Religious Recognition

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Editorial for the Topical Issue "Religious Recognition"

As the European countries become increasingly multicultural and multireligious, there is a growing need to study intellectual and political strategies which enable multiculturalism to thrive in democratic and peaceful modern societies. Since the Enlightenment, the concept of *toleration* has been the prominent conduit of plurality in a society. Toleration is, however, a concept that does not necessarily promote cooperation: I may tolerate others without wanting to do anything with them. Such an attitude towards toleration may lead to segregation, and even to the emergence of something resembling parallel societies within a democracy.

Leading philosophers Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Paul Ricoeur have proposed the idea of mutual *recognition* as a societal virtue and an attitude that can complement toleration in this respect. Rainer Forst speaks for thinkers who consider mutual recognition to be the full-fledged form of toleration in contemporary society. Others share Frank Furedi's view that toleration and recognition are quite different attitudes that serve different purposes.

Since the early 1990s, *contemporary recognition theory*, based largely on the foundational work of Honneth, has gradually developed into a well-established research programme.[1] It provides carefully articulated conceptual instruments for studying the multidimensional dynamics of mutual respect, esteem, and love. In the most paradigmatic sense, mutual recognition is a relation between two individual *persons*. In an extended sense, recognition applies to *groups* and *institutions*, and, according to some suggestions, even to normative entities generally. Since recognition in its various forms is a phenomenon dealing with *normative statuses*, questions about *power* are also brought in. All these aspects are also highly relevant for the study of various forms of recognition in religious contexts.

Issues of religious recognition are often rather complex, as the processes of normative recognition are, for the most part, *qualified* in their content. Thus, for example, we may say that we recognize your baptism or your group as an Abrahamic religion. We do *not*, however, usually say that we recognize *everything* that you represent, although we may acknowledge you *as persons* and *as serious discussion partners*. In such qualified accounts of theological processes, contemporary recognition theory offers sharp instruments for evaluating various ecumenical and societal options.

While recognition theory has begun to permeate theology, there is relatively little scholarly work on the religious and theological dimensions of recognition. This situation is likely to be caused by the fact that mutual recognition is commonly understood to be a modern, post-Hegelian concept and, as such, a purely secular idea. This view can be problematized by showing that both the *concept* and the *phenomenon* of recognition have long pre-Hegelian roots that, to a considerable extent, stem from the tradition of Christian theology. The general idea that toleration and recognition are complementary virtues helping modern

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[1] There is also already an internationally acknowledged Finnish research tradition in contemporary recognition theory that has contributed significantly to articulating the systematic foundations of the theory. See e.g. Ikäheimo and Laitinen, "Analyzing Recognition".

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liberal societies deal with their new multireligious situations can be affirmed. However, with respect to its origins, recognition is arguably much less secular and modernist idea than toleration.

This topical issue starts with essays having a historical focus, and then moves towards more contemporary issues. The first paper, "Mediated Recognition and the Quest for a Common Rational Field of Discussion in Three Early Medieval Dialogues" (Ritva Palmén and Heikki J. Koskinen), is a study of medieval interreligious dialogues with the help of contemporary recognition theory. The second, "In Search of the Good" (Timothy Riggs), combines the epistemic terminology of Neo-Platonism with Patristic Ideas of Recognition. The third essay, "Interactions with Others in John Chrysostom as a Means to Manage a Diversity of Visions" (Anna-Liisa Tolonen), provides a look at the Patristic theology of mutual recognition between different parties. The fourth contribution, "Levinas and the Ambivalence of Recognition" (Panu-Matti Pöykkö), discusses the issue of recognition in phenomenological thought. The fifth paper, "Tolerance or Recognition? What Can We Expect?" (Olli-Pekka Vainio and Aku Visala), evaluates some of the contemporary Anglo-American discussion on toleration and recognition. The sixth essay, "Recognition in Feminist Philosophy of Recognition" (Sari Roman-Lagerspetz), aims to show how the Hegelian ideas of recognition have inspired three prominent feminist philosophers of religion. The seventh contribution, "Recognition and Ecological Theology" (Panu Pihkala), explores the possibilities offered by theories of recognition and identity politics for a better understanding of Christian environmentalism. This conversation concludes with "Charles Taylor and the Political Recognition of Difference as a Resource for Theological Reflection on Religious Recognition" (Gerard Ryan). He aims to show that Taylor's argument for recognition of difference is an important resource in any theological reflection on the possibility of religious recognition.

All of the editors and most of the authors of this topical issue work in the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence (2014–2019) *Reason and Religious Recognition* at the Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki. Risto Saarinen, who is also the Director of the Centre, has just published a larger intellectual history of religious recognition in Western philosophy and theology. In addition to Saarinen's book, the following essays present some of the first fruits of our work to an international audience.[2] Five of the papers of this topical issue were originally presented as parts of an extended session with the title "From Tolerance to Recognition: Recognition and the Acceptance of Otherness" at the American Academy of Religion's Annual Meeting in Atlanta in November 2015. We are very grateful to Professors Vitor Westhelle (Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago) and Robert Orsi (Northwestern University) who commented on our papers in Atlanta. Veronika Hoffmann's studies on the relationship between recognition and modern Catholic theology have also provided valuable comparative insights.

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2 See also Koskinen, "Mediated Recognition" and Palmén, "Agreement in Conflict".