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# Mediated Recognition and the Categorial Stance

**Abstract:** In this paper, I articulate a systematic model of mediated recognition based on the notion of the categorial stance. Mediated recognition is understood as a trilateral form of recognition, while the categorial stance is conceived as an epistemic position operating with the most general ontological categories and relations. The central thesis argued for is that the categorial stance can be used as a rational resource for conceptually mediated recognition. I begin with tools found in earlier research literature, then characterize the idea of conceptual rationality, consider contexts of mediated recognition, and finally, integrate the categorial stance into the model.

**Keywords:** Recognition; Contemporary recognition theory; Mediated recognition; Rationality; Conceptual rationality; Ontology; The categorial stance.

## 1 Introduction

We live today in a globalized and multicultural world where the flourishing of societies requires that we have efficient ways of accepting and constructively dealing with all kinds of disagreeing parties and actors. Both as individuals and as societies, we need to be able to cope and co-operate with an encountered variety of cultural traditions, ethnic backgrounds, religious doctrines, political views, and so on.[1] This multicultural reality also presents us with multidimensional psychological and societal challenges (cf. Gutmann 1994). Consequently, rational ways of approaching such cultural encounters are urgently needed. In

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[1] Since they too have to do with an interesting sub-case of possible cultural encounters, the ever-growing variety of scientific disciplines and research traditions might also be added to this list.

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the following, my aim is to articulate some suggestions for a systematic model towards this end. The attempt is based on the debatable idea that *reason* and *rationality* have a positive contribution to make, and my specific focus will be on a *conceptual* form of rationality.

The discussion is closely related to an analytic reception of a research tradition that has been established since the appearance of two seminal publications, namely "The Politics of Recognition" by Charles Taylor, and *The Struggle for Recognition* by Axel Honneth, both originally from 1992. With the emergence from the late 1960s onwards of a new type of politics of multiculturalism, identity, and difference, it has been suggested by Taylor, Honneth, and other commentators that the transformation of the political landscape can best be understood by utilizing the concept of *recognition* (see Taylor 1994, p. 25–37; Thompson 2006, p. 1–8; Seymour 2010). However, in ordinary as well as in philosophical usage, the word 'recognition' has various meanings. Therefore, some amount of conceptual attentiveness and semantic explication is required, if the notion is to be systematically utilized in a theoretical context concerned with encounters between cultural identities.

## 2  The Concept of Recognition

In order to construct any systematic model of recognition, we need first of all to consider what we mean by 'recognition'. An adequate conceptualization of all the related phenomena can be a difficult undertaking, and it should not be expected that the resulting analyses would, or even could, be wholly unproblematic. Nevertheless, I shall in the following base my model on certain theoretical foundations provided by earlier research literature on the topic of recognition. The most important elements come, in addition to Taylor and Honneth, from further conceptual analyses suggested by Ikäheimo and Laitinen (see Honneth 2002, p. 505; Ikäheimo 2002, p. 447; Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007, p. 33; Laitinen 2002, p. 463).

In the relevant literature, recognition is paradigmatically understood as an *interpersonal relation* consisting of *taking someone as a person*. Thus, having a recognitive attitude towards someone means relating to her as a person. The relating is conceived in the sense of *responding to* the personhood of someone *in accordance* with various dimensions of her personhood. This responding is not a matter of mere cognition, but also of *volitional* and *emotional* responsiveness. Therefore, in recognizing someone as a person, we adopt a basic way of being towards that person, which shapes all our specific responses. In addition to cognitive, emotional, and volitional responses, taking someone as a person

is also understood to be a *moral* affair. When claims of someone's personhood are not adequately acknowledged, this arguably constitutes a case of morally relevant *mis*recognition. Although the concept of recognition has a psychological dimension related to certain capacities, what is mainly at stake is a *normative* dimension concerned with the granting of a certain *status*. Moreover, recognition is primarily understood in a practical sense as granting someone some positive status.[2] An everyday example of recognition between persons could be an act of greeting as a way of recognizing the other's presence in the same social space. Another would be recognition, in one form or another, of a person's achievements or contributions within her work community. Persons can also expect others to adequately recognize e.g. their equal standing in a relationship, their equal status as a citizen, or their possession of basic human rights in a society (cf. Ikäheimo 2014, p. 1).

To further our conceptual analysis of recognition from these preliminary characterizations, it can be noted that recognition seems to be a phenomenon fundamentally involving *attitudes* of recognition, and accordingly, we may then adopt an *attitude-analysis* of recognition. Even if our focus were on practical recognitive *actions*, the attitudes behind them are of crucial importance because acts are identified as genuine acts *of recognition* by the attitudes that they express or by the attitudes that motivate them. By postulating a more general structure captured by 'the A-B-X scheme' which consists of *some A taking B as X*,[3] we can usefully explicate the concept of recognition further. We may then call A the *subject*, B the *object*, and X the *content* of the relevant attitudes. One of the things we can do with this analytic tool is to ask what kinds of entities can A:s and B:s, or the subjects and objects of recognition be. Let us assume that at least the subjects of 'takings' or attitudes are persons or groups of persons. By then allowing variations in the B:s and the X:s, or the objects and the contents of the attitudes, we can usefully analyse certain systematic connections between recognition on the one hand, and the neighboring concepts of *identification* and *acknowledgement* on the other. In unregimented ordinary language, the latter two often appear as synonyms of recognition (cf. Ikäheimo 2014, p. 7–10).

In terms of the possible *objects* or B:s of the attitude-analysis, *identification* is the widest 'taking' in scope, since *anything at all* can be identified. This identification can proceed in different ways. *Numerically*, any B can be taken as the

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**2** The paradigmatic sense of recognition also has various aspects which cannot be discussed on present occasion. These include e.g. the way in which recognition is standardly considered to be not only *responsive to* personhood but also *constitutive of* it (cf. Honneth 1995, Ikäheimo 2014).

**3** The A-B-X scheme and the related attitude-analysis come from Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007).

*individual* thing it is. *Qualitatively*, any B can be taken as a thing with some *particular features*. *Generically*, any B can be taken as a thing belonging to a certain *genus*.[4] Considering *persons* as the objects or B:s as a special case of identification, we may then distinguish between B:s being a *certain person*, involving numerical identity; B:s being a *person of a certain kind*, involving qualitative identity; and B:s being a *person*, involving generic identity (cf. Laitinen 2002, p. 465). Moreover, we can also make a distinction between *external* identifications, where A and B or the subject and object are different, and *internal* or *self*-identifications, where A and B are numerically identical (Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007, p. 35). It seems plausible to assume that in principle, both external and internal identifications can be numerical, qualitative, or generic in nature.

Even though it is important to note that in the paradigmatic sense of recognition, taking something as a person is *not* understood merely as identifying it generically as a person, it would seem that such generic identification nevertheless has to be a necessary constituent of any act of recognition. Otherwise it would be hard to make sense of the very idea of *responding* to the personhood of someone. The recognition-response of the subject A has to be governed by *some applicable criteria* of generic identification of the object B. Thus, even if generic identification were *not* a *sufficient* condition for recognition, it does seem to be a *necessary* one. Moreover, there is also a close connection between identity and recognition in that when we speak of the recognition of different *cultural identities*, or of the related *self-identities* of persons and groups of persons, these identities can be understood in the sense of *qualitative* identity. In these cases, we are focusing on those aspects of the identity of persons or groups of persons that distinguish them from other persons or groups such as their distinctive cultural, ethnic, religious, or political characteristics (cf. Ikäheimo 2014, p. 27). While generic identity then has to do with *what* we are, qualitative identity determines *who* we are in the specific sense relevant for discussions of recognition of identity and difference.

To get back to variations in the objects and contents of the A-B-X scheme, *acknowledgement* constitutes a more specified form of 'taking' than identification does, because its objects or B:s can only be something like *evaluative or normative entities or facts* (Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007, p. 35–36; 2011, p. 8). These include things like norms, principles, rules, claims, reasons, values, and so on. When the possible X:s or contents in turn are things like 'valid', 'good', 'genuine', 'legitimate', and so forth, we can then acknowledge norms, principles, rules or

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**4** For elaborations of ontological categorizations based on *individuals*, *properties*, and *kinds*, see Loux (2006); Lowe (2006).

claims as valid; reasons as good; values as genuine, etc. Of special importance in the following will be the idea that we can also acknowledge *concepts* and more comprehensive *conceptual frameworks* built from meaning-relations between concepts as legitimate expressions of rationality and as normative entities in themselves. Moreover, as will become apparent shortly, there is also a relevant non-paradigmatic conception of recognition which is close to, or even identical with, acknowledgement in the sense just characterized.

Having already assumed that recognition means responding to someone in accordance with various dimensions of her personhood, we may now observe that especially due to Honneth, recognition is standardly also understood to be a *multidimensional* phenomenon. This means that recognition comes in three forms or different *species* under the overall *genus* of taking someone as a person (cf. Ikäheimo 2002).[5] The first dimension relevant for our purposes has to do with generic identity and what we are: In the species of *respect*, X refers to B's *being a person*, and relates to persons as capable of rational self-determination and bearers of rights and duties that follow from this status. The second relevant dimension has to do with qualitative identity and who we are: In the species of *esteem*, X refers to B's being *a person of a certain kind*, and relates to persons as having particular qualities, capacities, and achievements that merit evaluative affirmation by others. These two dimensions or species of respect and esteem are the ones that Taylor (1994, p. 38) discusses under the headings of 'politics of *equal dignity*' and 'politics of *difference*', respectively. In the former case, what is established is meant to be universally the same, "an identical basket of rights and immunities", whereas in the latter case, what we are asked to recognize is "the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else". The third standardly distinguished dimension of personhood finally has to do with numerical identity and which unique individual we are: In the species of *friendship* or *love*, X refers to B's being *a certain person*, and relates to persons as singular, needy beings capable of happiness and misery.

If we stick to the paradigmatic sense of recognition as an interpersonal relation as a matter of principle, then we commit ourselves to an essentially *dialogical* or *bilateral* conception according to which there is no such thing as one-sided recognition, i.e. it always takes the attitudes of two persons to constitute recognition. This means that A's recognitive attitude towards B counts as recognition only if B also has relevant attitudes towards A or A's recognitive attitude. More specifically, B has to recognize A as a *competent recognizer*. Even though the dialogical conception thus understands recognition to be a two-way complex of recognitive

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**5** The standard tripartite distinction in the literature between *love*, *respect* and *esteem* comes from Honneth (1995). Cf. Table 1 in Section 5 below. See also Thompson (2006); Iser (2013).

attitudes, this is *not* the same as supposing it to be a *symmetrical* affair. If A takes B to be an excellent painter or boxer, for example, the occurrence of proper recognition does not require that B symmetrically thinks the same of A, but only that B takes A to be a competent judge on the matter. To keep in line with this essentially dialogical or bilateral conception, the definition of the genus recognitive attitude given earlier would then have to be extended into something like *taking someone as a person, the content of which is understood and which is accepted by the other person* (Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007, p. 42).[6]

Provided that we can extend the concept of recognition beyond its original, strictly interpersonal context, then another, more far-ranging concept of recognition becomes available to us. This requires that two steps can be taken. Firstly, we need to *abstract* (in the sense of focusing exclusively on, or disregarding other aspects) A's recognitive attitude towards B *from its dialogical context*, and conceive it as a one-way *monological* phenomenon. The second required step towards the extension of the concept of recognition then is that we have to *generalize* the monological recognition *from the interpersonal case* into a more wide-ranging concept beyond personhood to include adequate *unilateral* responses to *any* normatively relevant features of *anything at all*. Being regarded as possessing normatively relevant features is clearly not the same as being regarded as a person. In terms of the A-B-X scheme, this means that the B:s or objects of recognition do not have to be restricted to persons alone, and that the X does not have to be linked exclusively with personhood either. In effect, then, the unilateral view is brought closer again to that of *acknowledgement*. Thus, we could say that A *unilaterally recognizes* B whenever A (more or less adequately) responds to B in ways called for or required by B's normatively relevant features, whether or not B recognizes A as a recognizer, or is aware of this response, or cares about it at all, and indeed whether or not B is even capable of this.[7]

# 3 Conceptual Rationality

We now have at our disposal a relatively articulated understanding of *recognition itself*, its specific dimensions of *respect* and *esteem*, and characterizations

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**6** In connection with the dialogical or bilateral conception, Laitinen (2010, p. 329) talks about 'the mutuality-insight' and 'giving and getting recognition' defining the latter terms thus: B *gets recognition* from A, only in cases where B not only is capable of recognizing A, but in fact recognizes A as a recognizer, and is aware of this response, and cares about it. And A successfully *gives* recognition only if B in fact *gets* recognition.

**7** This is only a slight terminological modification of Laitinen's (2010, p. 329) definition of 'recognizing and being recognized'.

of two different conceptions of recognition in the form of a narrower *bilateral* and a wider *unilateral* notion. In the beginning, I talked about rational ways of approaching cultural encounters, and stated that my attempt at a systematic model towards this end would be based on the idea that reason and rationality have a positive contribution to make. I also said that my specific focus would be on a conceptual form of rationality. It is now time to consider more closely the relationships between recognition, concepts, and rationality.

If we analyse recognition as an instantiation of the general A-B-X scheme consisting of some A taking B as X, then *concepts* seem to play a constitutive role in recognition via the *necessary specification of the X*, or the 'as what' clause. According to the analysis, recognition by a subject of the object will always have to occur *as something*, and conceptually empty recognitions do not appear to constitute a genuine possibility at all. Therefore, the assumption is that A cannot recognize B *simpliciter*, without any specific conceptual content or X. It could also be argued as a general point that there is no givenness of an intentional object in 'takings' or attitudes without some specification of that object in the perspective of the subject. Consequently, there is a fundamental sense in which concepts and recognition seem to be necessarily connected. Even in linguistic expressions like 'I recognize you' or 'the Scots recognize the United Kingdom' apparently involving only A and B, some specification of X is either implicitly assumed or otherwise contextually provided.

Adding the notion of *rationality* into the picture, it can be observed that there is already a close connection between the paradigmatic sense of recognition as a bilateral *interpersonal relation* and the notion of rationality in that rationality is standardly considered to be a defining feature of *personhood*.[8] It is also important to note that in everyday language as well as in philosophical usage, *reason* and *rationality* have a number of different meanings.[9] Philosophers often take 'reason' or 'rationality' to have its core meaning in *logical or argumentative reason*, that is, in the ability or skill to carry out logically valid reasoning or to give valid arguments for one's views. However, another important meaning is related to *conceptual rationality*, or the ability to organize one's sensations by means of concepts.[10]

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**8** Rationality can be seen as a defining feature of personhood both in the sense of *psychological capacity* and in the sense of *normative status*. On this distinction, see Ikäheimo (2014, p. 19–20).

**9** In addition to *argumentative* and *conceptual* rationality, Haaparanta (2010, p. 7–8) lists seven other conceptions of rationality.

**10** For present purposes, it is enough that concepts are understood as something that can perform such organization or structuring. Ontological analyses of *concepts themselves* are outside the scope of this paper.

In many of the various meanings of rationality, including the conceptual one we are focusing on here, the idea of *normative control* plays an important role. In argumentative rationality, the control is primarily related to correct inferential steps, whereas in the case of conceptual rationality the control is related e.g. to normative criteria for the correct use of concepts. Moreover, conceptual rationality is also connected with many of the dimensions crucially important for our psychological capacities and our normative status as persons. This is nicely depicted by Paul Redding (2013, italics mine):

> Concepts are not the contents of so-called thought-bubbles. They are the hinges or links of reasoning processes. They describe those aspects of thought that enables it to make *the right connections*: connections with the rest of the world; with other thoughts; and with actions. I use the word 'right' here to indicate *the possibility of getting these connections wrong*.

> Looked at this way, a concern with concepts can seem important indeed. To recycle an idea from Aristotle, *it's the capacity for conceptual thought that allows us to reason and act on the basis of reasons*, and not just react to environmental stimuli. That we all work with concepts at some level allows us to exercise reason and act freely – to be more than mere bundles of conditioned responses. *Concepts are what make us distinctively us.*

If concepts are indeed what make us distinctively us, that is, persons, free rational beings, or *freie Vernunftwesen* (cf. Ikäheimo 2014, Chs. 2 and 3), then concepts must also have a central role in paradigmatic recognition understood as *taking someone as a person*.[11] Under the politics of *equal dignity*, concepts and conceptual rationality are thus crucial contributors to *what* we are, and therefore also to the normatively relevant generic features of persons to which the adequate recognitive response then is *respect*.[12]

In addition to concepts' essential contribution to *general* personhood, conceptual rationality is highly relevant also for *specific* identities of persons. If concepts and conceptual frameworks are understood as ways of controlling or organizing our sensations, thoughts, and actions, as suggested above, then the specific way in which we perform this organizing obviously also contributes quite heavily to our *qualitative identity*, *self-identity*, and *group-identity*. Under the politics of *difference*, concepts and conceptual rationality are thus crucial contributors also to *who* we are. They essentially mold many of the normatively relevant

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**11** It will be remembered that *taking someone as a person* was our first definition of the genus 'recognitive attitude' in the previous section.
**12** Laitinen (2002, p. 469) defines *adequate recognition* in the following manner: A adequately recognizes B as X when she treats B in ways consistent with B's being X [in the interest of discursive consistency, I have replaced Laitinen's 'Z' with 'X'].

qualitative features of persons that concern their distinctive cultural, ethnic, religious, or political characteristics, and to which the adequate recognitive response then can be *esteem*. The qualification 'can be' is important here, because as for example Taylor (1994, p. 70) has argued, *a favorable judgment* of esteem or worth *on demand* does not seem to make much sense. There are also other kinds of reasons why we cannot simply assume that esteem is the default response to specific cultural identities. Some of the identities might, for example, fail to recognize the equal status of some other persons or groups of persons, or even actively endorse and participate in violations of their basic human rights.

Having already suggested an understanding of concepts and conceptual frameworks as *norms* for controlling or organizing our sensations, thoughts, and actions,[13] we may now raise the issue of whether it is plausible to assume that we could recognize concepts and conceptual frameworks themselves *directly*, as normative entities. Since *individual concepts* and more comprehensive *conceptual frameworks* built from meaning-relations between concepts do not have self-relations, they cannot be subjects or objects of recognition in exactly the same sense that persons can be. However, with the conceptual resources elaborated so far, the direct recognition of concepts and conceptual frameworks would seem to be possible as attitudes and corresponding acts of *acknowledgement* or *unilateral recognition*.

Having understood concepts and conceptual frameworks functionally as ways of controlling or organizing our sensations, thoughts, and actions, we could now sum up the different roles which functionally understood concepts themselves have been suggested to play. Firstly, the structure of the A-B-X scheme seems to presuppose that in all acts of recognition, there needs to be a specification of the X or the 'as what' clause. In the liberal sense of Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007, p. 43), the different 'takings' captured by the A-B-X scheme are understood as *relations-to-world* of persons such that these relations can range from pre-linguistic coping and vague background understandings all the way to clear and distinct beliefs. All these relations-to-world are then conceived to be that person's 'takes', 'views', 'understandings', 'stances', 'intentions' or 'attitudes' towards the world. In varying degrees of articulation, the relations are thus controlled, organized, or structured by concepts. Secondly, this very conceptual structuring of our sensations, thoughts, and actions has also been taken as central both to our generic identity as human beings or persons and to our specific identities as persons of a certain kind. Thirdly, it has been suggested that because they are systems of norms, concepts and conceptual frameworks could also be considered as objects of unilateral recognition or acknowledgement.

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**13** Cf. Ikäheimo (2014, p. 170).

# 4 Mediated Recognition

In the previous section, an attempt was made to integrate concepts, conceptual frameworks and conceptual rationality into our understanding of recognition. The central idea was to argue that concepts and conceptual frameworks have important embedded roles in the constitution of both generic personhood and specific identities of persons.[14] It was also suggested that with the responsive resource provided by unilateral recognition, we might be able to recognize or acknowledge concepts and conceptual frameworks directly.

In order to further the construction of our systematic model of recognition from where we have gotten so far, we need to move beyond the unilateral and bilateral forms, and start considering *trilateral* or *mediated* contexts of recognition. Such contexts are created by introducing *a mediating third party C* into the recognitional setting. In our familiar schematic terms, we could think of A's unilateral recognition of C as the first step. We could then think of *mediated recognition* as occurring so that even if A does *not* recognize B *directly*, A *can* nevertheless recognize B *via* C. If such recognitional relations can be built via C into both directions, then we can attain bilateral recognition between A and B as mediated by C. Such an end result constitutes a qualified *external unification* of A and B by C. Described at this schematic level of generality, the C:s can be persons, like judges in court, referees in a football game, or negotiators in peace talks. However, the C:s can also be non-personal entities like common norms, rational standards, concepts, or conceptual frameworks which both A and B can acknowledge or unilaterally recognize even if they do not acknowledge or recognize each other directly. From these unilateral recognitions of C, A and B can then proceed to mediated recognitions of each other.

To get a better grasp of how trilateral contexts of mediated recognition are supposed to work, two relevant examples from the literature can be used as illustrations. The first one comes from Peter Jones, who considers cases where esteem or direct merit recognition of specific identities is not forthcoming. In such cases, A does not (and perhaps even cannot) recognize B directly, because this would demand what the values of A simply cannot concede (cf. Jones 2006a, p. 140; 2006b, p. 40). The sense in which 'directly' is used by Jones has to do with the direct recognition of a *specific* identity under the species of *esteem* or a judgment of worth. Let us suppose, for example, that A is an atheist while B is a Christian.

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**14** It is interesting to compare this idea with Jones's (2006a, p. 140) points according to which the language of identity sinks people's particularities into their very being, and how in some instances, such as religious identities, beliefs are constitutive of identity (Jones 2006a, p. 142).

It might then be the case that A cannot accord recognition to the Christian B *as a Christian*, because A takes the value of Christianity to be nil or negative. Of course, the same may be symmetrically true of B, who might be unable to esteem the atheist A *as an atheist*, because B takes the value of atheism to be nil or negative. There seems to be a problem, then, in demanding recognition from persons to identities to which they have reason to take exception. Consequently, recognition in such cases cannot plausibly be assumed to be based on the esteem, merit, value, or worthiness given by the recognizer to the specific identity of the recognized.

The mediating third party C which Jones calls to the rescue in such situations is a *description* that is *different* from the original description incurring the disapproval. The significant difference in the mediating description is its *greater generality*. Among the alternative more general descriptions, categories, or identities that Jones considers are 'person', 'human being', and 'a being of equal moral standing'. In relation to specific identities, these are "more general and logically prior descriptions" which give "primacy to the general rather than the specific" (Jones 2006a, p. 133, 139).[15] Reliance on such more general categories makes it possible to *mediate* the recognition of someone's specific identity via their recognition under a more general form of identity. If A recognizes B *as a person* instead of *as a Christian*, then A's recognition of B's specific identity can be grounded in the recognition that A owes to B as a person, and not in any value that A should find in B's Christian identity (Jones 2006b, p. 35). This makes it possible for us to begin not with specific identities and their relative merits but with persons and what matters to them. Thus, the reason why A can accord recognition to B's religious identity is that it is *B's* specific identity; it can matter to A because, and in so far as, it matters to B. For the same reason, B can also accord mediated recognition to A's atheist identity, quite independently of B's own evaluation of the merits of that specific identity. Traveling through a general mediating identity can thus constitute a constructive contribution to the initial situation of non-recognition.

The second example of a mediated trilateral context of recognition comes from Ikäheimo's (2014, p. 59–61)[16] discussion of what he calls *institutionally mediated recognition*. If we consider, to begin with, e.g. a system of private property based merely on bilateral interpersonal recognition of ownerships between A and B, then we may conjecture that it can at best be a highly unstable arrangement which is dependent on the contingent attitudes and actions of A and B alone. The instability of such a bilateral arrangement can however be solidified by introducing a third independent institutional element C into the context.

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**15** Jones (2006b, p. 31) also points out that the recognition of particularities *presupposes* and *depends upon* more general forms of recognition.
**16** Ikäheimo's discussion here is related to J. G. Fichte's thought.

Thereby, a new kind of institutionally mediated relationship of recognition is created. A and B are then to entrust their authority over their relationship to an impartial and trusted third instance C. This *third party* is not a third person, but *positive law*, or in other words *a state* grounded on a system of norms written down as laws.

The introduction of the mediating third party C into the context creates *three different directions* of recognition, the first two of which are vertical in nature. The state's, or C's, *downward* recognition of the citizens, or A and B, grants them certain rights and duties. The citizen's, or A's and B's, *upward* recognition of the state, or C, is recognition of the legitimacy of the laws and norms that constitute the state, or C, as an institution. The citizens', or A's and B's, *horizontal* recognition of each other then concerns their mutual rights, or each other *as rights-holders* rather than as singular individuals. In this generated trilateral context, it is important to distinguish between *purely intersubjective* recognition between persons on the one hand and *institutionally mediated* recognition between persons on the other (Ikäheimo 2014, p. 61).[17] The former is an *unmediated* relation between A and B, whereas the latter is a relation between A and B *mediated* by C.

In both of our examples of mediated recognition, *a rise in generality* plays an important functional role. In the Jonesian strategy, the specific description or identity blocking the possibility of direct recognition is changed into a more general one. By thus moving e.g. from 'atheist' or 'Christian' to 'person' or 'human being', the mediated machinery of recognition can get going. In Ikäheimo's institutionally mediated recognition, the recourse to a system of norms written down as laws also implies a rise in generality, since the law is by nature a general conceptual normative framework which governs specific cases and individual persons falling under its jurisdiction. In addition, Ikäheimo's discussion introduces the notions of *upward*, *downward*, and *horizontal* recognition, with which trilateral contexts of mediated recognition can be usefully analysed.

Combining the rise in generality, the vertical and horizontal directions of recognition, and our earlier discussion of conceptual rationality, we can now move to an explicit consideration of general concepts and conceptual frameworks in the role of C. The *generality* of concepts and conceptual frameworks based on them is of course a *relative* matter in the sense that while e.g. 'person' is more general than 'Christian', it is still less general than 'sentient being' or 'living organism', and while 'Christian' is more specific than 'person', it is still less specific than 'Roman Catholic', 'Orthodox', or 'Protestant'(cf. Jones 2006a, p. 131–132; 2006b,

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**17** To highlight this distinction, Ikäheimo (2014, p. 61) introduces the expression 'recognition*' for institutionally mediated recognition between persons.

p. 31; see also Lowe 1998, p. 174–189).[18] This point about the relativity of generality (and specificity) is worth keeping in mind also in connection with *trilateral contexts of conceptually mediated recognition*.

With the systematic resources articulated so far, we can begin the construction of such a context with the person A's unilateral *upward* recognition of a general conceptual framework C. Since such conceptual frameworks can be seen as norms for controlling or organizing our sensations, thoughts, and actions, and since these norms are collectively authorized and administered (cf. Redding 2013; Ikäheimo 2014, p. 170), just as the ones constituting the laws of a state are, we may then talk analogously also of C's *downward* recognition of A. Supposing that a similar vertical two-way procedure is repeatable between another person B and C, we can then get to bilateral *horizontal* recognition between A and B mediated by the general conceptual framework C. What kind of possible application or relevance, then, could such an abstractly characterized procedure based on generality have in relation to recognition between actual persons and their specific identities? We have already seen some examples, and interpreting the following quote from Taylor (1994, p. 67, italics mine) in a suitable way provides us with useful further pointers:

> What has to happen is what Gadamer has called a '*fusion of horizons*'. We learn to move in a *broader horizon*, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as *one possibility* alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture. The 'fusion of horizons' operates through our developing *new vocabularies of comparison*, by means of which we can articulate these contrasts.

As in the problematic cases of direct esteem of specific identities, or in the unstable system of private property based merely on bilateral interpersonal recognition, the opening up of a *broader horizon* with *new vocabularies of comparison* can be of real help also in further cases. Cultural differences can sometimes be based on organizing our thought in radically different ways. Thus, in crossing intellectual, emotional, volitional, and moral barriers related to multiculturalism and the diversity of identities, it can be useful to realize that a specific identity constitutes just *one possibility* among a multitude of others.

# 5 The Categorial Stance

Having articulated the basic trilateral structure of conceptually mediated recognition, and having also considered some illustrative examples, what now remains of the task of constructing the systematic model that I have been gradually building

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**18** For the theme of recognition in ecumenical contexts, see Hietamäki (2014).

is the introduction and addition of 'the categorial stance' into the picture. Regarding this final theoretical move, two immediately relevant questions can be raised. The first one concerns the nature of the categorial stance, and the second one concerns its role. In other words: *what is* the categorial stance, and *what can it do* for a systematic model of mediated recognition?

As a response to the first question, we can understand *the categorial stance*[19] as *an epistemic position* operating with *the most general ontological categories and relations*. The categorial stance knowingly utilizes philosophy's unique contribution to the study of categorizing,[20] and being an epistemic position, the categorial stance can be analysed in terms of the A-B-X scheme which we have been working with all along. What, then, *are* the most general ontological categories and relations that the categorial stance operates with? According to a traditional understanding, ontology is the most general of all the disciplines. Its aim as a category theory is to identify the nature and structure of all that there is. Central to this project is the delineation of *the categories of being*, which are understood as the most general or highest kinds under which anything that exists falls. Relevant tasks then involve e.g. identifying the relevant kinds or the categories recognized, specifying the characteristics or categorial features specific to each, and indicating the ways those very general kinds or categories are related to each other e.g. in terms of their relations of priority or ontological dependence.[21]

To achieve a clearer understanding of the kind of categories that the ontological stance is supposed to operate with, we do not need to plunge very far into developments of any specific ontological theories. Instead, we may simply focus on examples of ontological categories which seem to have immediate relevance for our discussion of recognition.[22] A basic idea behind ontological generality is that if we continue the kind of rise in generality already familiar from the Jonesian example, i.e. from 'Protestant' to 'Christian' to 'human being' towards more and more general levels, then we finally reach an ontological level of generality from which the only remaining step upwards is to something indiscriminate and all-encompassing like 'entities', or 'all that there is'. Ontological categories

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**19** To some extent, this terminology is meant to echo Dennett's (1987) notion of *the intentional stance*. In his work on reification, Honneth (2008) also repeatedly uses the notion of a stance.
**20** Cf. Westerhoff (2005, p. 1); see also Lowe (1998, p. 174–189).
**21** An excellent introduction to ontology or general metaphysics as category theory along these very lines is Loux (2006), from whom the characterizations in the text are also drawn. For systematic developments of ontological category theory along Aristotelian lines, see Lowe (1998, 2006). For a historical overview of the overall theme of the categories of being, see Haaparanta and Koskinen (2012).
**22** The category of *persons* arguably already constitutes an ontological category crucially important for discussions of recognition.

then organize, structure, or categorize this '*being as such*' on the highest possible levels of generality, before it is divided further into more specific or more limited categories. In terms of our two dimensions of recognition, or of Taylor's politics of equal dignity and difference, *kinds* and *properties* can be considered highly relevant examples of ontological categories. In addition to these two, it is useful and perhaps also necessary to distinguish a third category of *individuals*, which are the entities that belong to different kinds and possess various properties.

While *kinds* constitute the individuals that instantiate them as *what* they are, *properties* and their combinations merely modify or *characterize* individuals antecedently marked out by kinds. This categorization partly corresponds with the already familiar distinction between *what* something is and *who* someone is, provided that the entity in question is a human being or a person. Kinds are *individuative* entities in the sense that they constitute their members as individuals distinct from other individuals of the same kind as well as from individuals of other kinds. Thus, everything that belongs e.g. to the kind *person* is marked out as a discrete *individual*, as *one* person countably distinct and separate both from other persons and from entities of other kinds (cf. Loux 2006, p. 20). Whereas kinds classify and individuate, properties describe, modify, or characterize individuals. In terms relevant for recognition, properties then are the entities out of which specific cultural identities are built.[23] To illustrate how the general ontological categories of *individuals*, *properties*, and *kinds* are very closely connected with various aspects and dimensions of recognition discussed before, these can all be collected into the following table, which also finds a place in its last column for the third Honnethian (see Honneth 1995; cf. also Thompson 2006; Ikäheimo 2014) dimension of recognition directed at individual persons, namely *friendship* or *love*:

**Table 1:** Ontological categories and dimensions of recognition.

| Ontological category | Kinds | Properties and their combinations | Individuals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Form of identity | *Generic identity* | *Qualitative identity* | *Numerical identity* |
| Aspect of personhood | *Being a person* | *Being a person of a certain kind* | *Being a certain person* |
| Normative ground | *Equal dignity* | *Unequal merits* | *Unequal personal significance* |
| Recognitive response | *Respect* | *Esteem* | *Friendship/love* |

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**23** In a fuller account of identity-constitution, the category of *relations* would have to be included in addition to properties, but we are here trying, for illustrative purposes, to keep the story as simple as possible.

A noteworthy feature of the ontological categories is that although they are above represented specifically in connection with aspects of persons and dimensions of their recognition, as very general categories, they both *transcend* and *unify* different domains of discourse. This applies also in cases of different cultural spheres and distinct identities. As a consequence of their utmost generality, ontological categories are not domain-specific. The categories of individuals, properties, and kinds are operational whether we are talking or thinking about numbers, galaxies, bananas, or persons.[24] According to the suggested categorization, these are all *individuals* belonging to *kinds* and possessing *properties*.

The top-down analysis of dimensions of recognition is already one thing that the categorial stance can do for a systematic model of recognition. In addition, the categorial stance can also provide access to a general conceptual framework which offers a *broader* perspective, facilitates *a fusion of horizons*, articulates *a sphere of possibilities* (cf. Taylor 1994, p. 67), and thus potentially contributes to building relations of mediated recognition between initially disagreeing parties. Mediated recognition can thus establish a higher-order recognitive context in which the initial disagreement at the level of direct or unmediated recognition may continue to exist, but its potential for creating social conflict is mitigated. For rather obvious reasons, the general conceptual framework-level accessible from the epistemic position of the categorial stance could be called *the ontological platform*.

Utilizing our earlier example of a cultural encounter between an atheist and a Christian, we might suppose e.g. that the atheist A bases her relation-to-world on natural scientific theories from fields like physics, biology and neurophysiology, while the Christian B holds that God, persons, religious institutions, and everyday contexts of action are fundamental to hers. From the categorial stance, it can then be observed that A and B operate with different ontological categories, and probably also hold different views of their relations of dependence or fundamentality. On the ontological platform, their cultural differences and distinct identities can be articulated as differences in choices of entities or categories, as well as in varying relations of priority among these.[25]

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**24** Although these do not show in the table, the same is true of various ontological relations like *instantiation* of kinds and varieties of *existential dependence*. For more on relations of *existential* or *ontological dependence*, see Fine (1995); Correia (2005); Schaffer (2009); Lowe (2010).

**25** It is important to note in this connection that there might also be differences at the very level of the ontological platform itself. Instead of an ontological categorization based on individuals, properties, and kinds, an ontological theory might also be founded e.g. upon so-called *tropes* (cf. Simons 1994), or *states of affairs* (cf. Armstrong 1997). For the relativity of ontological categorizations themselves, see Westerhoff (2005).

In the previous section, we considered an example where direct or unmediated recognition was not forthcoming because this would have demanded what the values of the recognizer simply could not concede. In addition to such *normative* barriers, there could also be more *cognitive* hindrances to recognition. One of these cognitive blocks is *the neutrality illusion*, which arises when one is epistemically stuck in one's own position, or within the confines of the conceptualization related to one's own specific identity, without being able to see it from a broader perspective as a genuine possibility among various others. Both A and B could in principle be in the grip of the neutrality illusion, which would then result in the other's position or specific identity seeming incomprehensibly alien and therefore beyond recognition. The transcendence and unification achieved by adopting the categorial stance can facilitate a fusion of horizons on the basis of which a genuine sphere of possibilities can be created such that it is no longer plausible to view one's own specific identity as a neutral starting point. Consequently, in our example the atheist A cannot assume that her position constitutes a neutral ground for issuing judgments about or recognitional responses to B's Christian identity. Naturally, the same applies with respect to B: she cannot assume her own religious position as a neutral ground for evaluating A's atheist identity either.[26]

In our example case, the contribution of the categorial stance goes even further than the articulation of a sphere of possibilities in that the ontological platform discernible from it is actually *presupposed* by *any* specific identity formed in relation to God, or to the issue of God's existence. The atheist A cannot even conceptualize her specific identity or position without stepping outside the boundaries of the natural sciences. In the very act of formulating any judgments on the existence or non-existence of God, one effectively oversteps the legitimate boundaries of physics, biology, and all the rest of the natural sciences (cf. Dennett 2006). It simply is not in the business of the natural sciences to operate with the concept or category of God at all. Thus, if A declares herself to be an atheist, she has thereby already ascended onto the ontological platform and simultaneously also left the more narrowly defined competence spheres of the natural sciences behind. Of course, the same applies to B and her religious identity. Any identity formulated in relation to God inevitably involves ontological or metaphysical commitments one way or the other. The recognition of this fact, made possible by the categorial stance, is something that also helps to counter the neutrality illusion.

By opening up a broader horizon, the categorial stance can lead to a *discovery of resemblance* between initially disagreeing parties on a new level of generality.

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**26** The general idea of ontological categories and relations as articulators of spheres of possibilities coheres quite nicely with the conceptions of ontology held e.g. by Lowe (1998, p. 1–27; 2006, p. 3–19) and Bottani (2012).

At the very least, distinct parties can come to see themselves as well as each other as players on the ontological platform. Even if further resemblances were not successfully discovered by the disagreeing parties, the categorial stance can still offer a conceptual framework within which *a more reflected approval of the otherness of the other* can be articulated. An example of the latter would be a conceptualization of the differences between an *atheist* A and a Christian, or more generally, a *theist* B by using ontological notions like *existential dependence* on the mediating platform C. This could then lead to an increased mutual understanding between A and B via C. Both a discovery of resemblance and a more reflected approval of the otherness of the other plausibly count as positive contributions towards recognition. The former leads to a qualified or partial *agreement*, while the latter amounts to an increase in *understanding* between disagreeing parties (cf. Pihlström 2013).[27]

# 6 Conclusions

In the foregoing, I set out to articulate a systematic model of mediated recognition based on the notion of the categorial stance. To begin with, an analysis of the concept of recognition was presented together with the two specified dimensions of respect and esteem. Two distinct forms of recognition, the bilateral and the unilateral, were also distinguished. In the next phase, an attempt was made to integrate the idea of conceptual rationality with the adopted understanding of recognition. It was argued that concepts and conceptual frameworks have important embedded roles in the constitution of both generic personhood and specific identities. A suggestion was also made that with the resource of unilateral recognition, conceptual frameworks could be directly recognized. Next, I discussed the trilateral structure of conceptually mediated recognition, and considered some illustrative examples. In the final stage, I then added the suggested contribution of the categorial stance into the overall picture.

Further questions can and should be raised, implicit problems need to be dealt with, and much more remains to be worked out in fuller detail. However, the general theoretical context for conducting such additional inquiries has been at least preliminarily charted in the present paper. A central idea behind the

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**27** Although we cannot go further into the theme of *tolerance* on present occasion, it could be pointed out that both *partial agreement* and *increased understanding* are something that recognition seems to add to *mere tolerance*, while still remaining short of a *full agreement* between distinct parties. For more on tolerance and its relation to recognition, see Forst (2012a,b); Galeotti (2002); cf. also Saarinen (forthcoming).

foundational attempt has been that the categorial stance can be used as a rational resource for a conceptually mediated form of recognition. To back up this claim, various systematic prerequisites were articulated in the earlier parts of the paper. An attempt was then made to show that with the conceptual resources provided by the categorial stance, we can produce an analysis of various aspects and dimensions of recognition; articulate a sphere of possibilities which opens up a broader horizon; reveal ontological presuppositions of specific identities; counter the neutrality illusion; and facilitate a discovery of resemblance or a more reflected approval of the otherness of the other. Mediated recognition based on the categorial stance can thus function as a *theoretical* instrument that is potentially useful in explaining, reconstructing and understanding certain recognitive phenomena. In addition to this, it can also function as a *practical* tool or option for shaping some recognitive relations in the actual and concrete world that we live in.

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