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Paul Ricoeur's Surprising Take on Recognition

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Abstract

This essay examines Paul Ricoeur's views on recognition in his book *The Course of Recognition*. It highlights those aspects that are in some sense surprising, in relation to his previous publications and the general debates on Hegelian *Anerkennung* and the politics of recognition. After an overview of Ricoeur's book, the paper examines the meaning of "recognition" in Ricoeur's own proposal, in the dictionaries Ricoeur uses, and in the contemporary debates. Then it takes a closer look at the ideas of recognition as identification and as "taking as true." Then it turns to recognition (attestation) of oneself, in light of the distinction between human constants (and the question "What am I?"), and human variables (and the question "Who Am I?"). The last section concerns the dialectics of struggles for recognition and states of peace, and the internal relationship between the contents of a normative demand and what counts as satisfying the demand.

Keywords: Paul Ricoeur, Recognition, Attestation, Identity, Human Constants

Résumé

Cet article examine les thèses de Paul Ricoeur sur la reconnaissance dans son livre *Parcours de la reconnaissance*. Il met en lumière des aspects de cet ouvrage qui peuvent, en plusieurs sens, nous surprendre, au regard des ouvrages antérieurs du philosophe, ou encore au regard des débats généraux sur l'*Anerkennung* hégélienne et sur les politiques de reconnaissance. Après avoir dressé un aperçu général du livre, la contribution analyse le sens du terme de "reconnaissance" dans la conceptualisation Ricœurienne, dans les dictionnaires que Ricoeur mobilise à l'appui de son argumentation, et dans les débats contemporains. Ensuite, l'article s'attarde sur l'idée de reconnaissance comme identification et comme "tenir pour vrai". Puis, il se tourne vers la reconnaissance (attestation) de soi-même, à travers la distinction entre les "invariants humains" (et la question "qu'est-ce que je suis?"), et les "variations humaines" (et la question "qui suis-je?"). La dernière section se focalise sur la dialectique entre les luttes pour la reconnaissance et les états de paix, d'une part, et la relation interne entre le contenu d'une demande normative et ce qui importe comme satisfaisant une demande, d'autre part.

Mots-clés: Paul Ricoeur, Reconnaissance, Attestation, Identité, Invariants humains

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In this essay, I examine Paul Ricœur's views on recognition in his book *The Course of Recognition*.¹ I wish to highlight those aspects of his take on recognition that are in some sense surprising. Something can be a surprise only relative to expectations, so I will first try to explicate the nature of the expectations, or the kinds of contextual background, against which Ricœur's book on recognition stands out.

One of these contexts is provided by the dictionaries that Ricœur consults for the meanings of "recognition" at the beginning of his book. There are interesting discrepancies and overlappings between the dictionaries and Ricœur's own discussion of them: for example, "recognition of self" is central to Ricœur but not mentioned in the dictionaries, and "acceptance of validity" is present in the dictionaries but not thematized by Ricœur.

Another context is provided by Ricœur's earlier writings on "human constants," especially on subjectivity and capable human agency.² These writings give rise to various expectations concerning what Ricœur might discuss in a book on recognition: these include highlighting the asymmetry of self-relations and other-relations, but avoiding both the Husserlian and Levinasian extremes while doing so, stressing the relevance of human agency, and the attestation of capabilities (but also fallibility and vulnerability) of agents. These expectations are met – indeed, it is surprising how much of these books on human agency (almost their entirety) Ricœur now covers under the titles of identification and recognition of self. It might be thought that "recognition" equals "intersubjectivity," but for Ricœur, only recognition of and by others does so: the semantic field is broader, so all kinds of cognition and self-attestation are now included as kinds of "recognition," whether or not they are constitutively intersubjective (which they of course do turn out to be in some sense).

A further background consists of the debates on "human variables" in terms of cultural identities, multiculturalism, politics of recognition, politics of identity and difference, including Ricœur's own writings on thick selfhood and narrative identity (especially in *Oneself as Another*, *Time and Narrative*, and a number of his essays).³ Here, one would have expected a rich analysis of how narrative self-definitions and thick identities are dialogically constituted in relations of recognition to others, and how cultural, practical, social, ethical and narrative aspects of thick identities relate to each other. The surprise here is *how little*, almost nothing, Ricœur says of all this, given that "Ricœurian" views on layers of self-relations could be anticipated on the basis of his earlier writings, as I hope to sketch below. Ricœur is right to oppose the narrow focus of these debates on cultural variables and differences, but it is nothing short of surprising that he does not develop his rich account further in this context. Recognition is also about dialogical constitution of thick narrative, evaluative, practical identities.

Yet another background consists of the Hegelian and Honnethian developments of the notion of *Anerkennung*, covering both human constants and variables, but also issues of social and

institutional reality and normativity.⁴ In these debates two senses of “recognition” often are intertwined, that of (mutual) recognition of agents (self and others) who are recognized by one another, and that of normative acknowledgement of values, reasons, principles, institutions as valid. It is a bit surprising, then, that Ricœur’s threefold distinction of senses of recognition (identification of anything, self-attestation and mutual recognition with others) excludes a central sense of recognition of values or normative entities as valid.⁵

Finally, as often happens, some expectations arise while reading the book, and later passages in the same book may be surprising in light of them. This is perhaps the case with Ricœur’s discussion of struggles for recognition and states of peace, as I hope to show below.

From Identification and Self-Attestation to Mutual Recognition

Ricœur’s usage of the term “recognition” is much broader than is customary in debates about the politics of identity and difference, which have “most contributed to popularizing the theme of recognition, at the risk of turning it into something banal.”⁶ He thinks that the kind of social standing related to cultural differences is only one of many species of mutual recognition, and furthermore, that *mutual recognition* in all of its forms differs from two other kinds of recognition discussed in the book. The other two are discussed in the first two chapters of the book: first, *identification of anything* as the thing that it is; second, *recognition of oneself* as a capable agent.

In Ricœur’s own description, the master threads of i) identity, ii) alterity and iii) dialectic of recognition and misrecognition structure the book, and each develops along the way. i) *Idem-identity* excludes alterity, but alterity is constitutive of existential *Ipse-identity*; ii) Self-recognition or self-assertion of one’s capacities “anticipates” mutuality or reciprocity, but does not yet accomplish it; iii) There is a development from “misidentifications” or mere mistakes via self-deception and failures of self-understanding to refusals of recognition of others, struggles for recognition, distorted forms of gift-giving and finally to the satisfactory experiences of getting recognition and states of peace.⁷

Ricœur starts from an observation that although there are libraries full of books on theories of knowledge, there are no corresponding theories of “recognition.” Recognition has surfaced only in a couple of “thought events” in the history of philosophy: Kant uses the term *Rekognition* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bergson discusses recognition of oneself in memory, and the young Hegel discusses *Anerkennung* in a social context. These seem to be about very different things. Ricœur wants to show that the topic of recognition has some unity, at least some “rule-governed polysemy,” which links these and other “thought events” together, regardless of whether or not the term was explicitly used in them. As it happens, Kant’s *Rekognition* turns out to be a disappointment for Ricœur, and Bergson is discussed only for a couple of pages. But, many other minor occurrences of “recognition” are reported along the way. Perhaps surprisingly, neither Fichte nor Hegel’s *Phenomenology* are hardly mentioned. Moreover, Ricœur does not really engage with analytical philosophy at all, which would have been relevant for the topic of the first chapter, at the very least.

Ricœur introduces his topic by asking what dictionaries might tell us about the unity of the term “recognition,” or *reconnaissance*. This section of the book works surprisingly well in English translation. The meanings of the French word are mostly covered by the English one, the

main difference being that “gratitude” is much more central in the French term. By contrast, there is no neat translation to German. For example, neither *anerkennen*, *wiedererkennen* nor *Recognition* covers the whole scope of this term.

Here’s one way of summing up the various (more than twenty) meanings of the word mentioned in the dictionaries.⁸ There is, first, a family of meanings related to identification of things. We can identify familiar people and objects directly by their holistic style or bearing, or we can identify things for the first time by some mark. Second, there is a family of meanings related to accepting some claim or document as true or valid. Thirdly, there is a family of senses in which recognition concerns people. To recognize can be for example “to bear witness through gratitude that one is indebted to someone for (something, an act)” or “to accept (a person) as a leader, master” and the recognized person can be “someone who is declared to possess a certain quality.” One may note in passing that Ricœur’s “recognition of oneself” does not figure in the dictionaries discussed.⁹ Furthermore, recognition as accepting as true or valid seems to be more prominent than Ricœur notes. Thus, an alternative “course” of recognition might as well move from recognition-identification to recognition-acceptance as true or valid (“recognition-adhesion” (211) and then to what Ricœur calls “recognition-attestation” of oneself and others.

Chapter One, “Recognition as Identification,” discusses Descartes, Kant, and phenomenologists from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty. It emerges that identification is threatened not only by mistaking some individual thing for some other individual thing, but also by a failure to construe something as an individual thing at all. Although it is not explicitly stressed by Ricœur, one can say that these two kinds of failures of identification may be relevant in political contexts. People sometimes see “groups” where there really are – or should be – none (and there may be struggles aiming at dissolving the very idea that the *x*s form a unified group), or people may fail to perceive groups which do demand positive recognition as a group, and sometimes of course people mistake some groups or individuals for others (so that they may buy the idea that Saddam Hussein might have been responsible for Al-Qaeda’s deeds).

Overall, there seem to be five themes discussed under the topic of *recognition as identification*: i) identification as a synthesis (say, perceiving a shape and not just dots; perceiving a material body and not just profiles and silhouettes; a forest and not just trees), which may be quite automatic in the case of human persons, but not so in the case of recognizing groups; ii) identification as distinguishing something from other things, for example, identifying a person as the individual that she is; iii) identification on the basis of marks *versus* on the basis of more holistic “style”; iv) the relevance of presence, disappearing and reappearing, and change¹⁰; v) (with Descartes) the topic of accepting “an idea” as true.

Chapter Two introduces an important presupposition to the debates about mutual recognition: the fact that we are able to act, that we are capable agents, and therefore capable of taking responsibility. The chapter links up with Ricœur’s earlier analysis (in *Oneself as Another*) of the kind of certitude with which we recognize that we have various capacities as agents. It differs from descriptive “identification” as discussed in the first chapter. The type of recognition in question is “attestation,” expressed by self-assertions such as “I believe that I can,” and implicit in anything that we do.¹¹ There is really no discussion of the sense of recognizing one’s identity, of who one is in particular (and not merely the fact that, like others, one is a capable, responsible agent). This is surprising, given Ricœur’s famous earlier analyses of *ipse*-identity and narrative identity, which no doubt are related to recognition of oneself.

In Chapter Two Ricœur first discusses Greek texts and agrees with Bernard Williams' thesis that a cultural constant about humans as "centers of agency" and as responsible actors can be found in the Greek texts. The next section, entitled "A Phenomenology of the Capable Human Being," introduces the topic of recognizing oneself as an agent, as having various capacities to speak, to act, to narrate, and to take responsibility. This section covers the main themes of Ricœur's *Oneself as Another* in a rather dense manner. The third section is entitled "Memory and Promises," which also covers themes from his book *Memory, History, Forgetting*.¹² Ricœur points out, following Bergson, that there is an implicit recognition of self in recognizing images or memories. And there is a peculiar kind of persistence of self that takes place in promises: even if my inclinations would change in the future, I now commit myself to doing something then. This is crucial for Ricœur's idea that *idem*-identity (identity as sameness) and *ipse*-identity (identity as selfhood) are in a dialectical relationship. The last section in the second chapter is entitled "Capacities and Social Practices". It first discusses social practices and collective representations, and then discusses how Ricœur's capacities relate to Sen's capability approach.

Ricœur's point, in preceding the discussion of mutual recognition by a discussion of the capacities and capabilities of each can be seen as a criticism of a certain kind of "constructivism" about agency. One's agency does not emerge in being recognized by others or oneself, but there are grounds in one's factual capacities and potentials. Self-recognition or self-assertion of one's capacities merely "anticipates" mutuality or reciprocity, but does not yet accomplish it.¹³ "If it is possible to abstract from every bond of intersubjectivity in analysing capacities on the level of potential actions, the passage from a capacity to its exercise does not allow for such an elision."¹⁴ "In these different ways self-recognition refers to others without this reference's assuming the position of a ground, like that of the power to act, nor does the 'before others' imply reciprocity or mutuality. The mutuality of recognition is anticipated in this 'before others' but is not accomplished in it."¹⁵

Chapter Three turns to interpersonal recognition and creates the sense of philosophical *aporia* that characterizes Ricœur's best work. Ricœur starts by discussing the asymmetry of the self and the other, by referring to the directly opposed versions of this asymmetry given by Husserl and Levinas, respectively. Ricœur's point is to warn against forgetting the real dissymmetries in the search for mutuality between the self and the other. After this initial warning, Ricœur discusses Hobbes's challenge to political philosophy, and interprets Hegel's notion of *Anerkennung* as a response to Hobbes. For Hegel "the desire for recognition occupies the place held in the Hobbesian conception of the state of nature by the fear of a violent death."¹⁶ Ricœur does not discuss the most famous passages on recognition in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but focuses solely on Hegel's earlier texts. In this, Ricœur follows Axel Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition*, the main text in contemporary debates on this topic. This leads to a lengthy and interesting commentary on Honneth's work. In Ricœur's view "the correlation between the three models of recognition inherited from Hegel and the negative forms of disregard" is "the most important contribution by Honneth's book to the theory of recognition in its post-Hegelian phase."¹⁷ "The three models of recognition provide the speculative structure, while the negative sentiments give flesh and blood to the struggle for recognition."¹⁸

The first form of recognition, love, is "constituted by strong emotional attachments among a small number of people."¹⁹ This is a pre-judicial form of reciprocal recognition where "subjects mutually confirm each other with regard to their concrete needs and thereby recognize each other as needy creatures."²⁰ Such attachments are inconsistent with direct violations of

physical integrity (as Honneth stresses), or negations of approbation (as Ricœur stresses) that systematically affect a person's basic self-confidence. "Humiliation, experienced as the withdrawal or refusal of such approbation, touches everyone at the prejudicial level of his or her "being-with" others. The individual feels looked down on from above, even taken as insignificant. Deprived of approbation, the person is as if nonexistent."²¹

The second form of recognition, universal respect, is institutionalized in the legal recognition of rights. Corresponding to different kinds of rights, there are various specific forms of disrespect. The humiliation that relates to a denial of civil rights is different from a denial of political rights, or welfare rights.

The third form of recognition concerns the social dimension of politics, *Sittlichkeit* in its broadest sense, which is irreducible to juridical ties. The concept of social esteem differs from self-respect and self-confidence and "functions to sum up all the modes of mutual recognition that exceed the mere recognition of the equality of rights among free subjects."²² It is a matter of "the notions that go with the idea of social esteem, such as prestige or consideration."²³ People need recognition of "the importance of their individual qualities for the life of others."²⁴

Ricœur then turns to a very fruitful addition to Honneth's analysis of struggles for esteem. Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot²⁵ speak of justification as "the strategy by which competitors give credence to their respective places in ... economies of standing."²⁶ People's standing can be evaluated to be great or small in the light of qualifying tests specific to different contexts, which Boltanski and Thevenot call "cities" or "worlds." "In each case, the evaluation of performances is based on a battery of tests that the protagonists must pass in competitive situation, if they are to be said to be 'justified.'"²⁷

They name six different contexts. "For example, there is the question of 'inspired greatness' as applied to artists and other creative individuals."²⁸ There is a "city of inspiration" illustrated by Saint Augustine's *City of God*. What matters is grace as distinguished from vainglory. "In this city, no credit is accorded to recognition by others, at least in terms of renown."²⁹ "But renown is precisely what the city of opinion refers to, in which standing depends only on the opinions of others. Ties of personal dependence are what decide one's importance in the eyes of others. Here honor depends on the credit conferred by other people."³⁰ In addition, they enumerate the domestic, civic, commercial and industrial cities, each with rival standards of social standing.³¹

There are feelings of injustice, for example, when such tests are corrupted, and differences of opinion arise, and the "worlds" may also challenge and even invalidate each others. There is a typology of types of criticism directed by one world to another: "What is the standing of a great industrialist in the eyes of a great orchestra director? The capacity to become great in another world may even be eclipsed by success in some order of standing."³² But one may note that perhaps this is balanced by the tendency of elites to form clubs. As ways of responding to such disagreements between and within worlds, Boltanski and Thevenot favor figures of compromise over those of consensus in dealing with the idea of agreement.³³

Ricœur stresses the capacity of persons to understand a world other than one's own. Ricœur suggests that the model of compromise is superior, for example, to Charles Taylor's insistence that mutual recognition must deal with genuine value judgments. Ricœur stresses, however, that the vertical role of the state, political power, and authority must be added to the claims put forward by Honneth, Thevenot and Boltanski.

Ultimately, Ricœur wants to question the importance of the idea of “struggle” that Hobbes, Hegel, Honneth, Thevenot and Boltanski all give central place. Ricœur asks: “when, we may ask, does a subject deem him- or herself to be truly recognized?”³⁴ Ricœur sees that this might be an insatiable quest. “Does not the claim for affective, juridical and social recognition, through its militant, conflictual style, end up as an indefinite demand, a kind of ‘bad infinity’?”³⁵

To answer this worry, Ricœur looks for circumstances, which would reveal the possibility of genuine recognition in a particularly convincing manner. Ricœur looks for actual experiences of “states of peace” to get confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not illusory.³⁶ Ricœur takes practices of giving and receiving gifts to be such an exemplary context. Ricœur’s main point in discussing gift-giving is to stress the role of gratitude as a response to a gift. Giving a gift in return is not the first response, nor is there a mechanic need to reciprocate: gratitude is as such an adequate way of establishing mutuality. A central meaning of the French word “*reconnaissance*” is gratitude, and Ricœur’s observations about gift-giving and gratitude are among the highlights of this book.

The exchange of gifts illuminates two central aspects of mutual recognition. The first is “the irreplaceable character of each of the partners in the exchange. The one is not the other. We exchange gifts, but not places.”³⁷ The second is the difference of mutual recognition from any form of fusional union, whether in love or friendship: “A just distance is maintained at the heart of mutuality, a just distance that integrates respect into intimacy.”³⁸

Below, I will suggest a different way of understanding the nature of struggles and states of peace, in terms of the normative demands and their conditions of satisfaction. Nonetheless, the main claims of Ricœur’s last chapter are hard to resist. We should not exaggerate possibilities of mutuality or forget the original asymmetry of the self and the other. We should not forget the role of vertical power relations in discussing the struggles for recognition, but at the same time, we should not deny that at least fleeting experiences of genuine mutual recognition are possible (even in an imperfect world).

What is Recognition? Dictionaries, Ricœur and Contemporary Debates

As mentioned above, Ricœur introduces the word “recognition” by going through various French dictionaries. *Grand Robert de la langue française* (2nd ed 1985, edited by Alain Rey), includes “recognition” in three major senses - identify; take as true; be grateful or acknowledge a debt - which branch to several further meanings, while Littre’s *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1859-1872) enumerates no less than twenty-three meanings for recognition and five senses of *reconnu*, (“that which is recognized”).

Even at the most general level, there are some salient contrasts between what the dictionaries (“D”) list (D1 identify; D2 take as true; D3 be grateful or acknowledge a debt), the three senses that Ricœur (“R”) uses to structure the book (R1 to identify anything, R2 to recognize one’s self, R3 to recognize and be recognized by others), and the usage of “recognition” in the debates on politics (“P”) of recognition (P1 to identify anything; P2 to acknowledge norms and institutions as valid; P3 to stand in relations of recognition to other recognizers).³⁹ Still, what is common to all these is that the the first sense (D1, R1, P1) is related to identification of an object of any kind, something that persists changes and remains the same until ultimately ceases to exist; what are called “individuals,” “particulars,” or “continuants” in analytical ontology.

To identify in this sense is to join together impressions, to take as an entity, as “a something” in the first place (to see the forest from the trees; to see the shape and not just dots; to see a solid material entity and not just profiles or patches of colour; to conceptualize a set of individuals as a group, and so forth). The Kantian approach to identification stresses this identification as a thing, as a “something.” Note that it is possible here to identify something as one thing without taking a stand on what it is. A more informative sense, though, is to identify (for the first time perhaps) on the basis of distinguishing marks as *this* individual, or to categorize something as having these particular features, or as belonging to this generic kind. This also includes to *re-identify* something, either on the basis of distinguishing marks again, or typically with familiar objects or individuals, more holistically on the basis of the individual’s style or *Gestalt*.

What is also common to the definitions is that the *third* sense seems to concern relations between persons (or recognizers) (D3, R3, P3). In the French dictionaries, especially gratitude or acknowledgement of debt: “To bear witness through gratitude that one is indebted to someone for (something, an act),” but also “to accept (a person) as leader, master” or “To submit to the authority of some person.” What is recognized can be “someone who is declared to possess a certain quality” or “he who receives signs of gratitude” and thus is rewarded. The third part of Ricœur’s book connects to contemporary debates on politics of recognition (via discussion of Honneth), so it is no wonder that there is an overlap in that meaning between R3 and P3.

Yet, what lies between the first and third senses diverges greatly between dictionaries, Ricœur’s book and mainstream contemporary debates. The topic of Ricœur’s second chapter, recognition of oneself, is totally missing from the dictionaries (R2).⁴⁰ And in the contemporary debates on philosophy of recognition, recognition of oneself is not typically distinguished as a separate sense of recognition, it is just stressed heavily that recognizing oneself and recognizing and being recognized by others are dialectically dependent (disrespect from others breeds lack of self-respect, lack of self-respect breeds failure to respect others, and so on).⁴¹ So it is a kind of surprise, both in relation to the French word, and debates on recognition, to find “recognition of self” as a separate topic.⁴²

The sense of “recognition” or “acknowledgement” of norms, reasons, principles, institutions, values as valid, while prevalent in contemporary debates on recognition (P2), is missing from the dictionaries⁴³ as well as Ricœur’s book. Such issues are not thematized, although they are briefly touched upon, as in the following passage: “recognition intends two things: the other person *and the norm*. As regards the norm, it signifies, in the lexical sense of the word, *to take as valid, to assert validity*; as regards the person, recognition means identifying each person as free and equal to every other person.”⁴⁴

By contrast, the dictionaries’ second family of meanings is that of “taking as true” (D2). These can be said to include the following: a) To take as true, to recognize that so-and-so is the case; b) To admit that so-and-so is the case (after hesitation or denial *etc*); c) To notice a relevant feature (To recognize the danger, to recognize someone’s innocence *etc*), or d) To avow an error, a mistake. This certainly is a central usage of the term, and both Ricœur’s book and contemporary analyses of senses of “recognition” might be strengthened by clarifying how their interests differ from this. Apparently, Ricœur’s first sense is meant to cover this as well, as he focuses on the phenomenon of identification as judging (and indeed says that Descartes’s views on identification cover that sense as well). To sum up, a more complete “course” of recognition might include the following: i) identifying a thing; ii) taking a claim as true; iii) accepting norms

as valid; iv) recognition of oneself; v) recognition of the other [and perhaps one should add, vi) recognition of collective agents, groups, organizations, institutions].⁴⁵

Recognition as Identification and "Taking as True"

In his Chapter One, Ricœur discusses "identification" in three steps. The first step is the "phenomenology of judgment" as discussed by Descartes, who stresses the possibility of error, hesitation, doubt. Descartes's main point can be put in terms of visual illusions: perceptions may mislead, and we cannot change the way we *see* visual illusions, but our judgements are more voluntary than perceptions. Should we believe that the two lines are equally long? This moment of "assent" then depends on us, and we decide on the basis whether we "receive as true" the idea, especially whether the idea is clear and distinct.⁴⁶ Closely related to recognizing as true is the idea that identifying something is distinguishing it from everything else. For Descartes "identifying goes hand in hand with distinguishing," whereas for Kant identifying will be a matter of connecting together a manifold in the first place.⁴⁷ Ricœur's second step then is the "synthesis" as theorized by Kant, joining together, the interplay of receptivity and understanding, and the role of "schematism" and imagination in this. The third is the move from transcendental "representation" to intentionality-in-the-world as discussed by Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty. These authors enable us to distinguish recognition from knowing, by turning our attention to more complex temporal and emotionally involved phenomena: it is one thing, no doubt interesting, to ask about the "synthesis" of an object I continuously turn in my hands and see one silhouette at a time, and another thing to discuss an object (or person) that appears, disappears and reappears, or may not reappear, especially when the objects or persons in question may be emotionally significant, or are subject to radical changes and aging, and may threaten to become unrecognizable. Ricœur thinks the word "recognition," with the connotations of doubt, hesitation, and the possibility of mistake is most appropriate for such situations.

Here are three comments on how Ricœur sees the connections of these issues to those in the subsequent chapters. First, Ricœur writes that "being distinguished and identified is what the humiliated person aspires to."⁴⁸ This may often be so, but clearly identification is not always enough for the kind of "recognition" that is opposed to "humiliation." Recognition in the relevant sense might be refused in spite of successful identification. Suppose someone is deliberately humiliating this distinguished and identified person. Or taking unjustified revenge, which presupposes identification and being distinguished. Or, on a positive case, suppose someone is "indiscriminately" respecting everyone (without identifying and distinguishing people from one another, as behind a "veil of ignorance" concerning any details which can be put aside) – that seems to be recognition without relevant distinctions from others (although it of course presupposes the separateness of persons, so some kind of distinguishing is admittedly at stake).

Second, Ricœur asks "does not the verb *to accept*, in the expression *to accept as true*, hold in reserve descriptive resources that go beyond the simple operations of defining and distinguishing?"⁴⁹ In Ricœur's view the Cartesian phenomenology of judgment brings together two meanings of recognition as identification that the *Robert* lexicon separates: "to grasp (an object) with the mind, through thought" and "accept, take to be true (or take as such)."⁵⁰ I would not be that optimistic on the prospects of bringing these together. There seems to be much more in the idea of "accepting as true," which should be divorced from identifying things, and it

should be developed into two directions: on the one hand, to the theme of “recognition that so and so is the case,” and on the other hand, to the broader issue of recognizing normative claims as valid. There is more to be said about the formulation “recognizing *that* so and so is the case.” Ricœur does not thematize the change from “ideas of objects” to “propositionally structured thoughts” which is crucial for analytical philosophy from Frege onwards (which Ricœur more or less bypasses in silence, in contrast to the dialogue with analytical philosophy in his *Oneself as Another*). Admittedly, a discussion on the difference between recognizing objects and recognizing that such and such is a case would have taken us beyond the current limits of the politics of recognition -framework in general: recognition is primarily, and for good reasons, taken to be about relations to persons (and objects), and not to propositions or states of affairs.⁵¹ But once we note the difference, it sounds wrong to say, as Ricœur does, that the subject of “accepting as true” is “the same subject that later in our inquiry will demand to be recognized.”⁵² Typically, persons can be recognized as worthy of respect, as meriting esteem and so on, but rarely as true (with the exception of “true friends” or “being true to themselves”). It is primarily propositions, statements, and beliefs that are true. So there are reasons not to collate the distinction between recognition as true and identification as something, not to mention recognition as true and recognition as a person.

Recognition-Attestation of Oneself as a Capable Agent

The Second Chapter introduces an important presupposition to any debates about mutual recognition: the fact that we are able to act, that we are agents, capable of taking responsibility. Despite the title, the chapter does not focus so much on identity, that is, on practical, existential or narrative answers to the question “who am I?” It does not even mention the expressivist issue of recognizing oneself *in* one’s achievements or deeds.⁵³ It is rather about self-assertion, attestation, and recognition of our general nature as agents, as having capacities. It is more about one’s standing as being capable of taking responsibility than about the particular acts for which we do take responsibility.

Insightfully, Ricœur points out that there is a special sense of certitude or suspicion in expressions of the type “I believe that I can.” Ricœur calls this “recognition-attestation.”⁵⁴ What is at stake is a kind of existential or practical confidence in one’s capacities, which is not reducible to the degree of belief that availed evidence would support. Admittedly, at any moment a skeptical doubt that I might have been just paralyzed and no longer a functioning agent is in theory possible, but more importantly there are more existential worries along the lines that should I commit myself to this or that task - will I be able to cope?

The immediate object of such recognition-attestation is on “capacities,” but by a detour through the “what” and “how” there is a reflexion on the “who.” The self in self-designation recognizes itself as the agent possessing these capacities. So ultimately, what is at stake is literally self-recognition in two senses: recognition of oneself by oneself. There are various things one could expect from the topic of self-recognition, which Ricœur does not touch here and which would deserve book-length studies on their own. These include self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect, self-evaluation, (narrative) self-definition, self-interpretation, self-understanding, self-constitution, self-knowledge, self-acceptance or tolerance of oneself, among others. (It may of course be better that Ricœur makes one point with more force: agency and agentic capacities are crucial.)

An interesting question not pursued here is how recognition, in the sense of approval from others, affects my definitions of myself, my answer to the question “who am I?” There are various senses one can give to this question, from “thick” forms such as practical identity (what are my fundamental aims in life?), evaluative self-image (how do I esteem myself in terms of the features I have, and what sorts of responses from others would seem *mis*recognition in terms of these features?), and narrative identity (where am I coming from and where am I heading to?) to the “thin” question of which singular self, *ipse*, I am (whose stream of experiences do I identify with as mine?). The answer to the last question is typically immediate and quite obvious, but in some psychopathologies (and thought-experiments) this “thin” core sense of self can be disturbed, for instance, with what used to be called “multiple personality disorder.” Its immediate and obvious nature is nicely illustrated by Ricœur’s discussion of a man without qualities, who says “I am nobody” and nonetheless remains a continuing center of experiences. So, the questions raised here would include, how is one’s practical identity, narrative identity, evaluative self-image or one’s thin ipseity dialogically constituted or structured in relations of recognition? In pursuing these questions, Ricœur’s earlier work on narrative identity would be among the compulsory reading list. With the help of Ricœur’s conceptualizations one could ask various questions:⁵⁵ How do struggles of recognition contribute to the “discordant concordance” typical of narratives?⁵⁶ Are there certain kinds of narratives that are devised to get recognition from others? Is one way in which expectations and recognition from others matters in the way that it shapes our narrative identity?

The Struggle for Recognition and States of Peace

As mentioned above, Ricœur questions the importance of the idea of “struggle” for recognition that Hobbes, Hegel, Honneth, Thevenot and Boltanski all give a central place in different ways. Ricœur asks: “when, we may ask, does a subject deem him- or herself to be truly recognized?”⁵⁷ Ricœur sees that this might be an insatiable quest. “Does not the claim for affective, juridical and social recognition, through its militant, conflictual style, end up as an indefinite demand, a kind of ‘bad infinity’?”⁵⁸ One can reconceptualize this apparent worry of infinite demands by focusing on the “grammar” or “logic” of demands and their conditions of satisfaction, on the one hand, and the question of justified expectations or demands and unjustified expectations or demands, on the other hand. The worry that demands are insatiable, that “nothing is enough” does not seem founded once these distinctions are taken into account.

First of all, any normative demand has its conditions of satisfaction built into it. They of course vary from the simple “do not step on anyone’s toes” to the hugely complex “gender equality is to be realized globally.” However complex, each demand is in principle limited: the demand in question does not require anything *more* than what it demands. It is not the case that nothing suffices, or that nothing is enough. For example, the demand for global gender equality is satisfied, when gender equality is realized globally – and that is enough. No further improvements in the relative position of women in comparison to men are being demanded – for example, female superiority is not part of the demand. And when the demand for global gender equality is met, that particular historical struggle is over (at least unless there are fresh drawbacks). This is a conceptual point, and not an epistemic one: I do not wish to pretend that it would be easy to know the exact contours of any complex demand. Nonetheless, there are clear cases which serve to make the conceptual point about demands and their satisfaction.

Second, it is not the case that all demands and expectations are justified: to stick to the same example, the demand for global female superiority would not be. There is no basis for the fear that by acknowledging *some* demands as justified, one should somehow then acknowledge *all* demands as justified. There is not even an apparent threat “bad infinite.” Whether or not one has to struggle before the demands are met does not change this basic “grammar” or “logic” at all.

Third, a complex issue such as global gender equality may seem so complex, and its full realization so distant in the future, as to create the misguided non-literal sense of “nothing suffices”: once formal equality is achieved, say equal rights for men and women, there are further, material aspects of inequality, and the very same demand for global gender equality may include them. So the struggle, work and effort must continue in cases like these – but in these cases, suggesting “a state of peace” would merely serve the interests of the ruling group, and should of course be resisted. It ain’t over ‘til it’s over. This kind of progress can be seen, for example, in the expansion of rights-discourse from basic rights to social and cultural rights, and in the inclusion of new classes of rights-holders.

Ricœur’s worry thus seems out of place. “Being adequately recognized” is the state that follows when the demands for respect, social esteem and so on are being adequately met, and when that is achieved, all parties may rest content. This is not to deny that genuine peace and mere truce are different states. There are more and less peaceful ways in which normative demands can be met, as illustrated by the way disputes are settled in courts: “the judge thus appears as bearing not only the scales of justice but a sword. The dispute is settled, but it is merely spared of vengeance, without yet being a state of peace.”⁵⁹ But that as such has nothing to do with the apparent insatiability of the demand in question – these are two ways in which a demand is satisfied. Thus, there’s all the reason to believe that demands for recognition are in principle satiable, but that we live in a world where globally speaking even the demands of basic respect are not adequately met.

To recap, once we distinguish justified demands of recognition from unjustified ones, the relevant “end” for the struggles comes with the satisfaction of justified demands. Of course, things are messy in practice, but conceptually speaking the issue seems clear: the contrast of struggles motivated by justified demands of recognition with achieved adequate and peaceful recognition is not a contrast between two areas of life in which recognition matters (say, legal rights and gift-exchange), but a contrast between two stages of the process of recognition in *any* area where there are justified demands of recognition. And expansions of these areas are unjustified only to the extent that the demands of recognition are unjustified. Two important qualifications are at place: First of all, there are areas of life that should be protected from public recognition (namely, those violating one’s privacy), but in those contexts struggles for recognition as well as peaceful recognition would be out of place. And again, fighting too narrow understandings of what is public and what is private may well call for further justified demands of recognition. Secondly, and importantly for Ricœur, there may be areas of life where genuine recognition can take place and is very welcome, but where demands of recognition do not make sense given the nature of the case. There are many things that the recipient is not in a position to require, demand or claim, but which (partly for that reason) are cases of genuine recognition: receiving gifts, or love, or expressions of friendliness. To recap, I find Ricœur’s balancing act between struggles and peace very welcome, but the suggestion that the demands might be insatiable, or a form of the bad infinite, does not seem well founded. What can meaningfully be

demanded can meaningfully be satisfied – but there are also independently meaningful and satisfactory things that cannot be demanded (such as gifts), and also areas where public recognition could be detrimental (such as private life).

To conclude, Ricœur's work on recognition enriches contemporary debates on recognition in many ways. It takes seriously the fact that the semantic field of "recognition" is broader than "intersubjectivity." Together with the consulted dictionaries and contemporary debates, as well as Ricœur's earlier work, the full course of recognition might be something like the following: i) recognition-identification of something as "a something" at all, or as this particular thing, or a thing with these and these particular features, or as a thing of this generic kind; ii) recognition-adhesion in accepting a proposition as true; iii) recognition-adhesion in accepting a norm as valid; iv) recognition-attestation of oneself as a capable agent, a person ("what am I?") or as this kind of person ("who am I?," "what am I like?," "what kind of person am I?," "where do I stand?"), as being this irreplaceable, singular person ("who am I?," "which person am I?"); v) recognition of others in the sense of esteem, respect or approbation or love. And perhaps one should add the following: vi) recognition of collective agents, institutions, organizations, groups. Ricœur's book also makes a number of substantive contributions to which this essay has not done justice: for example, the phenomena of gift-giving and gratitude, and the idea drawn from Boltanski and Thevenot of spheres of esteem are insightfully combined by Ricœur to the debates on mutual recognition. And while the book does not really discuss how *ipse*-identity and narrative identity are always developed in webs of recognition, Ricœur's earlier work provides the means for doing that.⁶⁰

¹ Paul Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2005); orig. *Parcours de la Reconnaissance* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2004).

² I have in mind especially *Fallible Man* (New York: Fordham UP, 1965) and *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³ Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970); *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1974); *Time and Narrative I* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); *Time and Narrative II*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985); *Time and Narrative III* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 20-33; *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); *The Just* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴ Bert van den Brink & David Owen, eds. *Recognition and Power* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007); Nancy Fraser & Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London/New York: Verso, 2003); Christoph Halbig & Michael Quante, eds., *Axel Honneth: Sozialphilosophie zwischen Ethik und Anerkennung* (Münster: LIT, 2003); G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, [1807]); G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991, [1821]); Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995 [1992]); Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007 [2000]); Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008); Axel Honneth, "Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions," *Inquiry* 45 (2002), 4; Heikki Ikäheimo, "On the Genus and Species of Recognition," *Inquiry* 45 (2002), 4; Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen, "Analysing Recognition – Identification, Acknowledgement and Recognitive Attitudes Between Persons," in *Recognition and*

Power; Heikki Ikäheimo & Arto Laitinen, *Recognition and Social Ontology* (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2011); Arto Laitinen, "Interpersonal Recognition - A Response to Value or a Precondition of Personhood?" *Inquiry* 45 (2002): 4; Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008); Hans-Christoph Schmidt & Christopher Zurn, eds., *The Philosophy of Recognition* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010); Michel Seymour (ed.), *The Plural States of Recognition* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2010); Ludwig Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie* (Freiburg/Munich: Karl Alber, 1979); Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992); Robert Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵ See however p.198 where he briefly discusses the possibility of applied hermeneutics in connection with the recognition of the validity of norms. I thank Gonçalo Marcelo for pointing this out. It seems fair to say that Ricoeur did see the importance of recognition of norms but did not give it a systematic role.

⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 212.

⁷ Ricœur also mentions the "misrecognition of the dissymmetry of oneself and the other" (249). In Patchen Markell's *Bound by Recognition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), it is argued that debates on recognition are based on a misunderstanding of the kind of agency involved (in Markell's view, inflated hopes of sovereign agency are at stake).

⁸ He uses *Grand Robert de la langue française* (2nd ed 1985, edited by Alain Rey), and Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1859-1872).

⁹ The English Merriam-Webster dictionary does have an entry for "self-recognition": "recognition of one's own self; or the process by which the immune system of an organism distinguishes between the body's own chemicals, cells, and tissues and those of foreign organisms and agents."

¹⁰ In this respect, the section "Ulysses makes Himself recognized" from the Second Chapter could well be in the first section, as it concerns recognition-identification.

¹¹ In *Oneself as Another* it is suggested that such attestation is at stake also when we ascribe such capabilities to others. Thus, one sense of recognition of others is the attestation of them as capable agents, like oneself. How this relates to respect, esteem, approbation, gratitude (discussed in Chapter Three of *The Course of Recognition*) is an interesting further question.

¹² Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History and Forgetting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004 [2000]).

¹³ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*; and Christine Korsgaard *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

¹⁴ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 253.

¹⁵ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 255.

¹⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 152.

¹⁷ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 188.

¹⁸ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 188.

¹⁹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 188.

²⁰ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 189.

- ²¹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 191.
- ²² Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 202.
- ²³ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 202.
- ²⁴ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 202.
- ²⁵ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006 [1991]).
- ²⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 205.
- ²⁷ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 205.
- ²⁸ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 205.
- ²⁹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 207.
- ³⁰ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 207.
- ³¹ One may note that all such standings compete with private pleasures, and the pattern of justification that hedonists may have in the eyes of one another. Some people may just not care about inspirational greatness and so on, but want a private life with private pleasures.
- ³² Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 209.
- ³³ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 206.
- ³⁴ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 217.
- ³⁵ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 218.
- ³⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 218.
- ³⁷ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 263.
- ³⁸ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 263.
- ³⁹ See Ikäheimo & Laitinen, "Analyzing Recognition."
- ⁴⁰ As noted above, the English Merriam-Webster dictionary does have an entry for "self-recognition," see note 8.
- ⁴¹ See Siep, *Anerkennung*, Honneth, *Struggle*.
- ⁴² This is connected to an interesting and substantial point. Ricoeur puts emphasis on the fact that there is a dissymmetry in mutuality and it can be asked whether in his model of recognition we first recognize individual capabilities, and only afterwards engage in interaction or intersubjective recognition. (I thank Gonçalo Marcelo for posing the question). Ricoeur clearly does stress the ontological irreducibility of individual capacities to intersubjectivity: the capacities are not created in intersubjective recognition, although intersubjective mediation is often needed in their exercise and actualization. However, such an ontological priority (in "*ordo essendi*") need not entail an epistemic priority (in "*ordo cognoscendi*"), so *recognition* of one's own capacities need not be prior to recognition of others, even though the capacities have to be there for either kind of recognizing to start to take place.

- ⁴³ Compare the fourth entry in Littré: "To recognize with negation sometimes indicates not having any regard for, not listening to. *He recognizes no law but his own will.*" "Having regard for" is close to the idea of accepting normative considerations.
- ⁴⁴ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 197; italics mine.
- ⁴⁵ On this sense of recognition, see John Searle, *The Making of the Social World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); for connections between contemporary social ontology such as Searle on the one hand, and the traditions of theories of *Anerkennung* on the other hand, see Ikäheimo & Laitinen, *Recognition and Social Ontology*.
- ⁴⁶ In contemporary debates, the voluntariness or involuntariness of cognitive judgements is sometimes discussed in terms of "beliefs" and "acceptances." See L. Jonathan Cohen, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance* (New York: Clarendon, 1992).
- ⁴⁷ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 28.
- ⁴⁸ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 25.
- ⁴⁹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 35.
- ⁵⁰ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 35-36.
- ⁵¹ See the discussion about promoting states of affairs vs. respecting persons in Parfit, *On What Matters* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 233-257.
- ⁵² Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 35.
- ⁵³ On recognizing oneself in one's deeds and its relation to self-esteem, see *Oneself as Another*, study 7. Thanks to Goncalo Marcelo for pointing this out.
- ⁵⁴ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 92.
- ⁵⁵ See my "Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur on Self-Interpretations and Narrative Identity" in *Narrative Research: Voices of Teachers and Philosophers*, eds. Rauno Huttunen, Hannu Heikkinen and Leena Syrjälä (Jyväskylä: SoPhi, 2002), 57-71.
- ⁵⁶ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative I*, 4, 21, 31, 42-49.
- ⁵⁷ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 217.
- ⁵⁸ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 218.
- ⁵⁹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 223.
- ⁶⁰ I thank the editors and anonymous referees for valuable comments and help.