Antecedent Recognition
Some Problematic Features of the Very Notion

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Structure of the Talk

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"It is a sign of Honneth’s admirable intellectual courage (and, perhaps, restlessness?) that he is willing to take significant philosophical risks with a research programme that is already well-established as a significant presence in contemporary practical philosophy."

David Owen, 2008, p. 585, "Recognition, Reification and Value"

• Why should we care?
  → The setting of educational goals: what should we teach?
• Contemporary recognition theory effectively thematizes educationally important issues related e.g. with rational autonomy, rights & duties, the ability to exercise one’s rights as a fully functional adult human being, as a citizen, etc.
2. Contemporary Recognition Theory

- Honneth: *a formal conception of the good life*.
- The aim of social relationships of recognition is the facilitation of *individual autonomy* in a broad sense (citizenship, psychological capacities, education).
- **Intersubjective preconditions** for the self-realization of individual personality.

- The overall genus of recognition: *taking the other as a person*. 
  
  **-Species:**

  - **Respect** → self-respect  
    - *generic*  
    - *legal community*
  - **Esteem** → self-esteem  
    - *qualitative*  
    - *shared value-horizons*
  - **Love** → self-confidence  
    - *numerical*  
    - *close relationships*

Dimensions of recognition provide **articulated goals for education**!
Recognition is by its nature a relation between persons / groups / institutions.

RRs involve attitudes, and they are both practical and normative in nature.

Recognition as something is what gives recognition its socio-normative and psychological significance (cf. recognizing someone as a person, etc.)

In RRs, we may distinguish a subject, an object, and a content.

→ The general schematic structure of 'takings' or 'stances'.

Identification ➔ Acknowledgement ➔ Recognition

There seems to be a reverse order of dependency.

Necessary conditions: recognition essentially incorporates both cognitive (identification) and normative (acknowledgement) components.

► Recognition is necessarily both cognitive and normative.
3. Honneth’s ”Invisibility” Account

• **Social invisibility**: cognition, but no recognition.
  The humiliation of 'looking through' based on this very distinction.

• Cognition + _____ = Recognition  ➔ What needs to be added?
• Gestures / expressions  ➔ What do these express?

• A small child’s introduction to social interactions…

• Cognition + Affirmation = Recognition?

• Recognition precedes cognition: Cognition drops out of the equation!

• Recognition is the expression of an evaluative perception in which the worth of persons is ’directly’ given.

• Expression of motivational readiness, not of cognitive conviction.

► **Antecedent recognition is not cognitive.**
• Some **problems** of the "Invisibility" account:

a) If recognition precedes cognition, then recognition cannot presuppose cognition in the sense of identification. ➔ The assumed dependencies?
b) What is 'an evaluative perception' without any cognition or identification?
c) How can the worth of persons be 'directly' given without any cognition?
d) To constitute a recognition-relation, **subjective** motivational readiness has to meaningfully connect with something **objective**. This connecting in turn has to be based on some cognitive criterion or form of identification. Otherwise, there is just indiscriminate radiation or random firing off of recognitions.

• Honneth: **Morality** can in a sense be said to coincide with recognition.
• The Kantian concept of 'respect' brings us closer to the moral core of recognition. (But this is just one of the standard dimensions of recognition!)
• The act of recognition is the expressive demonstration of an individual **decentering** (?) that we carry out in response to (?) the worth of a person.
  ➔ Cognition drops out, but **normativity remains**.
4. Honneth’s *Reification* Account

- Reification as the forgetting of an antecedent form of recognition.
- Neither an epistemic category mistake nor a form of moral misconduct, but a distorted form of praxis that is "structurally false".
- The spontaneous, nonrational (?) recognition of others as fellow human beings.
- Antecedent recognition is a necessary prerequisite of all human communication, one which consists in experiencing the other in a way that is not connected with normative implications or even positive attitudes.
- This form of recognition clearly is not intended to contain any norms of positive concern or respect. (>< Invisibility) Nor does it claim that certain positive, benevolent feelings are at work.
- This stance of antecedent recognition itself has no normative orientation.

► **Antecedent recognition is not normative.**
• Some **problems** of the *Reification* account:

• A stance in which we can recognize in another person the other of our own self, our fellow human → No normativity in this?

• Affective disposition, an empathetic and engaged relationship toward humans themselves and their surroundings...

• …arising from the experience of the **world**’s **significance and value**.

• We necessarily affirm the **value** of **another person** in the stance of recognition.

• Self-relation: engaged concern toward **oneself**, regarding one’s own feelings and desires as **worthy** of articulation.

→ Talk of ’significance’, ’value’, and ’worthiness’ in connection with the objective, intersubjective, and subjective spheres.

► **Normativity seems to be bolted into the foundations of recognition.**
5. A Two-Level Account?

• Somogy Varga and Shaun Gallagher see Honneth’s notion of antecedent recognition as promising and useful.

• Varga (2010, 24) makes the following distinction:
  a) **Intentional recognition**: Present in concrete intentional acts. A concrete addressee, a particular object.
  b) **Pre-intentional recognition**: A condition of all intentionality. A formal feature of being attuned. An affective and pre-intentional relation to the world as a whole, like a mood.

• Varga: Instead of primordial (or antecedent) recognition, it would be better to employ the terms ‘acquaintedness’ or ‘attunement’. This would not overstretch the notion of recognition.

► Antecedent recognition is **not recognition**.
• Some **problems** of the two-level account:

  • An affective and pre-intentional relation to the world as a whole, like a mood vs. the caretaker: Distinguishing the latter is a cognitive achievement, however rudimentary.

  • The necessary role of **cognition** in tracking (identifying) and adequately responding to **normatively relevant entities**!

  • Even the child has to be able to distinguish between her mother’s face and a piece of ceiling to get the whole developmental process going.

  • Decentering, affirmation of the independence of another perspective, etc. also presuppose forms of cognition or cognitive capacities.

  • If pure cognitivism, or overemphasis on belief-generation, is the initial problem, then a radical retreat to pure affectivism does **not** constitute a plausible answer (cf. the belief and desire components of action).

▶ **Cognition seems to bolted into the foundations of recognition.**
6. Conclusions (i): A False Dichotomy?

• Honneth: Lukács understands reification to be a habit of mere contemplation and observation, in which one’s natural surroundings, social environment, and personal characteristics come to be apprehended in a detached and emotionless manner – in short, as things.

• In humans’ relation to world, recognition precedes cognition, such that we should understand reification as a violation of this rank order.

• In the human lifeworld an involved stance always precedes the merely detached observation of persons and issues.

➔ A privileging of engagement over neutral cognition, of involvement over detachment.

• But why should cognition be understood as merely detached and neutral?
• Are engagement and involvement not based on cognition as well?

► The assumed total exclusiveness would seem to constitute a false dichotomy.
Conclusions (ii): External & Internal Problems

1) According to the standard conception, recognition is both cognitive and normative in nature (cognition and normativity as necessary conditions).

2) Antecedent recognition is not cognitive. ("Invisibility")

3) Antecedent recognition is not normative. (Reification)

4) Antecedent recognition is not recognition. (the two-level account)

→ There are two basic types of problematic features of 1) – 4):

a) The external problems of relating 2) – 4) to 1).

b) The internal problems of consistently formulating the individual ideas or thought-contents of claims 2) – 4).
Conclusions (iii): Educational Goals

• The internal problems, especially of the non-cognitivity and non-normativity of antecedent recognition, would have to be solved first. Only after this, could we even try to make any sense of the external problems.

• If 1) were indeed incompatible with consistently formulated 2) and 3), then there might be some reason to re-evaluate the standard conception.

• As things stand, however, the standard conception of contemporary recognition theory is well-established, and provides a set of clearly articulated and pragmatic educational goals.

• The same is arguably not true of the notion of antecedent recognition.

▶ Because of its unclear nature and status, the educational and pedagogical value of the notion of antecedent recognition remains unconfirmed.
Some References & Thank You!


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