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On the reification of non-human life forms

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Kurzzusammenfassung

Verdinglichung ist ein Begriff aus der Tradition des westlichen Marxismus und der Kritischen Theorie. Mit dem Begriff wird versucht ontologisch falsche Beziehungen zu erfassen. Axel Honneth hat aus dieser Tradition kommend zu diesem Thema gearbeitet. Er hat seine Konzeptualisierung auf seine Anerkennungstheorie aufgebaut und die Position entwickelt, dass Verdinglichungsphänomenen eine Anerkennungsvergessenheit zugrunde liegt. Eine seiner Aussagen ist, dass der Begriff auf menschliche Beziehungen angewendet werden kann, aber nicht direkt im Fall von menschlichen Beziehungen zur nicht menschlichen Umwelt. In dieser Arbeit wird Honneths Position bezüglich dieser Aussage kritisiert und erweitert. Es wird argumentiert, dass eine direkt verdinglichende Beziehung zu nicht menschlichen Lebensformen, zu Tieren und Pflanzen, möglich ist. Auf seiner Arbeit aufbauend wird die Position präsentiert, dass Verdinglichung von nicht menschlichen Lebensformen als eine Lebensvergessenheit konzeptualisiert werden kann.

Abstract

Reification is a concept that is part of the tradition of Western Marxism and Critical Theory. With the concept, ontologically false relationships are tried to be grasped. Axel Honneth is the latest author in this tradition who worked on this topic. He built his conceptualization on his theory of recognition and developed the position that forgetfulness of recognition is at the ground of reification phenomena. One of his claims is that the concept can be applied to human relationships but not directly in the case of human relationships with the non-human environment. In the thesis, Honneth's position is criticized and expanded with regard to this claim. The claim is made that a directly reifying relationship with non-human life forms, precisely animals and plants, is indeed possible. Building on his work, the position is presented that reification of non-human life forms can be conceptualized as a forgetfulness of life.

This is for Betty and Wilma
Aus der Liebe für Lebendes kommend

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Introduction

"And they sawed at the branches on which they sat and shouted to each other their experiences, how to saw better. And with crashes, they went in the deep. And those that watched them sawing shook their heads and sawed on vigorously."¹

(Bertolt Brecht)

1 The current ecological situation

1.1 The diversity of ecological crises

We find ourselves in acute ecological crisis situations. The descriptions of these crises have been made numerous, in the academic discourse but also in the public and political discourse, and they become more and more accurate and well-researched.² In Western Modernity, it has been, at least since the 1970s, very much present in the discourses of the different societal spheres. Numerous academic publications have pointed to the severe problems, some gaining heavy attention from the interested public.³ I will not and cannot give an extensive overview of how these ecological crises developed over time in Modernity, what their current dynamics are, and how they are possibly developing. However, I once again do want to give short impressions of how they express themselves in nature surrounding us, their effects on non-human life, and the livelihoods of many human beings.⁴ The by now well-known issue of anthropogenic climate change makes the headlines of news outlets and is at the forefront of public discourse about ecological crises. However, the issue of climate change is not the sole severe crisis. Even though other ecological crises are not as present in the public discourse they are still as important for the livelihood of human beings and other species living on our planet. Nonetheless, I want to start with the issue of the climate crisis.

1 Own translation. Brecht 1993, 314.

2 Nowadays, it is possible to inform yourself about the phenomena of ecological crises in various publications, academic and public. For this reason, I will not deliver extensive sources here. For the outlook on the academic discourse of natural sciences, I will now look into the most recent documents of the IPCC and the IPBES reports. (See *IPCC 2022*; *IPBES 2019a*.)

3 The probably most important example is the first report of the Club of Rome (See Meadows 1972). Another important example is from the famous US-American environmental author Rachel Carson. (See for example Carson et al. 2000) In Germany, for example, the issues of `Waldsterben` and acid rain were important in public discourse. (See for example Metzger 2015; Bölsche 1984). The ozone hole has been an important and troubling issue for decades until it seemingly got resolved. (See for example Mohr 2021)

4 In the time frame I wrote the thesis, the phenomena associated with the ecological crises unfolded in different ways.

By now, the dynamics and effects of anthropogenic climate change are well-researched and published. These scientific findings conglomerate in the reports of the IPCC (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change).⁵ The IPCC is an institution set up by the UN precisely for this purpose, “for assessing the science related to climate change”.⁶ The presentation of parts two and three of the 6th and up to here last IPCC report happened in 2022. At the presentation of these two parts, António Guterres, the current secretary-general of the UN, found harsh and insistent words to warn about the dynamics and effects of the climate crisis. These words are based on clear scientific findings that portray a dark picture of how the dynamics of climate change can and are likely to evolve. The summary of the newest findings is presented in the first part of the sixth assessment report.⁷ The summary for policymakers starts with the sentence: “It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.”⁸ This human influence leads to a general global warming which is around 1.2 – 1.3 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial mean temperature.⁹ Following this general diagnosis of the current global effects the climate crisis has, more concrete examples come of how the climate crisis expresses itself in concrete symptoms. The effects of global warming lead to various effects on a global scale. “Human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe.”¹⁰ Among these events are heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones. Those events not only and mostly happen in the Global South, as sometimes possibly the impression arises when following European news outlets. They also happen in Europe and affect the livelihoods of people living here. And the future presents a picture that is even more worrying and upsetting because these reports, like others, also make approximations for the future. One of the first diagnoses it makes is that the goal set in the Paris Agreement of a 1.5 to 2.0 increase in global temperature will be exceeded already during the 21st century if not stark reductions of greenhouse gases occur. Already, a 1.5 to 2.0 increase in temperature has dramatic consequences as we already experience as a foretaste in contemporary times. Extreme weather events like those described above are expected to become even more frequent and intense. This is likely to put an enormous amount of stress on many regions of the earth, especially the ones that do not have as much climate resilience, put

5 See IPCC 2022.

6 IPCC.

7 See IPCC 2021.

8 Ibid., 4.

9 See Climate Action Tracker; IPCC 2021, 6.

10 IPCC 2021, 8.

in the jargon of the climate science community. Even larger increases have even more dramatic consequences. When certain thresholds, which are called tipping points, are reached, climate science is not able to make reliable predictions anymore on how the climate system is going to react, and catastrophic events are possible to occur.¹¹

Another major ecological crisis is the biodiversity crisis. Because the speed of biodiversity loss is at such a fast and enormous pace, the term sixth mass extinction has been developed. It was developed in relation to the other five mass extinctions before.¹² The difference is that this mass extinction is caused by human actions. The continuing loss of biodiversity has also been described and monitored for decades.¹³ The situation humanity finds itself in is just the necessary continuation of this process. Because this crisis is another evident dangerous crisis, different platforms have been set up to monitor the development of biodiversity on our planet and the reality and dangers of extinction.¹⁴ One is an intergovernmental platform that is set up to monitor this crisis in all its dynamics and symptoms.¹⁵ This institution is called the `The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services` (IPBES) and is supported through services by the UN. Following goals of the IPBES are listed: `Assessments, Policy Support, Building Capacity & Knowledge: and Communications & Outreach`. For this reason, they publish regular reports on the contemporary state of the topic. The last global assessment report was published in 2019 and is another dark look at non-human nature surrounding us. The descriptive part of the report can be read as a description of the already happened and ongoing degradation of non-human life. This happened through human influence on the planet.¹⁶ The human impacts described are significant. Here are some examples of the report for policymakers: “Seventy-five per cent of the land surface is significantly altered, 66 per cent of the ocean area is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts, and over 85 per cent of wetlands (area) has been lost.”¹⁷ “Across much of the highly biodiverse tropics, 32 million hectares of primary or recovering forest were lost between 2010 and 2015.”¹⁸ These heavy influences had and are likely to continue to have significant impacts on biodiversity around us.¹⁹ Around 140,000 species worldwide are well documented on the

11 See IPCC 2021, 12-23.

12 See Rull 2022.

13 See, for example, Wilson and Schmidt 1996.

14 See, for example, IUCN Red List.

15 See IPBES 2019a. The platform was set up in Panama City in 2012 by 94 governments. See IPBES.

16 A key concept which has been developed for this fact and which tries to grasp the human influence on nature surrounding us is the term “Anthropocene”. IPBES 2019b, 229.

17 IPBES 2019a, 11.

18 Ibid..

19 An important notion is how biodiversity is understood: It is the diversity and variance of all life on earth, „[...] the diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems [...]“. Ibid., 10.

IUCN (The International Union for Conservation of Nature) red list.²⁰ Of these well-documented species, “[a]n average of around 25 per cent of species in assessed animal and plant groups are threatened,[...]” This means that among these documented species, “more than 40,000 species are threatened with extinction.”²¹ However, due to the lack of assessment and documentation of many species, for example insects, those are enormous underrepresentations of the real numbers. “Extrapolating from detailed assessments of species across a growing and diverse set of well-studied taxonomic groups, it is probable that at least a million animal and plant species – more than one in eight – already face global extinction.”²² The current global rate of extinction rate “is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than it has averaged over the past 10 million years”²³ and the numbers listed suggested that is threatened to be further accelerating if no global changes happen. This biodiversity crisis is intimately connected to the climate crisis because the rapid change of climate is worsening the biodiversity crisis.²⁴ While these extinction phenomena are already a drama on their own because much of the diversity and richness of life surrounding us is already lost or endangered to be lost, it also has even more dramatic, immediate consequences on human life. Existing biodiversity is a foundation of so-called ecosystem services, which, as the name suggests, are the basis for delivering and serving specific human needs. Biodiversity is, for example, an essential base for global food security.²⁵

Those two major crises are not the sole worrying dynamics happening in the natural environment around us. To grasp the wide variety of dangerous ecological crises phenomena, the concept of planetary boundaries was developed a decade ago.²⁶ Among the processes that are listed to allow a stable earth system in which humanity is able and will continue to be able to survive and thrive, are the climate system and the integrity of the biosphere, which means the existing biodiversity.²⁷ Other processes which are necessary foundations for a stable and safe dynamic of the earth system point towards other spheres of contemporary ecological crises. Among these are land-system change, biogeochemical flows, and novel entities (which include the pollution with plastic).²⁸ In those three areas, thresholds have been passed beneath

20 See Rull 2022, 2.

21 See IUCN Red List.

22 IPBES 2019b, 238 - 239.

23 IPBES 2019a, 12.

24 See *ibid.*, 13.

25 See *ibid.*, 12.

26 See Stockholm Resilience Centre; Rockström et al. 2009.

27 See Rockström et al. 2009, 9.

28 The other four areas are stratospheric ozone depletion, freshwater use, ocean acidification, and atmospheric aerosol loading. In the first three areas thresholds have not yet been passed. The fourth area has not been quantified yet. The conceptualization of land-system change points towards the „conversion of forests and other ecosystems to agricultural land“ (Rockström et al. 2009, 17). Biochemical flows signify

which safe and stable living conditions for human life are guaranteed. Those areas add to the existing, possibly more prominent phenomenon of climate change and biodiversity loss. These first paragraphs gave an outlook on the perspective of natural sciences on the ecological crises. To end the first part of my introduction, I want to stress the notion that apocalyptic scenarios exist, delivered by natural science. According to these, human civilization and societies as a whole are at threat.²⁹ Even though those ecological crises situations are subjectively still not always present to us, especially to citizens of wealthy countries of the Global North, those crises develop rapidly and manifest themselves more and more. This also means an increasing possibility of experiencing them in the everyday life in the Global North. Those crises are not only discussed in the academic, institutionalized discourse, which is supposed to be one foundation for global policy decisions.³⁰ They also go deep into the public discourse. Numerous books on the topics have been published. Some solely on the crises³¹, but others also have different proposals for solutions. They offer a range of institutional, political, and economic solutions, some with a focus on individual behavior, others for example, technological innovation. The topic is usually and especially the climate crisis.³² In the mainstream media, the topic also pops up frequently, mainly when dramatic extreme weather events occur.³³ After earlier approaches of environmentalism and its social movements³⁴, different environmentalist movements have emerged once again in recent years, many lead by young people. The most publicly known is Fridays for Future³⁵. Last but not least, the climate crisis is also a topic at the different kitchen tables of families, on the streets and in parks, between friends, and also a possible issue for intergenerational conflict. The reality of those ecological crisis situations and the discourse about them in academics and the public are the rather apparent ecological background of my thesis.

„interference with the Global Phosphorus and Nitrogen Cycles“ (Ibd., 12). And the concept of novel entities „refers to entities that are novel in a geological sense“ (Linn et al. 2022, 1). This means chemicals at large, including, for example, plastic use and pollution.

29 See, for example, IPCC 2021, 12 - 31; Stockholm Resilience Centre.

30 Like the title „Summary for Policymakers“ of the reports of the IPCC and the IPBES suggests.

31 See, for example, Rahmstorf and Schellnhuber 2019; Frenz 2021; Knight 2012.

32 See, for example, among many others Aronoff et al. 2019; Gates 2021; Klein 2019; Rifkin 2019; Rogenhofer and Schlederer 2021; Schilling 2022.

33 See, for example, BBC; The Guardian; BR24; ZDF.

34 See, for example, Armiero and Sedrez 2014.

35 See, for example, Fridays For Future; Ende Gelände; Sunrise Movement; System Change, Not Climate Change.

1.2 Human relationship to nature and life on the planet

I claim that with regards to the existing ecological crises, another diagnosis has to follow: The predominant human relationship to nature is in a deep fundamental crisis.³⁶ I do additionally claim, which is empirically possible to prove, that a specific dominant relationship to nature is the foundation for the crises and therefore also in a fundamental crisis. I claim that it is crucial to fundamentally question this predominant relationship, especially in the parts of our societies that are responsible for the crises we are in.

The descriptions of a failed modern and industrial relationship to nature have been made and are manifold. They usually include pointing towards other possible relationships or at least present an intuition of how they could look. One of them is made by early Critical Theory, more precisely Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and is part of their general thesis of a failed Western civilization, which they developed in their prominent and also controversial book “The dialectics of enlightenment”.³⁷ A short description and summary will be part of the main body of my work. An essential idea and concept developed within Western Marxism and Critical Theory will be the core of the thesis. Pierre Hadot and Graham Parkes³⁸, for example, present two other fundamental critiques. I want to take a look at the perspectives they presented. I aim to show with this that other Western philosophical outlooks exist, that are not in the tradition of Western Marxism and Critical Theory tradition and still have a fundamentally critical outlook on a predominant relationship to nature. Pierre Hadot lived mainly in the 20th century, and Graham Parkes is a contemporary philosopher. What is interesting for me in Parkes’ book³⁹ is his unfolding of a critique of a certain dominant relationship to nature in the times of the climate crisis, and at the same time, his pointing towards other possible relationships to nature, also coming from a Chinese philosophical tradition. Hadot’s goal was to unfold “An essay on the history of the idea of nature” in his book “The Veil of Isis”. Both of them describe a specific predominant relationship to nature

36 With this human relationship, I mean the dominant relationship to nature within and coming from the industrialized, nowadays also digitalized, so-called developed countries. I claim that this relationship can be seen nowadays as the dominant relationship because it is the relationship that altered and continues to alter the nature surrounding us in the ways that I described already. This relationship leads and continues to lead to crises. It is strongly dominated by economic imperatives, which I will briefly cover in the conclusion of my thesis. It puts all kinds of people under enormous pressure, especially indigenous groups all over the continent, which historically and also nowadays do have and practice another relationship to nature. See, for example, Latour 2022.

37 See Horkheimer and Adorno 2020.

38 Other prominent examples are the ‘Deep Ecology’ outlook or the works of Murray Bookchin. See for example Devall and Sessions 1999; Naess 1973; Bookchin 1982.

39 See Parkes 2021.

as a “Promethean attitude” towards nature.⁴⁰ The idea and conceptualization refer to Prometheus, a figure of Greek mythology who stole the fire from the Godfather Zeus and brought it to humans.⁴¹ Ultimately, he was punished badly for this atrocity. According to Hadot, this attitude can be understood as one “that wishes to discover the secrets of nature, or the Secrets of God, by means of tricks and violence”⁴². I want to expand this understanding: With this narrative, Prometheus and his actions are symbolic figures for the process of humans gaining the ability to rule over, control, and dominate natural dynamics. In this example, they were given the ability to control fire. Current examples of the Promethean relationship to nature can be found in the development of industrial society and economy and the possibility and reality of enormous exploitation of natural resources that come with it since the Industrial Revolution.⁴³ Concrete examples are light and electricity which can be seen analog to the fire which Prometheus brought to the human beings and specific modes of transportation. For Hadot, the opposing attitude to the Promethean is the Orphic attitude. With this conceptualization, he refers to another important figure of Greek mythology: Orpheus. “Orpheus (thus) penetrates the secrets of nature not through violence but through melody, rhythm and harmony.”⁴⁴ For Parkes one possible distinction is to contrast between a Promethean relationship (which we practice nowadays with nature) and a relationship to nature that is more in harmony with the natural surroundings around us. He refers to an ancient Chinese philosophical tradition that stands for this attitude towards nature: Daoism. In the Daoist tradition, “it’s a matter of understanding the good human life in *context*, since human flourishing depends on not just a healthy society but also a thriving natural environment.”⁴⁵ Here, we also have the strong idea of living in harmony with the natural environment, “to harmonize microcosm with macrocosm.”⁴⁶ From this perspective the current predominant Promethean relationship to nature is the failed relationship to nature which brought humanity into this problematic, crises situations and another relationship to nature is necessary. I want to point to an important difference between Hadot’s and Parkes’ conceptualizations of attitudes: Hadot focuses on the insights into nature and the natural

40 See Hadot 2008, 100; Parkes 2021, 40. Another prominent author who worked with the figure of Prometheus is E. O. Wilson. See Lumsden and Wilson 1983.

Another author who recently worked with Prometheus in the environmental context is Peter Sloterdijk. See Sloterdijk 2023

41 See Parkes 2021, 43.

42 Hadot 2008, 95.

43 See Parkes 2021, 44.

44 Hadot 2008, 96.

45 Parkes 2021, 144.

46 Ibid., 147. Parkes has a rich chapter in his book about this, filled with many ideas, also referring to ancient European philosophical traditions, for example, the Stoic. I just refer to the Daoist part of the chapter here.

processes, the abilities of humans to have insight and gain knowledge, while for Parkes a practical attitude and approach is essential and at the forefront. His focus is also on the good way of living. Along these lines, they differ in their outlooks. What both those critiques (or mere descriptions) have in common, also with those coming from Critical theory, is the pointing towards domination and subjugation of nature surrounding us. This can be either in the practical and actual life or in the practice of gaining insight and knowledge about nature. These introductory lines about the philosophical approaches of two different authors already give an impression about philosophical traditions and concepts that have dealt with the human relationship to nature and how widely spread a philosophical critique is. Building on and referring to this, I believe there should be a checking of what relationships to nature we currently have in our society and which others are possible) Unfortunately and very tragically, to this point in modern history, the developments regarding the human relationship with non-human nature continue to get worse and reach a devastating point. I claim, for this reason, all stones have to be turned around to see where the deeper problems lie and what change could look like. This means looking at the political sphere, the economic sphere, and the overall societal and cultural sphere. This can also mean to look at fundamental human relationships to nature, which exist in all those spheres. All fruitful sources must be checked for analysis and understanding for this aim. Philosophy and critical thinking especially have an important role in this endeavor. One of the sources can be the approaches and conceptualizations of Western Marxism and Critical Theory. With my thesis, I can possibly show what a fundamentally problematic relationship to non-human life forms on the planet is, in an ontological sense. This fundamental problematic relationship might be one of the reasons humanity finds itself in the profoundly critical ecological situation it is right now, as briefly unfolded above. My work can point a finger in this direction. I disclose the relationship, which I recognize as fundamentally problematic, with the help and tools of Axel Honneth's approach. I claim that I can, additionally, show with the work how a historical approach of Western critical philosophy can be expanded so that the relationship to non-human life can be included. This leads me to the work's central concept and theme, which is the vehicle for the work: The concept of reification, which is inherently central to Critical Theory. I will unfold the genesis and content of this concept in the upcoming chapter. But first, I want to present the plan for my work.

2 Plan of the work

I firstly want to clarify the primary goal of my thesis. I want to show that it is possible to extend Axel Honneth's theoretical approach and conceptualization of reification also to our human relationship to non-human life, more precisely to the life of animals and plants. Following the introduction, I will go into the main body of my work. This main body is divided into four parts. In the first (1), I will closely examine the concept of reification. This close look will focus on the historical genesis of the concept and the theoretical approaches different prominent authors had. This leads me to the second part (2). Here, I want to first present Honneth's theoretical conceptualization of reification. After this presentation, I intend to express why and where I aim to criticize Honneth's approach and give a first outlook on how I want to expand it. Because I have a precise intention in my thesis, I will introduce and closely examine the term and concept of life, perspectives of natural sciences, and, importantly, philosophical perspectives. Animals and plants are the non-human life forms that I will focus on in my thesis. This is the third (3) part. Lastly, the fourth part (4) will be my main theoretical work. In this part, I want to realize my intention to theoretically extend Honneth's approach. Especially parts two and three will give me the foundation to do this.

Main part

1 Historical genesis of the concept of reification

“All reification is forgetting”⁴⁷

(Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno)

1.1 Why reification?

Before starting with a historical exploration of the concept, I first want to answer why the concept is interesting to me and why I even think it is worth working with in the context of the human-nature relationship in the early 21st century. As Axel Honneth mentions in his book, the term and the concept have not been `en vogue` in critical societal discourse more or less since the early 20th century. However, his analysis also shows signs that this changes.⁴⁸ What is interesting for me in the concept lies in the foundation of Western Marxism and Critical Theory. They are both radical in the sense that they try to go to the roots of our societal being (ontology) and consciousness in the world. In that sense, I also understand the concept of reification as a very radical concept. I believe and argue that it is still fruitful to grasp widespread traits and patterns of consciousness in our societies. Therefore, it is still a proper concept to grasp social, anthropological and psychological phenomena. Indeed, I claim that this concept has to be understood as more actual and important than ever in the contemporary capitalized, bureaucratized, and digitalized world.

The reason it is important and fruitful to conceptualize it with regards to the relationship to non-human life forms is that I do think critical discourse and the concepts developed in Western Marxism, especially in Critical Theory, have to open themselves even more up for a perspective on the natural environment and the human-nature relationship. This is because of the importance of ecology in times of fundamental ecological crises.⁴⁹ A lot of academic work, discussion, and research happens in the field of human-animal and human-nature relationships. Obviously, a widely spread public discourse goes on as well. The Frankfurt School Critical Theory tradition has vast resources to contribute to those discussions with

⁴⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno 2020, 191.

⁴⁸ Honneth 2015, 13 – 18.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Hösle 1994.

their historical concepts. Its strength is that it delivers a radically critical perspective on Western societies. In order to contribute, it has to open itself up for the existing outlooks and the progressive public discourse in the context of the various ecological crises. This means in general seeing the signs of time and in concrete seeing the climate crisis, the continuing suffering of animals, the industrialized livestock farming, the loss of biodiversity, the massive loss of land mammals, and the overfishing of the oceans, just to name a few.⁵⁰

I briefly present what I see as distinctive features of this thesis. As I will unfold in the upcoming paragraphs, there exist works of philosophers within different philosophical traditions on the phenomenon and concept of reification. They have used this concept for the social sphere, the sphere of the individual psyche, and the sphere of the human relationship to non-human nature. However, I claim a distinctive feature of this thesis is the look at the particular relationship of humans to non-human life in its different forms. I claim that using the concept of reification in this context is what makes the works special and fruitful. With this being written, I want to start with the exploration of the historical genesis of the concept of reification.

1.2 Exploration of the historical genesis of reification as a concept

For the exploration of the historical genesis of the concept and the studies of the phenomenon of reification, I will mainly use Dirk Quadflieg's foundational work "Vom Geist der Sache: Zur Kritik der Verdinglichung". In the first part he delivers a very insightful outlook on its historical genesis. Because he developed a very summarizing work, it can serve as the foundation for my overview. I will closely examine the parts with the outlooks of these essential authors: György Lukács, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Jürgen Habermas. Axel Honneth's work and conceptualization will be the basis of my work. It will be thoroughly explained and screened through in the next part of my work.

1.2.1 György Lukács

Quadflieg starts his explorations with Lukács, who can be seen as the founding father of the concept in the discourse of critical Western Marxism of the early 20th century.⁵¹ The development of the concept goes back to his monumental essay: "Die Verdinglichung und das Bewußtsein des Proletariats"⁵². It is based on recognition and intuitions Lukács had when

50 However, I do not want to neglect and oversee the work that has been made and is contributing to the discourse. See, for example, Görg 2003; Stache 2017.

51 See Quadflieg 2019, 21.

52 See Lukács 1970, 170 - 355.

observing how his fellow citizens lived and acted in the Capitalist, bourgeois European societies of the early 20th century. An important feature of this world is its crisis proneness and the difficult living situations of many people.⁵³ He noticed certain traits in their everyday lives and actions that he traces back to the very foundations of their society. With the general and foundational concept of reification, he attempts to grasp a conglomerate of societal phenomena.⁵⁴ Lukács' intuition goes back to two concepts Marx presented in his work: 'Versachlichung'⁵⁵, also used by Max Weber, and commodity fetish. Lukács identifies the roots in the economic basis of these societies. He sees them in the Capitalist economy, which is based on the exchange of commodities. According to Lukács, phenomena coming from this social sphere expanded further and further in other spheres of the societies at that time. He claims these dynamics from the economic sphere are the foundation and offer the soil where different phenomena of reification can grow.⁵⁶ With the concept, Lukács tries to grasp phenomena of reification in three different spheres:⁵⁷

1. In the sphere of self-relationship.
2. In the sphere of intersubjective relationships between people.
3. In the sphere of relationships to the environment and objects surrounding us.

He argues all those relationships are subject to a certain mindset. With regards to the relationship to oneself, a sole calculating, rationalizing mindset, which is the product of developed Capitalist economies, leads to a loss of the qualitative characteristics of an individual.⁵⁸ The relationship to herself is necessarily dominated by this rationalized, calculating mindset. The Capitalist market economy produces and triggers this mindset. The subject has to bring her qualities to the market to be able to sell them and generate the monetary income she needs to survive. In this process, she is inclined to develop a thing-like relationship with herself. This thing-like relationship is rooted in the necessity to sell traits of oneself.⁵⁹ In a larger societal sense, this is expressed through the Taylor system, a system of wholly rationalized and specialized division of labor. Lukács claims the principles of a system

53 See Honneth 2015, 13.

54 See Honneth 2015, 13.

55 According to Quadflieg, Marx uses the term 'Verdinglichung' just a few times and more so works with the terms 'Versachlichung' and 'Vergegenständlichung'. For this reason, Lukács should be seen as the originator of the concept in the footsteps of Marx and Weber. See Quadflieg 2019, 21.

56 See Honneth 2015, 21.

57 See ibd.

58 See Quadflieg 2019, 25.

59 In my interpretation, these traits can have different forms, which can also be observed in our world nowadays. A person's looks or appearance can potentially be sold, but the intellectual or creative output is subject to the market mechanism as well. Along these lines, a bodybuilder should not be seen differently than a journalist for a daily newspaper.

like this go deep inside the psyche of the worker, blue-collar or white-collar.⁶⁰ Subjected to this system, the separation of different parts of the psyches of the workers is stimulated, and the workers are inclined to objectify and to reify parts of their psyches. Calculating rationalization dominates the work. All actions only make sense through the judgment of a calculation. The process of production does not organically flow. In contrast, as a positive blueprint, Lukács identifies an organic production of things, where productivity and time are in flow.⁶¹ Because time is also subject to this system and the rationalizing calculation, it loses its qualitative flow as well.

This leads to another psychological diagnosis. Lukács claims this mindset leads to a so-called contemplative, indifferent relationship of the worker with regard to herself, her work, and the product. The worker is not engaged with her own work and actions because of the distance developed through the calculating mindset.⁶² Lukács' intuition is that the mindset produced through people's economic relationships also goes into different spheres of society. He claims it goes into the whole of human life, also in the everyday life of the worker outside of labor. Through habituation, these relations become a second nature of the worker.⁶³ The Capitalist societal basis has a similar effect on intersubjective relationships. According to Lukács, they reify social relations. In social relationships, the contemplative and indifferent traits show as well. As a social phenomenon, he notices that intersubjective relations between people develop a "character of thinglikeness"⁶⁴. When interacting in an exchange of commodities, people develop a reified relationship with each other. They treat each other like things because this is the treatment they experience when interacting with each other on the commodity market, or also the labor market when selling their labor to the Capitalist enterprise. In the strong interpretation, this becomes second nature of people as well, and they develop this relationship with other people in their everyday lives. The third notion Lukács has is that of a reified relationship with the world: the products of work and even all the other parts of the world surrounding us. According to him, the relationship to and view of the individual things is dominated through the glasses of the commodity form.⁶⁵ The qualitative individual character of all things is likely to be hidden because they just count as reified objects, as the

60 See Lukács 1970, 177.

61 See *ibid.*, 178 - 179.

62 See *ibid.* 1970, 191; Honneth 2015, 23.

63 See Honneth 2015, 24.

64 See Lukács 1970, 170 - 171.

65 I think a good example of this is the art market, where a piece of art solely tends to be judged by the price it has. It gets reified and judged as a commodity. It tends not to be seen as the artistic expression it is and how it makes a sensual and emotional impression on the person who watches and experiences it.

commodity. This third notion of Lukács' intuition will be the important one for me because I want to pick this notion up but give it a different twist.

These were the foundations of Lukács' outlook and conceptualization. This also laid the groundwork for the work of the authors of early Critical Theory, Adorno and Horkheimer. In the next step, I want to present how they picked up, interpreted, developed, and changed the concept.

1.2.2 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer

Lukács' work presented the basis for Adorno's and Horkheimer's engagement with the phenomenon and concept. Their engagement has to be seen as embedded in their general work. They can be seen as two of the crucial founding fathers of Critical Theory or the Frankfurt School.⁶⁶ Like the terminus already suggests, their social theorizing is radically critical. For this endeavor, they are in the tradition of Western Marxism but also draw insights from the outlooks of psychoanalysis and Friedrich Nietzsche. One of their main works is 'The Dialectics of Enlightenment', where reification phenomena play a role as well. According to Quadflieg, they differ from Lukács' approach in certain important aspects. He notes that they radicalized specific thoughts and insights of Lukács in their 'Dialectics of Enlightenment'.⁶⁷ What does he mean by this? For Lukács, a central notion is that the Capitalist market society, especially the developed division of labor, which is an inherent part of the Capitalist dynamics, is the foundation for reified relationships.⁶⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer go much further back, all the way to mythological times. They identify the roots of Western civilization as the foundations. A central outlook they have is the historical view on the human relationship to nature.⁶⁹ Since their beginning, humans have had the problem of surviving within the powers of nature, and from the beginning, practices were developed - animism, rituals, and magic - to try to control those powers of nature. Those local practices were collected, and myths were developed. The central element that they recognize as leading to reification phenomena is the language developed in Western societies. This language they see as the original sin, so to speak. "Symbol and picture"⁷⁰ are separated and build the foundation for the domination of nature surrounding us through language. Rationalism and the historical process of enlightenment are built upon this foundation. Especially, conceptual abstractions developed in Western societies are seen as the roots for reifying perceptions and, therefore, for

66 See Wiggershaus 1986, 55 - 66 and 82 - 112.

67 See Quadflieg 2019, 19.

68 See Lukács 1970, 186 - 187.

69 See Quadflieg 2019, 40.

70 See ibd..

the phenomenon of reification.⁷¹ In the historical process of Western enlightenment, the approach of seeing and formulating specific laws of nature was developed. These laws are understood as the recognition of the processes of nature. This objectification or reification of natural processes builds the foundation for instrumental reasoning and the following domination of nature surrounding us.⁷² For Adorno and Horkheimer, Capitalist modes of production are not the root but the preliminary end of a development.⁷³

An essential element of the dialectical process of enlightenment is that this domination and instrumentalization of nature gets thrown back at humans and societies themselves. Adorno and Horkheimer reason that not only is the natural world surrounding us subject to the domination of this form of rationality, but also humans themselves are subject to this relationship in their self-relationships and relationships with others. They claim this mindset tries to erase all natural elements in our beings and relationships with others. This is expressed in the system of modern capitalism. "Not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationship of individuals to themselves, have themselves been bewitched by the objectification of mind."⁷⁴ This is a connection to the phenomena of reification Lukács described. They also identify phenomena of reification in three spheres: the spheres of intersubjective relationships, the self-relationship, and the relationship to the environment and objects in the surrounding environment. Even though they rarely use the term reification (*Verdinglichung*) in their work and prefer to use other terms like objectification (*Versachlichung* or *Objektivierung*), Quadflieg stresses that in his essence the terms signify the same content.⁷⁵ Like already emphasized, the difference is that Adorno and Horkheimer identify the roots somewhere else. They developed an important sentence from their approach: "All reification is forgetting."⁷⁶ This sentence possibly explains their understanding of reification like no other. What they try to explain with this sentence is that in the moment when an object or another subject is tried to be grasped with a concept, essential parts and

71 See Horkheimer and Adorno 2020, 22 - 24; Here, they have Walter Benjamin's work and his critique of language as a source and inspiration. See Quadflieg 2019, 42.

72 See Quadflieg 2019, 41.

73 See *ibid.*. I think it is especially interesting to read with the continuing radical exploitation of the natural world surrounding us and ideas that are developed as solutions for the climate crisis, for example, large-scale bio-engineering in mind. Adorno's and Horkheimer's work can point to the roots from where those phenomena and approaches develop. With regard to this, I think it is interesting to look at the relationship to nature, which was dominant in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, the economic practice and the promoted ideology were a radical domination of nature for the `needs` of society as well.

74 Horkheimer and Adorno 2020, 21.

75 See Quadflieg 2019, 42.

76 See Horkheimer and Adorno 2020, 191.

traits that are inherent characteristics are lost. One tries to grasp a thing and loses important features in this process. They are forgotten.⁷⁷

Do they offer a solution or at least a window of opportunity from this pessimistic analysis that the very basis of our being, our Western modern societal being, should be seen as the foundation for reification? One possibility they see is an approach of what they call `mimesis`. This process of mimesis, this convergence (Annäherung or Angleichung) to objects, can only happen in the sphere of neutral, not commercialized art, according to them.⁷⁸ In this mimetical process, there is supposed to be a specific relationship to the `real object`. It is neither tried to conceptualize the object, and therefore also to trim it, nor is it tried to use it for a particular purpose with means of instrumental reasoning. According to them, in this sphere, another relationship with the object is possible. Quadflieg's thesis is that they try to describe some kind of `good reification` with their approach.⁷⁹ Even though they have this window of opportunity, they still have a pessimistic and negative outlook overall, which they did not try to hide.

1.2.3 Jürgen Habermas

My next step is to offer a reconstruction of Jürgen Habermas' perspective on reification. Habermas is the most influential scholar in the so-called Second Generation of the tradition of Critical Theory.⁸⁰ One of his main works is: "Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns", which was published in two bands and lays out the essence of his theoretical approach.⁸¹ In his approach, Habermas separates himself from Frankfurt's first generation in aspects that are very important in the context of reification. I want to carve out the points that seem to be relevant to my work.

Habermas developed not to be content with Adorno's and Horkheimer's overall pessimistic approach with regards to the development of Western civilization and, importantly for me, the element of hopelessness they presented with regards to reification.⁸² Not being content, he himself wanted to develop an own societal theory. One of his aims was to look for potentialities of reason and rationality in the everyday interaction of people.⁸³ It can be stated

77 This also happens when you give a name to a person: "Charlie is an idiot." With this characterization, you lose important elements of Charlie. The same happens when you try to characterize a flower or a dog: "This flower or dog is beautiful." You can lose inherently important parts with the grasping of the concepts, possibly an old blossom or other features that are in themselves possibly not assessed as beautiful.

78 See Quadflieg 2019, 43 - 44.

79 See ibd., 96 - 97.

80 See Wiggershaus 1986, 597 - 628.

81 See Habermas 2019.

82 See Quadflieg 2019, 55 - 56.

83 See ibd., 56 - 57.

that he is responsible for an intersubjective turn. This approach also penetrates his analysis and critique of reification. Building on Max Weber, Habermas develops a theory and analysis of different spheres of rationality in society. According to him, these spheres are different in their forms of rationality. Besides the instrumental reasoning (*Zweckrationalität*) already diagnosed by Weber in the sphere of politics and in the economic sphere, he also diagnoses different forms of rationalities in the spheres of morality and law, science, arts, and expression. Those rationalities are intersubjective products because they depend on specific shared knowledge the subjects in society have. According to him, the worlds we live in are generally structured through our language. Actions depend on intersubjectivity and communication.⁸⁴ But how does this matter for the phenomenon of reification? According to Habermas, the phenomena of reification have to be identified in context and connected to the phenomenon of instrumental reasoning, which is inherent in the political and economic sphere and their bureaucratic administration. Building on this, Habermas claims that these are also the spheres where the phenomenon of reification has its place.⁸⁵ However, contrary to Lukács' ideas, Habermas does not see the sources solely in the Capitalist economic system and does not diagnose a totality of the tendencies of reification in modern, bourgeois Capitalist societies. According to Quadflieg, Habermas, therefore, differs in two central points from the two already reconstructed critiques of reification:

1. The foundations are no longer certain idealistic (*bewusstseinsphilosophische*) premises, which focus on subject-object relations. He more so points to specific potentials of rationality coming from intersubjective relationships.
2. In the analysis of Lukács, Adorno, and Horkheimer, it is ultimately unclear what the normative standpoint can be from which they can and do articulate their critique of reification. Habermas, however, can rely on his diagnosis of different societal spheres with different forms of rationality. According to him, some of these spheres do not fall prey to reifying tendencies. These spheres, for example, the everyday sphere of human interaction, can then be seen as normative retreats from which a critique can be articulated.⁸⁶ A major problem is, according to Habermas when those spheres get colonized by instrumental reasoning.

With this outlook, Habermas can still have a positive view on the projects of modernity, contrary to Adorno and Horkheimer. In his approach, he always has the reservoir of different everyday life worlds ("*Lebenswelten*") and their forms of rationality. They are in danger of

84 See Quadflieg 2019, 59 - 60.

85 See *ibid.*, 62.

86 See *ibid.*, 64 - 65.

getting attacked but can still deliver a normative standpoint from which tendencies of reification can be criticized.⁸⁷

After the overview of these authors, stemming mostly from Quadflieg's work, I want to clarify this: There have been extensive critiques of all approaches I presented, especially of Lukács', Adorno's, and Horkheimer's. I intend not to make a case or defend the validity of their approaches. My intention is solely to give an overview of their perspectives and conceptualizations. For this matter, Quadflieg's detailed and very insightful overview seems to me to be a great source that serves sufficiently for the presentation and its purpose.

1.3 Who has an outlook on the human–nature relationship integrated?

At the end of my historical exploration, I want to come once again to the issue of the human-nature relationship or, more precisely: the relationship of human beings to other life forms. This is the central theme of my approach and where the focus shall reside during the thesis. I would like to look at the approaches I just presented. Where does the outlook on the human-nature relationship already play a major role, or which one at least contains a tendency? From the reconstruction I offered, I think it is rather apparent that I can take elements for my approach and thesis from all three Lukács', Adorno's, and Horkheimer's explorations. How so? As I presented in the exploration, Lukács also points towards a reified relationship with the surrounding world. However, I do think his view does not exactly go in the direction where I want to develop it. He focuses on the effects of the Capitalist market system, and his outlook is that certain qualities of surrounding objects are hidden through the commodity form into which those objects get packed. I do not want to dive deeper into his analysis here. However, this already shows that a view of the non-human world surrounding us can be integrated into an understanding of the phenomenon and concept of reification. Overall, it seems to me that the natural environment surrounding us, unfortunately, does not play a significant role in the core of the philosophical tradition of Critical Theory because, in its essence, it contains a critique of the societal relations of the respective time.⁸⁸ However, it does play a significant role in the dialectical argumentation of Adorno and Horkheimer. I already presented the domination of nature that they recognized and how this relationship of domination falls back on human relationships. In general, like Lukács, they also understand

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁸ However, there have been some traits in the first generation of Critical Theory and then also efforts made in the development, as already mentioned.

the phenomenon with regard to the environment surrounding us. For Habermas, as far as I have insight into his outlook, it does not play a role.

With this being written, I will give it a different notion than Lukács, Adorno, and Horkheimer did in their insightful writings. This different twist is precisely with regard to the relationship to non-human life forms surrounding us. After having reconstructed the history of the concept of reification and looking at three different approaches and studies of the phenomenon, I now come to the central author I work with: Axel Honneth and his conceptualization of reification.

2 Axel Honneth`s work on reification

Before diving into Axel Honneth`s conceptualization, I want to start with another important question for the work: Why do I exactly work with Honneth`s approach? Is this just an arbitrary choice, or is there a deeper reason? The first reason is the recency of his approach. Honneth`s attempt is the most recent approach to actualize the concept on contemporary theoretical grounds and perspectives in the tradition of Western Marxism and Critical Theory. Historical authors, like Lukács or Adorno, have made significant contributions to the concept or built their own frameworks, but they do not have this contemporary theoretical aspect that Honneth has. Dirk Quadflieg recently made an important contemporary contribution. However, he does not have the conceptual approach that Honneth can offer by building on the foundation of his elaborated theory of recognition. This leads to the conceptual reasons. Through having laid groundbreaking theoretical work with his theory of recognition, Honneth laid the foundation on which he could build his own idiosyncratic and thought-provoking conceptualization. With this basis, he is able to deliver his own argumentation on how the phenomenon of reification can be understood and conceptualized. Additionally, he opens himself up for a more psychologically based attempt to explain reification phenomena. This is possible through the theoretical foundation he works on with references to empirical research. With this approach, he can also give the concept of reification a different notion based on empirical grounds. Last but not least, I want to mention a point I already elaborated on in the introduction. In my opinion, it is vital to examine how (contemporary) works of Critical Theory stand towards ecology and whether they suppress or neglect this topic in their work in times of massive ecological crises. For me, an important point in Honneth`s work is the existing or better missing relationship to the surrounding non-human environment and, therefore, nature, which he promotes in his work. With a focus on the natural environment present, I want to object to his positioning. Honneth`s theoretical grounds laid out the

possibility of further working on the perspective he presented and, at the same time, delivering a fundamental critique.

2.1 Honneth`s conceptualization of reification

This leads straight to Honneth`s conceptualization of reification. As already elaborated on, Honneth`s concept of reification has to be understood in the bigger context of his theory of recognition because ultimately, in his conceptualization, as he elaborates in his book, reification is a loss or forgetfulness of recognition.⁸⁹ For this reason, I would like to start with a recap of Honneth`s theory and concept of recognition.

2.1.2 The foundation: Theory of Recognition

I will not give an extended explanation and exploration of Honneth`s widely discussed theory of recognition.⁹⁰ But I do want to give a short outlook on his theory of recognition because it seems that without this basis, his conceptualization of reification stays without context. The main text that lays the groundwork for his theory of recognition is his book “Kampf um Anerkennung.”⁹¹ Christopher Zurn who wrote an extensive book on Honneth and his theory claims: “The book not only forwarded a number of original claims but, more importantly, provided a new research paradigm – centered on the keystone concept of intersubjective recognition – for revitalizing interdisciplinary social theory with emancipatory intent.”⁹² Honneth`s own understanding is that he goes back to Hegel`s `Jenaer Philosophie` with his project and builds it on the work, that Hegel himself did not finish.⁹³ Honneth declares as his goal to develop a theory of society. To be able to develop it without the metaphysical premises Hegel worked with - which are not possible to hold in the philosophical discourse in post-metaphysical times - he works with approaches of the social psychology of G.H. Mead, which give his theory an empirical foundation.⁹⁴

Development of self-relationship

One central theme and thesis of the book is that the self-relationship and personality of people develop in relationships of recognition. This is an intersubjective view on the development of persons and personalities and a premise the book builds on. Honneth can deliver this

89 See Honneth 2015, 61 - 75.

90 See, for example, Deranty 2009 and Zurn 2015.

91 See Honneth 2021 and Zurn 2015.

92 Zurn 2015, 1.

93 See Honneth 2021, 107.

94 See ibd., 7 - 8.

foundation for his theory with insights from Mead's social psychology.⁹⁵ Honneth's analysis is that in our modern societies, different spheres exist where processes of recognition happen. He outlines three social spheres that are important in our societies: An intimate sphere, which is built up through family, friendship, and close relations; a sphere of legal relationships; and a societal sphere of shared values.⁹⁶ According to Honneth, the first sphere contains relationships of emotional attention. For this sphere, he uses, in accordance with Hegel, the designation of love; the second sphere contains legal recognition, the fundamental legal status of the person is recognized and protected; and the last sphere contains the mutual recognition of the various subjects based on their particular abilities and attributes. This is the sphere of social recognition. He marks this sphere with the term solidarity.⁹⁷ Dirk Quadflieg points towards the fact that he, later on, changed the recognition processes of the last sphere, which is due to a changed look on the modern bourgeois and Capitalist societies. His view was first that this sphere contains recognition of the achievements (Leistungen) of the different subjects.⁹⁸ Even with this different outlook on the last sphere Honneth's overall thesis stays the same: In modern societies, the subject can develop a positive relationship to herself, if there are functioning processes of recognition in these different spheres in place. I now take a closer look at those different spheres.

Spheres of recognition

The intimate sphere

The most essential social sphere, and also where, for most people, their lives start, is the intimate sphere. They start in the intimate sphere of the family, and then they expand to friendships, love relationships, or other social spheres with an intimate character. In these spheres, emotional recognition, the recognition of one own emotions through the others, plays the essential role.⁹⁹ Honneth marks the human relationships dominant in these relations with the term love. He means "primary relationships"¹⁰⁰ with this terminology, the child-parent relationship, friendship, and erotic relationships. There is, according to Honneth, a limited amount of intimate relations with others. This limitation necessarily exists because there is a limited range of positive emotional reactions to other people.

95 See ibd. 114 - 147.

96 See Quadflieg 2019, 70.

97 See Honneth 2021, 148 – 211; Quadflieg 2019, 70.

98 See Quadflieg 2019, 73; and Fraser 2003.

99 See Quadflieg 2019, 70.

100 Honneth 2021, 153.

The legal sphere

To overcome this necessary deficit of emotional capacity and still be able to develop a functioning and somewhat peaceful societal organization in bourgeois society, another sphere is necessary that grants and protects the fundamental personhood of people in society. As mentioned above, this sphere contains the mutual recognition of the legal status of the subjects, which means the shared fundamental civil rights they equally possess. This possession guarantees legal equality. With this categorization, he builds on Hegel's and Mead's conceptualization.¹⁰¹

The sphere of solidarity

The last sphere necessary to develop a positive self-relationship is a broader social sphere than the intimate sphere. In this sphere of shared values, which Honneth later gave an economic twist with his change towards the principles of achievements, the members of society mutually recognize their different abilities and attributes. This mutual recognition based on individual characteristics is an inherent part of bourgeois societies' demarcation from earlier feudal societies. In his original conceptualization, Honneth named this the sphere of solidarity. According to him, this social recognition is a solidary practice because members actively acknowledge the individual characteristics of the others.¹⁰² Quadflieg points towards the crucial fact that Honneth later on changed his original conceptualization because he recognized that achievements are the most important feature members of the bourgeois, Capitalist societies get socially recognized for.¹⁰³

I want to point it out again: Honneth's fundamental point is that through their recognition in all these three spheres with the different dimensions, the members of society can develop personalities and positive self-relationships in our modern societies.

Critical analysis: Forms of lack of recognition

On this foundational description of societal dynamics and society's continuous development, Honneth can critically analyze societal dynamics, and his theory can gain a normative dimension. He claims that, contrary to Hegel and also Mead, he tries to make an analysis that contains the affective experience of the subjects. He ultimately asks how these experiences motivate subjects to start 'fights for recognition', as the title of his book already suggests. He categorically differentiates between different forms and qualitative differences in the lack of

101 See ibd., 173 - 195.

102 See ibd., 196 - 210.

103 See Quadflieg 2019, 73.

recognition. Like in his concepts of the spheres of recognition, he threefolds the potential lack of recognition.

1. The first phenomena, which he classifies as lacks of recognition, go deep into the intimate sphere and a person's bodily relationship. Here he identifies rape and torture.
2. Social forms of lack of recognition he identifies to be found in the legal sphere are deprivation of rights and social exclusion. In general, this means subjects structurally get excluded from certain rights in a society. Additionally to the mere exclusion of certain areas of society, this leads to subjects understanding that they do not have the status of a full and equal member of society and partner in interaction.
3. The last forms are in the third sphere. Here, he identifies processes where the value of certain forms of living do not get recognized, are disregarded, and degraded. In our everyday language, those phenomena are, for example, called insults. The problem for the subjects confronted with these phenomena is that the characteristics and features of their life forms are not regarded as positive features for a life in society.

Honneth's additional attempt is to make a theory, try to explain and make descriptions of how these experiences can lead to an affectionate and emotional conglomerate so that the subjects affected start participating in fights for recognition.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵ On this theoretical foundation, he tries to defend Hegel's and Mead's claim that these morally and affectively motivated fights for recognition lead to societal development and progress.¹⁰⁶ Those are the foundations of Honneth's theory of recognition.

Other works on this foundation: Social Freedom and Reification

Based on his work, he later elaborated on other important philosophical topics while still staying within his theoretical framework. In his monumental work "Das Recht der Freiheit," he conceptualizes an idea of freedom that is based on this theoretical foundation and framework: Social Freedom. In this work, he also builds on Hegel's intuitions.¹⁰⁷ He developed a concept of `reification` building on his foundations as well. This work he laid out in his small study and book "Reification".¹⁰⁸ And this is the one essential for my thesis.

Note towards Honneth`s theory of recognition

¹⁰⁴ I additionally want to add that other people with similar experiences and allies are usually looked for in those fights. The fights for recognition also historically happen in solidary, collective groups.

¹⁰⁵ See Honneth 2021, 212 - 225.

¹⁰⁶ See ibd., 227.

¹⁰⁷ See Honneth 2011.

¹⁰⁸ See Honneth 2015; 2008. I refer mostly to the German version as a source; solely for the quotations, I refer to the English version.

Before coming to the presentation of his concept of reification I want to give one note from my side on his theory of recognition. After this short reconstruction and introduction, I claim already one thing stands out in the context of my work. It is evident that his works focus on human societal relations, the intersubjective, interpersonal relations between human beings. Honneth's focus is not on the relations of human beings to the non-human environment. This includes other life forms, for example, animals or plants, which also exist in our societies. Now, I want to start my reconstruction of his concept of 'reification' and then go on with my input and critique.

2.1.3 Reification

Honneth's book starts with an overview of the contemporary relevance or irrelevance of the term reification. The diagnosis is that the term and concept have been highly used and referred to in critical intellectual circles at the beginning of the last century to grasp certain societal phenomena of the times. However, after the upheaval of the time, the use of the concept has almost disappeared for decades. Only in contemporary times, there has been a reintroduction in different contexts. Honneth sums up several of them: the literary use of the concept where authors point to different phenomena, the philosophical view on reification phenomena, sometimes with an explicit use of the term, and additionally in the context of brain science. This leads Honneth to the diagnosis that using and working with the term is more in vogue again.

György Lukács

After introducing his study, Honneth starts with the historical acknowledgment of different authors. He begins with the founding father of the concept in the frame of Western Marxism: György Lukács. I already delivered an introduction to Lukács' ideas and analysis. For this reason, I cut it short here. However, I want to point towards the critical dispute Honneth has with Lukács' work.

On the one hand, Honneth acknowledges the intuitions Lukács had, confronted and impressed with certain societal phenomena of his times developing in the Capitalist and industrialized Western societies. Honneth acknowledges the intellectual achievement of delivering a great attempt to grasp the varying societal phenomena of his times by introducing one critical concept. However, on the other hand, Honneth also points towards the shortcomings and blind spots of Lukács' conceptualization and ideas. Honneth claims that Lukács' original concept cannot hold a stand anymore in the contemporary critical philosophical and intellectual

discourse. He points towards different reasons for that.¹⁰⁹ First of all, he questions Lukács' ideas and explanations of how, in Capitalist societies, phenomena of reification can move from the market sphere and the exchange of goods to other spheres in society and can infect society as a whole in a totalizing manner. Lukács' strong central claim is that reification becomes the "second nature"¹¹⁰ of human beings in Capitalism.¹¹¹ One strong point of Honneth is that Lukács was not coherent in the explanations of his conceptualization. He pursued different explanatory strategies, which in some cases do not fit with each other.¹¹²

However, building on Lukács' groundwork in his own work, Honneth wants to pursue a specific strategy of explanation that already appeared in Lukács' text. Lukács is in need of conceptualizing a 'real, true human practice' which is in contrast to a reified, pathological practice with regard to fellow human beings, oneself, and the environment. Only from this foundation is it possible to criticize the pathological practice. He made social-ontological attempts to conceptualize and describe this real practice in his work. Honneth's goal is to adapt Lukács' original conceptualization with the means of his theory of recognition and, at the same time, to not fall into the traps of Lukács' criticized and questionable claims that come with his approach, clearing the concept from these appendices.

Martin Heidegger

Next, Honneth introduces the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. This is for specific reasons. Although Heidegger cannot be counted at all to the tradition of Western Marxism and can be more so seen as a Conservative philosopher¹¹³, the similarities, and overlappings in his and Lukács' philosophical works were demonstrated and pointed towards before.¹¹⁴ This is particularly apparent in their writings about the phenomenon of reification and what other possible relationships to the world they seem to have in mind. Both converge in their general critique about a predominant subject-object dualism in the Western philosophical tradition. Both of their works can be understood as a fundamental critique and deconstruction, attempting to overcome this philosophical understanding. However, there is one crucial point where they diverge, which is essential for Lukács' work. Lukács sees the roots for the dominance of this philosophical understanding in the existing societal conditions, concretely the Capitalist market conditions; for Heidegger, in contrast, any societal analysis and

109 See Honneth 2021, 20 - 29.

110 Honneth 2008, 23.

111 See Honneth 2015, 22.

112 See ibd., 22 - 27.

113 I will not go into the youngest revelations about his relationship to Nazism.

114 See Honneth 2015, 31.

conclusions are alien and not part of his work. He stays within the philosophical analysis and, more so, finds refuge in the everyday life of humans. He understands these philosophical abstract constructions as alienated from the human everyday experience. For Lukács, revolutionary processes in society are the solution that can release society from pathological phenomena. Heidegger, in contrast, makes recourse to the everyday experiences for his philosophy. A central concept and term in his philosophy is care (Sorge). He claims that the human relationship to life and the world is originally one of care. Humans are already in a deeply bonding relationship to the world, and their Being (Sein) in the world is impregnated by this relationship. The meanings that come towards us from the world are always already affected by this relationship.¹¹⁵

Honneth's attempt is to bring together the philosophical approaches of these authors. Terminologically, he does that with a focus on the central terms. The one of care and the compassionate practice that Lukács had in mind. Honneth points to the fact that the authors seemingly meant very similar attitudes. Additionally and importantly, the relations described with these terms should be understood not only regarding fellow human beings but also all other objects surrounding us in our environment. With these termini, not only intersubjective relationships are described. The central conceptual and theoretical challenge for Honneth is transitioning from the conceptualizations of the two historical authors into his theoretical fields. He tries to work with the phenomenal content of the central terms and translate it into his theoretical language. This means that his term and concept of `recognition` takes the place of the two terms of care and compassionate practice.¹¹⁶ He wants to do this to stay, on the one hand, within his theory and, on the other hand, he has the goal to enlighten what Lukács, Heidegger (and Dewey) meant with their descriptions and terms.¹¹⁷ To arrive at his goal he chooses another intermediate step and takes a look at the philosophy of John Dewey and his outlook on the topic. Honneth reasons that Dewey's work can help him as a bridge to his theory.

John Dewey

Honneth identifies the similarity of Dewey's philosophical approach to the philosophies of Lukács and Heidegger. Honneth points to one of Dewey's main points, which is interesting for his work. Dewey's view is that before any comprehension of reality, there must be an experience, which, in his view, is a holistic experience. This experience is bound to an

¹¹⁵ See ibd., 30 - 33.

¹¹⁶ See Honneth 2015, 39 - 40.

¹¹⁷ See ibd., 170.

interested involvement with the world. As a pragmatist, Dewey claims this involvement is also connected to a practice within the world. He calls it an interaction with the world.¹¹⁸ According to Dewey, an intellectual, organizing endeavor to analyze specific experiences and dissecting them into certain parts happens in hindsight after having these holistic experiences. Dewey's very interesting and precise point is that he warns of forgetting the original experience in the intellectual endeavor and therefore, also forgetting the reason why the intellectual endeavor was even started firsthand, possibly confronted with a problem.

The Priority of Recognition

This leads to Honneth's own perspective, which he elaborates on in the book's third chapter. Dewey's view ultimately serves as a foundation and support to Honneth's theoretical view that before any cognition (Erkenntnis), there must be some form of recognition (Anerkennung). Honneth understands this "priority of recognition"¹¹⁹ in a `conceptual` and a `genetic` way. His point is, following Lukács, Heidegger, and Dewey, that there is no way to neutrally get insight into the world without having an existential recognizing relationship to the surrounding world.¹²⁰ To prove his thesis and make a stronger argumentation, he leaves the speculative, theoretical and more intuitive tradition based on the individual experiences of the philosophers, who hold a certain authority, and moves on to a tradition lying into the scientific, more empirical field.

He first intends to look at the genetic priority of recognition before cognition. Here, he looks into the field of development psychology because he intends to look at human infantile development. This precisely is what he means by genetic priority: the priority in the genesis or development. He claims and shows that there has been a consensus for a while now in the research on processes of development psychology and socialization that the infantile ability to think and interact "must be conceived as a process that occurs in the act of taking over another person's perspective".¹²¹ It follows a more extended argumentation why this is the case. For this thesis, his claim is enough, and the argumentation is not necessary. With the second outlook on the conceptual priority, Honneth more or less argues for the perspectives Heidegger and Dewey have presented. Their points were that every outlook on the world, even the supposedly neutral, scientific outlook, is based on a prioritized human relationship to the world, which occurs before any more neutral, objectified relationship to the world can be

118 See *ibid.*, 40 - 42.

119 Honneth 2008, 40.

120 Interestingly enough, Honneth still writes about the possibility of also having a recognizing view of the non-human world surrounding us, the world of objects.

121 Honneth 2008, 41.

acquired. Dewey's strong point is that this should not be forgotten.¹²² To prove these fundamental outlooks, intending to pack them in his terminology, Honneth takes help from the work of another author, Stanley Cavell. Honneth sees a systematic argumentation in Cavell's approach, in addition to the argumentation, which was situated in the historical-philosophical field with his recourse to Heidegger and Dewey.

Honneth points to the fact that Cavell had his own conceptualization of recognition or acknowledgment in Cavell's terms. What is important for Honneth in Cavell's work is the relationship to others he describes. He describes the experiencing of another human being or another psyche. Cavell's strong point is that there has to be some point of existential involvement of oneself to the psychic processes and experiences of another person at first, or in his terminology an acknowledgment. Every reaction to the affections and feelings of others is an expression of acknowledgment. Honneth's resume compromised is this: "He (Cavell) maintains that the fabric of social interaction is not, as philosophers often assume, spun out of the material of cognitive acts, but instead out of that of recognizing stances."¹²³ With this, Cavell adds what Honneth calls a conceptual priority. The premise for the understanding of others is a prioritized affective acknowledgment of them.¹²⁴

Honneth points to a relevant issue that could be a source of misunderstanding. When there is the talk of a `positive` relationship with other people, this terminology does not mean this has to be necessarily solely a fostering of positive emotions towards others. The term positive solely signifies the prioritized existential and affective acknowledgment of the others, in contrast to the negation of the others. It does not necessarily mean recognizing a particular value the others have. Honneth is convinced that this recourse to Cavell's work gives him an additional crucial piece, after Heidegger, Dewey, and the insights of development psychology, for the foundation on which he can build his own approach and conceptualization. Lastly, I want to point to one important issue for my work, which also distinguishes Cavell's approach from Lukács`, Heidegger's, and Dewey's. Cavell is solely interested in human relationships. This is also where his ideas and theory are bound to. The attitude of acknowledgment can only be exercised toward other human beings. The other three philosophers, very importantly, extended those processes they had in mind to the whole world surrounding us. They explicitly signified them with different terms. Obviously, this issue and theme are of utmost importance

122 Honneth 2015, 53.

123 Honneth 2008, 50.

124 I think this is strongly connected to the phenomenon of empathy, and I wonder why Honneth does not at least do an excursion on this.

to me because this is the topic of my work. In the following chapters of his book, Honneth shows how he deals with the issue.

Reification as Forgetfulness of Recognition¹²⁵

The fourth chapter is the central part of Honneth's work and also the main chapter for me. Here, he presents his own conceptualization of reification. The most difficult and a critical question for Honneth is how it can come to those pathological relationships Lukács describes. How is a genesis of such reified relationships possible if the underlying assumption of Lukács is that the natural relationship of human beings to the world is one of interested involvement and recognition?¹²⁶ With his reference to the societal conditions as the underlying reasons for this process, Lukács also has to find his explanation in the societal conditions. He presents a possible answer in the connection between reification and objectified thinking. According to Honneth, Lukács tends to present the view that any process that leads to objectified thinking is a process of reification. Any societal conditions calling for or leading to these processes must then be understood as pathological. Honneth throws this perspective as too totalizing away. He understands the possibility of objectified thinking, like it is present in science, together with Heidegger and Dewey, as a possible product of a prioritized relationship of recognition to the world. This objectified thinking does not necessarily have to be pathological. Honneth's ultimate conclusion is that he has to go for a different approach and make a distinction between phenomena of reification and objectified thinking if he wants to actualize Lukács' original concept of reification.¹²⁷

As a foundation for his project, he gives a specific understanding. He wants to distinguish between two phenomena: "We have, on the one hand, forms of knowledge sensitive to recognition, and, on the other, forms of knowledge in which every trace of their origin in an antecedent act of recognition has been lost."¹²⁸ In this formulation we can see the foundation of Honneth's understanding, his terminology, and conceptualization of reification as a forgetfulness of recognition (*Anerkennungsvergessenheit*). In order to strengthen his position, he makes a case of how his understanding is in line with the approaches of the other thinkers he worked with. According to him, Dewey, Cavell, and also Adorno have similar outlooks on

125 Here, the connection to Heidegger's term 'Seinsvergessenheit' is obvious, and also the connection to Horkheimer's and Adorno's approach which is explained very well with the sentence "All reification is forgetting".

126 See Honneth 2008, 62.

127 See Honneth 2015, 64 - 65.

128 Honneth 2008, 56.

the topic.¹²⁹ For Honneth, the somehow existing possibility of forgetting the origin, where all objectified, conceptual thinking comes from, is the key to his understanding of reification. Within the perceiving processes, there is somehow the link missing so that “(..) our social surroundings appear here, very much (...), as a totality of merely observable objects lacking all psychic impulse or emotion.”¹³⁰

However, with this understanding, Honneth still has a similar problem like Lukács: How can this prioritized recognition be forgotten? According to Lukács, the main dynamics lie in the properties of the dynamics of Capitalist societies and markets. For Honneth, this answer to the question is not possible. Here, Honneth's understanding of forgetfulness comes into play. He understands the process of forgetting as a (possibly temporary) change in consciousness, a reduction in attentiveness. In the cognition processes, there is a loss or forgetfulness that a process of recognition is prioritized to the actual cognition. The two structural possibilities and reasons how it can come to such a loss are either “that our cognitive stance has become rigid or overemphasized, or, in the second case, with a retroactive denial of recognition for the sake of preserving a prejudice or stereotype.”¹³¹ Honneth lists different concrete situations where it can come to such a loss. He puts the sociological explanation, which means pointing to the social sources of how it can come structurally to such reification phenomena, in the last chapter of his book.

The next issue he intends to tackle is central to my work. After looking at the relationship with other people, Honneth now wants to look on the one hand at the relationship of people to themselves and, importantly, for me, to the surrounding environment. Here comes the key part, where I want to build my work, critique, and addition on. Honneth points to the fact that all three philosophers he worked with from the beginning, Lukács, Heidegger, and Dewey, had the view that the relationship to the non-human environment could be one of involvement, care (*Sorge*), or recognition. Honneth summarizes these views like this: “Just as we must be affected by other people before we can take up a more neutral stance, so also our physical surroundings must be disclosed to us in their qualitative value prior to our more objective dealings with them.”¹³² However, Honneth points to the views of the other authors he worked with in the book which are in contrast to these views. The developmental psychologists and Cavell work and stay in the context of relations to other human beings. For them, the priority of identification or recognition solely happens in this context, but not in the

129 Honneth 2015, 67.

130 Honneth 2008, 58.

131 Ibid., 60.

132 Ibid.

context of relations to the non-human environment surrounding us. This is a fundamental problem for Honneth. On the one hand, he wants to develop and build on Lukács' original concept of reification, where explicitly a reified relationship to the non-human environment is included; on the other hand, he also intends to build his own conceptualization on the insights and views of the other authors with 'recognition' as his central term. Faced with this problem he decides for one side. His reasoning is that the only thing that he could show, with his presentation of a genetic and a conceptual priority, is that there is a prioritized process of recognition towards other human beings.

His ultimate solution is to take this way: Honneth rejects Lukács' original view that we also have to have an attitude of involvement towards the non-human environment. Coming with this, he also rejects both Heidegger's and Dewey's views, who, according to Honneth, also make the point that "our physical surroundings must always already have been disclosed to us in their qualitative significance before we can relate to them in a theoretical fashion"¹³³. He rejects these outlooks in a few sentences. The argument against Lukács is that he "would also have to show that abandoning this kind of perspective would ultimately be irreconcilable with the goal of apprehending nature as objectively as possible. Only when it could be claimed here as well that recognition enjoys a categorial priority over cognition could he prove in the end that in treating nature instrumentally, we violate a necessary precondition of our social practices."¹³⁴ For Heidegger's and Dewey's view he writes that he "hardly see[s] any support for the strong hypothesis that an objectification of nature could in any way harm the primacy of care or qualitative experience."¹³⁵ He concludes that a direct way to understand phenomena of reification of the non-human environment and nature is not possible. From an ethical perspective, it might be good to have an interactive relationship with other life forms surrounding us. However, there is no necessary priority of recognition, involvement, or care like he claims there is for a relationship between humans.

He alternatively proposes another possibility. He still wants to look at this issue the three authors brought up but stay within the conceptual framework he defends. The view and conceptualization he proposes is an indirect look at this. He claims that we can imagine and conceptualize an indirect reified relationship to the world surrounding us. In this matter, he again refers to Adorno because Adorno also advocated the view that the cognitive relationship to the world, our objectified thinking, is only possible by adopting the perspective of loved people. In a terminology he adopted from psychoanalysis, he called it a libidinal relationship

¹³³ Ibid., 61.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Honneth 2008, 61.

with other people. In its development, the child can distinguish attitudes towards the objects from the actual objects. However, the child and human who develops still carries along certain attitudes and psychic energies she adopted from the loved person. So, the child still carries meanings towards the object adopted from other people.¹³⁶ This is precisely the source for the conceptualization of an indirect reifying relationship that Honneth presented.

On this foundation, he also presented a normative perspective: “Our recognition of the individuality of other persons demands that we perceive objects in the particularity of all those aspects that they attach to these objects in their respective views of them.”¹³⁷ Once again: Honneth sees this as the only way reification can be understood and conceptualized with regards to the non-human environment, including nature and also precisely other non-human living beings. “We then perceive animals, plants, or things in a merely objectively identifying way, without being aware that these objects possess a multiplicity of existential meanings for the people around us.”¹³⁸¹³⁹ Honneth summarizes his up to this point presented view like this: “When our relation to other persons is at issue, ‘reification’ means that we have lost sight of our antecedent recognition of these same persons; whereas when we speak of our relation to the objective world, the term signifies our having lost sight of the multiplicity of ways in which the world has significance for those we have antecedently recognized.”¹⁴⁰

Here already comes a small note. I want to clarify what this means. I claim that Honneth takes a purely anthropocentric view with this conceptualization. There is no regard for the perspective, perception and life of the living beings surrounding us. Honneth’s view apparently is that the only way reification of the non-human world surrounding us can happen is through other people. However, this makes a strong appearance to me that what actually happens is a reification of the other person again. Honneth does not relate to the world surrounding us, but he relates to a fellow human being’s perception of the world. In a strong sense, it seems to me that the world around us can be still reified and when another person and her perception of the world are recognized.

The last two chapters and the reply to the commentators

After this central part of the book, I shortly want to touch on the last two chapters and Honneth's reply to the three commentators to finish up the whole conceptualization of his book. Unfortunately, the issue of reification of oneself is of importance for my explorations

136 See Honneth 2015, 73 - 75.

137 Honneth 2008, 62 - 63.

138 Ibid., 63.

139 See Honneth 2015, 74 - 75.

140 Honneth 2008, 63 - 64.

and my thesis. In my opinion, it is an interesting topic on its own. The underlying question is what can be meant when there is the talk of reification of oneself. On this issue, Honneth brings up Adorno's view again, in addition to Lukács' paragraphs. Both tried to shine some light on this phenomenon and made clear that, in their opinion, this phenomenon exists, but, according to Honneth, they unfortunately did not deliver extensive descriptions. Honneth himself tries to integrate the issue in his own theoretical and terminological attempt. Cutting his more extensive explorations short, Honneth claims that in a positive self-relationship, there should be some form of self-affirmation (Selbstbejahung) or recognition of the processes within oneself. If this is not present, and there is a forgetfulness of recognition, phenomena of reification are possible, which can exist in different ways.¹⁴¹

His last chapter is on the social sources of reification and, therefore, opens up another important issue. Honneth, already earlier in his book, brought up this issue and claimed that Lukács ultimately failed to deliver comprehensive and convincing explanations of what those sources are. As we learned, Lukács brought back everything to the economic sphere of the Capitalist market society as the primary and ultimately only source. Honneth describes this as a very problematic approach and gives several reasons, which I will not go into detail here. Honneth's approach to this topic is based on his theoretical conceptualization. He looks for and presents social sources which lead to processes of forgetfulness of recognition.

At the end of his book, as a reply to the answers of three commentators - Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss, and Jonathan Lear - Honneth clarifies some of his standpoints. He points out what is important to him. With a relationship based on recognition, he does not necessarily mean a relationship with others filled with positive emotions or sympathy. He clarifies as well that he does not mean a moral or ethical dimension of recognition. He states that what he means with his idea of recognition is a social ontological relationship, which is prior to any other forms of relationship of recognition. This, for him, fundamental relationship is a recognition where the other is recognized as a fellow human being with the qualities a human being has. His view is that we do and can speak of reification when this basic, prioritized recognition is lost and forgotten, and the other is not even recognized as a human being anymore. He also points out that the examples of this happening are probably rare. One example where this might happen, according to Honneth, might be the situation of war and mass murder when the purpose of defeating and annihilating the enemy might destroy the last instances of correction that the enemy actually persists of fellow human beings with various

141 See Honneth 2015, 76 - 90.

qualities.¹⁴² He also points out the personal intention that drove himself. He wanted to understand how these instances are possible, what processes are going on, and how it can be grasped when human beings do this to others. After these insights on the finishing touches of his book, I want to return to the main issue for the thesis as a transition to the next part. Honneth's view is explicitly that any reifying relationship to the non-human environment is deducted from an interhuman relationship. The possibility of a direct reifying relationship to the non-human environment is denied.

2.2 Intention of critique and expansion of Honneth's theoretical approach

“Life does not live”¹⁴³

Theodor W. Adorno

For my critique of and addition to Honneth's work, I will go to chapter 4 of his book, which I have already marked as the most important chapter for me. As already stressed, the main problem I want to point towards is his positioning regarding the relationship to the non-human environment. I want to present a different outlook and approach here but still stay within Honneth's theoretical framework. This means, in his terminology, that I want to show how it is possible to conceptualize and understand a direct reifying relationship to the non-human environment surrounding us. For this reason, it is a critique of his approach regarding the relationship to the non-human environment and also an expansion of his approach to fit it in the context of relations to non-human life. My intention is, first and foremost, to say, yes, indeed, there is a possibility to directly reify non-human life forms.

I already laid out a detailed summary of the paragraphs where Honneth articulated his outlook.¹⁴⁴ The point essential for me to is the distinction between an indirect and a direct

142 I want to point to an important fact here. Honneth claims that Lukács' idea to see the origin of the reifying relationships in the dynamics of Capitalist market societies is flawed and simplified. I do get his point here. However, I would like to chip in a short defense of Lukács' original idea. We can indeed imagine that Capitalist market relationships lead to phenomena of reification, and I think these phenomena are widespread. Honneth's fundamental point is that these phenomena can happen when a specific purpose (Zweck), as he pointed towards in the extreme example of the war and the purpose of the annihilation of the enemy, can somehow suppress or block out (ausblenden) all other inter-human relationships, also the one of a basic recognition of the other as a fellow human being. I think this goes along with other authors, that this can and does happen when being stuck with the sole purpose of profit-making, of making money. This might not be an example as extreme as the one of war, but I claim that in its basic structures, it shows the same features.

143 Adorno 1988, 20, own translation. In my interpretation, Adorno wants to point to the diminished and oppressed life in the modern bourgeois, Capitalist, and bureaucratic societies. Herbert Marcuse, another important author in the tradition of critical theory, points towards this with his concept of the one-dimensional human being. See Marcuse 1987.

144 Just to clarify: I really appreciate Honneth's work, and I learned a lot from his work, but my view is that he might have a blind spot in this context.

reifying relationship to nature.¹⁴⁵ While he denies the possibility of a direct reifying relationship, he affirms and conceptualizes the possibility of an indirect reifying relationship. His focus is on reification as an inter-human phenomenon. With this positioning, he also denies the possibility of understanding reification as a valid concept regarding non-human life forms. However, some detailed points in Honneth's work are interesting to me. Rather obviously, he presents inconsistent approaches with his own official, prominent positioning. Evidently, he presents the approaches of other Western philosophers, which are not in line with his view. He gives other perspectives a room, which can be convincing in their own way for the reader. But more importantly, his own ethical outlook presented is interesting to me. This outlook on a reifying relationship with the non-human environment is briefly built into the abovementioned paragraphs. He states that it might be morally desirable to achieve a direct non-reifying relationship to nature.¹⁴⁶ "We may regard the possibility of interactive, recognizing dealings with animals, plants, and even things to be ethically desirable, but this normative preference cannot provide any sound arguments for claiming that society cannot go beyond these forms of interaction."¹⁴⁷ This implies to me that a relationship to nature that can be diagnosed as directly reifying and non-recognizing is possible. Its contrast foil and a relationship, which Honneth himself acknowledges as possibly ethically desirable, is an interactive, recognizing dealing. This goes in a different direction than his own claim that we can and should not conceptualize a directly reifying relationship to nature and, more so, only think about an indirectly reifying relationship. He claims that different forms of interaction exist. This seems to me rather obvious. This shows the diagnosis of reification itself. It is one possible (maybe pathological) relationship, among other possible forms. The important notion to me here is that I think he implicitly acknowledges that another interactive, recognizing relationship to nature around us would be possible.¹⁴⁸

Being conscious of those interesting and possibly somewhat inconsistent parts in Honneth's work, I myself want to present an explicitly different approach.¹⁴⁹ I claim my approach makes it possible to conceptualize a directly reifying relationship to nature. *My ultimate formula and thesis is that a (direct) reification of non-human life surrounding us can be understood as a loss of recognition of life. Life how it comes in its different forms, but nonetheless life.* In this sense, it is a forgetfulness of recognition as well, but it is presented in a different way than Honneth did it. Analogically to Heidegger's term 'Seinsvergessenheit', it could be called

145 See Honneth 2015, 72 - 75.

146 See ibd., 73.

147 Honneth 2008, 62 - 63.

148 See above and once again Honneth 2015, 72.

149 Which can actually go along the 'unofficial' ethical possibility he shows.

a *forgetfulness of life* (*Lebensvergessenheit*). The basic idea that I want to present is simple and is in line with the concept of reification. There exists a false recognition of something as a thing that is truly not only a thing or an object. Other important features of the life form are not recognized, precisely the life inherent to it. Building on Honneth, who points towards the basic recognition of the other as a human being¹⁵⁰, I want to point to the basic recognition of another life form as a living being, flooded by life. Honneth's intellectual approach with the sole inclusion of human life suggests that it is seemingly possible to forget that we can have this acknowledging relationship towards other life forms. Also, when seeing, perceiving, and acknowledging processes and dynamics in our human societies, it seems most definitely possible that this recognizing character towards other life forms and living beings is lost. It seems that ultimately, with my thesis and philosophical approach, I am close to and go back in the direction of the outlooks of Heidegger, Lukács, and Dewey, at least the ones Honneth described in his book. However, I intend to present my approach in the conceptualization and terminology of Honneth because, to me, the foundation of his theory of recognition is appealing and interesting. I will see if this functions and is convincing. With my critique and expansion of Honneth's approach, I want to go in a different direction but still lean on Adorno's quote presented above. Apparently, tendencies are possible to not recognize anymore that life is living. Non-human and also human life lives very much, but possibly this is not appreciated. Importantly, in my critique and approach, I do not look at the human self-relationship and the relationship to other fellow citizens and humans, which is obviously an important one. My focus resides on the relationship to non-human life forms. I claim that somehow, with this argumentation, I make a move that Honneth himself proclaims in his book as the possibility of the expansion of the human perspective. Honneth brings up the possibility of adopting different perspectives on objects. Adorno claimed that our recognition of objects and situations might be better and more accurate the more different perspectives we can adopt.¹⁵¹ Honneth argues with Adorno and within the house of development psychology he presented that this expansion of the perspectives is only possible with an emotional opening and identification with others, the same ways the child develops his worldview.¹⁵² For me it is important to take over the argumentation that a change and development of the human outlook and perspectives are possible. Our worldview on animals or plants can change, vary, and develop.

150 See Honneth 2015, 76.

151 See Honneth 2015, 73 - 74.

152 See *ibid.*, 52.

At the end of these paragraphs I already want to have an outlook on two important points for me. For one, this does not necessarily have any moral implications. This point aligns with Honneth's (and Lukács') approach. One can acknowledge the life within a non-human life form and still kill and take the life out of this form of life, for example, a spider or a snake wanting to bite. I will go into more detail here later on. Another important point is that the reification of non-human life, how I understand it, in perception and acting towards it, is almost certainly even more widespread than the reification of other humans, of human life.¹⁵³ Another important outlook I want to make is on the possibility of working with Honneth's tools in the approach I present. It is important for me to acknowledge that I cannot work with some things that are implied in Honneth's approach and conceptualization. One of Honneth's main points is that the recognition of oneself through others is important for a steady and healthy development of oneself. I presented this above in the part of my work called 'spheres of recognition'.¹⁵⁴ In this sense, a lack or loss of recognition is detrimental to one's development. It seems to me that clearly, it is another story with the recognition of other life forms, animals, and plants. It is most certainly not important to the development and flourishing of plants if their life gets recognized by humans, as long as they do not get killed or hurt by human beings. The same counts (probably) for most animals.¹⁵⁵ Another important point builds and follows from that notion and insight: Honneth claims, and I intuitively tend to agree that societal reproduction also builds on processes of recognition.¹⁵⁶ This can be imagined. If there is a destruction of processes of recognition happening within a society, the societal flourishing gets jeopardized as well as the individual development. For this reason, the flourishing of societies (and communities) builds on interhuman processes of recognition. This is apparently not the case for the recognizing processes I have in mind towards other life forms. But now, I want to take the next step to my conceptualization. Before presenting again and, more precisely, how it looks, I will first take a closer look at the phenomenon, term, and concept of life in different scientific, philosophical, and spiritual spheres. This is because life is the central term and phenomenon I work with in the approach. I think it is necessary to give the approach I present more underlying substance and make it more understandable. I intend to show why this term is so important to me.

153 I do not have any empirical data for this claim, but it seems obvious to me. The question is why this is.

154 See 2.1.2. The foundation: Theory of recognition.

155 I write 'most' here because I do not know, also not of any research, if and how the recognition through human beings might be important for certain animals who live very close and have an intimate relationship with humans.

156 See Honneth 2021.

3 The phenomenon and concept of life

“Oh, life, it's bigger.
It's bigger than you.”¹⁵⁷
(R.E.M)

The talk and occupation with questions about life (and death) have been important for human beings since they exist. Hans Jonas, a philosopher of the 20th century, has been engaged with this topic in his prominent book `The Phenomenon of Life`. He points to the fact that in worldviews of earlier days of humanity, what appeared as a riddle was the phenomenon of death because, for humans living in these days of time, everything around them appeared to be alive. For these humans counted the formula that “... being [was] the same as being alive.”¹⁵⁸ When we look around us and perceive the environment, this worldview can be seen as very sensible. The term for this worldview is `Animism`, which means that everything around us is perceived to be flooded by life and soul. How can death fit in there? This was the problem for this position and worldview.

According to Jonas, things changed massively in the upcoming time. An important break was the Copernican Revolution. The processes and results of the Copernican revolution gave humankind insights into the vastness of the universe. With these insights came the understanding that life is by far not the dominant rule in the universe. The Copernican revolution came together with Modern thought processes, beginning in the Renaissance. The whole outlook shifted and changed. The problem and riddle from now on was the phenomenon of life and not the one of death. How is it possible that life exists on this planet? This is a question that is still very familiar to humans nowadays. An inherent property of early Modern thought processes is the mechanical worldview. “[...] [I]t is the existence of life within a mechanical universe which now calls for an explanation, and explanation has to be in terms of the lifeless.”¹⁵⁹ This has important effects on the outlook on the phenomenon of life, namely also a materialistic outlook on life and living entities itself. The mechanic and material basis of life and different living entities is recognized, and the question is how from matter life can evolve.¹⁶⁰ After these opening paragraphs on the phenomenon of life, I want to

157 R.E.M. 1991.

158 Jonas 2001, 7.

159 Ibid., 10.

160 Ibid., 7 - 12.

dive into different spheres and disciplines where the term plays a central role. It will be central and fundamental in my thesis and analysis.

3.1 Natural Sciences – Biology

Before going into the philosophical considerations about the phenomenon of life, I want to look at a scientific outlook - the one in the field of biology. Jonas' attempt was to develop a philosophical biology, as he called it. However, in natural sciences, there obviously exist perspectives as well that have developed over time. Biology is the scientific field in which life in all its dimensions is studied. In the contemporary modern (Western) scientific spectrum, it is closely tied to physics and chemistry. These disciplines can count as foundations for biology. For me, the critical question is the perspective on life and how it is defined in biology. What is alive? Firstly, it has to be said that knowledge about life and its processes has already reached enormous heights. This goes along with the development of scientific insights.

Definition of natural sciences

According to the German Max-Planck Institute (Synthetic Biology), there is no generally accepted definition of life. One factor that leads to that is that there exists no comprehensive theory in biology that allows a generally defining view of life. However, there are different criteria and factors that serve as a foundation to recognize and define what is alive:

1. Living beings or different life forms consist of at least one cell in which biochemical processes take place.
2. A genetic program exists that is the foundation for the function of the life form.
3. All living beings have a metabolism. Matter moves within themselves, and they are in touch with the environment. There is a need to constantly exchange energy and matter with the environment to conserve and reproduce.
4. Chemical processes constantly happen in the cells, which spend energy. the term for this is catalysis.
5. There is a need for regulation of all metabolic processes within the living being.
6. For life to be able to reproduce itself, growth is necessary. A cell grows until it divides itself.
7. There is an ongoing reproduction of the genetic program. The genetic program can be copied and passed on to developing cells.
8. Some sort of evolution/adaptation takes place. Life changes and develops in relationship to the environment. This happens due to accidental changes in the genetic

program, which are passed on. The upcoming generations with the changed genetic programs might have better chances to survive under different environmental circumstances.

Those eight listed properties are possible scientific characteristics to grasp the very complex phenomenon of life.¹⁶¹ Additionally, influential voices in the 20th century added other perspectives when talking about the issue of life. Some of them put the process of evolution in the foreground as a central characteristic of life. There is additionally a perspective that puts the ability for self-organization in the center. And there exists a view in physics that puts the thermodynamical processes happening within life forms in the foreground. Another important concept that developed through the engagement is autopoiesis. This refers to the possibility of self-production and reproduction.¹⁶² These varying attempts to take a close look and define life's most important characteristics already show how difficult it is to develop a concluded and generally accepted theory. Nonetheless, they give us important insight into widespread perspectives on the most essential properties of life. Interestingly enough, there is a different outlook, which is important for me in this context. The Gaia hypothesis was developed in the 20th century and postulates that the planet's whole biosphere should be looked at like one big living being.¹⁶³ I think this perspective is more or less related to the perspective of Animism I explained earlier. But it contains the post-enlightenment notion that just living organisms are understood as alive, not stones or wind, for example.

3.2 Philosophical outlooks on the phenomenon of life, including my perspective

After this short view on the perspective of natural sciences, I want to dive into philosophical outlooks. At the end of this part, I want to highlight the points which seem to be the important ones for me. An important question for me is what philosophical perspectives I want to refer to. Over the history of Western philosophy, many approaches have developed towards the phenomenon of life.¹⁶⁴ The book I will work with is the Andreas Brenner's small summarizing work 'Leben'.¹⁶⁵ He presents a summary of different (historical) outlooks on the phenomenon of life. Brenner suggests in his introduction that we (most of the time) intuitively know what is alive around us.¹⁶⁶ But what philosophical outlooks does Brenner list in his book?

¹⁶¹ See Max-Planck-Gesellschaft 2022.

¹⁶² See ibd.

¹⁶³ See for example Podbregar and Lohmann 2013; Bardi 2013. There is much further discussion about this outlook and notion. I will not go into detail here. However, it was important for me to mention.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Brenner 2009, 18 – 51.

¹⁶⁵ See Brenner 2009.

¹⁶⁶ See ibd., 7.

3.2.1 The European/Western philosophical tradition

The ancient Greek tradition - Aristotle

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was, at the same time, a big natural researcher. This combination led to the many insights and ideas he presented about the phenomenon of life. Essential works are his physics and metaphysics.¹⁶⁷ For Aristotle, a central property of all alive is the movement within. According to him, all that is alive is moving, developing within itself, towards flourishing. The difference to entities that are not alive is that the movement and the development, the striving towards flourishing, and, at the same time, the possibility for change lies within the living being as an inherent property. In terms of modern natural sciences, this means probably that, for example, metabolic processes are taking place. Non-living entities, on the other hand, do not have this possibility lying within themselves. They need to be formed by outside forces to be able to change. Tranquility and, at the same time, the possibility for change are inherent to everything alive. An important relationship for him is between the material and the form. For Aristotle, just the material does not make a living being yet. The determining force that gives shape to the material and manifests it is the one that forms. The form leads to the completion of the living being, which is thought to already have its destination (telos) within it. The material only has the possibility within itself. The forming force is, for Aristotle, the soul, which is in all that is alive and is seen by him as the principle of life. The soul, the body, and the interaction of both are the central elements for him.¹⁶⁸

Materialism

Starting with modern times and the beginning of the period of Enlightenment, the materialistic outlook started dominating the perspective on the living. The philosopher who more or less started this materialistic modern endeavor and one of the most prominent faces associated with this outlook was René Descartes. In his 'Meditationes'¹⁶⁹, he contemplated the human condition. His prominent distinction developed from those contemplations is the twofold of the res intima and the res extensa. With the res intima, he more or less meant the soul of the human being, the entity that makes the human to the human. The res extensa is the matter, the body, for Descartes, importantly, the mechanical body, which is in a way separated from the res intima. For him, an important notion was that the intima, the soul of the living being, is thought to be somehow able to live without the mechanical body. It is important here

167 See Aristotle and Zekl 1987; Aristotle 1989.

168 See Brenner 2009, 18 - 20.

169 See Descartes et al. 1992.

that this Dualism, this combination between intima and extensa, solely takes place in the human being. Other living beings are thought just to have the element of the res extensa. This foundation also leads to the conclusion that animals are thought to be just mechanical bodies without any sensations, emotions, and consciousness. This Cartesian outlook was strongly influential in the upcoming times. The materialistic outlook is also closely related to the outlook of the developing modern natural sciences. A fruitful combination was the massive development made in the natural sciences in modern times through the development of a strict scientific method and technology.

German Philosophy - Kant, Romanticism and Goethe

Against this materialistic outlook, there was a strong countermovement, especially in Germany. Immanuel Kant's philosophy can be seen as the start of this movement. In his idealistic philosophical approach, he claimed that this materialistic outlook does not make sense from an epistemological perspective. He claims that we do not and cannot know the aims of nature; what we construct are solely human interpretations. We construct causes we do not know anything about. According to him, we are not able to go back to the fundamental cause for nature. Nature unfolds and cannot be interpreted solely from a causal, mechanistic perspective. Looking at it solely from a materialistic, mechanistic perspective is a false approach.

The young philosophers and poets from the Romanticism period were readers of Kant and influenced by his philosophy. They built on Kant's view of the relationship between the whole and the parts. According to him, the parts are not sufficient elements to explain the whole, with matter which is alive. The living is, at the same time, cause and effect. The Romantic poets share this view on nature as a whole, which cannot be reduced solely to its parts. According to them, there is a fundamental hindrance to recognizing nature and the living in itself. With this perspective, they also claim that the approach of natural sciences with its language cannot construct this direct epistemological relationship as it is claimed in the natural sciences. Their view is that only indirect recognition is possible. This recognition happens through the human subject. For this reason, the epistemological subject, which is also alive, and its relationship to nature and life surrounding us, is so important. The feeling subject and human being, which is importantly also alive, is essential for this relationship. He can generate different, varying accesses to surrounding nature than a mechanistic, objective, scientific view proposes.¹⁷⁰ This approach is vital for me because it importantly acknowledges

170 See Brenner 2009, 24 - 28.

all the life flowing through us and the things that are alive surrounding us. It openly criticizes a purely mechanistic, objectified, and therefore reified view. The phenomenon of life is a central principle in this philosophical approach.

I want to mention another influential German approach. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a special example with his approach. He developed his own philosophical outlook on nature. Goethe distinguished himself from the Romantic approach in a way. He intended to construct a rational approach. He combined philosophical analysis with his empirical observations. For Goethe Spinoza's distinction between `natura naturata` and `natura naturans`, the eternal creating natural force and the created natural individual phenomena play a significant role. The relationship between the whole and the individual parts is, for this reason, of enormous relevance. The whole cannot be understood solely from putting together the individual parts. The whole has something eternal, and it influences the individual parts. Goethe was skeptical of a systemic understanding of nature and preferred the concept of organization. He was also very skeptical about the possibility of grasping nature with abstract terminology, especially abstract scientific terminology.¹⁷¹ With these historical outlooks of German philosophy, I wanted to show other influential Western views in the history of philosophy.

An essential philosopher of nature of the 20th century – Hans Jonas

I want to come now to an approach that has developed in modern, contemporary times. Vittorio Hösle stated that without Hans Jonas, a responsible environmental philosophy¹⁷² of our times would not exist. This is a significant acknowledgment of Jonas' work. I want to mention his approach because it is strongly connected to my perspective. When researching and working within contemporary Western environmental philosophy, there is little or no way around Jonas' work. Two works are especially important: "Das Prinzip Verantwortung" and "Das Prinzip Leben". In the first book, Jonas unfolded a broad ethical approach in the times of ecological crises and the massive technological development of modern times.¹⁷³ In the second one, Jonas tried to unfold a philosophy of biology related to the phenomenon of life. Jonas can be seen as one of the founding fathers of modern Western environmental philosophy and ethics. His approaches are still of importance today, especially the views he presented in the "Prinzip Verantwortung". In his works, he brought already decades ago to the forefront of philosophical and public discourse how immense the ecological problems in our times are. He could build on insights of natural sciences already known 50 years ago. As the

¹⁷¹ See ibd., 30 - 32.

¹⁷² See Hösle 1994, 5.

¹⁷³ I will not go into details of his work here because I do not intend to develop an ethical approach.

title already says, the essential ethical principle in his book is the principle of responsibility. He prominently built on Kant's categorical imperative and expanded it to an ecological imperative: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life."¹⁷⁴ This imperative includes all dimensions of human actions and their effects on the natural dynamics. Notably, these effects affect not only other people living close to us but also people living in other regions of the world and future generations. The topic in his earlier book is the phenomenon of life, which laid the groundwork for his ethical work. This book was an ontological and existential attempt to understand and grasp this phenomenon of life.¹⁷⁵

3.2.2 East Asian Perspectives: Buddhism, (Neo-)Confucianism and Daoism

But the perspectives of Western philosophy are rather obviously not the sole philosophical perspectives on the phenomenon of life developed during the history of humankind. While still acknowledging the outlooks of other non-Western and non-modern traditions, I want to guide the focus and give a quick glimpse into its role in Asian philosophies and spiritualities. However, I will not be able to go deep into the rich literature here. As I mentioned in my introduction, I believe it is important to check different philosophical and spiritual sources for possible relationships to non-human nature in times of massive ecological crises.

Buddhism

I want to start with a philosophical and spiritual tradition spread in different forms all over the Asian continent: Buddhism. A theme that is widely known in the Western world is the importance of empathy and compassion in Buddhism. This is for a good reason because it is a central aspect of the Buddhist spiritual tradition. I want to show a short, selected glimpse of the relationship to nature in Buddhism. This really is only a selection because Buddhism has such a massive tradition, and different forms exist.

The importance of the principle of compassion is expressed by the Dalai Lama in an article he published. He addresses two topics in his paper: the Buddhist perception of nature and ethical principles following, according to him, from this perception. Nature, reality, and the laws of the universe are possible to be understood through human reasoning in the philosophical approach of Buddhism. Another important notion the Dalai Lama brings to attention is the fact of interdependence and interrelationship. No entity on this planet exists independent from

174 Jonas 1984, 5.

175 See Jonas 2001.

anything else. This is diametrical to the liberal ideology, where the pure independence of the lone-standing man is proclaimed. This is not necessarily of importance for the ultimate topic of my thesis. However, it does show the recognition of not only interhuman and social forces influencing us human beings, but it also recognizes the importance of nature surrounding us. This brings me to other living beings and life forms. Regarding the relationship with other living beings, the Dalai Lama expressed a perspective that goes even a step further: “I believe that every individual living being, whether animal or human, has an innate sense of self.”¹⁷⁶ This notion expressed here already necessarily implies the approach I want to strongly emphasize, and this is the recognition of life within other living beings. After this ontological perspective, I shortly want to come to an ethical perspective that builds on this ontology. I already started above with the principle of compassion. The Dalai Lama points out that all living beings strive for happiness and want to overcome suffering. According to him, this is an innate natural property in all living beings. Life itself has this property. The ethical practice acknowledges this fact and acts accordingly. Love, compassion, and affection are important elements to develop within oneself.¹⁷⁷

Chinese Perspectives: Confucianism and Daoism

From Chinese perspectives, the case is made that the discourse developed in Western countries, in Europe, and North America suffers from a one-sidedness. This Western perspective can be called Cartesian and can be traced back to Descartes and his philosophical approach¹⁷⁸: “And this can be largely due to its Cartesian approach, or the Cartesian dimensions, [...] with the three basic axioms of language as human specificity, separation of mind and body, and mind as immaterial thinking substance. Consequently, all those axioms European ecological discourse has lived by for three decades ignore the interconnections between discourse, human, and world, and can by all means undermine its role in promoting human beings’ ecological consciousness.”¹⁷⁹ What is emphasized in an ecological Confucian or Daoist tradition is the goal to live harmonious with nature surrounding us.¹⁸⁰ The divisions between subject and object, matter and mind, human and world are called out to be false. These divisions are part of the European philosophical tradition. The two traditions, Confucianism and Daoism, are evidently separate in their essences, which I will not go into

¹⁷⁶ Cain 2012, 135.

¹⁷⁷ See ibd., 133 – 141.

¹⁷⁸ See above 3.2.1.

¹⁷⁹ Zhou and Huang 2017, 273. This critique has an obvious connection to the approach of interconnection expressed above.

¹⁸⁰ See ibd., 274 - 275.

detail here. However, the case is made that in all their differences, they share a common foundation, which is “with regard to the ecological and harmonious dimensions”.¹⁸¹

Graham Parkes, whose work I touched on already in the introduction, gives an example of how Neo-Confucianist perspectives are similar to Buddhist perspectives. He cites the Neo-Confucian thinker Zhu Xi: “Heaven and Earth reach all things with their mind. When the human being receives it, it then becomes the human mind. When things receive it, it becomes the mind of things in general. And when grass, trees, birds, animals receive it, it becomes the mind of grass, trees, birds, and animals in particular. All of these are simply the one mind of Heaven and Earth.”¹⁸² Here, we can see in concrete the idea of connection, resonance, and harmony in this philosophical tradition. In the ancient Daoist philosophical approach, this is the dominant perspective as well. Parkes points to the fact that Laozi and Zhuangzi, two Daoist classics, made this point clear. “For all these thinkers it’s a matter of understanding the good human life in context, since human flourishing depends on not just a healthy society but also a thriving natural environment.”¹⁸³

In the accounts presented by Confucianism and Daoism, nature as a whole was the topic, the natural environment surrounding us and the goal to live in harmony with the natural processes so that human life can flourish as well. This strongly includes the inanimate natural dynamics, for example, the climate dynamics. However, the point of my work is to take a look at the relationship to individual, concrete living beings. What can be said about this? Within the Chinese accounts, other living beings are acknowledged as well. A strong notion in both traditions is the view to nourish life.¹⁸⁴ ‘Yangsheng’ is a concept and principle present in philosophical literature. It means “nourishing, nurturing, or tending to life”¹⁸⁵. In Confucian and Daoist ancient literature, the point is made that human and non-human life should be considered. This ontological outlook is implicitly the foundation. This is the development of an inner attitude, an acknowledgment, and a recognition that non-human life is not a mere thing. The outlooks also have a strong ethical perspective.¹⁸⁶ However, without ontological recognition, there could not be an inner and ethical attitude towards non-human life developed. After having given a short outlook on East Asian philosophical approaches and

181 See *ibid.*, 275.

182 See Parkes 2021, 145 - 146. Interestingly, this is also very much in line with the approach of natural sciences I sketched out: the insights into metabolic processes and the connection with the environment.

183 *Ibid.*, 144.

184 See Nelson 2020, 24.

185 *Ibid.*, 25.

186 See *ibid.*, 30 - 36, 43.

insights, I want to come now to my outlook on the living and life. I will develop it as some kind of a conglomerate of the different outlooks presented and described.

3.3 Highlighting of four important elements¹⁸⁷

For my endeavor in this thesis, I think it is important to bring up that the natural environment surrounding us is very multifaceted and cannot be lumped together, as Honneth seemingly does in his short paragraphs about the natural environment. It is important to acknowledge the richness and diversity of nature surrounding us. There is the physical natural environment surrounding us that is not alive: Phenomena like the wind, rain, temperature, humidity, lightning, and clouds; entities like stones, iron, or fossil resources in general. Then, all different kinds of life forms surround us, the most well-known animals and plants. On top of that, there are the dynamics and interactions between all those processes, entities, and life forms. My outlook is on the phenomenon of living beings surrounding us while still acknowledging other natural phenomena and entities.

The conglomerate of the insights and worldviews presented give a good understanding what the phenomenon of life is about. I respect them, most of them are sensible to me and my perspective goes alongside. They include either extensive philosophical reasoning and observations or scientific research. I think one can take vital elements of all those. I want to highlight the two most important points for me and add two perspectives not mentioned yet.¹⁸⁸

I think one, if not the most essential element of everything alive, is the movement by itself and within itself. This is described and recognized by different perspectives and outlooks; may it be the modern outlook of natural sciences or ancient philosophical outlooks, coming from the West, or from Eastern traditions. I think this is for good reasons. Somehow, everything that is alive is moving by itself within, and it has to move by itself within. If there is no movement anymore, this means death; the entity is not alive anymore. Natural sciences have a merely materialistic outlook and recognize some kind of metabolism, the movement within and exchange of different material substances with the environment. While this materialistic outlook has a strong dominance in the Western philosophical traditions, especially in modernity, in the Asian tradition, another element of movement adds towards

187 Even though I do not want to mention it explicitly in my work, I have to point out that I am strongly influenced by Eastern Asian approaches in my outlook on life, especially the Chinese philosophy, also with regards to Traditional Chinese Medicine and its concept of Qi. I think this also can give us a deeper understanding of what life and different forms of life are about. (See, for example, Keown 2014.)

188 For my approach, ultimately, all forms of animals and plants are important.

that: the movement of energies within the living being.¹⁸⁹ However you ultimately want to understand it, the basic point which is of central importance for me is the fact that all that is alive moves.

Another important element that I want to point out is the phenomenon of growing and flourishing. I think this is inherently connected to living beings. Everything that is alive strives to flourish. This case was strongly made by Aristotle and the Neo-Aristotelian tradition, but it is also an element of the Buddhist philosophy, at least expressed by the Dalai Lama. For Aristotle, everything that is alive strives towards its `telos`. Natural sciences also point towards this obvious fact in its own language. From the materialistic perspective of natural sciences, it is important to look at the material structures of living beings; also, importantly, small structures, such as cells. Cells divide themselves and grow. In Chinese philosophy, there are also observations of this phenomenon. It is accounted for with the term and concept of changes or transformations.¹⁹⁰ Everything that is alive goes through these transformations. This can easily be observed in nature and also with human beings in the process of their lifespan. This phenomenon of human changes includes the phenomenon of growth. But I think it also accounts for degrowing or growing older and dying. There is no living being on the planet which grows endlessly. In contrast, is the inanimate. Anything that is inanimate does not have this tendency to grow and flourish, for example, a stone. There is none of this dynamic coming from within by itself.

I believe the next point is utterly important as well. It was not mentioned views presented above. It relates to the first point but has a different dimension. On a very basic level, everything that is alive has some basic sensuality,. This allows the reaction to processes and events that happen within and also the outer world and the relationship between those two. This also means an interconnection with and responsiveness to the environment. This sensuality takes different forms in different life forms until we have consciousness in human beings. This element of sensuality can also be translated into an ethical outlook. For example, the one expressed by Jeremy Bentham, one of the founding fathers of modern animal Ethics: "the question is not, can they reason nor can they talk, but if they can suffer?"¹⁹¹ This ethical outlook is also similar in the Buddhist tradition, which looks at the possible sufferings of living beings.

What is, additionally, important to me to point towards are people's everyday experiences. It seems to me there is a basic intuition, at least working in most instances, to be able to

189 In the best case, this is the harmonious movement of the energies; of Qi in the Chinese outlook.

190 See for example Jullien 2010; Simon 2014.

191 Bentham 2005, 283.

distinguish between living beings and something inanimate. For most people across cultures, there is a gut feeling that a tree or a fish is essentially something different, has something different in it than, for example, a stone. I described phenomena inherent to living beings above. They grow, they move from within, they react to the environment. Possibly, they have different energies. Even though they might not be spelled out like this, those phenomena might be perceived in the everyday experience, possibly subconsciously. With these four highlighted outlooks on living beings and the phenomenon of life, I want to go into the next part: The perspective on animals and plants.

4 Two different life forms: Animals and plants¹⁹²

Until here, I looked at the phenomenon of life in a general way. I now want to shift the attention to concrete life forms because the reification of concrete life forms, precisely of animals and plants, is the topic of my thesis. When mentioning the conceptualization of life, the question is what concrete life forms we can discuss. Human life is the most obvious because it is the closest to us. Other forms of life close to our life form are all kinds of animals, especially mammals. The topic of my thesis is animals and plants in general. However, rather obviously, all kinds of animals and plants live on this planet. To get a rough idea of all the different animals and plants on the planet, I will provide a short insight into the field of biology, more precisely, Zoology and Botany, the sciences of animals and plants. Additionally, I want to do a small excursion in the modern Western animal and plant ethics fields.

4.1 A look into the field of Zoology

Zoology is the science of animals. This means that Zoology is the subdiscipline of biology which works with animals. Because so many species of animals exist on our planet, zoology is a very complex and diverse field.¹⁹³ If we want to distinguish different life forms into lower and higher forms of life, we can put the different animal species into the field of higher life forms. This is, among other things, because of how complex they are built.¹⁹⁴ We can claim that animals have other life realities than trees or plants overall. However, the different

¹⁹² I want to mention here that the concept of Gaia is interesting and intriguing to me. I think it strongly relates to the concept of ecosystems. For me, ecosystems relate to the network, the dynamics, the in-between, or the happening together and between each other. I claim that making the same or similar case regarding ecosystems is also possible. However, my perspective in this thesis is not on ecosystems and the whole biosphere - Gaia, if one wants - but on concrete, individual living beings or life forms.

¹⁹³ See Hickman and Weber 2008, 300 - 325.

¹⁹⁴ See ibd. 277 – 298.

species of animals still have the same properties life forms in general have, which I presented above. This means, for example, they have a genetic program, they exist of cells, they have some kind of metabolism going on, and so on.

Animals live in all different parts of the planet. Different classifications exist.¹⁹⁵ In general, it can be said that very different animals exist, from mollusks to worms to fish to birds to mammals.¹⁹⁶ An estimation is that 7,8 million animal species live on the planet where only a fraction is discovered and described.¹⁹⁷ It is well known that mammals, especially certain kinds of mammals, are the ones most closely related to human beings. However, one classical philosophical distinction is that humans possess the capacity to reason, in contrast to animals.¹⁹⁸ This is seen as one unique property.

I already pointed to some different well-known species above. I now want to present a prominent classical taxonomy more closely. First and foremost, animals can be divided into Protozoa (single-cell organisms) and Metazoa (multi-cell organisms). The multi-cell organisms contain the species we are most familiar with. However, there exist taxons that probably most people do not think of when asked about animals. Placozoa, Porifera (Sponges), Cnidaria, and Ctenophora are taxons that contain species we usually are unfamiliar with. The taxon of Bilateria contains all the species we are most familiar with. All the most known species are Chordata. All Vertebrata (vertebrates) are part of them. Fish, reptiles, birds, mammals, and also human beings are part of them.¹⁹⁹ All those different animal species have different and varying properties, which are researched in zoology. However, the one common, rather obvious feature I want to strongly point towards in the thesis is that they are all alive. They all share this common property. They are all living beings or certain life forms.

4.2 A look in the field of Botany

The second field I want to dive into is the field of botany – the science of plants. When living in Vienna, Austria, or other places in Central and Western Europe, for many people, thinking about plants involves thinking about specific types of trees, bushes, and flowers that are native here. However, there can be more manifold plants found all over the world. The scientific outlook on plants as life forms is a fascinating endeavor due to the richness, diversity, and continuous development of plants. According to the authors of the `Straßburger`, an essential book in botany, it is also a necessary endeavor due to the

195 See Storch, Welsch, and Remane 2004, XVII - XVIII.

196 See Hickman and Weber 2008, 275 - 940.

197 See Martin 2011.

198 See Grimm and Wild 2020, 33 - 35.

199 See Storch, Welsch, and Remane 2004, XIV - XVI.

importance and influence of plants on the planet as a whole, life on the planet, especially human life and societies, and their continuing survival.²⁰⁰ It is as well a rich and complex science due to the diversity and complexity of plants. For this reason, there is a developed system, a taxonomy, to put the life forms of the plants in order.²⁰¹ The systematic organization is based on different species. The current scientific insight is that the members of the different species can be traced back to a common ancestor.²⁰²

It says the first plants appeared on the planet 2.1 billion years ago. Since then, there have been continuous changes in the planet's flora. The development until now depends on the evolution of the plants, the changes in their surrounding environments - their habitats – and the interplay of those dynamics. Current plants on the planet can be divided into three groups: Glaucobionta, Rhodobionta, and Chlorobionta.²⁰³ A subgroup of those groups are the plants that grow on land. The most widespread of those land-growing plants are angiosperms.²⁰⁴ Currently, there exist 290.000 different species of plants described overall. Plants, as well as animals, can be distinguished from other life forms - which can be possibly understood as less developed. The first plant cell developed from other life forms.²⁰⁵

I do not want to go into too much detail here, but there is a systematic organization of life forms in general in two main groups: Archaea and Bacteria. Eukarya (Eukaryotes) are closely related to a subgroup of Archaea. They are of importance to me because members of this group are the most well-known life forms on the planet: animals and plants.²⁰⁶ I want to make the case in my thesis for the recognition of the more developed forms of life because it seems to me it is more intuitive for people that these life forms can be reified. Additionally, they are more directly accessible to our perception because they live in our immediate environment and are part of our day-to-day discourses. However, I want to point out one more time the important underlying phenomenon, which is an inherent feature of all life forms on the planet. They are all alive: animals, plants, and even bacteria. This is the central phenomenon for me in this thesis.

200 See Kadereit et al. 2021, V.

201 See ibd., 684.

202 See ibd., 687.

203 See ibd., 702.

204 See ibd., 902. Other existing are Equisetophytina, Gymnospermen, Lycopodiophytina, Marattiophytina and Polypodiophytina.

205 See ibd., 702.

206 See ibd., 701.

4.3 Animal and Plant Ethics

The sciences are closely connected to ethical approaches that have historically developed. Manifold ethical approaches already promote another relationship to nature.²⁰⁷ Animals and plant ethics do this regarding those two life forms. Those ethical approaches have to base their topics on the insights of the sciences. A short demonstration of the approaches and insights is important to me because it shows how far these disciplines have grown and their close connection to the approach I present. In all those fields, extended discussions, studies, and research are done and take place. I can in no sense do justice to that. Animal ethics are far more developed and have a longer history than plant ethics. This seemingly lies in the nature of the topic because ethical considerations for animals are probably more intuitive than those for plants.

Animal ethics

Jeremy Bentham can be seen as the founding father of modern animal ethics, as mentioned above. He was one of the founding fathers of the Utilitarian approach and had an influential role in animal ethics. After these first approaches in the 18th century, modern animal ethics developed further until now. An important fundamental approach is the extension of the moral community towards animals. This means an extension of the moral perspective, which also acknowledges animals as morally relevant living beings and individuals due to the different abilities and `features` (Eigenschaften) they have.²⁰⁸ A very prominent position has Peter Singer, who also belongs to the Utilitarian tradition like Bentham and follows a similar approach. For him, the ability to suffer or to experience sensations and feelings is the central reason to include animals in moral considerations. The Utilitarian principle is, in short, that the interests should be maximized. The interests of human beings should not inherently count more in Singer's approach just because they are human. An important approach developed in animal ethics is the idea of giving rights to animals. Tom Regan is a prominent representative of this approach. Regan's important notion is that animals are the `subject of a life`, which is interesting for me in the context of the thesis. This is the condition for the integration of animals in the moral community, the respectful treatment of them, and the entitlement to rights.²⁰⁹ As a reaction to the modern prominent approaches, other perspectives developed. One stresses our relationships with different animals and the different moral and emotional relations arising from this. There is a different emotional relationship to a dog that lives in the

207 See, for example, Singer 1982, Kallhoff 2002.

208 See Grimm and Wild 2020, 49 - 57.

209 See ibd., 79 - 97.

house than a wild bird. An important approach that is connected to these insights is the approach of `entangled empathy` which Lori Gruen developed.²¹⁰

Plant ethics

Plant ethics has different approaches because plants are different life forms than animals. Plant ethics is historically, in the modern development of ethics, a marginalized discipline. The dominant perspective is that ecological ethics or ethics with regards to nature can make a case to widen its perspective towards animals, but not towards plants.²¹¹ However, Angela Kallhoff tried to develop an approach which carves out the principles of plant ethics. Different reasons can be called out for including plants in ethical considerations. The first and probably most widespread one is the anthropocentric perspective that plants are useful, as resources or aesthetically, for human beings and societies. Therefore, they should be included in moral considerations. Another perspective is to consider the interest of the plants in themselves. The biocentric approach is especially interesting for me because the criterion here is to respect the plant as a life form. The Holistic approach goes even a step further and acknowledges nature's value and moral relevance as a whole. Those are existing perspectives in the field of plant ethics.²¹² Kallhoff puts herself in the Aristotelian tradition. The concept and phenomenon of flourishing (Gedeihen) is at the center of her philosophical and ethical approach. Her perspective is that there also exists a good life for plants, which is the flourishing one.²¹³

5 The theoretical expansion of Honneth's approach towards animals and plants on the basis of the phenomenon of life

“... ;wer das Leben erlangt hat, der ist am Ziel. Zu Ende ist für ihn die subjektive Bedingtheit.”²¹⁴

(Zhuāngzǐ)

210 See ibd., 110 - 114; 146 - 151.

211 See Kallhoff 2002, 11.

212 See ibd., 70 - 101.

213 See ibd., 21 - 24.

214 Zhuangzi, and Wilhelm 2011, 56.

After these parts, where I intended to give a more profound outlook on the phenomenon of life from different scientific and philosophical perspectives and take a look at animals and plants as life forms, I want to show how I want to expand Honneth's conceptualization. This is the essence of my work. I provided a history of the concept of reification in Western critical philosophy. Then, I presented Honneth's approach, who worked with and acknowledged these other approaches but conceptualized his approach based on his recognition theory. The next part focused on the phenomenon of life and two concrete life forms living on this planet: animals and plants. Honneth argues that no direct reification of anything non-human on this planet is possible. He claims that every form of reification of anything other than human must be understood in an indirect way. I try to oppose this perspective. Before I come to my critique and expansion, I want to present the work of a Finnish philosopher who also seemingly had a problem with the perspective Honneth presented.

5.1 Teea Kortetmäki - The Reification of Non-Human Nature

I want to shine a light on Teea Kortetmäki's work because it goes in the direction where I intend to go. She is well acquainted with Honneth's work and precisely points the finger at the relationship with non-human nature present in his work. She distinguishes three potential realms of reification in this context:

1. The reification of the environment surrounding us, which is human-made.
2. The reification of non-human animals.
3. The reification of non-human nature overall.

She points to the fact that Honneth neglects the relationship to nature surrounding us in his theoretical account but also acknowledges the possibility of an indirect or derived reification of everything non-human surrounding us.²¹⁵ But what is Kortetmäki's account presented in her article? Ultimately, Kortetmäki presents three different accounts of how reification of the non-human environment can be understood in a direct way. The first one is also a form of forgetfulness. It is the forgetfulness of how our environment, in essential parts, is constructed by humans. I would add here is open for changes, additionally to the human genesis.²¹⁶ According to her, this can be understood as a form of direct reification of the human-made environment. She also takes a stand regarding the reification of animals. For her, the reification of animals can be understood analogously to the reification of human beings. It is a `deanimalizing` of the animals. She gives the treatment of animals in intensive industrial

²¹⁵ See Kortetmäki 2019, 492 - 493.

²¹⁶ I think we can see this in the rapid technological developments, such as digitalization, in the last decades.

`meat production` as an example. The last realm is the most complex and controversial, according to her. It relates to the reification of non-human nature in general. She makes the case that "the reification of non-human nature is an appropriate and useful notion, with some reservations"²¹⁷. For her, "it concerns the misapprehension of non-human entities by either mistaking them for humanly made objects or by lumping them all, living and lifeless, into the same group called 'natural objects' and that have a meaning only in relation to human appropriation."²¹⁸ This is exactly the proposal Honneth has in mind. As presented, he claims that reification of the non-human environment can be solely understood in an indirect way through the misapprehension of its meaningfulness to fellow human beings. With Kortemäki it can be said, that the environment still is reified, because it is acknowledged for its meaning to humans. With this approach she deliberately criticizes and expands Honneth's approach. For her, an important feature of reification is the phenomenon of habitualization. Her definition for a reifying relationship towards non-human nature is then "the habitualised instrumentalisation of non-human nature"²¹⁹. Kortemäki sees her approach as an attempt to account for reification phenomena of non-human nature, which can open up the possibility for further discussion. The problem she also points towards is the fact that some "socially induced practices of the misapprehension of the environment, animals and non-human nature, practices [...] have become so normalised in society that some of them are accepted as basic social facts."²²⁰

I presented points of her work that seem central to me. It is essential to make a clear case of how my approach differs from hers, even though crucial elements of our works overlap. This is probably because the underlying discomfort with central points of Honneth's approach and our intentions might be similar. What I myself try to do in my approach is to intimately work with Honneth's theoretical conceptualization and intentionally broaden it towards animals and plants as non-human life forms. This means I work with his idea of a `forgetfulness` of recognition. I try to develop a notion, which puts the phenomenon of life in the center. The conceptualization is then one that still contains a forgetfulness of recognition but with regards to non-human life. This leads to the possibility of understanding reification of concrete life forms not only regarding animals like Kortemäki already does and suggests in her work, but also regarding other life forms. As already laid out, my precise intention is to include plants in the analysis. Regarding both Kortemäki and especially Honneth, I want to claim that animals

217 Kortemäki 2019, 503.

218 Ibid..

219 Ibid., 504.

220 Kortemäki 2019, 504.

and the possibility of reification of animals are a rather obvious case for me, especially animals that are closely related to humans and live in close neighborhoods. It is not enough for me to leave it with animals.²²¹ It could be said that I unfold the third point of Kortetmäki's work. If there is a misapprehension of non-human entities, an upcoming question could be what can be apprehended in those entities. I claim that in living beings or life forms the phenomenon of life can be apprehended.

5.2 My understanding of the phenomenon and concept of reification

So far, I have reconstructed a history of reification and presented Honneth's conceptualization. My goal in this paragraphs is to present in a very figurative way how I understand the phenomenon of reification to make clear where the approach in the thesis comes from.

The concept of reification is used and understood in very different contexts. For Honneth, in the context of the relationship to other human beings and the self-relationship in a direct way, indirectly relating to the non-human environment. However, it is also sometimes used in the context of social institutions.²²² "Reified institutions, in turn, are considered as immutable and as necessary as the laws of nature [...]"²²³ They are not up for change; they are supposedly not up for movement. This leads me to an important association with the reification phenomenon. This counts for all contexts. For me, reification has the central element of a hardening in perception. Social institutions can be perceived as hardened, not up for change anymore, as rigid, and as a result of nature. They are not seen as human products with existing possibilities for change. Honneth points to the missing process of recognition in the case of the relationship with others or oneself. I also want to connect this with a process of hardening. Something is made thinglike in perception and is therefore hardened. In the case of relationships with others, this means for me, the others are hardened in the recognition process. They are merely recognized as things without the inner life, without the fluidity of experiences. They are somehow just perceived superficially. I believe this happens when our consciousness is narrowed in some way, for example, in an everyday situation of stress or possibly one of much speed. Another person might move by us, through our consciousness, in a superficial way. One phenomenon of consciousness follows the next one. There is no precise, deeper attention. I think this happens a lot in our very fast-living world. We do not really grasp the person as a human being.²²⁴

221 In animal ethics, various claims have already been made about why animals should be considered in ethical discussions.

222 See Kortetmäki 2019, 490.

223 Ibid.

224 This is probably different from the dehumanizing phenomena that happen in the political context.

This leads me to the relationship with oneself. It is, for me, also signified through a hardening when it is a reified relationship. I perceive parts of me as mere things, for example, processes of my inner self. On one hand, the processes of mine, the mental, the emotional, or the bodily, are not perceived as mine, but somehow perceived from the distance as a thing.²²⁵ They are not recognized, to use Honneth's term. This means that the movement and fluidity of the processes in me are not recognized; it is up for change as well. Human life in its dimensions is one of fluidity, like the term human `emotions` signifies. Thoughts and feelings change; opinions change; the appearance changes, for example, through the aging process.²²⁶ When reification happens, elements of it are solely perceived as things. Those are the properties for me: The false perception of a hardening and the missing perception as something fluid, up for change, moving, and alive.

I will go into more detail for the description in the context of the relationship to non-human life forms. But I already want to point out that much: If you deny that non-human life can be (directly) reified, you ultimately deny the inner life of non-human life, of animals and plants. You just look at the outer image at one point in time. You also deny the fluidity of the life form, which is constantly up for change in its life phases. The living entity that is not moving or changing anymore is dead.

5.3 The theoretical expansion – the center of the thesis

Recognition before cognition

As I already made clear, my argumentation works with Honneth's conceptualization. The theory of recognition is the foundation on which he builds his understanding of reification. One of the cores of Honneth's approach is this process: For him, recognition happens before cognition. This is meant in two ways, as I pointed out above:²²⁷ a genetic priority and a conceptual priority. I translate this in the context of the human relationship to non-human life forms and make a claim that this also fits. I cannot go into development psychology but I hope to still make a case that this process happens in the context of the relationship to non-human life forms. In the context of the relation to non-human life forms, this means that first, there has to happen recognition of the life inherent to the life forms, that the precise animal or plant is alive. I presented essential inherent properties of everything which is alive above.

225 I think, for this reason, the concept of alienation is so intimately connected.

226 However, I still do acknowledge that there are certain underlying, reappearing structures in people and other living beings. And I think this is an essential philosophical question: What stays the same, and what changes?

227 See part 2.1.5.

This was recognized in philosophy and science. This is the underlying phenomenon to recognize: the phenomenon of life. Then there can happen a cognitional act.

We can also recognize the life form as a concrete living being with certain properties. This recognition of the animal as an animal then leads to the understanding that the animal, for example, the dog, has certain experiences. It can experience hunger, thirst, and pain. The recognizing foundation can, in the case of animal relations, lead to cognitive processes.²²⁸ They are inherently linked. Without the basic recognition of the living being as a living being, there could not be the cognition of certain concrete phenomena and experiences of the animal. This can also lead to derivations of acting possibilities. I make the same case regarding plants. The approach is here that there is a recognition that different plants are different life forms with certain properties and needs that derive from this. This recognizing process is then the foundation for the cognitional process of the plant's needs to be alive and flourish, for example, water, possibly the need for a different place to stand, with more sun or shade. In both cases, I translate the relationship and the process inherent to it into the context of relations to non-human life forms. In both cases, I make the case for a conceptual priority, as Honneth calls it.

The forgetfulness of life

Honneth's conceptual development ultimately leads to the formula that reification can be understood as a forgetfulness of recognition. I want to go along with the general expression but give it a different twist. In my context and approach, it is possible to speak about a forgetfulness of recognition as well. But for me, it is a forgetfulness of recognition of the phenomenon of life, or, in short, a forgetfulness of life. There is a forgetfulness that what is alive is alive. This is the essence of my work, of my expansion of Honneth's work. My critique is clear: With his indirect approach, he denies the possibility of a direct reification. I do claim that yes, indeed, it can be reified directly and conceptualize this with the foundation of Honneth's approach, his theory of recognition. Life forms, animals and plants, are not mere things; if they are perceived like that, they are reified. Theoretically, that means that there is a loss of recognition of life present, and the phenomenon of reification of non-human forms of life can be understood this way.²²⁹ Honneth argues for a basic recognition of the fellow human

228 A counter-example for this not happening is the relationship to toy animals. The missing recognition of the animal as a living animal is the foundation for the recognition process that experiences of, for example, hunger, thirst, and pain are absent.

229 Indeed, various forms of non-human life develop in various ways, with different qualities. A cat and a bird are entirely different from bacteria or other microorganisms. However, I do want to repeatedly emphasize a basic principle that they share, also with human beings: The phenomenon of life.

being as a human being. I argue for the basic recognition of a life form as a living being. It does not merely have the status of a thing. The phenomenon of life is the first attribute to recognize, prioritized to all other properties different life forms and living beings have. In the case of animals, for example, their different experiences; in the case of plants, their sensitivities and needs.

What is a significant difference to Honneth's approach?

Honneth's approach suggests that some kind of recognition of the other person, the consciousness of the other person, is necessary for the foundations of the development of ourselves as a person and a human being.²³⁰ Honneth calls this the genetic priority of recognition. In the development of the cognitional processes of the infantile, the human being, the recognition necessarily comes beforehand in the development process. A question would now be how this theory can hold in the context I present when the recognition of other life forms is the topic. I think it is important to admit that this intersubjective, reciprocal process does not play a role in my topic. Possibly, I actually head the other way. In my view, right now, my approach would be rather a development or progress of consciousness and is not to be understood as a genetic priority per se, which means that the infantile necessarily has the process of recognition (of the non-human life form) beforehand. I do not want to make this assumption that this somewhat natural recognition exists and then gets lost in life development. I do not want to suggest that the overcoming of a reified relationship with non-human life is a return to some sort of original, infantile consciousness. Right now, I propose looking at it the other way around and seeing it as a development of consciousness, out of a reified contemporary consciousness towards an ecological consciousness, where then different life forms around us are also recognized as living beings. It seems to me it is easier to see it this way, and it does not have to rely on the premise of an original, true, infantile consciousness.²³¹

Reification of life: A hardening of life

This section is related to the precise understanding of the phenomenon of reification I have, and I presented above. As already presented, for me, it is associated with a hardening of the life form in perception. The flow of life within plants, for example, is not recognized and acknowledged. This means, on the one hand, the inner life of the life form is not recognized,

²³⁰ See, for example, Honneth 2015, 46 – 47.

²³¹ However, I still do not want to leave the possibility aside that it might actually be some return to a more original consciousness. I am not fully able to answer this question, which is also not necessary for me.

and, on the other hand, connected to this the changing fluidity of the life form is not recognized.²³² This also means it is superficial. It stays on the sensual surface of the material. It just recognizes the lively entity as a thing.²³³ It does not recognize and acknowledge, is not aware of the inner life of the corpus, of the plant, the tree, for example. Reification for me has these two aspects: Hardening something in the perception, which is alive and not merely a dead object, and staying on the surface, not recognizing and being conscious of the whole lively body of a living entity.²³⁴ A non-reified perception is one which recognizes the flow of life, that life changes all the time, that life itself cannot be fully identified (also living entities), due to its character. All living entities, including human beings, are constantly in a flow and changing. There is a difference between the dead body of a dog and the dog that barks, bites, eats, shows, and has emotions and affections; which is alive. It is not a mere object and just a thing.

Possible Overcoming

I already pointed towards a possible overcoming at the end of the last paragraph and the benefits that might come from it. The goal would be firstly an enlightenment and understanding that a recognizing, acknowledging relationship to plants can exist. As I describe it, it is rather a simple process. A non-reified perception just involves perceiving and recognizing the living being as a living being. The phenomenon of life is recognized with the different properties inherent to it, presented above. In the second step, a recognition of the particular life form occurs. This involves a breaking up, an opening, and a widening of the perception. I think it is connected to the feeling of one's own life. This can lead to basic recognizing processes towards other life forms.

We are able to expand our perception and consciousness and recognize these processes happening within different life forms. Indeed, here I can argue with Honneth and the point he

232 I do not want to deal with the influence of certain practices here, even though I acknowledge and it is rather clear to me that practice and perception are inherently linked. This means certain practices affect the perception and the other way around. For example, this means that people who live with nature surrounding them can have a relationship with non-human nature that is different from people living in the heart of a city. A person who deals regularly with animals has a different relationship with them than people who do not deal with them.

233 This would be a purely materialistic and mechanistic perception like the Cartesian. An idealistic or even constructivist perception would see those entities as mere constitutions of the human mind.

234 It seems that phenomenology is also a rather important discipline in this context. Two authors I want to refer to here: One is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who is seen as a very important author relating the phenomenology of the corpus and especially the lively corpus (see Merleau-Ponty 2010; Bermes 2020), and the other one is Edith Stein who wrote a very interesting work on the phenomenology of empathy. (see Stein 1980) It might be possible to conceptualize a phenomenological account of an embodied relationship (possibly even an empathetic relationship) with lively entities, for example, plants. I do not want to work further in this direction in this thesis. However, I wanted to present and mention this idea because it seems fruitful to me.

made in his book. His point is that we can develop different perspectives on different objects surrounding us.²³⁵ Building on this, the process would be then to recognize life as something in itself.

5.4 Critique of Honneth's approach of indirect reification

I want to bring forward two suspicions why Honneth dismisses the possibility of direct reification of non-human nature. One is his theoretical closeness to Hegel, the philosopher who built up many of the foundations for Honneth's work and to whom he relates. Hegel has this concept in his philosophy that there just exists an idea of life.²³⁶ This is an idealistic premise. With this approach, the reality of life, the life inside the living beings, is denied and not recognized. This premise is connected to a second suspicion. Suppose Honneth stays within the idealistic metaphysical foundation. In that case, it is also possible that he incorporated a radical constructivist perspective that non-human nature and non-human beings around us are only constituted through human subjectivity.²³⁷ Approaches like this can lay the groundwork for reifying perspectives, where all non-human nature is solely perceived as a mere object. However, I think this is not in line with earth's history and how it is scientifically researched. The human being, the `homo sapiens`, only is, for quite a short period, the inhabitant of the planet. Different life forms existed and were flourishing before human beings lived and will probably also live and flourish after human beings live on this planet.²³⁸

5.5 Where do we find those phenomena of reification?

Institutionalized practice

I now want to give a practical outlook on where we can find reifying tendencies in our societies regarding non-human life forms. An institutionalized example is the whole field of industrial livestock farming, where the animals are just the sources for meat production and are not recognized as living and sentient beings during their life span. Just the result counts, the production of the meat. One can suspect this is an institutional form of reification on a broad scale. For the larger public, it stays mostly in the dark of the societal organization. Solely the end products can be found in the freezers of the supermarkets.

Everyday - practice

²³⁵ See Honneth 2008, 74.

²³⁶ See Hegel 2021, 468 - 475.

²³⁷ See Höhle 1994, 52 - 57.

²³⁸ I think a good basic point regarding the climate crisis and other ecological crises is that they are not a problem for nature itself or the planet, but more so for humans, their societies, and their survival on the

Then, we have examples of people involved in their everyday lives. My point is to look at the interactions with and perceptions of people of animals and plants in those everyday life examples. I intend to make clear and present how reification can be understood concretely in real-life examples. Firstly, I want to look at a food market, where various kinds of food are sold, from vegetables to meat. I want to give the example of the animal, the living fish, on the food market. There is a place on the food market where fish is sold, and there might be living fish. The fish is killed on the spot, and the fresh meat is sold to the consumers. The fish is still alive before it is sold. People come to the place to buy. There is probably a reciprocal recognition between each other by the people coming. Every person is supposedly recognized with their basic humanity. But are the living fish recognized on a basic level as well? Does there happen reification? And if yes, in which relationship? Let us take the perspective of the fish. Once it is taken out of its basin, it is in agony. It is the fight for the life. Is this being perceived by the humans being there? Or is the fish just being perceived as a thing, as food? If this happens, I claim that reification, as I described it, takes place. The life of the fish on a basic level and its particular properties are not recognized.

Now, I want to come to the relationships with plants, concretely with trees. I think different relationships and different views are possible. One example is to have the view of the carpenter on the trees in comparison of the forester. The carpenter might look at the trees and see the wood that can be used to manufacture different kinds of furniture. He might have the possibilities of production in mind. He is possibly inclined to reify the tree and oversee the life still flooding it. On the other hand, the forester may have a different view of the tree. He supposedly recognizes and acknowledges the life in the tree. Without this process, he would not be able to do his work.

5.6 To which philosophical ideas does my approach relate to?

Next, I want to follow up on the question to which authors my approach is related. I want to point out that I am not alone with the approach I presented and developed. Other approaches intimately connected to the approach I develop exist. First, I want to take a look at ancient traditions that I have presented already. The basic recognition of life was still present in ancient experience. These experiences were expressed in the philosophical considerations and thoughts of those times. "Soul flooded the whole of existence and encountered itself in all things. Bare matter, that is, truly inanimate, `dead` matter, was yet to be discovered – as indeed its concept, so familiar to us, is anything but obvious. That the world is alive is really planet and other sentient living beings.

the most natural view, and largely supported by prima-facie evidence." ²³⁹ According to Hans Jonas, this was the widespread view. Because those natural elements that we nowadays recognize as dead entities and elements surrounding us, like stones, wind, or rain, were so intertwined with the dominating living matter that it seemed like they belonged together and had the same animate spirit in them. The problem that came to the surface in the life experience and philosophical thinking of that time was the problem of death. How is death possible in a truly animate world? "Unquestioned and convincing at the beginning stands the experience of the omnipresence of life."²⁴⁰ The recognition of life was something very normal and something like a reification process, a perception of entities in the environment surrounding us as mere things, was very much against intuition. Later on, there were many philosophical reflections in the Western tradition on the connection between life and death, from Marcus Aurelius to Montaigne.²⁴¹ The recognition of life inherent to living beings is something those perspectives have in common. I would say they also have in common the thought that in all life, the possibility and necessity of death is already inherently present from its beginning. Everything alive is about to die.

Like before, I will now use the output of the Dalai Lama to get an impression of Buddhist perspectives. I already expressed impressions above, which give an idea of what the outlook is and how respectful the relationship to different life forms is. It already gives a good idea about recognizing and acknowledging life in its different forms. I just want to add to this. The Dalai Lama, in general, offers an outlook of Tibetan Buddhism to a greater audience. In one book about him, the author describes how the Dalai Lama seemingly perceives a plant. The perception, how it is described most clearly, is not a reified perception. He perceives the plant as a whole and a life form. Another interesting view is the dialectical relationship to the natural environment, which I found portrayed in Buddhist thought. It is thought that a clean, healthy environment is helpful for the Buddhist intention to clarify the mind.²⁴² This demonstrates the effect of the environment, also the one which is alive, on the mind and psyche. I think that my approach is closely connected to these different (ancient) philosophical and spiritual approaches. It offers a critique of a certain mode of perception, a reified perception. At the same, it possibly offers a conceptual idea of how a dereified perception can be imagined, as a mode of recognition, along with Honneth's approach.

²³⁹Jonas 2001, 7.

²⁴⁰Ibd., 8.

²⁴¹Ibd., 7- 37.

²⁴²See Cain 2012, 136.

Now, I come to the Modern European tradition, which was mentioned in length already. I think all three Lukács, Heidegger and Adorno, have different intuitions about the relation to the non-human environment. Honneth, however, clearly denies the possibility of reification. The former three seem to have a closer connection and recognition of the non-human processes around us. However, my approach differs from them through my focus on the phenomenon of life. I want to take a closer look at Adorno's approach because it seems interesting for my work. Two of his points are interesting to me: The idea of a mimesis, which I mentioned earlier in the work, and his idea of the non-identical. In my understanding, the idea of the mimesis means the convergence to and the copying of objects or better artwork through oneself.²⁴³ If we try to use this approach in the concept of the relationship to non-human life forms, it means the convergence with those life forms. Suppose we see this as a possible option. In that case, there should also be a development of recognition of those life forms of animals or plants beforehand to capture it not only on a superficial level but also on a deeper level. The second idea is the idea of the non-identical that Adorno and Horkheimer offered. In their philosophy, the non-identical should be understood as a rest that is not integrated and suppressed.²⁴⁴ This can be understood with regards to the subject itself but also in the relationship to surrounding objects, which are supposedly not grasped in their fullness and individuality with the general concepts we use. If you use this idea and approach in the context of the relationship to non-human life forms, this can be translated into a lack of recognition. Using this for the relation with non-human life forms can mean a lack of recognition of their fullness. The perception does not go through the superficial to the inner levels and the life of the life form. A dereified perception, how I understand it, can be possibly equated with Adorno's idea of a "metaphysical experience"²⁴⁵. It is metaphysical "because there appears a moment of the universal in the particular"²⁴⁶, according to Quadflieg. In my context, this could be the phenomenon of life. With this metaphysical experience, a perception of the "inner of the entity", "the entity in itself"²⁴⁷ is meant. I think this very interestingly shows a great similarity to the approach I presented. However, there may not be a full overlapping with my approach because the phenomenon of life and different life forms play, to my knowledge, not that much of a role in their philosophy. However, when reading Adorno

243 I would not see the mimesis conception just in the relationship to art. I think that we can also understand the mimesis conception and approach in the relationship to everyday objects. In the context of my master thesis, I want to strongly emphasize that this approach of mimesis seems to me very possible in the relationship to non-human life around us, to animals and plants, dogs and trees, for example.

244 See Quadflieg 2019, 51.

245 See Quadflieg 2019, 52.

246 See *ibid.*, own translation.

247 See *ibid.*, own translation.

and Horkheimer closely, my approach has to be seen as closely connected to their analysis and approach concerning the human relationship to nature. The significant difference is that I build my approach on Honneth's recognition approach in my attempt to expand his conceptualization towards non-human life forms. Not taking into account the 'dead' natural world surrounding us, I only include the natural world around us, which is alive. This leads to the central concept of the phenomenon of life.

5.7 Practical and ethical outlook

I am aware that the outlook and approach in this thesis can open up a myriad of questions, as every text probably does. For me, the rather obvious philosophical ones are about practical and moral conclusions. In general, I do not want to escape these questions, but I have to say that in this thesis, there is no space to go into these questions extensively. I want to say two things about the practical conclusion. The first one is that I am aware that recognition of other life forms is very likely to happen through practical interaction with other life forms. I think many examples show us that practical interaction can produce a very different appreciation. First-time dog owners are a good example. After the necessary close first-time interactions with the dogs, the people are much more likely to have a different appreciation and view of them as living beings, with sentiments and desires. The second thing is interlinked with the moral perspective. In my concluding paragraphs, I will go into this perspective in more detail. Our natural, social, and cultural environment is constructed by the economic system and dynamics we live in. This environment gives the possibility of action. For this reason, it is necessary to look at the 'economy'.

The last paragraph in the main body of my work is about the moral conclusions. My work intends not to give any ethical or normative conclusions. In my opinion, the concept of reification is an ontological concept in the social or psychological sphere that tries to grasp certain phenomena. However, the concept of reification is a critical concept in itself already. Therefore, it does inherently have moral considerations and dimensions. In my opinion, it implicitly criticizes certain phenomena of perception and has the element of judging them as pathological. For this reason, it may not deliver a handbook for actions, but it does point out modes of perception that are likely to be pathological. I suspect that having a dereified perception of the world can also lead to a different moral perspective on our relationship with non-human living beings. It can lay the groundwork for what kind of moral and active relationship we want to have. It can lay the groundwork for ethical and normative approaches. Those outlooks on the practical implications lead me to my concluding remarks.

Conclusion

1 The outlook on the economy: Recognition of non-human life forms within the economic sphere?

An essential question, which comes up with the approach I developed or remains for me or, is how this relates to the contemporary societal world with its moving dynamics. What role does a critique of reifying tendencies and call for recognizing non-human life forms even play? When trying to answer this question, I think it is important to identify the central problematic societal area. It is crucial to look at the sphere, often called 'the economy'. The relationship to 'the economy' or the economic part of our lives is important because it is such a big part. It is, in short, the part that defines how we produce and consume in a society. Certain dynamics and systematics are the foundation for the existing patterns. The diagnosis of the Capitalist economic dynamics as the basis that powerfully shapes all other parts of society is a traditional Marxist analysis. This leads to some elements of the Marxist tradition.

1.1 Diagnosis and Criticism of the fundamental dynamics and logic of the Capitalist system; Marxism and Ecomarxism

To offer a critical and pessimistic but I believe also realistic outlook on the phenomenon of reification and the possibility of overcoming it, I will go into Western Marxism and Critical Theory analysis. It is very much connected to the Promethean attitude Hadot and Parkes have presented. I will introduce some central concepts from the Western Marxist tradition and the tradition of Critical Theory: Exploitation²⁴⁸, Commodification, and Instrumental Reasoning²⁴⁹. I think all those concepts are inherently connected to the phenomenon of reification. My task is to show this connection and why such a pessimistic outlook on the economic sphere and its effects on reifying mindsets, perceptions, and actions is realistic. Lukács already presented the analysis that the current economic system, the Capitalist market economy, systemically leads to phenomena of reification. I think this analysis is still up to date in our society. What I will present in the following paragraphs is, therefore, nothing new. It is more or less a summary of insight and outlooks on the Capitalist system. I will additionally try to show how it relates to the approach I presented and how it fits in.

248 See Flechtheim and Lohmann 2003, 91 - 106.

249 See Horkheimer 2004.

Connection of commodification, exploitation, and reification

The analysis is, also for Lukács, that the phenomena of commodification and reification are inherently connected. Reification can be seen as a result of commodifying processes in society. This is very much the analysis Lukács presented when he sees the Capitalist market society as the root of reifying phenomena. The diagnosis is that it develops out of the social relations from the Capitalist market institutions and its processes of exchanging goods and making entities into commodities, whether objects, other human beings, or oneself. In this analysis, commodification is the underlying basis for reification. However, commodification can also be seen as a form or a type of reification when we follow Honneth's conceptualization. As presented, Honneth separates his conceptualization from the Capitalist market society as a sole root. He sees reification, in general, as a lack of recognition. The phenomenon of commodification can also be applied to non-human life forms. Animals and plants can be and are commodified, like other existing entities, as we can see in our everyday lives. The inherent conclusion is that no processes of recognition of the phenomenon of life in the different living beings take place. The central problem inherent to Capitalist logic is that there is systemically no form of recognition integrated. This means the general analysis also holds in the context of the thesis.

Another central Marxist concept that I claim has a strong connection to reification is the process of exploitation conceptualized by Marxist analysis. In a nutshell, the concept tries to grasp a fundamental element of a Capitalist market society. On a mere societal level, it points to, critically analyzes, and explains the exploitation of one class, the working class and its working powers, through another class, the Capitalist class, or, in the abstract, the capital. The analysis is, in short, that the working class, the working people, do not get fully refunded for the work they do, the value of their work, and that the surplus value of their work goes to the Capitalist parts of society.²⁵⁰ The Ecomarxist approach had the focus to translate these exploiting processes from the societal level to the relationship to the natural environment. I think they can draw a pretty clear picture of similar processes of exploitation happening through Capitalist dynamics with the natural environment, including plants and animals.²⁵¹ In my opinion this does not necessarily go along with reification processes. In both cases, the societal relationship and the relationship to the natural environment are not conditions for reification processes. It is very much possible to recognize and acknowledge other human

250 See Flechtheim and Lohmann 2003, 91 - 106.

251 See, for example, Foster, Clark, and York 2010; Saitō 2017.

beings and their qualities and the life within non-human life forms and still try to manipulate it in ways that serve your needs the most. In the case of Capitalist dynamics, this means the interest to maximize profits. However, it can surely be very much coupled with reifying processes. In order to exploit somebody or something, there is no need to recognize the basic humanity or the phenomenon of life; it might even be obstructive. It seems plausible that there is a completely reified relationship towards life forms to maximize profit. If the only underlying objective is profit maximization, any means that serve this end can be seen as helpful. An example would be a solely mechanical outlook on animals and the treatment on this basis. Nature is indeed often a hindrance to profit-maximization processes and is, therefore, up for removal. So it is even possible that natural entities which are obstructive tend to be destroyed.²⁵²

Nancy Fraser's analysis

A prominent contemporary author in the tradition of Critical theory, which expresses a fundamental critique of Capitalist society and its relationship to nature, is Nancy Fraser. In her latest book "Cannibal Capitalism" she expresses the fundamental problems of the Capitalist system, also regarding nature.²⁵³ The story she tells is an old one, recognized by Marxist theory since its beginnings: The commodification and exploitation of nature. "[T]he system's economy is constitutively dependent on nature, both as a tap for production's inputs and as a sink for disposing its waste."²⁵⁴ Therefore, she does not identify humanity as such as the driving factor for the ecological crises, especially the climate crisis, as it is often proclaimed, for example with the term 'anthropogenetic' climate change. She points precisely to the Capitalist system with its profit-driven actors as the driving factor.²⁵⁵ She makes an empirical and a systematic case to underline her position. The problem heightens nowadays with the continuing escalation of the ecological crises, when societies are threatened in their cores by these crises.

252 I want to point to an interesting leftist perspective on the phenomenon of life. Rosa Luxemburg, who is a very important figure in the Modern leftist tradition and can be counted as one of the most enlightened persons, also in a moral sense, of the 20th century in Europe, wrote, in my opinion, an interesting and impressive letter to her friend Sophie Liebknecht out of jail. In this letter, she expressed her appreciation and love for the phenomenon of life. (See Kraus, Luxemburg, and Pfäfflin 2022, 11- 13) This is not a systematic argument for a more enlightened perspective toward the phenomenon of life on the political Left. I think it is just an interesting and inspiring anecdote on the phenomenon of life from an important leftist figure.

253 See *Cannibal Capitalism*, The basis for this is her dialogue with Rahel Jaeggi presented in her book "Capitalism"

254 See Fraser, 107.

255 See *ibid.* 104.

1.2 Reification and the relationship to instrumental reasoning; Early Critical Theory - Horkheimer and Adorno

Secondly, I want to look at a much deeper critique of economized and especially bureaucratized Western societies, which developed from and alongside Western Marxism. The concept of instrumental reasoning was developed in early Critical Theory, especially by Max Horkheimer.²⁵⁶ It is closely connected to the concept of reification and has close bounds to Max Weber's work.²⁵⁷ The concept he developed is not solely bound to an analysis of the modern (and postmodern) Capitalist economic system, but according to Horkheimer (and Adorno) it is much deeper embedded in Western modern societies, going back to the developments in the processes of the period of enlightenment, like I pointed out already earlier in this thesis.²⁵⁸ However, instrumental reasoning is closely connected to the developments of Capitalist exploitation and gives a very solid foundation for the exploiting dynamics.²⁵⁹ In general, Horkheimer's goal was to carve out and highlight the form of reasoning at the very basis of contemporary societies, and industrialized culture.²⁶⁰ The central point for me is, that with this diagnosis also comes the strong assumption that the relationship to nature is formed and dominated by this instrumental reasoning and a strong connection to the phenomenon of reification exists. What does this mean? Horkheimer explicitly points out that instrumental reasoning is strongly connected to the domination of nature. "Nevertheless, nature is today more than ever conceived as a mere tool of man. It is the object of total exploitation that has no aim set by reason, and therefore no limit."²⁶¹ Other ends dominate the reasoning towards nature, and the relationship itself is therefore instrumentalized. Instrumentalization and domination go hand in hand. Within this and because of instrumental reasoning, there is no place for recognition of nature and life surrounding us. Instrumental reasoning and reification, therefore, also go hand in hand. "As the result of the process, we have on the one hand the self, the abstract ego emptied of all substance except its attempt to transform everything in heaven and on earth into means for its preservation, and on the other hand an empty nature degraded to mere material, mere stuff to be dominated, without any other purpose than that of this very domination."²⁶² What is also important for me is the

²⁵⁶ See Horkheimer 2004.

²⁵⁷ See Habermas 2019, 489.

²⁵⁸ See 1.2.2)

²⁵⁹ See Quadflieg 2019, 46.

²⁶⁰ See Horkheimer 2004, 13. Habermas also adopted the concept. He set out an analysis of the particular form of rationality present in the so-called economic sphere of society and the sphere of the state. In both these spheres, he diagnoses a form of rationality called "Zweckrationalität". This analysis and conceptual comprehension goes back to the German sociologist Max Weber.

²⁶¹ Horkheimer 2004, 108.

²⁶² Horkheimer 2004, 97.

diagnosis that this instrumentalized and reified view is widespread through different spheres in our societies. I want to point to another important sphere now, next to the sphere of the Capitalist economy with its decision-making. With this I mean the bureaucratized political administration. I claim we can also find instrumentalizing and reifying processes there. This means we find them in contemporary management positions of the economic and the political sphere. In my opinion, a fundamental reason for this is that in those distanced positions, there happens no direct, immediate perception of and contact with situations and entities. Concrete situations mostly just appear on office screens and are associated with numbers. I claim this makes them especially prone to reifying perception processes. There might be moments, some spaces of light, where the people involved question this instrumental reasoning solely for certain ends. Spurts of recognition (also an ethical recognition) - in my case of non-human life forms - might come through. However, overall, it is mostly overshadowed by the ultimate reasoning, at least in the economic sphere, which is the profit motive. This is also the sphere where the most environmental destruction happens.

I deeply doubt that it is possible in a Capitalist society to integrate a non-reified look at life on a broader, systemic basis. The reason is that processes in the whole society are strongly subject to economic imperatives, the profit imperative, as pointed out. This is clearly shown in the actual societal dynamics. It shows in the broad actions and their effects on non-human nature and life forms, plants, and animals. This can be tamed and bound to some extent by political and societal processes and struggles. However, there is always a strong force working that has no inherent interest in having a different, more recognizing stand towards non-human nature. The diagnostic and critical concepts of commodification, exploitation, and instrumental reasoning support this diagnosis. The profit motive dominates all other possible outlooks on non-human life forms and nature in society overall.

We can see this tragic misery with the relationship to non-human nature in the great failure right now to deal with the climate crisis and other ecological crises, even though there exist big pledges, promises, and plans on a supranational level and in the different countries.²⁶³ If one wants to see some hope, we might be able to find it in the development of a more enlightened and reflected political and societal sphere. I claim that any society that is bureaucratically organized in some sense, whether it has strong Capitalist elements or not, has to be able to reflect on its organization and administration. It should be aware that this organizational administration inherently contains categorizations and, therefore, tends to stay on the surface of things. Underneath this bureaucratic organization is the `real element` of

263 See IPCC 2022; “The CAT Thermometer | Climate Action Tracker” 2022.

things. This is where life happens. This can be said about human life, human societies, and interactions, but also with a look at non-human life, in the context of my work at plants and animals. In my opinion, without reflecting and recognizing these processes, human life and societies are not as rich as they could be.

Additionally, we live in times now where this outlook brings other species, but also the human species, in great danger. A potential solution in the context of my work would be a reflection on the relationship to nature in general, on existent reifying processes of non-human life forms, and the development of a recognition of life coming in its different forms. This should happen on a broader societal level because this happening for individuals and small groups is not enough. On the one hand, we can see the potential in societal movements and environmental struggles, and on the other hand, in a supranational political institution like the UN, which promotes a rather radical environmental agenda. The question remains how these societal and political dynamics will continue to be in relationship to strong and forceful economic dynamics and their impacts on society and nature.

2 Concluding remarks

One can ask herself how the outlook I have sketched is important in severe, rapidly unfolding ecological crisis situations. Would a more pragmatic outlook in these times not be of more importance? The urgent calls for radical changes get stronger and more from different sides. I want to give two reasons, also for myself, while also acknowledging the importance of more practical perspectives. On the one hand, I do think it can be of societal importance to have a closer outlook on the relationship to nature surrounding us, combined with a radical critique of certain existing relationships. On the other hand, I think it can be individually enriching to question oneself with possibly internalized (reified) perception patterns and possibly try to gain a better outlook on the inner life of non-human life forms surrounding us. The outlook I presented may not relate so much to the climate crisis because, rather obviously, the climate system is a physical dynamic that then secondhandly is in relationship to the different life forms on earth. However, it may relate to other ecological crisis phenomena like the biodiversity crisis. The reification concept can deliver one insight into how our relationship to nature and non-human life forms is deeply pathological in our society. Examples, which I mentioned already in the introduction, are industrialized animal slaughterhouses, deforestation for land grabbing, overfishing of the oceans, the exploitation of mines and the devastating effect that has on the surrounding life, and so forth. As I mentioned already, I did not want to

present an ethical outlook. However, an ontological outlook may also change our consciousness and present the basis for a certain change of demeanor and action.

My main philosophical work expands Axel Honneth's theoretical approach and additionally expresses some possibilities for a different outlook on living beings. It points towards something that, in my diagnosis, is fundamentally problematic in the broader societal sphere. I hope the work has some enriching aspects. The only goal a work like this can have is to try to help understand this relationship and also possibly show ways that other relationships could be possible. Here, the concept of recognition of life plays the main role in my work.

2.1 Final contemplation

What I want to say at the end of my presentation: What I present in my work contains a meditation or contemplation about a human relationship with non-human animals. I want to emphasize that they are meditations that need time, space, and muse, like all philosophical work. Most people in our fast-moving societies either do not have the time and possibilities or do not take the time and possibilities for meditation like this. I acknowledge it is difficult for many people going into these contemplations, stuck in their everyday lives, the happenings in these everyday lives. However, it can help to get to know life around you, and develop an attitude of recognition and possibly also appreciation. What is helpful with the tools of analysis of Critical Theory is that they have a fundamentally critical and, therefore, deep outlook on post-enlightenment development in the Western world. Their problem is that they give little hope and optimism on a political and societal level. I tried to explain phenomena with words and concepts, but I think it is more of an experience. In the end, I want to point towards the fact that this experience, a recognition of animals and plants, can be very rich and manifold because the living world surrounding us is very rich and manifold. An important question which remains for me is the relationship of life and spirit.

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