of moral autonomy, such as being implicated in the moral injury of others. These two types of injustices are distinct, and improvements in one area do not necessarily translate to improvements in the other. The proposed revisions to the recognition frame help distinguish between them.

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