Paul Ricoeur: *Caminos del reconocimiento*, traducción de Agustín Neira, Madrid: Trotta, 2005, 280 pp.

Paul Ricoeur's final book[1] is written with the skill and confidence of a mature philosopher, one who has nothing to prove but his persistent passion for thought. What moves him, in the book discussed here, is the feeling of wonder at the coherence and breadth of the lexical field displayed in the notion of 'recognition'; the way in which the sequence of meanings[2] derived both from speech and literature reveals a sort of 'regulated polysemy.' Ricoeur declares that he is perplexed by the fact that philosophy has not suggested yet a 'theory of recognition.' With the *Grand Robert* dictionary at hand, he reveals this chain of definitions: 'to accept, to take for certain, to admit, to confess, to be tributary, to thank' (p. 25), intending to show how each intermediary step conceals implicit meanings, philosophemes or 'events of thinking' which suggest a hidden intelligence within the amazingly varied definitions.

Ricoeur's hypothesis is that the philosophical uses of the verb 'to recognize' can be linked together following a pathway derived from its own grammar. This goes from the *active voice*, referring to recognition as identification, to the *passive voice*, referring to mutual recognition, and passing through one's own recognition. In the active pole, recognition expresses the aspiration of exerting a way of intellectual control over the world. In the passive pole, the request for recognition shows an expectation that can only be satisfied in reciprocity. Throughout the whole itinerary, recognition gradually liberates itself from its cognitive emphasis, to the point where, in the end, it makes way for knowing (pp. 31-32). This sequence contains, according to Ricoeur, various underlying issues that, in some way, can be arranged around four different – but linked – *routes* towards recognition: the routes of identification, capabilities, struggle, and oblivion.

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[1] Paul Ricoeur passed away in May, 2005, at the age of 91, only a few months after the publication of the book reviewed here. The book's original title is: *Parcours de la reconnaissance. Trois études.* Paris: Éditions Stock, 2004.

[2] The other French dictionary consulted by Ricoeur, the *Littré*, enumerates 23 meanings of the verb 'to recognize.'

The route of identification

Recognition first follows the route of identification, which goes from the distinction of 'something' in general, recognized as 'other', to the perception of oneself and one's own capabilities, having passed through the identification of an external 'someone.'

The question of identification as a task shows *the subject's initiative and will* of rationally grasping the world that surrounds him. It is the subject who distinguishes, and this, from Descartes onwards, refers to the theorization of judgement as a capacity to separate the true from the false where the method consists in distinction, in contrast to either memory or opinion. To distinguish a thing, an idea, or a person, is to identify it, receive it as true, as believable, in view of the clarity and sharpness of its presence. As in Descartes, the sense of recognition oscillates between grasping an idea through thought, and accepting something as true: it is constantly swinging between knowing and recognizing (pp. 41-48).

With Kant, to recognize is also to identify, except that it is not so much in the sense of *distinguishing* but in the sense of *relating* (p. 49). There is a function of liaison, connection, or synthesis between sensibility and understanding. In the fundamental act of judgement, 'between the receptiveness of sensibility and the spontaneity of understanding,' 'the mediated knowledge of an object', through its representation as intuition or else as concept, is produced. To judge is, therefore, to subsume sensible intuitions under a concept (p. 54). Within this synthesis' framework, time becomes the condition of all experience, in 'the form of internal sense, that is, our own intuition and the one of our inner state' (pp. 51-53). Conscience is recognized in the 'production' of the unity constituted by the concept of an object (p. 57); 'in order to recognize itself, the unity of consciousness is produced in the concept' (pp. 60-63).

With Husserl and *phenomenology*, recalls Ricoeur, the idea of a stable and mediated relation between subject and object is relinquished. It is the 'ruin of representation,' which leads to the problem of variation and time, one that, at an extreme, can make things unrecognizable (pp. 65-70). It is this theme of a phenomenology of perception which, in Merleau-Ponty, refers to the problem of the 'perceptive constant' of all sensorial registers. There is a form of confidence in the stability of things that contrasts with the doubt that often comes with the passing of time: the successive appearance, disappearance, reappearance of objects. The 'temporal distance' is integrated into identity because change in time becomes a danger that complicates identification. Only then can one speak about recognition, rec-

ognition of things by their generic features, and of people by their individual features. The enemy of recognition turns out to be, then, misrecognition, of both persons and, in particular, faces, as seen in the process of aging. To understand recognition is, therefore, to think in mysteries, in contradictions; it involves an effort that can also have a 'pathetic dimension' (p. 75).

In short, through distinguishing between the object, the relation subject-object, and the mystery of perception of an *other* in time, recognition is still identification, although it gradually faces the risks of error, doubt, change. From antiquity to modernity, the topic of recognition as the necessity to know remains open and unresolved.

The route of capabilities

The difficulty of grasping the external world gives rise to an inner look, a look that leads to the second route of recognition, which is the recognition of one's own capabilities. Since the Greeks, claims Ricoeur, the notion of *recognizing one's own responsibility*, responsibility in action, is outlined. The Homeric heroes are 'centres of decision' and deliberation who have to face the problems of intention, evil and freedom. Ulysses' return to Ithaca is a recapitulation of the steps of communitarian, friendly, filial, marital recognition; being recognized is for Ulysses to recover his own identity. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, to assume past acts, even the unintended ones, is a way of assuming the pain suffered, a new way of recognizing oneself. With Aristotle, the subject recognizes himself through practical wisdom that, in a habitual state of virtue, leads to his intentional decision towards morality. This is a reflexive subject who recognizes his responsibility, discerns the correct action in the face of uncertainty, and decides consciously on what is within his power.

From there on, according to Ricoeur, it takes the shape of what - in modern times - is a *phenomenology of the capable man*, based upon reflexive consciousness and a 'hermeneutics of yes' (p. 101) that is inaugurated by Descartes and Locke. First, on the theoretical plane of the *cogito*, and then on the practical plane, mainly in Kant's moral philosophy and his philosophy of law, the consciousness of an 'arbitrator' as well as a legislator subject is outlined (p. 102).

Ricoeur considers, however, that the modern thinkers have neglected a proper study of reflexive action, in the line traced by Aristotle. This is why he suggests the *investigation of capabilities* that, in his opinion, enriches the notion of recognition by replacing an emphasis upon identification with an emphasis upon confession or declaration of potency (in the form of the

phrase 'I believe I can'). With this development, one's recognition establishes itself in a central place between recognition as identification and mutual recognition.

Indeed, Ricoeur underlines *the anticipations of mutuality* contained in the recognition of oneself as self-affirmation of one's own capabilities, which is always performed with reference to an other, without solipsism, on the basis of an exchange. This is evident in the most immediate capabilities, from the capability of 'saying' or 'speaking,' that always implies a listener, to the self-designation, which requires an other to adopt the alluded name. In turn, 'being able to do' or the capability of producing events both in the physical and social worlds, leads directly to the *other* becoming either obstacle or facilitator. In the capability of telling one's own story, that is, in the *narrative identity*, the private dimension of identity is bound up with the public dimension, shared with others, because one's own life's narrative is always organized around the stories of everyone else (pp. 110-114). Finally, with *accountability*, the capacity to act is completely focused in the *other* as interrogator, inquisitor, accuser, or judge, and the notion of responsibility is assumed by a subject of legal rights, although it conceals a wider and more complex obligation – that can have no limits – towards the vulnerable and fragile other (pp. 115-118).

Furthermore, Ricoeur calls the attention towards two *ulterior capabilities*. With *memory*, finding is re-finding, re-finding is recognizing, and recognizing is to approve the reencounter, which is to admit having forgotten: this is the paradox of recalling. In the labour of recalling, the inner look evokes and remains; it recognizes the images of the past and recognizes itself. With *promise*, claims Ricoeur, a capability that implies all the other ones is expressed, as it contains a will of constancy of one's own identity, as well as a sort of fiduciary dimension. It is a statement where one's own recognition becomes the recognition of the other, where otherness is consubstantial because the claim of capability goes not only towards a listener but also towards a beneficiary. With promise, not fulfilling or betraying one's own word is an inability, but also an insidious power. The promise is made before an other, in favour of an other, but it can be rejected, unaccepted, suspected, and thus refers to the problem of the credibility of he who promises, that is, to his narrative identity, and to the trust it provokes. One's own misrecognition is closely related to misrecognizing the other. Inversely, reciprocal recognition is a way of founding identity in the testimony of one's own capabilities given by the other.

For Ricoeur, the route of capabilities extends itself into collective recognitions. Following Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize-winner in Economics in 1998[3], Ricoeur claims that subjects do not behave themselves only according to a utility calculation, but instead bearing in mind the degree of freedom that they have at their disposal in order to choose the kind of life they want to have. From there arises the idea of the 'right towards certain capabilities of acting' as responsibility of maintaining or else widening these liberties that the individuals both share and seek to affirm through the State. It is the case of famines, says Sen, where the effective and generalized exercise of a liberty, of a surviving capability (thanks to employments or else subsidies) is what avoids tragedy, rather than a mere redistribution of food. The shared freedom of exercising this right becomes, then, the assessing criterion of social justice and of the legitimacy of struggle as a route towards recognition (p. 153).

The course of struggle

The risks of the inner look refer to *otherness as a problem* because the *other* does not always help in the process of recognizing one's own identity and capabilities. He can also set himself as a barrier, preventing a complete recognition of oneself.

Denials of recognition or misrecognizing the other constantly oppose themselves to the struggle for recognition. In Hobbes' *state of nature*, subjects deny recognition to one another due to distrust, and to the vanity of refusing to give up their own rights, refusing to leave the right to rule to the State under the condition of reciprocity. But fear of a violent death imposes the need of a rational calculation that makes this renunciation and recognition possible prior to the Leviathan's contract. Unilateral promises aroused by this fear are at the base of both the contract and the State; there is no moral motivation nor a dimension of otherness, claims Ricoeur (pp. 171-179).

On the other hand, in Hegel's concept of *Anerkennung*, one's own recognition is produced by the recognition of others; the former does not precede the latter. Here the desire of being recognized plays the same role that the fear of a violent death does in Hobbes (p. 182). Instead of fictitious rational calculation, there exists an ethical life in which self-reflection is oriented towards otherness, in response to the experiences of contempt, towards successive planes of recognition of others that establish collective

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life, as well as institutions. At the social level, the lord-bondsman tie is defeated, through learning about oneself and the *other*. The demand of recognition produces relations according to law as an instance always opposed to crime. Through family, society, and political community, the reciprocal recognition that makes one's own recognition possible then takes shape.

The intrinsic conflicts of the successive models of affective, legal, and social recognition that are summarized in 'contempt' are forms of misrecognition that become integrated into the arduous process of obtaining recognition. To state the conflict as the core issue of the struggle for recognition is, according to Ricoeur, the merit of *the up-dated versions of Anerkennung*, such as Axel Honneth's one[4]. The contributions made by this author are, in his opinion, the systematization of the forms of contempt (on the basis of Hegel's models), the emphasis on negative perception that it involves, as well as the moral potential of non-recognition. Denial of recognition is the moral motivation of social struggle. In personal relations of love and friendship, lack of approval is found in the origins of the feeling of mistreatment; in judicial relations of law, lack of respect produces exclusion; finally, in social relations, within the frame of a community of values, lack of self-esteem creates feelings of humiliation and dishonour.

The struggle for recognition can be seen on all those planes, but Ricoeur stresses the way in which *legal recognition* widens the sphere of admitted rights (for each individual and for new categories of people) and, at the same time, *enriches the range of capabilities* that the subjects recognize in/towards one another (pp. 204-209). He underlines the way in which the distance between distribution of rights (for example social and economic rights) and distribution of goods creates an 'unbearable contrast' that is a core source of moral indignation (p. 208).

Ricoeur is also interested in pointing out how the recognition of social-esteem does not occur only on one plane, but in various economical, political, and cultural systems. These are communities of values that contain an unavoidable *axiological diversity* that contrast with the presumed universality of the legal plane (pp. 209-210). The struggles for recognition on this plane go beyond the extension of rights. This is why Ricoeur considers that it is necessary to complete Honneth's proposal with other 'orders of recognition' and conflictivity, like the ones derived from social competition. This is the case of the 'economies of grandeur' proposed by Thévenot and

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[4] A book by this author to be consulted is: Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. For a Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Also useful are: 'Reconocimiento y obligación moal,' in: *Areté*, IX (1997), pp. 235-252; 'Reconocimiento y justicia. Entrevista a Axel Honneth, por Francisco Cortés,' in: *Areté*, XVII (2005), pp. 273-294.

Boltanski, where conflict and commitments emerge from strategies of justification that each person exercises in accordance with the criteria of grandeur of the 'world' he lives in[5]. Here it is interesting to emphasize how, for Ricoeur, tensions between worlds can provoke the development of an individual capability for interpreting other systems different from one's own; *i.e.*, a sort of 'capability of commitment.'

Ricoeur agrees with A. Honneth in that *the extension of individual capabilities through recognition* originates in the development of conflictive interactions. He concurs with him, and also with Hegel, in that the culmination of one's own recognition embraces the previous two routes because it seeks to see the individual's capabilities recognized, and, through them, one's authentic identity. Thus, beginning with a claim ('I recognize the truth'), and going through a statement ('I recognize that I am capable'), one ends up with an expectation 'I am recognized', and apparently this is how the passage from the active voice to the passive voice of recognition is brought to an end.

But here Ricoeur confesses a *feeling of discomfort* in view of the idea of struggle: indeed, when will a person consider himself to be truly recognized? (p. 224). The expectation of being affectively, legally and socially recognized is undoubtedly an indefinite, endless demand. It is a form of 'infinite damage' (p. 225), as new ways of humiliation and new frustrated capabilities will always arise. Considering this discomfort, Ricoeur poses *the possibility of going beyond conflict* to discern a state of peace that, in the exchange of gifts and in gratitude, may establish a full form of mutual recognition.

The route of oblivion

Ricoeur devotes himself, then, to the examination of the forms of otherness that, in the way towards mutual recognition, contain a peaceful experience, a form of truce. He states that these are forms of otherness with 'symbolic mediations' that go beyond legal or mercantile orders. This is why Ricoeur is interested in, as provisional state of peace (*agape*), the 'effective experience of the ceremonial exchange of the gift,' which implies a pause in the interpersonal conflict. But the pause of the gift and the counter-gift contains a paradox between the feelings of gratitude and indebtedness: there is no way to introduce a reciprocal equation there. It is for this reason

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[5] Boltanski, L. and L. Thévenot, *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*, Paris: Gallimard, 1991.

that Ricoeur wonders if there is a concealed form of misrecognition in the gift's peace.

This question directs him to a reflection on the founding asymmetry of otherness, an asymmetry that is not annulled by reciprocity. Phenomenology, admits Ricoeur, does not achieve a way of overcoming this primordial distance, neither in E. Husserl's version, who tries to construct a laborious grasping of the other through the conscience of oneself, nor in E. Levinas' version, who begins with the primordial exteriority of the other's voice and face. Phenomenology's account does not accomplish a usurpation of the asymmetry in order to explain mutuality (pp. 264-267).

This is why Ricoeur aims at *inverting the strategy* and seeks to integrate the original asymmetry within mutuality. His thesis is, therefore, that the discovery of the oblivion of such an asymmetry is beneficial for recognition in its mutual form (p. 266). Whereas in the idea of justice there is always an assumption of equivalence that contains new conflicts in a latent state, only *agape* suspends dispute, overcomes offences. In *the oblivion of the primordial difference*, a form of failure to recognize is the very core of recognition. This is precisely the gift that, in its exceptional character, both ceremonial and festive, abstracts the equivalence and produces a form of oblivion in which the other remains inaccessible. In this mutuality, Ricoeur insists, there is no fusion; there is a distance that protects intimacy, a distance in the proximity of love and friendship.

In this distance from the relation and the asymmetry – not from the *other* – there is a task of the immeasurable, the disproportionate, *i.e*, of what is priceless. It is there where *gratitude* assumes all its meaning, which is placed in receiving, between giving and returning. In gratitude, the asymmetry between he who gives and he who receives is affirmed as a double otherness: as both origin and destination of gratitude. The other is the one who gives without anything in return; he is the one who returns without any obligation.

The oblivion of the asymmetry is a form of benevolent or pacifist misrecognition. At the same time, both in gift and gratitude there is a form of *symbolic recognition* that is constituent not only of identity, nor even of mere reciprocity, but of something that goes beyond, an *appeased mutuality*. There is an effective recognition in the exchange of gifts, a situation of truce that, according to Ricoeur, proves that the struggle for recognition has a motivation that is nobler than the struggle for power.

Recognition, affirmation, transformation

Ricoeur's account is interested in conceiving of the concept of recognition as a *model of progressive intersubjectivity*, with cognitive, sociologic, socio-political, and moral dimensions, which goes from the capability of knowing to mutuality. Curiously enough, as has already been seen, with the idea of oblivion, the claim of recognition is not solved in the most passive voice possible, the one of *being recognized*, but in *showing recognition*, that is, in gratitude and the oblivion of offences, which can hardly be presented as a passive posture. The range of recognition, which begins with the active voice of knowledge, *seems, thus, to come to a closure in the opposed active voice*, the one of a willed misrecognition. Recognition is fulfilled – and, at the same time, it is concealed – in mutuality.

What opposes recognition is, in the first place, failing to know the identity (on the planes of knowing, self-reflection, and otherness); but, in the second place, what is reluctant to the full recognition of mutuality is, in a way, a poor form of recognition, that is to say, a form of calculated reciprocity. Throughout the whole course, what is at stake, for both Ricoeur and Honneth, in the line of Hegel, is the conquest, through the other, of one's personal autonomy (and, ultimately, of solidarity in struggle and in gratitude.) With the oblivion of asymmetry, Ricoeur wants to correct the drift of recognition's endless expectations, as well as to avoid the risk of annulling the individual in an alleged fusional union in otherness.

In the conceptual range of recognition, Ricoeur attains an articulation of epistemology, moral philosophy, social theory, and political analysis, and manages to derive the problem of justice from there: he places the moral grammar of the *struggle for recognition* on the plane of a wider semantic evolution. It is important for him to demonstrate the fact that without bearing in mind the aspiration of knowing and identifying, as well as the need of feeling capable, that is to say, without the stages that precede reciprocity, this struggle (and the very mutuality) cannot be understood. On the other hand, with Honneth stating that the routes of recognition have their empirical bases in anthropology, psychoanalysis, and sociology, Ricoeur suggests, with the concept of *capabilities*, extending the systematization of the forms of contempt by opening the perspectives of social struggle to endless expectations.

Ricoeur appears to be convinced by the possibility of the progress of democracy as a system of gradual integration of recognitions. With the recognition of the *right to certain capabilities*, individual differences are seemingly able to be legally and culturally assimilated by means of affirmation

policies. The idea of extending capabilities suggests a criterion for the discursive negotiation of a consensus within the democratic framework. On the other hand, the ideas of oblivion and gratitude seem to contain a latent radical social criticism: they establish that the horizon of recognition is definitively above all distributive equivalence. To say that complete mutuality is only fulfilled by transcending the commercial or legal exchange – which are asymmetrical forms of recognition – is to suggest a transforming policy of recognition that would have the hard task of expanding the spaces of 'truce in gratitude' (and, therefore, facing the risks of 'failure of the gift' – in rejection, in hypocrisy, in the absence of return, or else in the mediocrity or delay of a return) (p. 246).

Thus, Ricoeur's hermeneutics seems to insinuate a proposal that *fluctuates between an affirmative policy and a policy which transforms* society[6]. Anyhow, it is clear for the author that the concept of recognition does not suffice in itself, and that, in its amazing richness, it is still one enlightening perspective – among others – on the bigger problems of peace and justice.

As a matter of fact, the strength of this message does suggest some enquiries concerning *Peru's specificity*, enquiries into the conditions of oblivion, truce, and gratitude in a society burdened by the memory of successive misrecognitions. Also, questioning the evolution of capabilities, especially of accountability, memory, and promise, and the high level of reciprocity they demand in order to develop themselves. Likewise, questioning the way in which the route of capabilities can face forms of racist contempt; and on the local effects of the 'unbearable contrast' between the distribution of goods and the distribution of the 'rights to certain capabilities of acting.' All in all, Ricoeur's message forces us to seek the routes of recognition that enable us to discern a horizon of mutuality among us.

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[6] It is worth mentioning such an author as Nancy Fraser, who distinguishes the respective means and ends of the policies of affirmation and the policies of transformation (Fraser, Nancy, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Postsocialist Condition*, New York: Routledge, 1997). Also of interest here is the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth on the roles of 'recognition' and 'redistribution' both in social critique and in social change (Fraser, Nancy and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, London/New York: Verso, 2003).