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Towards a Cosmopolitan Theory of Recognition between States.

Frédéric Vandenberghe

Malgré sa peur de prendre l'avion, Axel Honneth est venu au Brésil en 2009 pour participer d'une conférence internationale sur la justice et la reconnaissance. La conférence, organisée en son honneur, a eu lieu au Goethe Institut de Porto Alegre. Les organisateurs m'avaient invité pour commenter son texte sur la reconnaissance entre Etats (publié entretemps dans Honneth, Axel : `Anerkennung zwischen Staaten. Zum moralischen Untergrund zwischenstaatlicher Beziehungen', in *Das Ich im Wir. Studien zur Anerkennungstheorie*. Berlin : Suhrkamp, 2010, chapitre 8, trad. française in *Ce que social veut dire II. Les Pathologies de la raison*, Gallimard, 2015). Le texte devait paraitre dans les actes de la conférence, mais tout comme les organisateurs, moi aussi j'avais oublié son existence. Alain Caillé me l'a rappelé et je lui en suis ... reconnaissant. (F.V)

The prominence of the concept of recognition is a symptom of our times. Replacing older diagnostic concepts, like alienation, exploitation or neurosis, to name but a few, it has succeeded in gathering a variety of feelings of diffuse suffering (physical, mental and moral suffering, both individual and collective) under a single conceptual umbrella. It is enough to look at the world through the spectacles of the theory of recognition to find struggles of recognition on every street corner. One way or another, everybody feels misrecognized, misunderstood and disrespected : the workers, the unemployed and the immigrants ; the prisoners, the nurses and the elderly, the teachers, the professors and the students ; the women, the gays and the lesbians ; the minorities, the indigenous and, these days, even the bankers feel discriminated against. It is certainly not a coincidence that the theme of recognition has found such wide acclaim in the academic world. There´s hardly a conference nowadays in philosophy, sociology and political sciences without a paper on Hegel, Honneth and Frazer or on the struggle for recognition by, say, the *quilombos* (communities of free slaves) in Brazil or the immigrants in Europe. Meanwhile, the whole debate about the relation between recognition and redistribution has spawned an academic cottage industry that is reminiscent of a similar craze that arose around Habermas and Rawls at the end of the eighties.

Axel Honneth´s theory of the spheres of recognition is at the heart of the current debates. [1] Since the publication of *Kampf um Anerkennung* in 1992, incidentally the same year as *Faktizität und Geltung* (Habermas, 1992), he has developed his theory of recognition as a left-Hegelian alternative to Habermas´s discourse theory of society, morality and law. Returning again and again to Hegel and the Frankfurt School, he has steadily refined, broadened and deepened his understanding of the relations of recognition in the sphere of love, law and solidarity as preconditions of human flourishing. In order to move away from the formalism and proceduralism that characterizes Kantian theories of justice, he brings back to the fore the "ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit)* of the Hegelians and the concern with human flourishing and the good life (*eudemonia*) of the Aristotelians. With the early Hegel, he proposes that human flourishing can be analyzed in terms of "practical relations to self" (self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem) that depend on the existence of relationships of mutual recognition in the sphere of primary sociability (love), legal institutions and moral norms (law) and networks of solidarity and shared values (solidarity). It is in and thanks to relations of recognition with others that human beings can fully develop their capabilities and be considered as persons in the fullest sense of the term (Forst, 2004 : 413-437) – i.e. as subjects who are at the same time ethical persons (singular and non-substitutable subjects who are different from all the others), moral and juridical persons (autonomous and self-determining individuals who are equal to others and are endowed as citizens with economic, social, political and cultural rights) and social persons (role

players who are recognized for their contribution to a shared social project and a the pursuit of the common good). Together, satisfactory relations of recognition in the sphere of love, law and solidarity are preconditions of the pursuit of "the good life for and with others in just institutions" (Ricoeur, 1990 : 202).

Although one can note a certain tendency on the part of Honneth to extend his theory of recognition to all fields and to apply it to all themes from the encyclopedia of the human sciences (from alienation, bureaucracy, class to, why not ?, public transport and football), I welcome his excursus into the field international relations. The introduction of 'recognizing' as a supplementary dimension that subtends 'bargaining' and 'arguing" (Niesen and Herbort, 2007) significantly widens the possibility of modes of action in negotiations between states. With its suggestion that both communication ('arguing') and strategy ('bargaining') have to take into account the difference in values, outlooks and projects of the societal communities if they are to succeed in their negotiations, it shows not only that international relations can be analyzed as one more struggle for recognition, but it also indicates new ways in conflict resolution.

With the recognition between states, relations between, rather than within, societies are, perhaps for the first time, explicitly thematized. Up till now, Honneth had focused on the struggle for recognition between groups of the same societal community. The implicit assumption that groups that struggle for their rights share a common horizon of values and are, one way or another, engaged in a common project, is now relaxed. With the introduction of states, the analytical focus is enlarged. It now encompasses not only intra-group, but also inter-group relations, which can be peaceful or strained to the point of open hostility.

Before I ask some critical questions and offer the cosmopolitan communicative communitarian perspective as an alternative, let me first summarize and schematize the argument in three steps (the first two make up the empirical argument, the last one the normative argument).

1. In a first moment, Honneth argues against 'power politics', as conceptualized by the realist school in international relations, from Machiavelli, Hobbes and Hegel to Morgenthau and Kenneth Walz. In the same way as he criticized rational choice in *Kampf um Anerkennung* for its neglect of values and norms, he now rebuts the anarchic logic of realism. States do not just use hard power to defend their vital interests and affirm their position in geopolitics. To understand foreign relations in general and hostilities between states in particular, one should also take into account the identity claims of the societal community they represent, the values they incorporate and the common project they pursue. When such a community feels that its self-image is not recognized by other states, when it feels humiliated and devalued – 'polluted' as Jeffrey Alexander (2006) would say – hostilities may ensue.

2. The recognition between states has a performative-symbolic dimension. Although foreign policy often appears determined only by the interests of the state, the pursuit of these interests has to be understood within the horizon of normative expectations that the ideas, identities and ideals of the people, as expressed in the narratives of justification that are constitutive of the self-identity of a state, be respected. With Roger Smith (2003), we could call these expressive-normative narratives of identity that inspire worth among the members a people by weaving together economic strength, political power and ethically constitutive narratives 'stories of peoplehood'. Honneth claims that the recognition or non-recognition of these stories constitutes a crucial, but neglected and undertheorized factor in understanding and explaining the behavior of states with regard to other states.

3. In case of conflict or in order to avoid conflict, it is important not to fuel the cycle of 'mimetic violence' with mutual pollutions of each other's identity. The explicit acknowledgment of the identities, interests and ideals that are part and parcel of the identity of a people may well be a first step in strategies of appeasement and conflict reduction between states.

Now that the main drift of the argument has been presented, I want to raise some critical questions – 'provocations' as Brazilians would say – in order to get the conversation going and stimulate the debate. Basically, I want to hold a brief for a cosmopolitan communicative communitarian theory of recognition between states. The argument will be developed in three steps. In a first moment, I´ll try to 'out-Hegel' Honneth and contend that, as a result of globalization, societal communities now form a single community of fate and that the emergence of a planetary consciousness justifies talk about cosmopolitan communitarianism (1). Whereas my first move is a Hegelian one, my second move is more Kantian. Affirming the priority of rights and norms over values, I will argue that the recognition of states is conditional on their endorsement of human rights and democracy (2). Finally, I will conclude my discussion with a social ontological question concerning the existence of collective subjectivities (3).

1. My first question concerns Hegel : Can we actualize Hegel and develop a cosmopolitan theory on a communitarian basis that keeps pace with the global "community of fate" ? I know there are good historical, political and philosophical arguments not to draw on Hegel´s philosophy of the state in

particular identities (class, race, gender) in multicultural societies have to be conceived of as struggles for citizenship that can best be dealt with within a Habermasian framework. Moreover, it should also be noted that the third category is rather unstable. Conceived originally as solidarity, it has been progressively retooled as achievement (*Leistung*) and linked to Dewey and Durkheim rather than to Hegel. In any case, the social topology that one finds in the *Rechtsphilosophie* (family, civil society and state) is misleading and does not correspond to Honneth´s.

[4] Unlike John Rawls (1999), I do not think that 'decent hierarchical peoples' with authoritarian and undemocratic states deserve to be unconditionally recognized in the concert of nations. That does not mean that they do not deserve respect. It means rather that liberal democratic states should support the internal struggle for recognition as an important dimension in the struggle for recognition between states. Needless to say that support for democratic movements in decent hierarchical societies does in no way justify the imposition of democracy by force from without by a coalition of liberal democratic societies.

[5] As a European, I share this aversion of nationalism. But in a post-colonial context, like Brazil, nationalism has a different meaning altogether. Returning just from Québec, where nationalism is progressive and not reactionary and degenerative like in Europe, I wonder, just for the sake of the argument, whether Honneth would be willing to recognize the existence of nations as collective subjects and, if so, if he would also be willing to grant them collective rights (possibly with the right to secession of peoples without states) ? For a *plaidoyer* for the recognition of the collective rights of Québec, which conceives of itself as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-national nation, see Seymour, 2008.

[6] In passing, I also note that a careful analysis of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, from which I extracted the final quote, is well overdue. Honneth has careful readings of the *Realphilosophie* and the *Rechtsphilosophie* ; but what is still missing is a close analysis of the 'dialectic of the master and the slave' to supplement Kojève.

international relations. With its insistence on power and grandeur, his theory of the state exemplifies a realist, not to say hawkish position in international relations that exalts war as a force of rejuvenation of the nation. With its dialectical relations between people, language and the state, Hegel can be used, and has been used, to justify undemocratic, authoritarian and warmongering regimes. Like everything else in Hegel, his conception of the state is inseparable from an onto-teleo-theological metaphysics of the Spirit that is only a secularized version of the history of God.

Yet, in spite of all this metaphysical baggage, I wonder if we could not go back to Hegel to develop a cosmopolitan philosophy of history that suits the global age. As complex global systems, from the economic and the technological to the cultural and the ecological, connect the fate of communities in one locale to the fate of communities in distant regions of the world, the 'methodological nationalism' of the realist school has to be 'sublated' in a self-conscious 'methodological cosmopolitanism' that considers the world system as a single unit (Beck, 2002). Now that all communities and polities of the planet are increasingly united in 'overlapping communities of fate' that are engaged in the same human adventure, the same collective project, we can perhaps lift the communitarian restrictions and think of globalization within a communicative communitarian cosmopolitan perspective as the becoming conscious of humanity as a single species.

The integration of communities into a world system, unified by an economic and technological substrate that spans the globe, requires and provokes a planetary consciousness. With the dialectic between globalization *an sich* and *für sich*, Humanity emerges for the time in history on the scene of world politics as a collective subject pursuing the common project of "the good life with and for other peoples and civilizations in just, democratic institutions and a sustainable environment". Although the emergence of world government is neither likely nor desirable, the idea of a world society without world government – though with a global executive body that is (at least in theory) responsible for the maintenance of peace and security, the enforcement of human rights and the stewardship over natural resources (Habermas, 2005 : 324-365)- is at the horizon of the world society. [2] Hegel´s vision of the realization of the idea of mundane reason (*Weltvernunft*) in a self-conscious ethical substance (*selbstbewußte sittliche Substanz*) has become not only a possibility, but also a necessity and a reality.

2. Now that I have tried to update Hegel and introduced the idea of cosmopolitan *Sittlichkeit,* I can go back to a more Kantian line of argumentation and raise my second question, which concerns the place of justice, human rights and democracy in Honneth's analysis. In the text, there are references to interests and power, as well as to common values and projects, but, strangely enough, not to universal norms and human rights. This absence can, no doubt, be explained by Honneth´s tendency to introduce the ethics of care (love) and communitarian ethics (ethical life) into moral and political philosophy against more deontological positions (law). Although his position does allow for a more encompassing conception of justice that integrates Hegel, Kant and Levinas into the unitary framework of the theory of recognition (Honneth, 2000:133-170), at times Habermas´s successor seems to be carried away by a more polemical vein and explicitly advances recognition over and against communication. I am not convinced by this move. I conceive of Honneth´s theory of recognition as a turn within Habermas´s theory of communicative action to which it offers a welcome complement, but not an alternative (Iser, 2008). For this, its conceptual bases are too narrow in my opinion. In the same way as I pleaded before for a cosmopolitan communitarianism, I ´d now like to defend the idea of a communicative theory of recognition among liberal democratic states.

The three categories of recognition have become the hallmark of the Honnethiana. Following the young Hegel, he distinguishes three stages in the development of collective moral consciousness. Thanks to the struggle for recognition, persons and the communities they represent are recognized in the sphere love (the family), law (civil society) and solidarity (the state). [3] Against Hegel and with Habermas, I would, however, like to invert the order of progression in such a way that solidarity (civil society) comes *before* and *not after* the law (the state). The collective identity of the societal community is not the end. It is not the ultimate, but the penultimate station on the way of a global social order that realizes the common good of all communities and societies in a single world society. The right to recognition of particular nations, peoples and states is conditional on their endorsement and effective defense of human rights (though there might, of course, be different formulations of it). Not all forms of life are worthy of esteem, but only those that recognize democracy and protect the human rights of all – not only of individuals, but also of the various collectivities that make up a state. I would, therefore, contend that today only liberal democratic states are legitimate. [4]

The cosmopolitan communicative communitarian perspective is, obviously, a normative one. In the last part of his paper, Honneth convincingly demonstrates the irenic function of the recognition of worth of peoples. Especially in cases of conflict, when whole populations are stereotyped and 'polluted' by politicians, it is important that positive characterizations of the 'enemy' circulate in the public sphere, so

that the narratives of justification of animosity that devalue and disrespect the other lose their credibility. That is, definitely, an important point, but I wonder if communication across divisions, based on common values and norms, is not as important as the recognition of cultural differences between nations and nation-states. What has to be avoided by all means is the transformation of diacritical markers (religion, ethnicity, race, language) of relative difference into the deadly opposition of friends and enemies. Once again, we see that a theory of recognition is not opposed to a theory of communication, but that it complements it.

3. So far the question of the recognition between states has been treated from the perspective of moral and political philosophy. Arguing for a cosmopolitan communitarianism that suits the global age, I have tried to actualize Hegel and to push the theory of recognition in a more liberal direction. I have basically made the case that the dialectics of globalization have led to the emergence of common values of, and a common project for, the overlapping communities of fate of the world. But a common project presupposes, of course, common action and a collective subject. Moving from moral and political philosophy to social metaphysics, to conclude, I now want to take up the question of the ontology of collectives.

In the opening pages of his text, Honneth makes it quite clear that he doesn´t want to transfer the concept of recognition to the macro-level and that, unlike Hegel, he does not consider the state as the executive organ of a collective identity. I suspect, however, that this nominalist stance derives from a normative (not to say affective) aversion of nationalism. [5] Could we, however, not use the concept of the community of values to develop a more sociological analysis of the constitution of collectives, like the Proletariat or Humanity itself ? Do we always have to adopt a nominalist perspective and assume that collectives are only aggregates of individuals in interaction who cannot act as a person ? I would strongly contest such an affirmation and argue that any political theory of international relations must recognize the existence of societal communities as collective actors endowed with causal power and the capability to change the world.

Elsewhere, drawing on the work of Roy Bhaskar, but extending it to the field of social movements, I have outlined a realist theory of collective subjectivities that analyzes the constitution of collectives – from the dyad all the way up to imaginary communities – in terms of triphasic dialectical process (Vandenberghe, 2007). If collectives are to act as persons of a higher order, they need, first, to symbolically represent themselves as an 'imaginary community' and constitute themselves as a 'We' with a categorical identity, differentiated from the others. To transform this 'imaginary community' into a virtual network of members who can enter into contact and communication with each other and coordinate their actions across space, they also need the technological mediation of mass communication. Finally, to transform this virtual network of people into an organized group that can defend its identity, ideals and interests, the collective needs to be politically represented by a spokesperson that speaks in its name and actualizes its capacity to act as one person.

At the time, I did not directly refer to the theory of recognition, but I could have. After all, is the theory of recognition not a theory of collective subjectivity ? Isn´t it first and foremost a political theory of intersubjectivity that analyzes how conflicts can lead to the normative integration of societal communities through progressive inclusion of the excluded in a common project ? Indeed, to the extent that the performative dimension of the act of recognition is quite conspicuous in the mutual recognition of states, I think that the analysis of collective subjectivities could benefit from the analysis of the recognition in international relations. In the trajectory that goes "from the passive use to the active use of voice" (Ricoeur, 2004 : 35), the political recognition between states is at the active end : it presupposes an act of will ; it is a decision and not simply the discovery of a reality that already exists. As an illocutary, declarative act, the act of recognition of a state by another state has a performative power – although one cannot say that states only exist thanks to the recognition by other states, it is evident that the act of recognition adds something. It brings it into existence as a legitimate entity. The recognition between states may be only a special case, but to the extent that it brings the performative power of recognition into the open, it could be used as a template for the analysis of the performance of identities in general and the constitution of a collective subjectivity in particular as "an I that is a We, a We that is an I". [6]

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