

# *Misrecognition, Misrecognition, and Fallibility*

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**Res Publica**

A Journal of Moral, Legal and Social  
Philosophy

ISSN 1356-4765

Res Publica

DOI 10.1007/s11158-012-9183-5



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## Misrecognition, Misrecognition, and Fallibility

Arto Laitinen

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**Abstract** Misrecognition from other individuals and social institutions is by its dynamic or ‘logic’ such that it can lead to distorted relations-to-self, such as self-hatred, and can truncate the development of the central capabilities of persons. Thus it is worth trying to shed light on how *misrecognition* differs from adequate recognition, and on how *misrecognition* might differ from other kinds of mistreatment and disregard. This paper suggests that *misrecognition* (including nonrecognition) is a matter of inadequate responsiveness to the normatively relevant features of someone (their personhood, merits, needs etc.), and that if the kind of mistreatment in question obeys the general dynamic or ‘logic’ of mutual recognition and relations-to-self, then it may be called ‘misrecognition’. Further, this article considers the multiple connections between misrecognition and human fallibility. The capacity to get things wrong or make mistakes (that is, fallibility) is first of all a condition of misrecognition. Furthermore, there are two lessons that we can draw from fallibility. The first one points towards minimal objectivism: if something is to count as a mistake or incorrect response, there must accordingly exist a fact of the matter or a correct response. The other lesson points towards public equality: if our capacity to get things right on our own is limited, then public, shared norms will probably help. Such norms are easier to know and follow than objective normative truths, and they may contain collective cumulative wisdom; and of course the process of creating public norms embodies in itself an important form of mutual recognition between citizens.

**Keywords** Misrecognition · Fallibility · Honneth · Christiano · Objectivism · Public equality

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## Introduction

Misrecognition from other individuals and social institutions comes in many forms some of which matter more than others. Misrecognition can be politically motivating or it can cause powerlessness and apathy or do neither; cases of misrecognition range from harmless minor nuisances to crushing experiences creating traumatic wounds and significant suffering. More positively, receiving recognition is central for the practical relations-to-self of persons. Respect is related to self-respect, esteem to self-esteem, denigrating feedback concerning one's abilities is related to an internalized sense of incapacity, experienced humiliations are related to a sense of inferiority and so on (see e.g. Taylor 1992; Honneth 1995; Walker 2006). Misrecognition can lead to distorted relations-to-self, such as self-hatred, and can truncate the development of very central capabilities of persons, including the capacity to lead one's life, and gain self-awareness of one's nature as a potentially free being.

Given that misrecognition is of such importance, it is worthwhile trying to shed some light on how *misrecognition* differs from adequate recognition, and on how *misrecognition* possibly differs from other kinds of mistreatment and disregard. In the next section it will be suggested that *misrecognition* (including nonrecognition) is a matter of inadequate responsiveness to the normatively relevant features of someone (their personhood, merits, needs etc.), and in the section after that a broad definition of *misrecognition* as any kind of mistreatment or disregard is contrasted with narrower definitions holding that only some more specific kinds of mistreatment count as misrecognition. While there hardly is a correct definition, it is suggested that if the kind of mistreatment in question obeys the general dynamic or 'logic' of mutual recognition that respect, esteem etc. seem to do, then we could call all of those 'recognition'.

In addition to elaborating the idea of misrecognition, this paper considers the multiple connections between misrecognition and human fallibility. Quite straightforwardly, the capacity to get things wrong or make mistakes (that is, fallibility), seems to be a condition, transcendental if you wish, of misrecognition, which after all is a form of inappropriate responsiveness, or a kind of 'mistake' (fourth section). Furthermore, there seem to be two rival lessons that we can draw from fallibility. The first one points towards minimal objectivism: if something is to count as a mistake or incorrect response, there must accordingly exist a fact of the matter or a correct response, whether we know it or not (fifth section). The other lesson points towards public equality, or the public dimension of societal norms familiar from debates about public reason: if our capacity to get things right on our own is limited, then public, shared norms will probably help. Such norms are easier to know and follow than objective normative truths, and they may contain collective cumulative wisdom as opposed to individuals' private judgements; and of course the process of creating public norms embodies in itself an important form of mutual recognition between citizens (sixth section). In the debates on recognition and misrecognition these lessons have not been widely appreciated, so pointing them out constitutes a general desideratum for future discussions: anyone relying on the notion of misrecognition should ideally either show why these lessons need not be drawn after

all, or then provide some account of the nature of minimal objectivity and public equality.

### What is the Difference between *Misrecognition* and *Adequate Recognition*?

Human persons (and groups) are recognizers. That is to say that they can show, in many forms, adequate regard or sensitivity for anything that has significance, poses claims, has value or normative status. The loose formulation 'regard or sensitivity' covers all ways of 'taking and treating' the other, all sorts of responsiveness from immediate affective-cognitive-conative responses to reflectively giving these features due weight in practical reasoning, and to participating in relevant practices, accepting relevant principles and acting accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

In recognizing someone as a person, or a certain kind of person, or a certain person, we adopt a basic way of *being towards* that person, which shapes all our specific responses.<sup>2</sup> We experience those responses as subject to claims that the other's personhood in its concrete manifestation presents us with. Let us think of cognitive attitudes as responding to someone in terms of *acknowledging claims*. Thought of in this way, we really recognize someone as a person, or a certain kind of person, or a certain person, only if we acknowledge claims which her personhood or her particular features or her singular identity presents us with. From this point of view, a case of misrecognition can be seen as a case where the claims of B are not appropriately or adequately acknowledged by A.

It is possible to think that these claims are real normative features of the lifeworld, which are in principle independent of whether anyone 'makes' or expresses these claims, as well as independent of what A or B think that the claims of B's personhood are. Because of this, it is possible for both A and B to be mistaken about what the claims of B's personhood to be acknowledged (or the 'true' claims) really are. Neither A or B are infallible.

Thus, although people may want and demand recognition for various things, it is a different question as to whether these demands are normatively justified. This is because a normative theory of recognition tries to find some basis for assessing such claims, and answering the question about the difference between misrecognition and adequate recognition. As such, at the most general level, *adequate recognition* is a matter of adequate responsiveness to features of others: a matter of respecting those who are worthy of respect, esteeming those who are worthy of esteem etc.; whereas *misrecognition* is *inadequate* responsiveness. In order for the regard or sensitivity or responsiveness to be adequate, we should respect everyone who is worthy of respect (i.e. everyone); have genuine concern or care for beings capable of suffering or

<sup>1</sup> In Laitinen (2010a) I discuss the variety of responses, and the variety of features of persons in more detail.

<sup>2</sup> The second and fifth sections of this essay draw from Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007) and Laitinen (2002).

faring well or being happy (i.e. all sentient agents); and esteem everyone in accordance with their esteem-worthiness.<sup>3</sup>

Inadequate concern is constituted for example by various kinds of disrespect, misesteem and lack of concern, care or love. What these all have in common is that they violate normative demands of a special kind: normative demands that are rooted in the normatively or evaluatively significant features of the other person, such as the very fact that the other is a person and as such a possessor of a very weighty moral status, or that the other is vulnerable and capable of suffering in various ways, or that the other has merits of different kinds. There are also other types of normative demands, say, the demand to promote the expected impersonal value of actions, and this demand, valid or not, need not be rooted in the features of other persons.

All forms of misrecognition are by definition *prima facie* wrong, since they are by definition insensitive to some valid reasons or values. Different forms of misrecognition differ on which reasons or concerns that they are insensitive to. Or positively put, different forms of adequate recognition consist partly in responsiveness to reasons of some range. For example, *overall respect* partly consists in acknowledging that there is a strong and important reason not to 'wrong the other' (Scanlon 1998; Laitinen 2009). *Respect for autonomy* consists in acknowledging that there is reason to protect and honour the other's autonomous choices—even when they are (in one's own view) substantively mistaken. *Basic concern* or care partly consists in giving the other's well-being intrinsic weight in one's practical reasoning and in being concerned about obstacles to the other's well-being (Mason 2000, p. 27).<sup>4</sup> *Esteem* partly consists in acknowledging the normative relevance of the other's merits etc. In all of these cases, if one is *not* responsive to (what one takes to be) reasons in the range that partly distinguishes that attitude from others, then one is not recognizing the other in that way.<sup>5</sup>

Just as there are many varieties of adequate regard, wronging or mistreating others also comes in many varieties. For example, a recent volume illustrates the variety of violations of *human dignity*: instrumentalization, degradation, dehumanization, torture, rape, social exclusion, absolute and relative poverty, trade exploitation and bonded labour (Kaufmann et al. 2011; cf. Thompson and Yar 2011). These kinds of violations are arguably among the basic ways in which human beings can be mistreated, and the universal basis for criticizing these modes of treatment lies in the dignity of human persons, or their basic moral standing or status.

Further, it is not only basic human dignity, but the nature of *autonomous* agents that can be disrespected. Autonomy comes in many guises, varying from personal autonomy (the idea of setting one's life goals for oneself, and taking responsibility for those choices) to political autonomy via democratic participation (the idea of participating in collective self-rule, being a 'co-author' of shared norms and sharing

<sup>3</sup> To the extent that we relate to them 'esteem-wise' at all—which may well be optional normatively speaking (the other option being not having a view about their merits at all) and non-optional only given special relations or previous commitments.

<sup>4</sup> See also Ikäheimo (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Note however, that it may often be possible to be responsive to such reasons also without the attitudes—if one has other motivations that make one responsive to them.

responsibility for them), and from moral autonomy (the capacity to make moral judgements relying on one's own moral conscience and not on putative experts or authorities) to cognitive autonomy (the capacity to make competent judgements on non-moral matters as well, being a relevant conversation partner or witness) (see e.g. Fricker 2007).<sup>6</sup> Here, the basis for criticizing disrespect for autonomy lies directly in the normative significance of capacities for autonomous life. It is, for example, wrong to exclude women from collective decision-making on the pretence that they are not capable of it, when they in fact are.

Another family of ideas comes to play with the idea of adequate *esteem*. Here, too, there is a basic requirement for equal non-stigmatization and the absence of unjustified disesteem. Further variants of esteem include a non-personalized basic level esteem for anyone in any social position that contributes to the common good of society; gradeable but non-personalized esteem for everyone in one's social position; and further, gradeable personalized esteem for actual contributions and merits in the position held, and gradeable personalized feedback and esteem for achievements in self-realization projects. Further variants of inadequate treatment are related to love, care, concern, trust, solidarity, proper regard for cultural identity, shared form of lives or 'difference', and so on.

The basic point in all these variants, which are mentioned here merely to highlight the kind of phenomena at stake, is that the difference between *inadequate* and *adequate* regard is related to the relevant features of persons, and different features are relevant in different kinds of cases: merit may matter for esteem in ways in which merit do not matter for respect or love. The suggestion, then, is that *misrecognition* differs from adequate recognition precisely in that *misrecognition* is inadequate regard, whereas due recognition is adequate regard, in light of the evaluative and normative features of the other.

### **What is *Misrecognition* as Opposed to Other Possible Types of Disregard and Mistreatment?**

In the previous section it was stressed that *misrecognition* differs from adequate recognition in being a case of mistreatment or disregard. At this point it will be of interest to take up a definitional or terminological question: what is *misrecognition* as opposed to other possible types of mistreatment, abuse, disregard, wronging, insulting, or unjustifiable harming or injuring?<sup>7</sup> Is all such (in)adequate regard '(mis)recognizing'? Or only some subset?

A 'broad' view would suggest that *any* kind of mistreatment, or lack of regard, is a failure of recognition. Such a very broad definition suggests that *any* kind of wronging, mistreatment, abuse, disregard, unjustified harming, insulting or injuring,

<sup>6</sup> Arguably both cognitive and moral autonomy are involved in *recognitive* competence—the competence to recognize others, and indeed personal and political autonomy as well.

<sup>7</sup> This question can be understood as concerning the *nature* of recognition (is it a matter of attitudes, actions, expressions, statuses?), or the *scope* of recognition (narrower or broader). I will here put aside the question about the nature of recognition and use phrases like 'take or treat' (see Brandom 2007) to refer to it.

is a case of *misrecognition*.<sup>8</sup> This resembles the usage in which respect for persons is taken in an 'overall' sense: any kind of wronging or violating is a case of disrespect.

'Narrow' views would suggest that only *some* kinds or subsets of mistreatment and disregard are failures of recognition. Typically 'recognition' is used by any one author in a narrower, more precise sense, referring for example to adequate regard for cultural identities or for other minorities, or for the other's personhood, merits or needs, etc.

However, one may note that various narrow views differ on which narrow phenomenon they focus on. For Kantian universalists mutual recognition is really a matter of mutual respect. For Durkheimians mutual recognition could be a matter of mutual esteem and organic solidarity created by acknowledging contributions to the societal good. For those influenced by the ethics of care, recognition is crucially a matter of concern for needy, vulnerable beings. And for those approaching the notion of recognition from the debates on identity and difference, recognition is primarily a matter of public acknowledgement of the importance of cultural or other differences.<sup>9</sup> Often it is tempting to say, like Honneth among others does, that *each* of these approaches has identified one subset or kind or dimension or aspect of recognition. Making this move when new suggestions for types of recognition emerge amounts to adopting a more and more multidimensional view of recognition, and soon we may reach the broad view.

A possible advantage of any narrow view is first of all that a narrower definition of misrecognition and recognition promises to be more informative for researchers: instead of saying a little about many kinds of things, someone interested in recognition can get more out of a more restricted phenomenon by focusing on it. However, it is not impossible for a defender of a broad *definition* of recognition to pay attention to one narrow kind of recognition at a time—it is just that that kind of recognition is not taken to encompass the whole range of forms of recognition. The broad view is not any less fruitful as it can include all the fruitful narrower views and the substantive points they make. If lack of responsiveness towards the other as an autonomous being is wrong, and a case of misrecognition, its importance or significance is not diminished at all by the fact that there are very many other forms of wronging and misrecognizing.

The advantage for the broad view is that including any kind of mistreatment or disregard as a case of *misrecognition* draws attention to the general question of how relations of recognition affect self-relations: how respect is intertwined with self-respect, esteem with self-esteem and so on. Do not *all* ways of wronging or mistreating others have this dynamic? Are not the reasons why recognition and misrecognition *matter* the same all across the spectrum, since recognition matters to self-relations, to the nature of the relationship between persons, etc.? If so, this is the main reason for thinking that misrecognition in the broad sense is a unified phenomenon. I leave this here as a question for further study, suggest this as a possible benefit of the broad definition, and move on.

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<sup>8</sup> Note however, that *justified* harming may be a case of adequate recognition, for example in the just punishment of criminals. I thank Annette Dufner for posing the question.

<sup>9</sup> I discuss critically various narrow views in Laitinen (2010a).



## Misrecognition as a Problem for Fallible Agents Only

Misrecognition is a problem only for fallible agents, or for imperfect societies. Gods or angels might well be fully responsive to each other's need for recognition, but humans and human societies are certainly less than fully responsive. Presumably even in the best kind of human society that we could hope for at the 'end of history', there would still be misdemeanors, criminal courts, and sometimes some innocent people would by mistake be sentenced to jail. To imagine a society without any violations and responses to violations is to imagine a society for some other kinds of beings than humans. Even in a perfect human society interpersonal and institutional misrecognition is likely to take place, thanks to human imperfection and fallibility.

In the case of individuals, the fallibility may be of different kinds. Cases of misrecognition may be failures to notice the other or their *descriptive* features, or to recognize related *normative* claims, or, more dramatically, a failure to *care* about them sufficiently to be motivated to act accordingly (not to mention malevolent motivations). The last type of failure seems to be more insulting than the first one.

The failures of the second type, concerning the normative claims, can further be of *three kinds*. It can be a matter of *total ignorance* of that type of reasons at all (one has not grasped the relevant general reason or principle in question), or a systematic underestimation of this principle's weight in comparison to other valid principles. Secondly, it can be a matter of *systematic bias* in applying the principle (say, one does not believe that women's achievements *could* be any good and thus one is blinded by prejudice). Thirdly, it could just be a relatively isolated situation-specific blunder due to lack of attention. Of these, total ignorance may *de facto* be most harmful, but it seems that often misrecognition of the second type, of systematic bias, feels more deeply insulting. This is probably because it seems more personal and more arbitrarily discriminating, whereas the first type is just a case of 'ignorance'. Thus, it seems that cases where there is room for immanent criticism of recognizer's views feel most hurtful to the recognizee.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in the case of societies, failures to perform in accordance with justified principles may be of various kinds. The society may not have adopted that principle at all. Even though a principle should be adopted, a society may have failed to adopt it or make it a functioning positive norm at all. This may be because in the society the principle has not even occurred to many people, or because despite attempts to institute the norm it has been resisted and hasn't achieved the required support. Or there may be a systematically biased and partial understanding and application of the principle—say, there is a gender bias in how a principle is being applied. Or the society may have failed to institutionalize the normative understandings and ideals, and the institutions may guide people to act in ways contrary to the ideals.

Much more could definitely be said about the ways in which individuals and societies may fail to be responsive to normative claims, but the main point for now is the rather obvious fact that they can so fail, they are fallible. And because the individuals and societies that provide the context of one's life are fallible, it is possible that one faces misrecognition from them, of the kinds outlined above.

<sup>10</sup> On further variations of the failure of recognition, see Thompson and Hoggett (2011).

## From Fallibility to Minimal Objectivism

From this analysis of fallibility, two interesting lessons can be drawn. First, in order to make sense of our capacity to make mistakes, we must conceptually distinguish what is *in fact* (mis)recognition and what is subjectively *taken to be* (mis)recognition. Often enough these may coincide but not necessarily always. This means that we need to assume at least *minimal objectivism* about misrecognition.<sup>11</sup>

This is because we presumably are fallible not only as recognizers, but also in our normative expectations and experiences concerning recognition from others. There may be cases where our normative expectations are too demanding and go beyond what can reasonably be expected from others. And there may be cases where someone is being mistreated, but does not know any better and so has normatively speaking too modest demands for recognition. He or she could and should be dissatisfied with the treatment but, often for understandable reasons, is not. (In the extreme, think of cases of ruthless slave-owners with consistent lack of commitments towards the well-being of slaves, or slaves with an internalized sense of inferiority and a consistent set of low normative expectations.) What is common to the expectations and experiences that are misguided—in being either too demanding or too modest—is that there is a difference between what we *take to be* a case of misrecognition, and what *is* misrecognition. Misrecognition is not definable in terms of what is taken to be misrecognition—otherwise they could not come apart at all. This conceptual point suggests at least minimal objectivism about the standards of misrecognition. For some ‘takes’ to be ‘mistakes’, there must be some fact of the matter or a ‘correct take’ that differs from a ‘mistake’.

For another way of putting the same point, minimal objectivism is presupposed in the idea that changes in actual convictions may be cases of *improvement or learning*. Something is learning only if the latter view is better than the earlier view. And it is better thanks to its content, not thanks to the fact that it is held at a later stage—mere temporal change does not tell us which changes are for the better and which for the worse. It would have been better to have the better views even before they were acquired. So some contents of convictions are (at any given time) better than others, whether or not they are actually held at that time.

We may then say that the criterion for *adequate* (as opposed to inadequate) regard is given by the content of the best possible views and convictions that would be available to the parties. (Unavailability may in principle rule out some views that would otherwise in principle be even better—and thus what is adequate regard here and now may differ from what would be adequate regard at the ‘end of inquiry’). And this content of adequate regard give us the best account of the relevant differences between people and relevant equality between people that make a difference to how they ought to be treated and regarded.

Disagreements and disputes also presuppose minimal objectivism. We usually take it for granted in our moral and political life that there are meaningful disagreements. We are constantly engaged in struggles for recognition, as well as in

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<sup>11</sup> See Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007), from which this section partially draws from; see also Laitinen (2002).

disputes over recognition and misrecognition, in which we *de facto* presuppose that there is some, however, contested and difficult to find out, fact of the matter as to whether something really is a case of adequate or appropriate recognition or rather misrecognition.

If we do not make this presupposition of minimal objectivism, we are in danger of collapsing the distinction between struggles for recognition and strategic struggles. This is an undesirable consequence for theorists, who are discussing struggles and demands for 'recognition' in ethical, political and social theory. Feelings or experiences of misrecognition—whether explicitly articulated as demands for recognition or just experienced as more or less vague feelings of discontent—are crucially important indicators of misrecognition, but such feelings or experiences are not authoritative. There seems to be no reason to think that desires, demands or expectations for recognition are in principle any less vulnerable to ideological distortion or manipulation than other parts of our self-relations, world-relations or interpersonal relations.

### From Fallibility to Public Norms

The first lesson drawn from this analysis of fallibility pointed towards minimal objectivism. The other lesson is in a sense opposite, and more complicated (and seems to be more widely appreciated in liberal political philosophy and post-Hegelian critical theory, whereas the first lesson is a commonplace in contemporary ethics and meta-ethics). This argument is developed for example by Thomas Christiano (Christiano 2008; cf. Laitinen 2010b). If we are indeed fallible, it may be impracticable for each of us individually to aim at the objective truth, and we should rely on the second best instead—public, shared norms that prevail in our society (and their related institutionalized role-expectations and sanctions). There is much less disagreement in our views on whether something is a deviation from public norms, than on whether it is a deviation from objective truth. So the second lesson of fallibility does not point towards objective truth, but towards public, shared norms which may fall short of objective truth, but which nonetheless help us do better than simply our private, subjective takes.

While infallibly tracking objective truth would be best, it is unavailable. Following public, shared, artificially created norms may be second best, and following solely everyone's own conscience in each matter is only third best. One crucial reason is that 'I will also not be able to rely on my fellow citizens to treat me in accordance with the same rules by which I deal with them if they or all of us follow the rules each of us thinks are best.' (Christiano 2008, p. 55).

For Christiano, social justice is the justice of institutions and relationships between persons. However, we can draw a distinction between 'private' and 'public' relationships between persons, and focus on the latter. In private relationships it may well be best that everyone follows their own judgements and emotions, whereas in public relationships there is a need for public norms. The second lesson of fallibility concerns public institutions and relationships. (Defining

the contours of 'public' and 'private' is notoriously difficult, but the points made here do not depend on any specific understanding).

Central to social justice is the requirement that equality be *publicly realized*. Justice must not only be done, it must be *seen* to be done.<sup>12</sup> Why? The intuitive idea is that lack of publicity may harm social relationships, and leave fundamental needs unmet, even when justice in fact gets done. Suppose someone borrows money from you and without telling you, deposits it back to your account (without leaving you any means of verifying it). You have reasons to think he or she has not paid you back, which may well erode the trust between you even if no violations occurred. Christiano suggests that this is a normatively defective case in comparison to one where everything is out in the open—justice must be seen to be done, to have the fundamental interests of the parties met. The relevant interests are those of being recognized as an equal, and feeling at home in the social world.<sup>13</sup> One's *experiences* that justice is not being done, that one is being treated unjustly, and not recognized as an equal, are a crucial constitutive element of alienation from the social world even in cases where one's experiences are mistaken.

In more detail, the line of thought is this: if we are indeed fallible, we cannot always trust that we get things right concerning standards of misrecognition. We can expect disagreements. And given the plausible further assumption that people are different, that there is some diversity in their evaluatively relevant features which ought to be recognized, we can expect that fallibility and disagreement are significant. With yet another assumption, we can suppose that people are cognitively biased—they are better in dealing with cases like themselves, their own interests and the features that are salient in the cultures with which they are familiar. So Christiano appeals to four facts that characterize any moderately complex society. There is genuine *diversity* in the (objective) conditions of each person's well-being, and widespread *disagreement* about their interests and demands of justice. Further, people are deeply *fallible* in their assessments, and tend to be *cognitively biased* toward their own well-being. Given these 'four facts', which Christiano calls diversity, disagreement, fallibility and cognitive bias, it may be better to rely on *publicly shared norms* as a second best, instead of aiming at the objective truth. While publicly shared norms will be deficient and fallible as well, there are at least

<sup>12</sup> This concerns also remedies: after an injustice has achieved public attention, the remedy must also be publically exercised.

<sup>13</sup> Christiano characterizes the interest in 'being at home' through the following seven ideas: (1) having an array of meaningful choices in life, (2) understanding the institutions under which one lives, (3) understanding the ways in which the institutions affirm or discourage practices, (4) connection to and identification with the projects of other people, society as a whole and its parts, (5) having others affirm and identify with one's own projects (no sense of anomie), (6) having one's intimate self protected in ways which do not disgust or humiliate one, (7) having one's intimate self 'provided for' in ways which do not disgust or humiliate others (Christiano 2008, pp. 90–93). Earlier, it is characterized as an interest in appreciating and enjoying the world; it is at the heart of one's well-being—having a sense of fit, connection and meaning in the world in which one lives (pp. 61–63). Thus people have an interest in the world conforming to their judgements—otherwise it is opaque or hostile to one's interests. 'It is like playing a game whose rules do not make sense to one. One is at a loss' (p. 62). As a permanent state, it is a serious setback to one's interests.

advantages in comparison to everyone following their own consciences on all matters (especially thanks to diversity, disagreement and cognitive bias).

Christiano's argument is all the more interesting in that it starts from an objective basis and then builds intersubjective or public conditions on top of it. In his argument, the latter are relevant to our *epistemic* (rather than motivational or volitional) deficiencies: we are fallible, and we have the all-too-human tendency to be cognitively biased towards our interests, and given our epistemic capacities and the availability and contestability of evidence, we tend to have reasonable disagreements, especially on how to balance various considerations. (It is easier to agree on which things are *prima facie* good or bad).

Christiano's argument proceeds by appealing to three fundamental interests that humans have: the interest in being recognized, the interest of feeling 'at home' in the social and political world, and the interest in the correction of cognitive biases. When are such interests in recognition, at-homeness and cognitive correctness adequately met? One might expect that these interests are served ideally when all parties *know* the relevant normative truths, whatever they are, and treat each other accordingly. Even in the context of *diversity* of well-being, this would be so. Although people would differ in their genuine interests, ideally each person's different interests would be addressed—so ideally there need not be any disagreement.

But Christiano stresses that under the further empirical conditions of *disagreement*, *cognitive bias* and *fallibility*, things are different. In these non-ideal conditions it is not realistic to assume that the truths about justice be known by all parties, so that one person's (call her A) understandings may be one thing and another person's understandings (call him B) may be another and the truth of the matter may be yet another.

So the question is: when should we say that *under such conditions* A adequately recognizes and treats B? When is B justified in feeling inadequately treated? Is the crucial thing that B is treated adequately by *B's standards*, or by *A's standards*, or by the standards which are the objectively *correct* standards of justice? Interestingly, Christiano accepts none of these three options. Central to his defence of public equality is the idea that A truly and justly treats and recognizes B as an equal when A treats him in accordance with the prevailing common, *public*, standards which apply to everyone in the common world and in whose determination both A and B have an equal say (along with everyone else).

This is because the other alternatives end up setting back the vital interests of the parties. Given the four facts just presented, there is so to speak *objective* harm unless *intersubjective*, *public* standards are being followed. If A relies on her own *personal standards* in treating B, even with utter conscientiousness, it is very likely that she does not get things right, under conditions of cognitive bias, fallibility and diversity. She acts only on her own biased view, and does not capture what is really in B's interest, or what justice really demands concerning B. Thus B's interest in getting A's cognitive bias corrected would not be met.

And even in cases where A would get things right, it might be that B (as a fallible judge himself) would disagree. (Recall the analogy to the case of returning the money without the lender's knowledge). In either case, B would not experience

being adequately recognized, and could experience alienation from the social world. Thus his interest in being at home would not be met.

And if the way A treats B is to be evaluated only by the standards B accepts, there is (in addition to an obvious epistemological problem for A) a problem of why B should have a say and A not. This amounts to a subordination of A's judgements to B's judgements, and thus a lack of equal respect towards A.

So should not A treat B in accordance with objectively *correct* standards of justice (the principles of justice that *should* be the content of public norms, and not what in fact are the contents)? After all, cognitive bias and fallibility are bad because they lead us away from the correct standards. So could there be anything amiss in a case where A successfully and without ulterior motives treats B in accordance with correct standards of justice? Probably not, if both A and B would *know* that this is the case (although perhaps what justice requires is sometimes underdetermined in the absence of public rules).

But, as Christiano stresses, given the fact of widespread disagreement, and the facts of diversity, cognitive bias and fallibility, we cannot assume such an ideal of mutual knowledge as the typical case. What A believes to be the fact of the matter seems to B to be merely A's private view, and vice versa—even in a case where one of them is in fact right.

So Christiano's message is that we need *public* rules to be able to tell when B's experiences of inadequate recognition or alienation are justified. Publicity removes the epistemic difficulties—we can expect that there isn't widespread disagreement, fallibility or cognitive bias concerning public norms, and there is no fundamental diversity either since the public rules are the same for all. Further, to avoid subordination, we ought to grant both A and B an equal say in the formulation of such public rules since public equality is needed. The four facts and the related interests justify *public* equality over mere abstract equality.

Christiano (2008, ch. 3) argues that democracy realizes the equal advancement of individuals' interests, and is a publicly clear way, and further, is the *only publicly clear way of doing so*. Everyone should have an equal say in collective decision-making processes concerning the organization of society. If someone's judgement is not taken seriously, then their interests are set back. The decisions are likely to reflect the cognitive bias of those in power and the exclusion from decision-making is in itself a lack of recognition and probably a violation of 'at-homeness'. Public norms are not merely epistemically favoured—they have *authority* and provide binding 'exclusionary reasons', that is, second-order reasons not to act on some other first-order reasons one may have (cf. Raz 1986). More precisely, this is so if certain conditions are met: if the norms are democratically created, and do not violate the rights of individuals.

How do these two lessons, minimal objectivity and publicity of shared norms, relate to one another? For one thing, minimal objectivity concerns all interpersonal relationships, whereas the point about public equality concerns public institutional and interpersonal relations. Further, the artificially created public rules are, as to their content, more or less just. They of course ought to be just, but they often fall short. That is, the public norms may be imperfect as well, but they are a better alternative to everyone relying on their own conscience in an uncoordinated

manner. Arguably a number of objective duties and responsibilities are related to the public norms independent of content, despite the possible shortcomings in the contents of those norms objectively speaking (see Raz 1986). First, we ought to mostly live by the public rules (they provide ‘exclusionary reasons’); and secondly, we have a standing obligation to try to influence them for the better—there is a constant need for social criticism. However, thirdly, in some cases (depending on how just the public rules in fact are) we should engage in civil disobedience.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have suggested that adequate recognition and treatment of people is a matter of adequate responses to the evaluative and reason-giving features of people in different situations. Substantive theories differ on which features are relevant for recognition. In my view there are many kinds of features that generate requirements (not only equal personhood but relevant differences in merits and needs, etc.), and many kinds of responses that are required (from emotions and attitudes to institutional protection and action). These substantive views will be very controversial and contested. But what I find very hard to contest is the idea that we are fallible, capable of making mistakes. Or at least the burden of proof is with those who think that we are incapable of error. That view would be quite extraordinary to say the least. And in any case, misrecognition would not be a problem for infallible agents. And from fallibility, two lessons can be drawn, one pointing towards minimal objectivism, and the other towards public, democratically created norms.

**Acknowledgments** I would like to thank the participants in the conferences ‘The Politics of Misrecognition’, Bristol, January 2010, and ‘The Social Ontology of Personhood: A Recognition-Theoretical Approach’, in Münster, February 2011 for discussions, and Simon Thompson and Nasar Meer for very helpful comments and suggestions.

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