JYX JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Laitinen, Arto; Hirvonen, Onni

Title: Recognition, Identity, and Difference

Year: 2021

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

Copyright: © Springer VS, 2021

Rights: In Copyright

Rights url: http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en

Please cite the original version:

Laitinen, A., & Hirvonen, O. (2021). Recognition, Identity, and Difference. In L. Siep, H. Ikäheimo, & M. Quante (Eds.), Handbuch Anerkennung (pp. 459-468). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-19558-8_68

Recogition, identity and difference

Arto Laitinen & Onni Hirvonen

Abstract: This entry discusses three forms of politics of recognition: politics of universalism, affirmative identity politics and deconstructive politics of difference. It examines the constitutive, causally formative, and normative role that recognition has for the relevant senses of universal standing, particular identity, and difference in these approaches.

Keywords: recognition, identity, difference, universalism, new social movements

1. Introduction

The latter half of 20th century has seen the rise of identity politics, politics of recognition, and politics of difference. At some level of abstraction, these may look synonymous: just different names for a broad range of new social movements that go beyond traditional politics of distributive justice, class struggle, or party political competition for power. Instead, they focus on forms of oppression that are related to who people *are,* their identities and differences, and such social kinds as gender and race, and various sexual, cultural, linguistic, or religious minorities.

But a closer look quickly reveals that politics of recognition is not merely about identity and difference, but also for instance about politics of universalism (Charles Taylor 1992); and that politics of difference may decidedly be set against politics of identity, and also against affirmative politics of recognition. In short, how recognition, identity, and difference are related depends on which meaning of each term is being used. While identity and difference raise important philosophical questions of their own (see e.g. Hegel, Adorno, Deleuze), our focus here is on *recognition* of identity, equality and difference.

In what follows, we go through the three constellations, politics of universalism (e.g. John Rawls 1972, first wave of feminism), identity politics (e.g. Taylor's 1992 multiculturalism and the second wave of feminism) and politics of difference (e.g. Judith Butler 1990; 2004 and the third wave of feminism). We examine the constitutive, causally formative, and normative role that recognition has for the relevant senses of universal standing (and the sense in which everyone shares the generic identity as persons), particular identity, or difference.

2. Politics of Universalism

Politics of universalism is programmatically "difference-blind", it abstracts from particularities that make persons qualitatively different from one another. It is also blind to the identity of people in the sense that universalism requires the same treatment independently of which person is at stake: like cases are to be treated alike (whether the distribution is based on merit, equality or need). More or less all modern movements of thought are universalist in this sense, Kantian moral philosophy and liberal political philosophy (e.g. Rawls 1972) being the purest representatives (cf. Taylor 1992).

It is thus helpful to contrast politics of universalism with both politics of identity and politics of difference. Yet, in *some* sense, the notions of identity and difference are at play in politics of universalism as well.

In a politics of universalism, everyone is to be recognized as a subject of experiences, a thinker and a potential communication partner, a bearer of inviolable moral dignity and rights of persons, a free and equal citizen, an equal peer or a participant in a democratic project of co-authoring norms, an

autonomous and responsible agent leading their own lives. For such a politics of universalism, what matters is *that* someone is a person, not so much *what kind of* a person he or she is: particularities are abstracted from. What matters is the *generic* identity (*qua* a person; or perhaps *qua* a citizen), which makes us alike as members of our kind (and at the same time different from non-persons, or non-citizens), not the particularities that make persons or citizens different from one another.

In some minimal sense, however, politics of universalism may further track *which* person is at stake: a responsible agent is responsible for his or her own deeds, and in that sense *numerical* identity and self-consciousness over time may also be at stake. Politics of universalism also typically respects the *numerical difference*, or "separateness" of persons: it can argue against consequentialism which, in paying attention only to the total sum of well-being, and not whether it involves sacrificing someone for the common good, arguably fails to respect the separateness of persons (Rawls 1972, 164-166).

But generic and numeric identity and difference are not the ones central to politics of identity and politics of difference: what is meant there is rather self-definitions, -images or –interpretations; memberships in particular social kinds or groups; narrative or practical or ethical identities; lived and narrated answers to the question "Who am I?".

In this essay our approach to politics of universality (and politics of identity and politics of difference) is from the recognition-theoretical perspective. From that perspective it is crucial to distinguish normative, causal and constitutive roles of recognition (cf. Ikäheimo 2014). Does recognition have these three roles in politics of universality? *Normatively*, adequate recognition is responsive to the universal moral standing. Something like Kantian respect is a form of respect-recognition (Darwall 1977). Most modern theories endorse this fundamental equality of persons; and hold that it would be a case of misrecognition not to be sensitive to it.

There is also wide agreement concerning the *causal-formative* role of interaction and recognition from others: human beings are not born ready-made persons, but their innate potentials concerning central person-making capacities (such as the capacity for self-determination) need socialization (and thereby recognition from others) to be actualized. The *constitutive* role of recognition is more contested. According to what seems to be a mainstream view, persons have their universal moral standing independently of social recognition (recognition has no direct constitutive role for moral status). It is based on their person-making features, and while many of these features are actualized in processes of recognition and interaction (causal-formative role for development as a person), the moral status results automatically, whether recognized or not. Some hold that already having the potentials grounds the moral status (whether or not this is socially recognized). It would be morally problematic if the moral status of persons would depend merely on whether others recognize it or not: there would be nothing wrong in not recognizing some classes of humans as equal persons. The mainstream view holds that even if not everyone is in fact recognized, they nonetheless ought to be recognized, because of their moral standing as a person. (Cf. Jaworska and Tannenbaum 2018 for discussion).

This mainstream view is opposed by Hegelian and social constructivist views, which would hold that the universal moral standing is also a result of interpersonal recognition (defending thus a constitutive role for recognition) (Brandom 2007; Pippin 2008). A more complex view holds that full personhood is dependent on recognition, although the moral standing is not (cf. Laitinen 2007).

In a broad sense, politics of Universalism continues the project of Enlightenment: the equality of persons matters, not their particular features. Persons matter equally "in spite of" differences and

particular identities. Of feminist approaches, the first wave of feminism is closest to the politics of universalism.

As politics of universalism abstracts from particularities, it has been criticized for missing out on important forms of oppression and misrecognition. A friendly form of that critique holds that politics of universality is not enough, but needs to be complemented. A more severe charge is that it leads to unjustified assimilationism (Young 1990, 167). An even more radical critique holds that politics of universality is impossible; it is always a matter of politics of particularities hidden as universals; and so politics of universalism will invariably turn to a form of oppression itself. It is ultimately all power play and struggle between particular views. This kind of criticism often comes from the viewpoint of politics of difference (cf. Taylor 1992). As a principled criticism this line has not been found very strong, but it is a valid epistemic reminder that no-one should be too complacent in thinking that their viewpoint is precisely the universally valid viewpoint.

3. Affirmative politics of particular identities: positive demand for recognition

The features that politics of universalism is bound to miss have to do with *particularities:* what *kind* of person I am, you are, and we are. The distinctness of individuals is lost when abstracting from such particularities. People matter not only in spite of differences, but also *because of* their differences.

The distinctive features can be of many kinds: gender, race, sexual orientation, linguistic or cultural background, religious worldview, or other "comprehensive" outlooks. If the first wave of feminism tried to argue that women are equal to men – as per politics of universalism –, the second wave of feminism added that women are special – their way of being and experiencing the world are special. The same two waves can concern any such particularity: various forms of indigenous minorities can argue on the one hand that they are equal persons, and on the other hand that the distinctiveness of their culture matters. These special ways of being need to be recognized for what they are: each are special in their own way. Furthermore, as these features are at the same time "differences" it explains why such "politics of identity" may considerably overlap with "politics of difference".

To complicate things further, there are various senses of "identity" that are central to such politics of identity: they give a slightly different explanation to why and how gender, race, and other particular differences come to be constitutive of one's identity. Sometimes the practical or moral aspect of identity, consisting of value-orientations, personal life-goals and projects, and conceptions of the good are taken as one's "identity" (Taylor 1992). Sometimes the narrative or biographical aspect of one's identity is stressed (Ricoeur 1992, Schechtman 2007). Sometimes the evaluative self-image is emphasized: what features are important about me? Concerning what features is the recognition of my identity most central? What is most central to my self-esteem or "positive relations-to-self" (Honneth 1992)? Finally, various collective and social aspects of identity, deriving from membership, especially in various minorities, are stressed in debates on recognition of identity. All these are about selfhood and self-conceptions, or "ipse-identity" answering the question "who am I?" or "what kind of person am I?" rather than mere generic identity ("I am a human person") or numerical identity ("Which person am I?").

What is the causal-formative, constitutive, and normative significance of recognition for particular identities? On the *causal-formative* aspect, there is a consensus that interaction and recognition from others affects our self-relations deeply. Further, differences that might be associated with biology, such as gender and race, are arguably socially constructed kinds: the scripts, behavioural expectations and role-models are thoroughly dependent on social interaction. Dialogical views are

generally regarded much more plausible than monological views concerning the causal formation of self-images.

Yet, it is meaningfully debatable whether recognition from others is directly *constitutive* of identity, or merely indirectly causal-formative of identity. Genuine "identity" is often construed as something that only the in-group (or the individual him- or herself) *can* and *may* define, find, or accept. By contrast, external labelling, stereotyping and stigmatizing are matters of externally provided contents. On this view, authentic identity is and should be self-defined, and the dialogical context of recognition from others has only indirect relevance: the individual has a say on which socially attributed features belong to their identity and others may or may not affirm it. By contrast, a constitutively dialogical view of identity would give significant others a say on each others' identity: on that view, external views can *directly* affect one's identity.

Normatively speaking, there are two main views on how particularities ought to be adequately recognized. One view appeals directly to the evaluative and normative significance of the features (e.g. homosexuality as a significant way of being human, cf. Taylor 1992). Another view appeals indirectly to the view that others should respect the individual's self-definitions (e.g. we respect X's homosexuality, or religious orientation, not because we take a stand on the significance of homosexuality or the religious orientation, but because we recognize the significance of these *for X*; and we respect this orientation out of respect towards X).(cf. Jones 2006).

The former view, stressing substantive value-judgements, has the obvious problem of plurality of comprehensive doctrines, which value particularities differently (Rawls's fact of pluralism). Perhaps such positive recognition should take place within "pockets of esteem", between relatively likeminded and competent judges? Or is there room for substantive judgements of value and significance, in which different cultures could learn from one another? Or perhaps precisely recognition from concrete other outlooks (even though they are imperfect and fallible) is especially interesting – and it will then depend on positions of power, epistemic situation, and importance of the issue to the agent how much weight particular acts of recognition have? Can whole cultures or ways of life be subjected to such value-judgements? If so, their possible incommensurability should be taken into account. Furthermore, because such detailed comparison takes time and energy, can there be a positive duty to give such recognition?

The latter view, stressing respect for persons and their orientations, is motivated by neutrality towards comprehensive doctrines. It, however, is close to becoming politics of universality, and therefore not meeting the needs for particularized feedback: it shies away from making judgements concerning particularities and merely focuses on the general ability to form and accept a particular identity. In its defence, it has been argued that we cannot claim a right for particularized esteem and the best we can hope to achieve is neutral toleration or basic respect (McBride 2013). This normative question has remained highly controversial.

Stressing recognition of particular identities has been criticized first of all for *reifying* identities, assuming fixed or immutable identity-constructions for which recognition is demanded (Benhabib 2002, Fraser 2003, Phillips 2007, Young 2000). Closely related is the charge of misplaced *essentialism*: identity-politics may assume that being a woman matters to the identity of each woman, or that membership in that minority matters centrally to each member of that identity: what about those members who do not think that the membership is central to their identity? Perhaps sometimes it is better not to be identified and recognized (Butler 2004: 3, Fraser 2003, McNay 2008). After all, everyone will have many intersecting memberships and features, which may or may not be relevant for one's identity. There is then a danger of being "bound by recognition"

(Markell 2003). This topic of presuming too stable or fixed understandings of "identity", which might actually be an obstacle to the lives of individuals, is one of the main motivations behind the politics of difference. Politics of identity has also been charged of *homogenization*: of mapping individuals into assumedly homogenous groups that downplay intra-group difference. Identity as something that is related to shared features within a homogeneous collective does not do justice to the plasticity of individual life-experiences and projects. Recognition for the collective identity may inhibit autonomy, replacing "one kind of tyranny with another" (Appiah 1994, 163). Seyla Benhabib (2002, 53), argues that it is ''theoretically wrong and politically dangerous'' to assume that an individual's search for authentic selfhood should be subordinated to the struggles of groups.

It has also been claimed that any identity always involves a constitutive exclusion:

> "An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity. Entrenched in this indispensable relation is a second set of tendencies, themselves in need of exploration, to conceal established identities into fixed forms, thought and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things. When these pressures prevail, the maintenance of one identity (or field of identities) involves the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates. Identity requires differences in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty." (William Connolly 2002, 64).

Another type of criticism has argued that the focus on questions of identity takes attention away from questions of distributive justice and other traditional forms of oppression.Indeed, during the years when identity-politics has been most intensely followed, inequalities have surged to new heights globally (Fraser and Honneth 2003, Fraser 2013). For many Marxists and socialists, identity-politics has meant the end of radical materialist critique. The focus on particular identities is not very Hegelian either: "What do the self-consciousnesses strive to have recognized in their struggle for recognition? In Hegel's original idea: not their identity, but their freedom" (Deranty and Renault 2007, 107).

In some broad sense, affirmative politics of identity continues the project of Romanticism. Of feminist thinkers, the second wave of feminism is closest to such identity-politics. In this respect, it lies between politics of universalism (and the first wave of feminism) and politics of difference (and the third wave of feminism).

4. Deconstructive politics of difference

The third approach focuses on particularities and differences, like the second one, but wants to do without the (allegedly dubious) conceptual baggage of "identity". "Identitarian" thinking is seen as nothing but violent suffocation of difference (for different variants, cf. Nietzsche, Adorno, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Butler, Young). Difference is to be celebrated. Instead of aiming to find one's best self-interpretation and a clarified and unified understanding of one's self and what one stands for, one may celebrate its heterogeneous elements rather than brushing them away. Differences between and within people are not something to be overcome. "Identity-formations" represent order, and hamper change. Often the task of emancipatory politics is not to recognize the identity-formations, but "to put the group out of business as a group" (Fraser 1997, 19).

This approach typically starts from a suspicion of power and domination it sees hidden in politics of universalism or identity politics. It also starts by criticizing hegemonic discourses, which label some

minorities as “others” or as “different” and give them stereotypical or stigmatized identities – by contrast, the majority lacks such stigmatized identities.

Unlike in politics of universalism, mere abstraction from stereotypes, stigmas, *etc.* is not enough. The stereotypes and stigmas are to be *deconstructed*. But where this approach may join hands with universalism is in stressing the victims’ viewpoint: a hitherto oppressed group may legitimate claims against past injustice. (After these claims have been met, the group can cease to exist.).

The sense of “difference” is here the same as in “identity politics”: the focus is on particularities. But “identity” is seen as a culprit – what is needed is change, becoming, plurality, not stable construals of the (unity of the) self. The notion of the “other” or “Other” is central for this approach, as a reminder against identitarian tendencies of homogeneity. While “identity-politics” claims esteem for particularities, this approach aims at critical deconstruction of fixed or shared horizons of valuation.

In what sense is “politics of difference” a form of “politics of recognition”? What is the constitutive, causal-formative, and normative role for recognition in this approach? The *constitutive* and *causal-formative* roles of recognition both for the universal standing of persons and the particular identities can be acknowledged in this approach – but the evaluation may be negative: people are being seen as “bound by recognition”, and it is all the worse for people to be recognized as something stable and fixed. The role-expectations and scripts are to be deconstructed – everyone is better off if such social kinds as race and gender would either cease to exist or at least cease to be socially salient bases of normative expectations.

The main *normative* imperative is to avoid misrecognition, and to note the ambiguity concerning power in recognition: seemingly positive recognition may at the same time amount to misrecognition and domination. Genuine otherness is to be respected, but perhaps not comprehended, understood, captivated, nor held in positive esteem in any (ethnocentrically) categorized form. Such comprehension and praise amounts to domination and subjugation. Sometimes the claim is made that such domination and subjugation cannot be avoided (Althusser 1970, Butler 1997); that it is a necessary evil in becoming subjects or persons or bearers of identity.

In a broad sense, deconstructive politics of difference follows Nietzsche’s and postmodern thinkers’ approach – what Charles Taylor (2007) has called “immanent counter-Enlightenment”. Of Feminist approaches, the third wave of feminism is closest to this deconstructive approach. This approach has been charged with normative emptiness or irrationality, and lack of positive vision of moral status of persons on the one hand, and of particular selfhood and identity on the other. The charge is that it plays with two cards: it engages in criticism, yet denies that there are any standards of criticisms, ending up in a performative contradiction (cf. Habermas 1985). It arguably needs something to provide the normative basis for criticism. One such could be the phenomenology of social suffering. But, as the proponents of the two other approaches may ask, is this enough to give normative guidance without any reference to positive conceptions of good and right? This approach makes an important point, though, that these conceptions need not be set in stone. Whatever one thinks of the need for more positive commitments, this deconstructive approach is widely appreciated for its acuteness in pointing out the ambivalence of recognition (cf. Ikäheimo et al 2018).

5 Conclusion

The main lesson on which all three approaches converge is that differences should never be the basis of stigmatization, domination, or oppression, and that historically oppressed groups have a good claim to recognition, at least until the historical injustices have been repaired.

As we have seen, the main senses of “identity” and “difference” at play for politics of identity and for politics of difference concern the numerous particularities that distinguish human persons from one another, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, linguistic and cultural orientations, disabilities and special needs. How these feature in one’s identity has been thematised differently, depending on whether one emphasizes practical, narrative, self-interpretive, or collective identity. By contrast, politics of universality brackets these, and only stresses the equality of all human persons (generic identity, and generic difference from non-persons) and numeric identity (being the very same human person) and difference (the separateness of persons).

For politics of universalism, recognition from others is both causally formative and normatively responsive to the moral standing of persons. Whether recognition is also constitutive of the moral standing, is more controversial. For the politics of identity, recognition from others is causally formative, but it is debated whether it is also constitutive of one’s particular identity. The normative basis of recognition of particularities has remained controversial, the main candidates being the evaluative significance of those very particularities, or the existential significance of those particularities for their bearers, who ought to be respected. Concerning politics of difference, recognition is often seen as (necessarily) ambivalent, and clear normative criteria for adequate recognition are seldom provided. The causal-formative and constitutive roles of recognition are acknowledged, but not necessarily welcomed, as recognition is seen to be intimately intertwined with power and domination.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor W. 1966. Negative Dialektik. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Althusser, Louis. 1970. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. In Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. London: New Left Books.

Appiah, Anthony. 1994. Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction. In Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition, Ed. Amy Gutmann, 149–164. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Benhabib, Seyla. 2002. The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Brandom, Robert B. 2007. The Structure of Desire and Recognition. Self-consciousness and Self-constitution. Philosophy & Social Criticism, 33 (1): 127–150.

Brennan, Geoffrey, and Philip Pettit P. 2004. The Economy of Esteem: An Essay on Civil and Political Society. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Butler, Judith. 1990. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1997. The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Butler, Judith. 2004. Undoing Gender. New York: Routledge.

Connolly, William. 2002. Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Darwall, Stephen. 1977. Two Kinds of Respect. Ethics 88 (1): 36–49.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. Difference and Repetition. New York: Columbia University Press.

Deranty, Jean-Philippe and Emmanuel Renault. 2007. Politicizing Honneth's Ethics of Recognition. Thesis Eleven 88 (1): 92–111.

Derrida, Jacques. 1990. Force of Law. The 'Mystical Foundations of Authority'. Cardozo Law Review 11: 919–1045.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. The History of Sexuality. New York: Vintage.

Fraser, Nancy. 1997. Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Post-Socialist" Condition. New York: Routledge.

Fraser, Nancy and Axel Honneth. 2003. Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange. New York: Verso.

Fraser, Nancy. 2013. Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis. London and New York: Verso.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1985. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hegel, G. W. F. 2010. The Science of Logic. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Honneth, Axel. 1992. The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts. Translated by Joel Anderson. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Honneth, Axel 2012. The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition. Wiley Blackwell.

Ikäheimo, Heikki. 2014. Anerkennung. De Gruyter.

Ikäheimo, Heikki, et al Ambivalence of Recognition. Columbia University Press.

Ikäheimo, Heikki & Laitinen, Arto 2007. Analyzing Recognition. In Recognition and Power, Bert v.d. Brink & David Owen (eds.). New York: Cambridge UP.

Jaworska, Agnieszka and Tannenbaum, Julie, "The Grounds of Moral Status", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/grounds-moral-status/>.

Jones, Peter. 2006. Toleration, Recognition and Identity. Journal of Political Philosophy, 14 (2): 123–143.

Laitinen, Arto. 2007. Sorting Out Aspects of Personhood: Capacities, Normativity and Recognition. Journal of Consciousness Studies 14 (5-6): 248–270.

Markell, Patchen. 2003. Bound by Recognition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

McBride, Cillian. 2013. Recognition. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McNay, Lois. 2008. Against Recognition. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Phillips, Anne. 2007. Multiculturalism without culture. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pippin, Robert. 2008. Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Rawls, John. 1972. A Theory of Justice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. Oneself as Another. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ricoeur, Paul. 2005. The Course of Recognition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schechtman, Marya. 2007. The Constitution of Selves. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1992. The Politics of Recognition. In Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition, Ed. Amy Gutmann, 25–73. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. A Secular Age. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. Justice and the Politics of Difference. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Young, Iris Marion. 2000. Inclusion and Democracy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.