**The politics of recognition**

Recognition has both a normative and a psychological dimension. Arguably, if you recognize another person with regard to a certain feature, as an autonomous agent, for example, you do not only admit that she has this feature but you embrace a positive attitude towards her for having this feature. Such recognition implies that you bear obligations to treat her in a certain way, that is, you recognize a specific normative status of the other person, e.g., as a free and equal person. But recognition does not only matter normatively. It is also of psychological importance. Most theories of recognition assume that in order to develop a practical identity, persons fundamentally depend on the feedback of other subjects (and of society as a whole). According to this view, those who fail to experience adequate recognition, i.e., those who are depicted by the surrounding others or the societal norms and values in a one-sided or negative way, will find it much harder to embrace themselves and their projects as valuable. Misrecognition thereby hinders or destroys persons' successful relationship to their selves. It has been poignantly described how the victims of racism and colonialism have suffered severe psychological harm by being demeaned as inferior humans (Fanon 1952). Thus, recognition constitutes a “vital human need” (Taylor 1992, 26).

Recognition theory is thought to be especially well-equipped to illuminate the psychological mechanisms of social and political resistance. As experiences of misrecognition violate the identity of subjects, the affected are supposed to be particularly motivated to resist, that is, to engage in a “struggle for recognition.” Therefore, at least since the 1990s, theories of recognition have enjoyed a lively academic as well as public interest. They promise to illuminate a variety of new social movements—be it the struggles of ethnic or religious minorities, of gays and lesbians or of people with disabilities. None of these groups primarily fight for a more favorable distribution of goods. Rather, they struggle for an affirmation of their particular identity and are thus thought to be engaged in a new form of politics, sometimes labeled “politics of difference” or “identity politics.” However, many accounts want to ascribe a much more fundamental role to the concept of recognition—covering the morality of human relationships in its entirety. From this more general perspective, also earlier campaigns for equal rights—be it by workers, women or African Americans—should be understood as “struggles for recognition.” To frame these political movements in terms of recognition highlights the relational character of morality—and justice: Justice is not primarily concerned with how many goods a person should have but rather with what kind of standing vis-à-vis other persons she deserves (Young 1990).

This entry will first discuss some controversies surrounding the very concept of recognition (1) before reviewing four dimensions of what is recognized (by whom and on what grounds) that have been highlighted by different theories of recognition (2). However, even in light of these differentiations some authors have expressed the fear that concentrating on the issue of recognition might supplant the central problem of (re)distribution on the political agenda (3). Finally, the often rather sanguine descriptions of recognition and its potential for emancipation (4) have been fundamentally challenged: The concern is that because the need for recognition renders persons utterly dependent on the dominating societal norms it may undermine the identity of any critic. Thus, some worry that struggles for recognition may lead to conformism and a strengthening of ideological formations (5).