

Book Review

Heikki Ikäheimo, *Recognition and the Human Life-Form: Beyond Identity and Difference*. New York and London: Routledge, 2022. ISBN 978-1-032-13999-9 (hbk). ISBN 978-1-032-22332-2 (pbk). Pp. 248. £130.00 (hbk). £38.99 (pbk).

There are at least three projects in the latest book on recognition by Heikki Ikäheimo: (1) a careful disentangling of the many strands of the phenomenon of recognition, (2) a historical account of the origins of recognition in classical German philosophy and its rebirth in the theories of Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, and (3) an exposition of the human life-form as a universal account that offers a standard by which all human societies can be judged. While the bulk of the book is concerned with the first two projects, it is the third that gives the work its title and that Ikäheimo takes to be his most novel contribution to the discourse. After an analytic first chapter that lays out the different dimensions and modalities of recognition, Chapters 2 through 5 are largely exegetical. Ikäheimo masterfully shows how the elements of recognition arise in the discourse's foundational texts and in the recent debates over what a politics and social theory centred on recognition can accomplish. There is no way within this review to comment on Ikäheimo's careful and nuanced readings of the key texts, or to render a judgement on the claim to universality that he makes in the end. I focus instead on the project of providing an adequate account of what recognition is and on one feature of the account that raises more questions than it answers.

Ikäheimo thinks that much of the recognition discourse has suffered from a lack of clarity about just what entities are in play when we talk about relations of recognition between persons. He makes a fourfold distinction that is supposed to allow us to capture these relations in all their richness while also identifying the conceptual core of the phenomenon. Acknowledging that various accounts 'focus on actions, on relations, or on attitudes', Ikäheimo holds 'that *attitudes* are the basic unit' from which the other aspects of recognition should be analysed (15). This focus entails that Ikäheimo's account is largely concerned with the psychological preconditions and effects of recognition. He distinguishes the individual practical attitudes towards others that are key to the basic relation from what he calls 'complexes of attitudes and other psychological states' (15). The point of this distinction is largely to defend the methodological abstraction of the basic (usually dyadic) recognitive attitudes while also acknowledging that the specific

attitudes are typically accompanied by a whole complex of attitudes and affective states. Taking the individual subject in all their psychological richness, Ikäheimo then directs us to ‘concrete interpersonal relationships’ (17) in which simple attitudes and attitude complexes operate between individuals. ‘A paradigmatic example of a concrete interpersonal relation is that between persons who interact and communicate with each other regularly and have each other somehow in mind much of the time or at least often’ (17). The concreteness of these relationships stems in part from the way they are embedded in objective causal and institutional structures.

Thematising the institutional at many points in the book, Ikäheimo also takes one of his key claims to be the independence of the recognitive attitudes from their institutional embodiment. What he calls the purely intersubjective sense of recognition is typically a scene of two agents with a direct practical relation. He calls the sense of recognition captured in this scene ‘both the ontological and the ethical backbone of the human life-form’ (18). The relevant contrast is with ‘*norm-mediated* recognition’ (20) in which the relation between persons involves duties, rights and/or institutional roles. The purely intersubjective is primary because it is through such pure relations that we understand how key norms are generated (in a conceptual sense that Ikäheimo identifies with the ‘ontological’). The core of recognition is the taking of attitudes that are *personifying*, a way of regarding each other unconditionally that gives us the status of persons. Ikäheimo is wary of ‘status’ conceptions of personhood that attempt to operate independent of ‘psychological’ conceptions of the person, and he thinks that both conceptions are required for a full theory of the human life form. It is crucial for him that recognition can be understood at the level of attitudes, for ‘if one identifies [recognition] with particular attitudes, one is likely to find more invariance of both the phenomenon itself and its importance’ (18). With a purely intersubjective attitudinal core, the universality of the life-form is within reach.

Adapting Honneth’s ‘multi-dimensional’ account of recognition to his own terminology, Ikäheimo conceives of recognition along three dimensions: deontological, axiological and contributive. These three dimensions of recognition correspond to three ‘layers of personhood’ (that are secured through that recognition) and three corresponding ‘facts’ about the human life-form (that are shaped by recognition). Coming from the classical formulations in Fichte and the mature Hegel, the deontological dimension can appear to be the only one. This is the dimension that Fichte identifies with *right* and which Ikäheimo interprets as a matter of the (co-)authority of norms (38). Having gained prominence through the interpretations of Hegel by Terry Pinkard, Robert Pippin and Robert Brandom (among others), this dimension of *normativity* draws on the insight that ‘since there are no other “administrators” of the contents of these norms and no other source of their authority than human beings themselves, humans are, collectively

speaking, self-governing or autonomous beings' (215). While this deontological dimension is typically associated with the attitude of respect, the *axiological* dimension finds its paradigmatic attitude in love. He thinks of this axiological dimension as having 'to do with persons as concerned for their own well-being and possibly that of others and seeing the world in terms of good and bad' (14). We find this dimension already in the young Hegel; it corresponds in the life-form to the fact of human concern for present and future well-being. The third dimension, the 'contributive', has to do with individual contributions to a shared or common good. Ikäheimo finds this in Hegel, but especially in Honneth's conception of esteem and the self-esteem that comes from affirmation by other persons (161ff.). There is a danger of instrumentalization in this form of recognition, but in gratitude Ikäheimo finds an attitude of non-instrumental valuing of contributions (163).

Ikäheimo thematizes the tension between his attitude-based view and the stress on action in many recognition theorists, including Fichte and Hegel, yet it is not clear to me that he resolves the fundamental tension in favour of his view. He notes that one might think that 'acts of recognition' are fundamental, but he argues that attitudes remain central simply because an act is only one of recognition if it expresses an underlying recognitive attitude (18). I agree that one cannot have a proper action without the proper attitude, but does that mean that attitudes can be isolated as the basic building blocks apart from their role in actions? This question comes to the fore when Ikäheimo worries that attitudes fall outside the scope of norms because they are not directly under the agent's control (one cannot simply will to fall in love). If there is a norm to, say, love one's neighbour, the best one can do is to 'try to make it more likely that he comes to have the attitude of love. Trying to make it more likely is acting, and *that* can indeed be directly governed by norms, whereas coming to have an attitude is not' (21). This focus on attitudes leads to some surprising claims, such as 'gratitude is a response to attitudes or motivations, not to actions' (20). Because of this distance between norms and attitudes, Ikäheimo aligns norms (and institutions) with actions and purely intersubjective recognition with attitudes. Thus he writes that in institutionally mediated recognition 'it does not make much difference what exactly the attitudes of the recognizer and the recognizee towards each other are since recognition in the institutionally mediated sense is primarily a matter of actions and omissions rather than of attitudes' (83). He thus cites the greater 'psychological depth' of the purely intersubjective attitudes as opposed to the institutionally mediated actions. He thinks that Hegel's account in the *Encyclopedia* 'Phenomenology' puts attitudes front and center while the institutional roles leave individuals external to one another. Ikäheimo thus writes, 'In Hegel's words, only purely intersubjective recognition "unites humans internally"', whereas institutional recognition leaves the subjects in an important way external to each other and thus does not instantiate the moment

of unity of concrete freedom to the same degree' (84). The passage Ikäheimo cites is, curiously, in an Addition in which Hegel is talking of a need for a *Kampf*, for *action* that will allow the freedom of each to be for the other. In my view, the problem is that the purely intersubjective attitudes are merely internal. Clearly, the Hegelian goal is to unite the internal and external in recognition; that is just what a theory of action is for, a theory in which the inner attitudes are specifiable only in connection with the actions that express them.

There is a real worry about Ikäheimo's view that the attention to individual personhood in all its psychological depth tends to displace the normative and institutional. Aspects of his view even raise the worry that recognition becomes a vehicle for values (of personhood) that can be described in wholly individualistic terms. Clearly, Ikäheimo would not welcome that conclusion, as the whole thrust of his theory is to valorize the relational attitudes and their expression. Yet it is not always easy to see how the logic of realization fits with the idea of an attitudinal core. In his chapter on Hegel, he advocates a reading which he calls 'Aristotelian normative or evaluative essentialism' (89). The 'maximal realization' (89) of the human essence, namely concrete freedom, is the reconciliation of the individual with the other. Hegel's own view in the *Philosophy of Right* is clearly oriented by action and mediation by norms, and in the *Philosophy of Right's* Preface he is quite sceptical of calls for 'brotherhood' or 'friendship' as the basis of society. Ikäheimo does retain the deontological element of legal rights, along with the attitude of respect, yet much of his account aims for a kind of unconditional solidarity that is hard to reconcile with the pervasiveness of individual rights and competitive market relations.

In his claim for a universal human life-form Ikäheimo brings together his three dimensions of recognition with a conjectural universal anthropology. I cannot do justice to this rich account here. I only note one way in which he also runs into an issue in his final chapter because of the centrality of unconditional attitudes to his account. Though he suggests that unconditional recognition may be a requirement for 'social reproduction', in the end he chooses to focus instead on its status as a 'human *ideal* or evaluative essence' (220). Through being recognized unconditionally in the three ways Ikäheimo lays out, one 'realizes personhood to the fullest extent' (221). He raises two potential objections that his account must face owing to the claim that recognition both *responds* to something in the recognizee and that recognition *constitutes* the recognizee as a person. The answer to the question of how you constitute something that you also antecedently respond to can be given in terms of potentials for full personhood that are only actualized through recognition. The other issue is 'the apparent incompatibility of the thought that the unconditional mode of intersubjective recognition is *normatively* responsive to the psychological layer of the recognizee's personhood with the thought that it is *causally* responsive to it' (226). This problem arises because Ikäheimo holds that a

recognizer is causally responsive in the sense of being ‘motivationally affected or “moved”’ (226) by the recognizee. Such an immediate causal relation, whereby an attitude is directly caused by the other’s presence, appears to be in conflict with the normative because the latter is a matter of ‘voluntary control’ (227). To solve this problem, Ikäheimo comes back to his claims about the ‘various degrees of control on the subjective and objective factors that make it more or less likely that they will be affected or moved by other persons in the relevant circumstances’ (227). This requires a project of self-cultivation, and of education more generally, as instilling the dispositions to render one immediately responsive to others. There is something strangely external to this idea, as if we had to adopt a predictive stance to ourselves in trying to make it more likely that we are causally activated under the right circumstances. I think that Ikäheimo has gone astray in conceiving the responsiveness as a causal one in the first place, by taking it out of the realm of action and putting it in the realm of the immediately elicited attitudes. Even if the project of self-cultivation is central, that cultivation should surely be directed towards capacities for action and not simply to engender the right motivations. The latter account gives the impression that feeling is more important than action, whereas we should say that the right action should be accompanied by the right feeling.

Ikäheimo’s account is a compelling reminder that in the discourse of recognition we have the best freedom-based alternative to classical liberal individualism. The vision of solidarity over profit, love over vanity, and gratitude over self-interest, is one that deserves the attention of anyone concerned with the mounting populist and authoritarian pressures on liberal democracies, and one that brings home the need to make the case for a new ethical orientation to society. Ikäheimo reminds us of the danger of capitulation to market-oriented instrumentalization, and that, however omnipresent such instrumental actions are in the public sphere, they must not be allowed to take precedence in our imagination of what humanity can be.

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