

## *Justice through Recognition*

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### **Abstract**

In the current times, it is the political debate and the philosophy of politics that reveals how relevant the theme of recognition is, and in what manner the progress and well-being of human beings, who are part of different groups and communities, depend upon it. The psychology of recognition underlines how complex and deep the process of recognition is. It constantly involves an articulated dialectics which Ricœur demonstrated to have a direct link with personal emancipation. The sociological-speculative research on recognition reveals how central the intersubjective dynamism of communication and action is in the public sphere, both for the process of self-emancipation and for the emancipation of a given society. The dialectics between justice and recognition cannot “simply” be reduced to the critical analysis of the double movement of ‘justice through recognition’ and ‘recognition through justice’, nor to a question of public agreement or legal formalisation and determination. In the end, it is through the challenges referred to and developed between self-emancipation and intersubjective action that the future of our civilisation will be at stake. There will not be social emancipation, social justice, and social (mutual) recognition without the personal engagement of citizens, and without emancipation of them.

Keywords: recognition, hermeneutics, emancipation, sociology, religion

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## Introduction

If in politics the concept of recognition had a long history of uses, on the ground of political and legal theory this concept has emerged only recently – actually, in the nineties, thanks to Charles Taylor’s book *The Politics of Recognition* (1992). Most recently, in his *The Course of Recognition* (2004), Paul Ricœur productively resumed the different philosophical uses of the concept of recognition (namely, in theory of knowledge, in philosophical psychology and anthropology, and in political philosophy) demonstrating their reciprocal correlations and connections with disciplines like psychology, sociology and, of course, politics. We would observe the same in some of the most important recent speculative researches around the theme, mainly those of Habermas, Honneth, Thompson, and Fraser; and this, beyond their particularities and differences. Specifically, it is sociology that plays an explicit and immediate role as a counterpart or an “orientation” point for philosophy; while psychology enters indirectly into the discourse. Sociology even has the role of an intermediary position, between psychology and politics. In fact, the social-political point of view in the uses of recognition has predominantly intended connecting the theoretical-ideal models of personal identity both in reference to self-comprehension and the modality with-whom a person is recognized in given contexts. Ricœur has expressed well the essential truth behind this vision summarising the triangular relationship between psychology, sociology, and politics through the following expression: ‘We do not mistake ourselves without also being mistaken about others and our relations with them’ (Ricœur 2005, p. 257). Taylor too had somehow offered a key of interconnection distinguishing between *recognition as respect*, which is essentially to consider in social-political, moral and legal terms; *recognition as esteem*, which is mostly referred to good social practices and to the politics of difference, as well as to education and culture; and, finally, *recognition as love*, which refers to the inner, psychological life, as well as to the private relation sphere.

As a consequence, the dialectics between justice and recognition cannot “simply” be reduced to the critical analysis of the double movement of ‘justice through recognition’ and ‘recognition through justice’, trying to determine which one comes first. It is necessary to develop a tripled, parallel approach between psychology, sociology and political theory, under the mediatory function of philosophy. This, will certainly be useful for a comprehensive speculative approach, but it will give at the same time a more enriched and deepened understanding of the multiple and complex implications of the social-political dynamics of recognition and mis-recognition. Even the two major thematics that have for the most part struck and affected the public debate and social life about issues on recognition reveal that a true constellation of different elements are at work within the dialectics between justice and recognition; and without doubt even for the idea of justice it must be a varied definition, corresponding to the diverse disciplines involved at each passage. First of all, the themes of cultural relativism and multiculturalism require an approach of theory of politics which goes beyond the theory of politics in itself for embracing a critical philosophy exercised as a critique of culture and ideology (Taylor’s *Politics of Recognition* and Habermas’ research indicate and follow this line). The second thematic addresses the question of conflicts-mediation and of intercultural rights and focus the moment of a psychological analysis as unavoidable (because, there are not simply conflicts between individuals as well as between groups, but rather because the attitude or capacity of a singular person to manage conflict may make the

difference in singular cases as well as in complex situations). It is a theme of practical order that calls into question as much political philosophy as psychology and education; as much critical sociology as philosophy and morality; and, of course, as much law (especially, international law) as peace studies and ethics. But, as a practical problem, it requires a philosophical approach that is not only able to mediate between these disciplines synthesising their diverse contributions, but even to actively work with and for psychology, politics, ethics and even religion in order to coordinate the diverse resources of knowledge and capabilities, effectively finding and indicating practical solutions. Differences, tensions and conflicts are inevitables, permanent and structural. The new horizon of the social and moral challenges, individual and collective, may be *to transcend* conflicts and differences in the same sense in which it has been considered and prospected by Johan Galtung, but perhaps a more generalised and deepened approach is that of the religious philosopher Daisaku Ikeda, who – beyond his personal Buddhist creed – emphasises the generalisable idea that one has to have full responsible involvement in transforming situations by reforming and emancipating himself. Conflicts and challenges may be used as an opportunity of personal and social growth, enrichment, and intercultural development. This vision has many elements in common with other non-violent approaches religiously based, such are those of Tolstoy, Gandhi, M. L. King, and Mandela.

Without a doubt, analysing the current trend we easily recognise that this conception and perspective is far from being largely embraced and recognised as a practicable, wise, way; even law and politics do not seem to move in this direction, nor toward the direction of a new intercultural era of multicultural recognition and creative cooperation. Today, issues of politics of recognition which are *stricto sensu* political are receiving the response of a defensive public criticism and the spread of nationalism; while, in terms of policies of rights, the current challenge seems to no more give in terms of (normative and political) resolution of differences, of identitarian politics, of separatist politics, but of reception and management of differences, acceptance and management of conflicts, acceptance and management of the increasingly next identitarian diversities. And, what about philosophy? Philosophy is generally denying its direct, theoretical and practical, full involvement into this question. In perpetual conflicts against itself, it is revealing a more and more divided spirit between a totally detached approach – which, essentially, is the sterile, “pure”, approach of a large part of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy – and a sectarian, radicalised, approach, fragmented because of being religiously or ideologically angled (instead of critically and argumentatively). Accordingly with Xanthaki’s essay “Multiculturalism and International Law: Discussing Universal Standards” we may say that the basic elements of multiculturalism have penetrated the public sphere (Xanthaki 2010, pp. 21-48), and disciplines such as law – we may include even non-critical and non-practical philosophies – are, in one way or another, acting and contributing as regulatory social mechanisms. They are defending the *status quo*; they are continuing to work according to coercive interest and rational logics. However, what is important for us is to focus and deepen the fact that multiculturalism raises the question of personal emancipation not only professionally, but morally and culturally. In fact, each one of us is perpetually involved, personally and responsibly. But what are the principal psychological and sociological elements involved in this dialectics, and in what way may they be subsumed into the circle of a theoretical-practical philosophy?

In the following paragraphs the authors of major reference will be Ricœur and Habermas, respectively for resuming a philosophical moment essentially based on psychology of recognition and, subsequently, on sociology of recognition. As previously mentioned, in each one of the singular perspectives we find a constant, interdisciplinary connection between psychology, sociology and politics of recognition. All those disciplines must be of central reference in a general theory of recognition, but this theory does not yet exist (Ricœur 2005, p. IX). However, the approach of a critical philosophy may already help, even if it is without the basis of an already well systematised theory.

The critical philosophy must have a theoretical and practical approach, or better, it must have a theoretical approach with an essential ethical mark; it must also be interdisciplinary and practically involved. Taken as a whole, Ricœur's approach – which, following his own presentation can be summarised as a “*reflexive* philosophy” that remains within the “sphere of Husserlian *phenomenology*” as its “hermeneutical variation” (Ricœur 1991, p. 12) – seems to mirror all these needs. Therefore we will be following it.

### **The psychological way of recognition**

The question of recognition is particularly significant in the field of cognitive psychology, but its use is both theoretical and clinical in other psychological schools, like in psychoanalysis where the issue of recognition emerges both in the theoretical and clinical sphere, specifically in connection to the therapeutic process of the patient-analyst relationship. Ricœur had studied this phenomenon, precisely translating the therapeutic process in terms of dialectics of recognition. He writes:

The analytic situation offers desire what Freud, in one of his technical texts, calls “a playground in which it [the patient's compulsion to repeat] is allowed to expand in almost complete freedom”. Now why does the analytic situation have this virtue of reorienting repetition toward remembrance? Because it offers desire an imaginary face-to-face relation in the process of transference. Not only does desire speak, it speaks to someone else, to the other person. This second starting point in analytic practice (...) does not lack theoretical implications. It reveals that from its beginning human desire is, to use Hegel's expression the desire of another's desire and finally for recognition (Ricœur 2012, p. 96).

Thanks to a productive re-actualisation of Hegel's phenomenological theory, the dynamism of transference-countertransference is here understood as a psychological and at the same time social dialectic of recognition. Studying the psychology of recognition from this point of view we may find it useful to comparatively intertwine Paul Ricœur and Axel Honneth's research, because both make reference to psychology or psychoanalysis using Hegel's theory of recognition. Even, Ricœur's theory of recognition, as it is developed in his *The Course of Recognition* (2004), has an explicit connection with Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition* (1992). But the French philosopher opposes Honneth's ethics of conflict. Certainly, Ricœur's renewal of the Hegelian theory of recognition tends to incorporate the natural perspective of Honneth's proposal; but it is still true that this renewal lies in a speculative anthropology presented by the author as *a phenomenology of the capable human*

*being.*

Honneth develops his argumentation through Winnicott's psychology, while Ricœur comes back to his early research on Freud and philosophy, where psychoanalysis is connected and intertwined to Hegel's phenomenology. By comparing Hegel's phenomenology with psychoanalysis, Ricœur describes a conception of personal identity as an ongoing hermeneutic-dialectic process constricted between the opposites of regressive forces and progressive forces, of 'necessity' (the body's needs and instincts) and freedom (the mind's or spirit's will and determination). In his *Freud and Philosophy* (1965) he writes:

The analytic situation does not bear merely a vague resemblance to the Hegelian dialectic of reduplicated consciousness; between that dialectic and the process of consciousness that develops in the analytic relation there is a remarkable structural homology. The entire analytic relation can be reinterpreted as a dialectic of consciousness, rising from life to self-consciousness, from the satisfaction of desire to the recognition of the other consciousness. As the decisive episode of the transference teaches us, insight or the process of becoming conscious not only entails another consciousness, the analyst's, but contains a phase of struggle reminiscent of the struggle for recognition. The process is an unequal relation in which the patient, like the slave or bondsman of the Hegelian dialectic, sees the other consciousness by turns as the essential and as the unessential; the patient likewise has his truth at first in the other, before becoming the master through a work comparable to the work of the slave, the work of the analysis (Ricœur 1970, p. 485).

This important interpretation can also be found in Ricœur's human being conception as used and re-actualised in *The Course of Recognition*, for example via passages like this: 'We do not mistake ourselves without also being mistaken about others and our relations with them' (Ricœur 2005, p. 257).

### **The sociological way of recognition**

Focusing on the sociological theme of recognition, we find Talcott Parsons' *General theory of social action* (1949) as the first major text of reference for sociological research that investigates the question of intersubjectivity and interrelation. Parsons' sociology enters into dialectics with anthropological and ethnological research, becoming particularly interesting for philosophers and theorists of qualitative sociology like Jürgen Habermas. Actually, reflecting around the development of this research between sociology and philosophy, we can say that, generally speaking, the question of recognition in sociology has moved over the decades from a polarisation on the issue of the philosophical and sociological theme of intersubjectivity to the sociological-ethical and sociological-political theme of reciprocity. In Habermas' theory of action we do not only find summarised and discussed Parsons' conception, but even his interdisciplinary approach and "logic" is subsumed. At the same time, this theory of action becomes central for a speculative research, studying the sociological functioning of the dynamic of recognition.

Habermas interprets the sociological question of intersubjectivity and interrelation in an original, critical-practical and interdisciplinary way, transforming it as a question deeply connected to the triadic thematic of 'public sphere', 'discourse' and 'reason',

that is between critical sociology, theory of communication, political theory. As an anthropological basis for this view, Habermas implies Aristotle's conception of man as a 'political animal', as a natural, social and political, being who lives with others, realising himself in the public space. Because of the fact we are constitutively intersubjective, we are radically dependent on each other. Actually, it is in the public sphere that we become persons, because we are learning continually through the interaction with others.<sup>1</sup> The construction and organisation of public spaces – whose structural framework is of a *social* nature – reveals the constructive or decadent, the harmonies or rifts of a communitarianism. It is within the varied, emancipatory or repressive, communitarian dynamism of mutual recognition or mis-recognition to influence and impact the singular life for the majority, as well as the life of a group, a community or society as a whole. Analysing and evaluating the reality of our rationalised and bureaucratised, western, societies Habermas denounces a dynamism of coercive and repressive nature, within which the work of the social, public, critic and the "militancy" of an emancipatory communication is required as necessary and urgent. It is not the "simple" material quality of life or the quality of peaceful inter-relationships to determine a good degree of development of a society and the emancipation of its members. In fact, it depends on the quality of *communicative* relationships. This concept of intersubjective communication constitutes the keystone of Habermas' theory of recognition, in which the possibility of empowerment and emancipation is "played" between the critique of the system and its re-organisation from the one side, and the quality and productiveness of the intersubjective, communicative, relationships. Finally only individuals and groups practising mutual recognition and advancing instances of respect and recognition through dialogue and critical communication can counterbalance the invasive, levelling, pressure of the systems, which has a structural, unavoidable tendency to become authoritarian and repressive.

## Conclusion

In the current times, it is the political debate and the philosophy of politics which reveal how relevant the theme of recognition is, and in what manner the progress and well-being of human beings, who are part of different groups and communities, depend upon it. The struggle for recognition is the conceptual key for interpreting a dialectical process which is of a new kind. It has found, and may find again, diverse ways of expression – we have already had, and are still having, anti-segregation or anti-racial or civil rights movements, women's movements, peace movements, green movements, gender movements and so on. This important political process of recognition is an important and interesting dialectics within our democracies. At the same time, it has a sort of inner dark side: in fact, the politics of recognition may easily degenerate in a politics of differentiation. And this, certainly poses problems of relativism and, worst, it may gradually slip into a "democratic" disaggregation, transforming multicultural society in an anarchical anti-social reality focused on differentiation and subjective rights.

The psychology of recognition underlines how complex and deep the process of recognition is. It constantly involves an articulated dialectics that Ricœur has

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<sup>1</sup> See: Speech delivered on the occasion of the conferment of the Kyoto Prize, November 11, 2014, published in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 11-12th 2004.

demonstrated to have a direct link with personal emancipation. The sociological critical research on recognition reveals how central the intersubjective dynamism of communication and action is in the public sphere, both for the process of self-emancipation and for the emancipation of a given society. As I previously underlined: the dialectics between justice and recognition cannot “simply” be reduced to the critical analysis of the double movement of ‘justice through recognition’ and ‘recognition through justice’. In fact, it is through the challenges referred to and developed between self-emancipation and intersubjective action that the future of our civilisation will be at stake. There will not be social emancipation, social justice, and social (mutual) recognition without citizens’ personal engagement, and without emancipation of them. We are responsible. We are the key.

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