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Abstract

Some strands of feminist and social philosophy suggest that the basis for personhood is having an identity—where identity is not defined entirely in individualistic terms of reason and autonomy and is in fact quite relational. When personhood is conceived in these terms, morality becomes a matter of recognizing persons for who they are, which includes recognizing them as members of social groups. In this paper I explore the notion of esteem as a species of recognition for these layers of identity, claiming that esteem deserves to stand on equal footing with respect as a moral attitude.

Key words

recognition, esteem, respect, identity

For better or worse, the categories we apply to ourselves and one another matter. They matter to who we are as individuals, and to how we relate to others who are similar to or different from us. You can be an indigenous person, a cisgender person, a middle-class atheist with autism, or all of these. You can be a Star Trek fan, a Lego master builder, a father of twins, or, again, all of these. Categories can be used to define an individual's identity, cultivate solidarity with others, and enforce and perpetuate oppressive social boundaries.

But traditional moral thinking has concentrated on personhood in the abstract—a particularly individualistic conception of personhood that backgrounds such categories. In the analytic tradition, morality has for some time been construed as a matter of treating other persons with respect based on their capacity for autonomy, which is thought of as grounded in reason. One reason for this is Kant's conviction that morality is universal together with the belief that reason is also universal, both in the sense that it is the same for all and that it is what all persons have in common. This conception of both morality and personhood has many advantages, but it deemphasizes things like categories and individuality that also matter to us, thus causing a longstanding "blind spot" in philosophical thought about morality.

In recent decades, feminists and social philosophers have called attention to this blind spot by highlighting the experiences of subordinated groups and mining them for insight about moral experience. Some strands of this thinking suggest that what is universal about humans, and hence the basis for their personhood, is their having an identity—where identity is not defined entirely in terms of reason and autonomy (as traditionally

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understood) and is in fact quite relational.[1] When personhood is conceived in these terms, morality becomes a matter of recognizing persons for who they are, where "who they are" is a layered thing: people are persons in the abstract, where this is more a matter of *what* rather than *who* they are; people are concrete individuals with a unique combination of personal characteristics, relationships, interests, and so on; they are also members of any number of intersecting categories that form layers between the very abstract and very concrete.

The moral attitude of respect that has garnered so much of analytic philosophy's attention is a form of recognition[2] whose object is personhood in the abstract[3] (even when we take personhood in the broader, relational sense). Love, whose philosophical profile has been rising in recent years, is a form of recognition whose object is individuality.[4] Is there, then, a distinct recognitional attitude (or set of attitudes) whose object is those middle, category-based layers of identity? I believe there is, and in this paper I want to explore this attitude and its the moral importance. My claim will be that esteem, as I will call it, deserves to stand on equal footing with respect as a moral attitude; like respect and love it is a crucial nexus of moral recognition.

In *The Struggle for Recognition* (1996), Axel Honneth divides moral recognition into three major categories that roughly correspond to those I laid out above: rights, which provide what he calls "cognitive support" to someone as a moral agent; love, which provides emotional support to someone as an individual with specific needs; and solidarity, which provides social esteem to someone whose traits and abilities make them a member of a "community of value" (ch. 5). I'm probably drawing the lines somewhat differently from Honneth, but his treatment of the idea of solidarity works as a starting point.

Honneth characterizes esteem according to its function of allowing individuals to achieve a healthy relation-to-self in virtue of being recognized for their "concrete traits and abilities" (121). At this level, we are singling people out according to difference, rather than universals, but the differences are generalized and intersubjective, so that we view people as members of groups who share some characteristic—hence we are somewhere between abstract personhood and concrete individuality. And we have worth in the form of social status as instances of these (intersecting) types (123). Deriving worth from group identity in this way requires a set of shared values against which an individual's contribution to a group can be understood (121). Honneth's idea is that when we see ourselves as members of socially valuable groups—which, because they share some valued characteristic, are communities of value—we take on a kind of solidarity with fellow group members. When

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[1] See, for example, Lindemann (2014), Held (2006), Kittay (2010).
[2] Throughout this paper, I am using "recognition" in a positive, valuing sense. The term can also be used in a neutral, taking-into-account sense: I can recognize someone as a threat, or recognize someone's needs, in order to generate an appropriate response. Thus, I can recognize a white supremacist in the neutral sense without recognizing them in the positive sense.
[3] See, for example, Darwall (1977), Buss (1999), Honneth (1996).
[4] See, for example, Helm (2010), Fitz-Gibbon (2012), Honneth (1996).

this social esteem is internalized, it manifests as self-esteem, that is, confidence that other individuals will recognize you as an individual (128-9).

There's quite a bit to unpack here. I'll start with the idea that esteem is based on personal traits and abilities. Lots of things fall under "traits and abilities," and they are not all alike when it comes to how they contribute to someone's identity, so it's worth teasing them apart if we're going to understand how to accord them proper recognition. There are social group traits like race, gender, class, etc.; talents; virtues; interests; and personal characteristics like sense of humor, mannerisms, taste, etc. All of these are influenced by historical and cultural circumstances. The boundaries between them are sometimes blurry, but broadly speaking, these different classes of traits function differently at the social level and both evoke and call for different kinds of (moral) response.

Characteristics like race, gender, class, and so on, have wide "external" or "top down" social implications in the sense that they shape how others perceive us, are more given to us, and are not things we have to work at. They are what are referred to as social identities, and the way these identities are valued or disvalued by individuals—both inside and outside a group—is heavily influenced by the social construction of the meaning of these categories. Social identity in this sense is accorded to people in virtue of their having (or being perceived to have) the trait that is characteristic of the group (e.g. skin color, gender markers, noticeable disability, etc.).

Talents are another kind of "trait or ability," and they are also thought of as more given, but they're considered more individual than social identities, and they require cultivation in order to gain social recognition. You might have a talent for music or mathematics the way you have a race or ethnicity, but unlike the latter, the former isn't going to characterize you unless you work to hone it. But when their talents are cultivated and circumstances favorable, talented people can identify with their accomplishments and achieve great social status.

Virtues, like talents, require cultivation, but they're different from talents in that the capacity for virtue is thought of as something everyone is born with—though which virtues are cultivated, and even what counts as a virtue, is socially conditioned. But here too, conditions must be favorable for virtues to be cultivated. Virtue is easier to achieve in environments with good teachers and role models, and where circumstances allow for healthy development. When it's achieved, however, people can name their virtues as part of who they are; they might think of themselves as brave, caring, spirited, etc.

Interests are more choice-based than other traits named so far, since we can change them more readily than other characteristics, though they too are constrained by historical and cultural circumstances. An notable thing about interests, however, is that the social groups formed on their basis seem more "internal" or "bottom up" than social groups based on traits like race or gender. Bird lovers aren't immediately identifiable by their appearance, so they have to choose moves like joining the local Audubon Society chapter in order to

cultivate the social opportunities that identity affords—unlike more perceptible traits like race or gender that immediately put us into one box or another.

A final identity maker worth mentioning here is work. Honneth seems to take work as a paradigm instance of a basis for social esteem. The work we do does have a tremendous influence on our sense of self and self-worth, as well as social position, but it does not fit cleanly into any of the classes I've discussed. Because of the social status associated with different types of work, it has much in common with the characteristics that contribute to social identity. But in many (though certainly not all) cases, there are elements of talent, choice, and interest that make work overlap with the other classes. Thus, I suggest it is a separate class of trait from any of the others I've named.

With this taxonomy of traits in mind, I suggest that the way we afford recognition to these different classes of identity makers falls into two rough categories, which is to say I think esteem can be divided into two subcategories. Consider first the attitudes we have toward people with excellences like virtue and talent. Darwall (1977) calls our recognition of these traits "appraisal respect," a species of admiration for the people in virtue of these excellences. In Western culture, appraisal respect seems to accrue to people as individuals—we don't think of them in terms of membership in a group of, say, virtuoso pianists or kind people, and (as far as I know) there aren't gatherings like patience conventions in which people bond *as* patient people. Virtuoso pianists do gather, as they do for competitions, but the focus in a competition is on individuals' talent more than it is on bonding over their talent and accomplishment. Despite its accruing to people as individuals, however, appraisal respect is a form of esteem rather than love because our recognition of an excellence targets only one aspect of a person, not their individuality as a whole.

Next consider the kind of recognition afforded to people on the basis of social identities, interests, and work. This accrues to people as members of some group: Muslim, Lakota, transgendered, pickers at Amazon, lawyers, Game of Thrones fans, model airplane enthusiasts, etc. This gets more complex because while these categories are all things that people can identify with and bond over, the defining group characteristic may have more or less social significance. Although it may signal many things about you, being a Game of Thrones fan doesn't influence your standing in society the way being a Muslim or a picker at Amazon does. Nevertheless, to the extent that membership in a group is important to your sense of yourself, it's frequently important that you be recognized—esteemed—for this membership. For lack of a better term (though I would welcome one), I'll label this type of esteem "recognition-as." When a group membership is important to us (in a certain context), we want to be recognized *as* members of this group.

Recognition-as may itself have some sub-species. Honneth discusses *solidarity* in connection with this kind of group identity, and solidarity is important. It's an internal sort of recognition-as: a way for members of a group to value their group as such and one another as members of the group. When the group is a subordinated one, solidarity can

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help members to cultivate individual and group pride (Honneth 128); group members bond together actively to strengthen group identity and work to promote their interests as a group. Solidarity is outward-facing in that it is a way of standing up for and owning a group identity. Solidarity may also be adopted by people who are not members of the group but who value the group because of similar interests or as a matter of justice: unionized members of one profession may join another union's strike as a show of solidarity. But this kind of external solidarity can be tricky and is not always welcome by the members of the group.

Related to solidarity is *fraternity*. Anthony Cunningham describes fraternity as a bond between people based on some shared experience with which they identify (1991, 127). For Cunningham, the core concept is the sharing of commitments in a way that helps group members identify with one another. This doesn't mean universal harmony, but it is a bond that goes beyond convenience or feeling--something like the idea that "blood is thicker than water." "Fraternal bonds," Cunningham suggests, "require a sense of sharing that can lead to a transcendence or expansion of the self to include others in a personal, even if non-intimate way" (127). Fraternity in this sense involves "a receptivity to sharing one's life in a way that gives rise to a shared care and concern for others"--*as* others in a specific group or relationship (127). It is more inward-facing than solidarity, then, in its emphasis on whatever experience or characteristic is shared within the group.

But because they are primarily—though perhaps not exclusively—bonds shared within a group, solidarity and fraternity are unable to include how outsiders may recognize and value people within the group. That is, they don't fully capture allyship or other forms of outsiders' esteem. Part of what solidarity aims at in its outward-facing capacity is recognition from outsiders of the value of the group as such, and the value of the people in the group *as* members of that group—examples include gay pride and Black Lives Matter. Thus, we need this third term to capture the kind of "external" recognition-as that isn't fully captured by solidarity and fraternity.

So far, then, I have sorted social esteem into different kinds: appraisal respect for traits like talent and virtue, and recognition-as for traits that form the basis of social identities—which can take the form of solidarity or fraternity, or a more external, perhaps "plain old," recognition-as. The taxonomy is nice, but so what? Well, part of the point is that recognition, as moral valuing, can take many forms; respect isn't the only form that matters morally, and we may owe one another more than just the "recognition respect" (Darwall 1977) we can have toward others as (abstract) persons.

One reason for this is that we never interact with people on the level of abstract personhood. Rightly or wrongly, we immediately form impressions of them using the social categories we infer they belong to from contextual clues. Another reason is that lack of esteem makes it much harder to respect others as persons. Implicit bias suggests as much. Thus, because group identity interacts with recognition as a person, one way to resist

implicit bias is to work on esteem for subordinated identities. A better understanding of esteem can help with this.

Group identity also interacts with recognition as an individual. Love sees past categories in some respects; the idea that love is "blind" suggests that lovers look past certain traits of their beloved. But for a genuine, healthy love, this "looking past" can't be a matter of ignoring these traits or thinking they don't matter—because insofar as the categories the beloved inhabits form part of their identity, they do matter. They just don't matter in the sense of making a difference to how the lover values the beloved. (Incidentally, because love values the beloved for who they are, loving people in certain categories should tend to raise the lovers' esteem of those categories. We know that getting to know individual "Others" tends to soften attitudes toward their Otherness.)

But esteem is also important in its own right, even in contexts less intimate than love. We need people who are like us for a sense of belonging, and we need people who are different to value us—not just despite but because of our differences—for a sense of social ease. As Honneth notes, social esteem is an important source of identity formation and self-esteem. We need others to become ourselves. This is partly because of the reciprocal way recognition works. One great insight of recognition theory, generally attributed to Fichte, is that recognizing someone as having an identity helps to constitute that very identity whenever you recognize me as someone whose recognition matters (Laitinen (2010) calls this the "mutuality insight" of recognition theory). My seeing who you are (in an affirming way) helps you be who you are because you can be more comfortable in your own skin, which is a much better state to be in than when you must hide or downplay a part of yourself.

Furthermore, if you matter, period, then you also matter *as* all the things that make you who you are, and anyone seeking to get things right needs to give adequate regard to these qualities (this is what Laitinen (2010) calls the "adequate regard" insight). So if respect for persons-as-such is morally required of us, as it is generally acknowledged to be, then esteem of them is too.

Now, there's a lot more to work out here: What about identities that are morally bad, like white supremacy, that we may need to take into account but not legitimize? Does this social esteem actually just boil down to respect in the end? Does appraisal respect really belong in the class of recognition I'm trying to get at here—does it really matter morally in the way recognition-as does? I cannot answer these questions here because I'm conveniently up against my word limit, but as I work out a fuller account of esteem and its moral importance, I hope to offer satisfying answers.

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