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***Power and Recognition:
The Hobbesian Model***¹

The subject of this paper is the position of Hobbes within the history of the philosophical problem of recognition. My discussion is divided into three parts: I) an introduction in which I specify what I mean by ‘recognition,’ which will form the groundwork for my consideration of Hobbes; II) an attempt at a definition as well as a theoretical/historical analysis of the ground-breaking “Hobbesian model,” a thematic and conceptual method through which Hobbes reformulated the question of recognition in modern thought; III) a brief excursus on the afterlife of this model, that is, the persistence of its anthropological presuppositions and its problematic dimensions within a particular tradition of social thought (I call this tradition ‘struggle for distinction’) that includes authors like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Norbert Elias, and Pierre Bourdieu). I end with a balanced appraisal that elucidates both the advantages and the limits of Hobbes’s approach from a strictly philosophical perspective.

I. Which “recognition”?

Before dealing with Hobbes, it is necessary to say a few words relative to the philosophical problem in question: what do we mean by “recognition”? It would be helpful to have such analytical specification even with ostensibly clearer and more distinct ideas, but such precision is indispensable for this concept whose vagueness seems inversely proportional to its importance in contemporary debates. I will rely on the judgment of Paul Ricœur, who in his recent essay, *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (2004), begins by reporting a feeling of confusion concerning the semantic rule of the term: in the absence of a “theory of recognition” [*reconnaissance*] worthy of this term, in the sense that there exists instead one or more “theories of knowledge” [*connaissance*], there exists a “dispersion d’apparence aléatoire des occurrences du mot au plan du discours philosophique²”. To list just a few that have appeared in the history of Western thought: recognition as a form of knowledge (perception and identification of things and people: “I recognize a ship on the horizon”; “I recognized

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² P. Ricœur, *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, Paris, Stock, 2004, p. 9. Ricœur refers to the French use of the term, which presents some peculiarities. The most distinctive one is the equivalence between recognition and appreciation [*reconnaissance-gratitude*], which is difficult to translate. On the other hand, Ricœur’s general remarks on the philosophical meanings can be regarded as valid in other languages such as German, English, or Italian.

the Duke of Guermantes even though he had aged greatly”); recognition as ‘*attestation*’ – a concept that belongs to the philosophical terminology of *Soi-même comme un autre* relative to ‘*ipseité*’ – or else the reflective gesture, in the sense both cognitive and moral, of a subject who takes account of his own qualities, states, and “capabilities” (“I recognize that I am guilty, responsible, capable of...”); finally, recognition as an intersubjective relationship, with moral, social and political valences, in which one recognizes the qualities of another (“I recognize your good faith;” “Julien Sorel never felt recognized by his own superiors;” “women have been recognized as political subjects”).

Now, even if it is true that we can single out a minimum common denominator within this semantic range, reducible to the problem of identity, one conclusion is nonetheless unavoidable: recognition is said in many ways.

2. Even though I begin with the same confusion as Ricœur, I will not follow his entire ‘route’ which consists of extracting from recognition an “ordered polysemy” in the philosophical sense, beginning with the recovery of a “dynamic unity” on the lexical plane. In the discussion of *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, this dynamic unity winds around, progressively rounding out the three important interpretations that I already cited: the one relative to the theory of knowledge, which is connected to Kant’s theoretical philosophy, the one relative to the theory of self and identity, which in turn owes much to Bergson, and finally, the one relative to the intersubjective problem, which – following common opinion – Ricœur places “under the symbolic figure of Hegel.” I will concentrate my analysis on this third and last meaning of recognition, the one most familiar to philosophical common sense and the most prevalent in contemporary discourse. To sum up the general meaning, I turn to Axel Honneth’s authoritative definition of the concept, *Reconnaissance*, in the *Dictionnaire d’éthique et de philosophie morale*. According to Honneth, this was the philosophical intuition of the young Hegel:

the idea that consciousness of oneself as a human being depends on the experience of social recognition ... that human subjects, in conducting their existence, need respect and esteem from partners of reciprocal action³.

Now, we can divide this generic definition into two different questions:

a) an *anthropological (and psychological) question* regarding the relational nature of the human being, and in particular, the ties of symbolic dependence that the individual develops in his confrontations with other men and with society as a whole. Under the complex formula of “need for recognition,” we can include all those

³ «L’idée que la conscience de soi de l’être humain dépend de l’expérience de la reconnaissance sociale [...], que les sujets humains, en menant leur existence, avaient besoin du respect ou de l’estime de leur partenaire d’interaction», A. Honneth, *Reconnaissance*, in *Dictionnaire d’éthique et de philosophie morale*, ed. M. Canto-Sperber, Paris, Puf, 2004 (new edition).

requests that satisfy “spiritual,” moral, and personal demands, and which are not reducible to a physical need or to the search for sensible pleasures. Such needs are multiple and distinct primarily because they manifest several levels depending on the age and type of subjects, their reciprocal relationships, and their placement within social contexts. One moves from the simple proofs of existence (not wanting to be ignored, seeking another’s gaze, attracting attention) to more powerful recognitions that imply the confirmation of one’s own value: in the first place, affective relationships (friendship and love, familial or sexual), and then to social relationships that are distinguishable according to degree and content (approval, praise, esteem, respect, prestige, honor, fame, and glory) – and according to which, they come to be seen by others as “meaningful” or “generalized,” like class or any social totality in all its complexity⁴.

b) A social question (and as such, both moral and political), regarding the nature, dynamics, and outcome of the relationship of recognition, of the inter-subjective connection in itself. Among the many problems that can be raised on this point, we could mention those dealing with the “structure” – asymmetrical or symmetrical, vertical or horizontal – of relationships. For example, there are intrinsically hierarchical recognitions, like those between fathers and sons, teachers and pupils, masters and slaves, and recognition among equals, for example, friends, lovers or rivals; we complicate the picture if we distinguish the stages of the process: a recognition initially asymmetrical can end in a symmetrical manner, with the achievement of equality on the part of the inferior person (the classic example is the so-called master/slave dialectic, but father/son and teacher/pupil relations can produce a similar outcome); an exchange between equals can transform itself into an experience of domination, as we can see – by way of example – in the results of the mimetic theory of René Girard or in Jessica Benjamin’s psychoanalytic studies of the relationship within sadomasochistic couples⁵.

But in the history of recognition as a social question there is a separate chapter: that which deals with the *peaceful or violent nature of the inter-subjective relationship*. In particular, it is known that, beginning with Hegel and his interpreters (but as we will see, the problem really starts with Hobbes), philosophers have set up a paradigm that exalts the agonistic features to the point of identifying recognition as a form of rivalry or conflict. From this comes the success of the expression “struggle for recognition,” which – at the cost of some misapprehension – has become almost

⁴ On the phenomenology of these various forms of recognition (different in method, similar in content), see A.O. Lovejoy, *Reflexions on Human Nature*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961; E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Every Day Life* (1959), it. trans. *La vita quotidiana come rappresentazione*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1969; Id., *Behaviour in Public Places* (1963), it. trans. *Il comportamento in pubblico. L’interazione sociale nei luoghi di riunione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1971; T. Todorov, *La Vie Commune. Essai d’anthropologie générale* (1995), it. trans. *La vita commune*, Milano, Pratiche, 1998.

⁵ See R. Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré* (1972), it. trans. *La violenza e il sacro*, Milano, Adelphi, 1980; J. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (1988), it. trans. *Legami d’amore*, Milano, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1991.

synonymous with recognition itself: recently raised again by Honneth, Habermas, and Taylor, this concept of a “struggle for recognition” dominates today’s discussions of multiculturalism, of the rights of minorities and of excluded subjects⁶.

3. As mentioned, tradition suggests that philosophical awareness of the problem of recognition, comprising both the anthropological and social aspects, began with Hegel: not only in the famous pages of the *Phenomenology*, immortalized by Kojève⁷, but even earlier, and more extensively, with the writings that date from the Jena period. In *System der Sittlichkeit* (comp. 1802-1803), and above all in his *Realphilosophie* (comp. 1805-1806), the «*Kampf um Anerkennung*» became the heart of Hegelian ethical theory. Such a theory proposes to reconcile the fissions in the modern world by playing on the inclination of individuals to be integrated into a substantial whole⁸.

In any case, it is difficult to believe that recognition – an eternal feature of the human condition, at least as long as we accept the definition of man as a social being – represents an original discovery exclusive to Hegel. This claim is a historiographical simplification deriving from the excessively restrictive use of the term ‘recognition.’ The history of ideas is filled with examples (consider the case of ‘romanticism’) in which the philosophical knowledge of a problem preceded the invention of the concept and of a specific terminology. In order to uncover the existence of a powerful reflection on recognition before that of Hegel, all we need to do is set forth anew the limits of the question in a language that does not belong to the nineteenth century. One example among many, the elegant book by Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Reflexions on Human Nature*, which reconstructs the passionate seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history of “approbativeness,” the need for approval and praise: this recurrent idea in modern anthropology, the foundation of moral and social theories in authors like Mandeville, Rousseau, Smith, expresses, according to Lovejoy, the distinguishing characteristic of man, the only feeling animal sensitive to the thoughts of others, much like the “desire for desire” in the

⁶ A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung* (1992), it. trans. *Lotta per il riconoscimento*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2002; J. Habermas e Ch. Taylor, *Multiculturalismo. Lotte per il riconoscimento* (1992), Milano, Feltrinelli, 1998. Cfr. S. Benhabib, N. Fraser, J. Butler, I.M. Young.

⁷ A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (1947), it. trans. *Introduzione alla lettura di Hegel*, Milano, Adelphi, 1996. On Kojève’s role in the history of recognition, see R. Bodei, *Il desiderio e la lotta*, in A. Kojève, *La dialettica e l’idea della morte in Hegel*, Torino, Einaudi, 1991; Id., *Le Prix de la liberté*, Paris, Cerf, 1995.

⁸ «On y affirme que le progrès moral s’accomplit au cours d’une succession de paliers, composée de trois modèles de reconnaissance de plus en plus ambitieux, entre lesquels, à chaque fois, se déroule une lutte que les sujets se livrent pour voir confirmées leurs aspirations à l’identité», A. Honneth, *Reconnaissance*, cit. (this definition encapsulates the thesis of *Kampf um Anerkennung*, cit.). See also J. Taminiaux, commentaires de G.W.F. Hegel, *Système de la Vie éthique*, Paris, Payot, 1976; Id., *Naissance de la philosophie hégélienne de l’Etat*, commentaires et traduction de la *Realphilosophie de Jéna*, 1805-1806, Paris, Payot, 1984; R.R. Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, University Press of California, 1998; P. Ricœur, *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, cit., pp. 253 ss.

words of Hegel and Kojève⁹. To be sure, the advantage of this non-literal approach is the opposite of the restrictive approach: the historical-philosophical field of the problem risks extending itself too widely to the point of embracing even ancient classical and Christian authors (and there would be good reasons for doing so). It would be difficult from this wide perspective not to underscore as a philosophy of recognition (at least in the basic anthropological sense) the Platonic and Augustinian reflection on love or the Aristotelian treatment on friendship.

To escape inflation, we should introduce a framework of historical time, asking ourselves whether we can distinguish a specifically *modern approach* to the problem of recognition¹⁰, and whether we can begin this modern history with *authors prior to Hegel*. The work of Thomas Hobbes, in my opinion, can address both of these questions.

4. Hobbes's philosophical reflections (dealing with man's dependence on symbolic confirmations and his need for those forms of inter-subjective experience that shape self-consciousness) exhibits two conditions that remain typical of the modern approach to recognition:

a) The *law of individual self-affirmation characterizes a new idea of subjectivity* (we can resort to the slippery, but in this case relevant, category of the "modern individual"). This new configuration of the "I" finds an exemplary philosophical expression in the Hobbesian doctrine of natural right, centered on the power/freedom relationship, and justly considered by Leo Strauss as an epochal break between ancients and moderns¹¹. It is at this metaphysical turning point that the new and complex formulation of the problem of recognition is brought back to the level of moral and sociological change: in a traditional society, recognition isn't perceived as a problem, because it is spontaneously included in the collective categories of social identity; but at the moment in which the individual escapes from the chains of the social order in order to affirm himself, his identity (no longer mapped out from the outset by the roles assigned by tradition) must now be constructed in a more autonomous form, through a tortuous and dialogic conflict with other men. What is born with modernity – to say it with the words of Charles Taylor – is not the *need* for recognition, but its *struggle*, and the possibility of its failure¹².

⁹ «An animal which has an urgent desire for a thought *of* a thought – and of a thought not its own – and whose action is profoundly affected by this type of desire, more profoundly and more pervasively than by any other [...] – that is man», A.O. Lovejoy, *Reflexions on Human Nature*, cit., cap. III, p. 92.

¹⁰ On the difference between ancient and modern recognition, see *De la reconnaissance Don, identité et estime de soi*, «Revue du M.A.U.S.S.», 23, 1, 2004.

¹¹ L. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (1936), it. trans. in *Che cos'è la filosofia politica*, Urbino, Argalia, 1977; Id. *Natural Right and History* (1953), it. trans. *Diritto naturale e storia*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 1990.

¹² Ch. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991) *Il disagio della modernità* (1991), trad. it. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996. See also P. Berger, *On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor*, in «Archives Européennes de Sociologie», XI, 1970, n. 1, pp. 339-347; A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, cit.;

b) A second characteristic is closely tied this first one: *conflict becomes the privileged interpretive paradigm for social relations*. That Hobbes represents an historic turn is confirmed by the impressive legacy of his most famous formulations: beginning with *homo homini lupus* and *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the Hobbesian philosophy became immediately associated with the endemic nature of war.

Put together in diverse constellations, these two elements are found in all the modern theories of recognition: Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel, Kojève, Honneth, Bourdieu... Yet once this shared foundation is identified a new analytical problem arises: we need to distinguish accurately between theoretical models that are often very different, if not incompatible, in their descriptive and normative motives. Consider the difference that separates the Hobbesian vision of conflict, a destructive and painful state in which *exeundum est*, from the Hegelian model, which also regards struggle as a positive experience of emancipation. Even within similar traditions, we can distinguish different interpretations, like the various readings that are given to Hegelian recognition: Kojève, emphasizing the existential features of the master/slave dialectic, and themes like honor, fear, & death, is closer to Hobbes; Honneth, taking a Habermasian perspective on inter-subjectivity, renounces individualistic motives in favor of an integration within the *Sittlichkeit*, insisting on the “social” passions of love, respect, and consideration; Taylor’s Hegel, by contrast, has communitarian features, and his idea of recognition is related to the problem of authenticity.

Once again, recognition is said in many ways. The considerations that follow will focus on one of the most successful and famous of these models, whose specific characteristic is the absorption of recognition into a strategic mode of action: a *struggle for honor and prestige*.

II. «Power» and «glory»: The Hobbesian Model

1. I will reconstruct the position of Hobbes in a ideal-typical manner, without dealing with the differences that mark the various redactions of his theory, and which open up the problem – not negligible from an historical perspective – of the internal evolution of his thought¹³. I will instead consider this thought as a theoretical system,

¹³ My interpretation of the Hobbesian model is especially indebted to L. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, cit.; A.M. Battista, *Nascita della psicologia politica*, Genova, Icgig, 1982; A. Pacchi, *Hobbes and the Passions*, in «Topoi», VI, (1987), and now in *Scritti hobbesiani, 1978-1990*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1998, pp. 79-95; M. Reale, *La difficile eguaglianza. Hobbes e gli animali politici*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1991; E. Pulcini, *Il Sé mimetico e il falso riconoscimento*, in *Pensare la società. L’idea di una filosofia sociale*, a cura di M. Calloni, A. Ferrara, S. Petrucciani, Roma, Carocci, 2001; A. Ferrarin, *Artificio, desiderio, considerazione di sé. Hobbes e i fondamenti antropologici della politica*, Pisa, Ets, 2001. Quotations from Hobbes refer to: *Elements = The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. F. Tönnies, London, Cambridge University Press, 1928; *De cive = Libri de cive*, in

coherent in its complexity, and I will focus on the first publication of Hobbes, the *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, edited around 1640 and considered by many to be his psychological masterpiece. Aside from the subtlety and depth with which he conducted his analysis of human passions, the interest of this work resides in the general argument and idea; here we find the essential nexus between power and recognition that characterizes, as we will see, the peculiarity of the Hobbesian model (the same nexus in his later works becomes obscured for various reasons). The originality of the argument manifests itself already at the level of terminology, in the complementary nature of the two terms at the center of the anthropology of the *Elements*: *power* and *glory*.

2. In the study of human nature, Hobbes reasons from a naturalistic and mechanistic perspective, concentrating on the metaphysical principle that man shares with all living beings: the *conatus* (*endeavor*, in the English text), in other words, the “effort” through which the individual tries to preserve his own life, gradually increasing his own power. The centrality of this principle of *self-preservation*, which is at the same time a principle of *self-empowerment*, created an enormous rupture in classical anthropology, which had anchored the pursuit of pleasure and happiness to an objective and hierarchical vision of the good. In releasing man from this inflexible switchboard of natural laws, Hobbes legitimizes the right to competitive self-affirmation, and thus opens the field to an anthropology focused on the will to power¹⁴.

From this dynamic and aggressive nucleus, which constitutes the propulsive center of individuality, Hobbes deduces two fundamental categories of the passions¹⁵, which are characterized by the two distinct forms of “good” to which they aim; following the critical tradition, we will define them as “passions of utility” and “passions of glory.” The first seek physical pleasure by turning themselves toward material objects (for example, food, drink, smells, sexual pleasure); the second turn toward symbolic objects, which are enjoyed in a “spiritual” form – i.e., not felt through the senses, but as a mental activity, and in particular, through the faculty of

Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis Opera Philosophica quae latine scripsit omnia, ed. W. Molesworth, 5 voll., London, 1839-1845, vol. II (English translation *The Citizen*, 1651); *Leviathan* = *Leviathan*, a cura di C.B. Macpherson, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968.

¹⁴ L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, chap. V. See also C.A. Viano, *Analisi della vita emotiva e tecnica politica nella filosofia di Hobbes*, in «Rivista critica di storia della filosofia», XVII, 1962, pp. 355-392; Ch. Lazzeri, *Les racines de la volonté de puissance: le «passage» de Machiavel à Hobbes*, in *Thomas Hobbes. Philosophie première, théorie de la science et politique*, Paris, Puf, 1990, pp. 225-246.

¹⁵ To understand the historical importance of Hobbesian anthropology, we have to remember that the term «passion» is particularly meaningful in modern philosophy: according to Hobbes, passions are all those needs, desires, and motives that operate as the distinctive springs of action in man. This modern theory of passions falls under the rubric of what today we call anthropology, psychology, & moral and social philosophy. See D. Kambouchner, *Passions*, in *Dictionnaire d'éthique et de philosophie morale*, cit.

the imagination¹⁶. There is a marked difference between these two categories of passions – the different quality of pleasure searched for and the different relationship each has to physical need – but there is also an important communal structure: everything is born from impulsion, the noted endeavor, that pushes the “I” to accumulate infinite power, continually transcending itself and assaulting all obstacles that it finds in its path. At the material level, this impulsion translates into an unlimited desire for sensual pleasure and possession, which collides with that equal security claimed by other human beings. At the mental level, this impulsion translates into *an unlimited desire for superiority over the consciousness of others*, of which the *Elements of Law* offers this dazzling definition:

GLORY, or internal gloriation or triumph of the mind, is that passion which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendeth with us (*Elements*, IX, 1).

With glory, a “triumph of the mind” – in the body of Hobbesian work this is also called pride, vanity, or, from the Greek, *eudokimein* (thinking well of oneself) – recognition begins to take part in the “heated” questions of modern philosophy. It does so from two essential points of view: anthropological and social, which we outlined at the beginning of our paper:

a) The need for recognition is not only a constitutive element of human nature, as are the physical needs (the passions of glory possess the same merit as those of utility), but it is, in fact, the key to the whole subjective and psychological structure; the need for recognition is indispensable for interpreting the deeper goals of human behavior and their specific features (at least this is how we find it in the *Elements*, where glory appears as a primary and dominant passion from which all the other passions are deduced). It should be noted, however, that with respect to the wide spectrum reported in our introduction, Hobbes makes a very selective choice, concentrating exclusively on *one* dimension of the need for recognition: that which expresses symbolic demands tied to the strategic competition for power: *the desire for honor or prestige*, with all its subtleties and derivations, as pride, vanity, consideration, fame, the search for distinction... In the economy of the Hobbesian model, this subspecies of recognition excludes or tends to absorb and close off other possible forms of “desire for desire” that are not necessarily emulative or aggressive, like the need for affection, approval, esteem. (The choice of the term «glory», traditionally tied to a chivalric and aristocratic world¹⁷, is emblematic: French authors such as Pascal and Rousseau, influenced by Augustinianism, prefer that of *amour-propre*, thus reintroducing affect as an essential part of the need for recognition. Hobbes’ metaphors are equally revealing: to illustrate his idea of recognition, Hobbes

¹⁶ See *De cive*, I, 2.

¹⁷ On the aristocratic origins of Hobbes’s psychology of honor, see L. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, cit.; K. Thomas, *The Social Origins of Hobbes’s Political Thought*, in *Hobbes Studies*, ed. K.C. Brown, Oxford, Blackwell, 1965.

uses images of war and rivalry, such as the duel, the race, and revenge.) This choice of foundation, which follows consistently from the metaphysics of the *conatus* and from the tradition of «political realism», which reduces human reality to the principles of power and conflict¹⁸, ends up profoundly shaping the outcomes of Hobbesian moral and political philosophy.

b) Being constitutionally a “relational” passion, which implies dependence on and comparison with others, and superimposing itself, as it does, on the *conatus*, the need for recognition becomes the key to social existence. In the Hobbesian model, the balance between inter-individual relationships is determined by the tension between two divergent urges, both derived from the desire for glory: on one side, the motives of need and dependence, indispensable for guaranteeing to one’s consciousness the external proof of recognition, and on the other side, the self-affirming and competitive impulse. A foundational cause for the social problem of modernity resides in this necessary contrast between attraction and aggression, vulnerability and power (which, as we shall see, becomes unavoidable in the internal picture traced by Hobbes).

3. Let us consider the first feature: what kind of innovations does the Hobbesian discovery of *glory* introduce into the analyses of human nature and of individual psyche?

Even though the Hobbesian model has been generally, and in part justly, defined as a “liberal” anthropology, which reduces society to its ultimate components – single independent atoms freely moving around, one against the other – one cannot claim that its center of gravitation is the individual. Hobbes reflects on human nature essentially as a political philosopher, whose psychological interests are always subordinate to the collective interest, and in particular to the good of social stability: in view of the primary objective of *peace*, the crucial problem reveals itself to be *inter-subjectivity*, the relationships that men undertake with each other, the difficult interaction of their personalities¹⁹.

The originality of such an approach emerges in his theory of the passions, in particular in the formulation of the *Elements*, the work least stamped by mechanistic naturalism. Hobbes presents there what today we would call a system of “social psychology,” an analysis of the human mind conducted entirely in light of the reciprocal relations between individuals. Glory, in this context, plays an archetypical role from the moment that it presupposes an inter-subjective definition of what the individual considers most precious, that is, knowledge of his own value: the image that the Hobbesian consciousness has of itself does not arise in a spontaneous manner from internal feeling (for example, in the form of an original experience that

¹⁸ See P.P. Portinaro, *Il realismo politico*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002.

¹⁹ We can grasp the peculiarity of this approach by comparing Hobbes with Descartes, whose coeval theory of the passions aims at individual ethical perfection. See A. Pacchi, *Hobbes and the Passions*, cit., pp. 83 ss.

Rousseau would have called the *sentiment de l'existence* or the *amour de soi*); rather, it has to be mediated by other consciousnesses. For at least two reasons:

a) In the first place because glory, like all the symbolic confirmations, relies on the inclinations of others – it has to be “recognized,” conceded by another subject. Unlike a material good (e.g. the quantity of food or drink necessary to satisfy my hunger and thirst), the symbolic good cannot be obtained and consumed simply as a function of individual desire; rather, it necessarily depends on the attitude and behavior of other people. (One thinks here of love: I cannot take possession of it as I would a thing, I cannot extort it; instead, it has to be granted to me by another because otherwise it loses the essential character of love; similarly, the passions of honor, even when they are imposed through violence or through implicit forms of blackmail, they nonetheless require external confirmation: I cannot enjoy the thought of my superiority if the entire society around me openly despises me – and in fact, a vainglorious individual must pretend to possess such attestations that are, in reality, denied him). The problem is that the reactions of others to our demands cannot be mechanistically controlled: others, for thousands of reasons, can always deny their love, their admiration, even their envy – and it is this uncertainty that constitutes the drama of recognition.

b) In the second place because, in light of the metaphysical and anthropological presuppositions accepted by Hobbes, the knowledge of oneself attested by glory is always relative and antagonistic: there is no normative order, external and absolute, with respect to which the individual can measure his own value (e.g. one's own degree of goodness connected to an objective ideal of the good), but valuing something means always valuing it in relation to others, in the sense of being better or worse. In this way, antagonistic comparison becomes an integral part of the individual psyche, which assumes a whirling reflective structure devoid of all boundaries. Instead of the teleological complex in which classical anthropology traps and regulates human life, Hobbes substitutes the unique, anarchic, and unreachable goal of “feeling better than others”:

... all the pleasure, and jollity of the mind consists in this; even *to get some, with whom comparing, it may find somewhat wherein to Triumph, and Vaunt it self* (*De cive*, I, 5).

From this claim a vicious circle inevitably emerges – and it is this, in my opinion, that accounts for the great interest in the Hobbesian vision of inter-subjectivity; it is the source of his profound, and tragically ambivalent, view: the “I” that wishes to excel spiritually over others in order to express the will to power needs to see itself confirmed by those same others with respect to whom he claims his superiority. The need for recognition contradicts the spirit of competition. Since both motives are crucial and ineradicable, the relationship assumes a paradoxical form, a double bind that renders ever more interdependent those same individuals who should, on principle, be autonomous.

I will return to the social consequences of this problem in a moment. First, I would like to draw out some further consequences of the discovery of the role of social negotiation for the formation of subjectivity:

a) *Restlessness and instability* characterize the consciousness that has no internal barometer and is thus condemned to fluctuate on the waves of other people's behavior. It is a problem that Hobbes considered unavoidable – one thinks here of the passages in which he describes the exasperated atmosphere of daily life in society, in which everyone is obsessively deciphering signs of honor and scorn – and he offered no specific moral remedy; but a solution will become important for Rousseau, whose ethics of authenticity aims to stabilize anew a solipsistic *ataraxia* through the renunciation of superfluous and symbolic dependencies;

b) *The insatiability of the need for recognition*: incapable of setting for oneself absolute aims, the desire for glory swells infinitely as an effect of the relativistic system of comparison, without ever satisfying itself. If everyone wanted only to feel himself to be “better” than others, then there can be no natural extinction of their desire and the only outcome possible is the endless contest (irritated beyond everything by the assumption of an anthropological equality, which makes the definition of stable hierarchies impossible: in the war of all against all, there will always be someone able to overcome my ephemeral victories).

A clarification: this *relativistic interpretation of the need for recognition* – the idea that one cannot give oneself a sufficient amount of proof to satisfy one's vital demands and at the same time to always claim even more of it – constitutes an original feature of Hobbes's approach, deriving from his metaphysics of *conatus* and from the exclusive identification between recognition and prestige: a vision of a less pervasive power and a more peaceful idea of the principle of self-preservation (like that which Rousseau attributes to *amour de soi*) could lead to less tragic alternatives, such as the hypothesis of a fair distribution of symbolic attestations, which placates the minimum demands of subjects without placing them in a necessary mutual conflict. This eventuality cannot exist on the horizon of a Hobbesian anthropology, which refutes the very idea of a value that is not “positional”: symbolic goods only count by function of their rarity, and therefore, the subjective gratification is by definition inseparable from the humiliation of others.

c) *The hypertrophic development of mental and imaginative life*. As an amphibian living in two kingdoms, the world of nature and the world of society, the Hobbesian man lives a double life, in which his physical needs (the passions of utility, immediately given by the instinct for preservation), line up with compelling spiritual needs: honor, consideration, prestige, admiration, distinction, and in turn, the fear of offenses and humiliation, the rancor of wounded honor, the desire for revenge. Hobbes, in this regard, speaks of the mental construction of a real parallel reality: an irritated and paranoid interior world, populated by consciousnesses struggling for the immaterial symbols of power.

d) *The genetic role in the complex development of interiority.* From the abstract form of glory as a predisposition antagonistic toward comparison, Hobbes derives other mental passions that require, in forms more or less determined and secondary, positive or negative, a reference to the value of other consciousnesses. These are the psychological phenomena that René Girard would call mimetic and that, in the lists of the *Elements* and of the *Leviathan*, comprise humility (or the feeling of being less than others), emulation (trying to become equal to others), envy (wanting the things of others and being like others), laughter (of which Hobbes gives a curious and emblematic definition: enjoying the humiliation of others), ambition (wanting more than others), etc. All passions, in other words, are modifications of the superiority/inferiority complex: in the image of the race, which we will comment on soon, this structure of derivation emerges very clearly.

4. After having considered the role of glory within the subjective and psychic formation, let us turn now to its social effects. As I mentioned, the reason for the agonistic bent in the Hobbesian idea of recognition resides in its “positional” nature, made explicit in this passage from *De cive*:

...because that Glory is like Honour, if all men have it, no man hath it, for they consist in comparison and precellence (*De cive*, I, 2).

Hobbesian men pursue glory as a zero-sum game: the success of one coincides necessarily with the defeat of the other. All claim superiority, but they are not ready to concede to others the privilege that they reserve for themselves: the only possible outcome is therefore war. Even if the conflict does not explode in an explicit way, the relationships between individuals remain poisoned by a latent tension, an emotional atmosphere of quarrels and suspicion; violence does not express itself physically, but finds an outlet through the cunning means of symbols and signs:

... it is impossible but men must declare sometimes some mutuall scorn and contempt either by Laughter, or by Words, or by Gesture, or some signe or other; than which there is no greater vexation of mind; and than from which there cannot possibly arise a greater desire to doe hurt. (*De cive*, I, 5).

Here is the “mental” origin of the Hobbesian state of nature: the war of all against all is not only a struggle for the accumulation of goods, dictated by utility and by the necessity of survival²⁰, but it is also a duel for prestige, that immaterial – almost

²⁰ In *Kampf um Anerkennung* Honneth argues that Hobbes’s state of nature offers a paradigm of the tendency of social theory to reduce conflict to the instrumentally rational establishment of power, and he further contends that Hegel opposed this tendency in his political philosophy based on the principle of the struggle for recognition. We can agree with this thesis, but not with the conclusion that the problem of recognition is exclusively «Hegel’s original idea». (Recently Honneth has softened this schema, reconsidering as forerunners of the Hegelian discovery both Hobbes’s idea of *glory* and Rousseau’s concept of *amour-propre*). As I try to demonstrate in this paper, we can solve this interpretive question by distinguishing between different models of «struggle for recognition»: the

magical – entity, which the Greeks used to call *kydos*. With respect to the violence that concerns material resources, aggression fomented by recognition is certainly futile. Blinded by vanity, men assault each other over trifles,

as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name (*Leviathan*, 13).

Yet, the intensity of the conflict seems to grow in proportion to the degree of its evanescence. Reader and translator of epic poems, Hobbes must have loved many of those episodes in which the heroes go insane or kill themselves in order to defend their honor. Risking life for something so impalpable seems the height of absurdity: indeed, the rationalist logic that leads to the contract was set up to counter this irrationality of glory.

With Hobbes, the need for recognition identified with the desire for supremacy becomes a dominant passion (in the double sense of dominating the human mind and aspiring to dominion in relationship with others), and in this way, Hobbes transforms the classical visions of psychology and of society. Both these dimensions converge in the passage that closes Chapter IX of the *Elements*, crystallizing in a powerful metaphor: the image of a race without a goal or a purpose, in which the only objective of the participants is to stay ahead of the others:

To consider them behind is glory.
To consider them before is humility.
To lose ground with looking back vain glory.
...
To endeavour to overtake the next, emulation.
To supplant or overthrow, envy.
...
To fall on the sudden is disposition to weep.
To see another fall, disposition to laugh.
To see one out-gone whom we would not is pity.
To see one out-go we would not, is indignation.
...
Continually to be out-gone is misery.
Continually to out-go the next before is felicity.
And to forsake the course is to die.

conflict illustrated by Hobbes is centered on the equation recognition/power, that subordinates symbolic claims to the strategic goal of self-affirmation. Honneth's model, on the contrary, has normative ends, and presupposes a very different concept of values, norms, and personal identity. See chapter 3 for the analogies between the Hobbesian model and Bourdieu's.

III. *The Struggle for Distinction: its Afterlife and a New Appraisal*

The same idea expressed so vividly in the image of Hobbes' *Elements* has been condensed recently into a term recognizable within French culture. Thanks to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, *distinction* has become the antonomasia of all theories of recognition tied to power. An originally aristocratic concept (just as many anthropologies of honor contain an aristocratic connotation), distinction is now, in the language of sociology, the margin or gap that marks, at the same time, the difference and superiority of the social subject with respect to social rivals: that which is "distinctive" is better because it is "different" and "superior" with respect to others.

The first metamorphosis of the Hobbesian model into a theory of distinction is found in the concept of Rousseau's *amour-propre*, whose social effects correspond exactly to those of Hobbes' glory. According to the historical-genealogical reconstruction in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, the socialized individual develops an immoderate desire for competitive self-affirmation, *la fureur de se distinguer*, which inflames the narcissistic energy, itself representative of the desire for recognition: like the worldly eighteenth-century aristocrats (on whom Rousseau evidently constructed his social template), the Rousseauian *homme civil* lives under the appraising look of his own equals, preoccupied solely in raising his own status by increasing his "importance" in the eyes of this public:

Chacun commença à regarder les autres et à vouloir être regardé soi-même, et l'estime publique eut un prix. Celui qui chantait ou dansait le mieux, le plus beau, le plus fort, le plus adroit ou le plus éloquent devint le plus considéré, et ce fut là le premier pas vers l'inégalité, et vers le vice en même temps: de ces premières préférences naquirent d'un côté la vanité et le mépris, de l'autre, la honte et l'envie; et la fermentation causée par ces nouveaux levains produisit enfin des composés funestes au bonheur et à l'innocence²¹.

More recently (but still connected to the French society of the *Ancien Régime*, which served as an historical model for his "court sociology"), Norbert Elias made use of a concept of recognition as distinction to construct a model of alternative social action corresponding to that of economic interest: where bourgeois rationality

²¹ J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, in Id., *Œuvres complètes*, 5 voll., Paris, Gallimard, 1959-1995, vol. III, pp. 169-170. Rousseau makes two important corrections to the Hobbesian model. Firstly, he historicizes Hobbes's psychology, regarding self-affirmation not as a natural and innate desire, but as the historical (and as such, relative and reformable) result of a decadent process: the theoretical result is the dichotomy between a primitive and good form of egoism, *amour de soi*, and the artificial and evil *amour-propre*. Secondly, Rousseau follows the Augustinian tradition in identifying an affective demand as part of the need for recognition: this integration between love and honor substantially modifies the *pars construens* of the system, and opens up positive forms of sociability. On Rousseau's theory of *amour-propre*, see B. Carnevali, *Romanticismo e riconoscimento. Figure della coscienza in Rousseau*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2004.

calculates in terms of material income, aristocratic rationality calculates in terms of symbolic profits: honor, prestige, elegance, exclusiveness, conspicuous consumption, etc. The two forms of rationality match two social configurations distinct in both time and space, stamped by different systems of value, and ideally represented by the royal court of Louis XIV and the eighteenth-century world of professions and of finance. But even while acting through diverse forms and means, these two strategies obey a single aim: to better one's own relative position within the social field. Thus, the ethics of bourgeois savings and the ethics of the noble *dépense* reveal themselves as equivalent means for increasing one's own "chances of power":

In a society in which every outward manifestation of a person has special significance, expenditure on prestige and display is for the upper classes a necessity which they cannot avoid. They are an indispensable instrument in maintaining their social position, especially when – as is actually the case in this court society – all members of the society are involved in a ceaseless struggle for status and prestige²².

But it is above all in the sociology of Bourdieu that we find the most coherent theoretical elaboration of recognition as "social capital." The philosophical presuppositions that form the background of Bourdieu's social theory are substantially the same as in Hobbes: to an anthropology of the will to power (for the sociologist, this is devoid of a metaphysical foundation), is added the distinction between two different spheres of goods, the material one of economic resources and the immaterial one of symbolic and cultural resources: the individual moves about both spheres guided by a single vital *interest* – the concern for his own self-affirmation. Just like the Hobbesian distinction between passions of utility and passions of glory, which though acting in different worlds and for different reasons nonetheless obey the finality of the *conatus*, the theory of distinction operates on a single basic assumption: the prime objective of social subjects is the maximization of power and the accumulation of symbolic profit is an essential part of this strategy. (The notion of a "symbolic capital" is emblematic: it indicates metaphorically the quantity of recognition that an individual or a group can accumulate by artfully manipulating the cultural system). The problem of recognition, then, becomes absorbed into a utilitarian anthropology, bringing about a fundamental integration of materialist assumptions traditionally associated with the paradigm of the "economic man" (this opens a new and infinitely rich field for phenomenology and the hermeneutics of power conflicts); but, at the same time, the symbolic demand remains subordinate to the logic of "interest". The *Esquisse pour une théorie de la pratique* characterizes the "economics of practices," the theoretical model that embraces all forms of action, material or symbolic, under the sign of a unique strategic model:

On ne peut échapper en effet aux naïvetés ethnocentriques de l'économisme sans tomber dans l'exaltation populiste de la naïveté généreuse des origines qu'à condition d'accomplir jusqu'au bout ce qu'il ne fait qu'à moitié et d'étendre à *tous* les

²² N. Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft* (1969), eng. trad. *The Court Society*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1983, p. 63.

biens, matériels ou symboliques, sans distinction, qui se présentent comme *rare*s et dignes d'être recherchés dans une formation sociale déterminée – s'agirait-il de "bonnes paroles" ou de sourires, de serremments da mains ou de haussements d'épaules, de compliments ou d'attentions, de défis ou d'injures, d'honneur ou d'honneurs, de pouvoirs ou de plaisirs, de "ragots" ou d'informations scientifiques, de distinction ou de distinctions, etc. –, le calcul économique qui n'a pu s'appropriier le terrain objectivement livré à la logique impitoyable de "l'intérêt tout nu", comme dit Marx, qu'en abandonnant un îlot de sacré, miraculeusement épargné par "l'eau glaciale du calcul égoïste", asile de ce qui n'a pas de prix, par excès ou par défaut²³.

The experience of recognition, in other words, seems “reduced” to the pursuit of social conflict through other means: conceived as a *ruse* or game of interest, it is deprived of its own specificity, or to use the categories of communicative action, it becomes crushed by a functionalist conception to the detriment of its normative potential²⁴.

A proper analytic reconstruction of Bourdieu’s theory would take us beyond the scope of this paper. I will limit myself to one possible line of development, bearing in mind that the ideas I put together in the end can be useful also for the successors of Hobbes.

2. Like all great interpretive models that try to represent the manifold nature of human reality, the Hobbesian model is a portrait in chiaroscuro: illuminating certain aspects of the experience necessarily leaves others in the shadows. If the historical merits are unquestionable – as I have attempted to show, and thanks to Hobbes, recognition has become a central problem in modern anthropology and sociology – its philosophical merits are largely tied to the radicalism, acuity and open-minded realism of its demystifying hermeneutic devices: the contest of honor is a hidden dimension of social conflict, and even though it is always painfully experienced by each one of us as part of our daily life with others, it is often ignored by analysts in favor of a superficial materialism. Theorists of distinction crudely deny the secondary nature of the symbolic, teaching us to unmask traces of violence even in apparently insignificant phenomena: Hobbes actually glimpsed “war” in a single offending word spoken in conversation, Bourdieu shows that even the most pointless choice of a brand of wine can signify a stake in a game of power.

However, what makes this method fascinating is also what makes it frustrating. There appear to be no solutions to the problem of violence in Hobbes’s state of nature if not the equivalent and opposing violence of repression by the state. Similarly, the world of Bourdieu seems locked in a spiral that denies citizenship to values, to disinterest, to non-aggressive and uncompetitive movements that can form the basis for relationships

²³ P. Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (1972), Paris, Seuil ("Points essais"), 2000, pp. 362-363. See obviously also *La Distinction* (1979), it. trans. *La distinzione*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1983.

²⁴ See A. Honneth, *Die zerrissene Welt der symbolischen Formen*, in «Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie», 36, 1984, pp. 147-164.

between men (it is not by chance that his heretical students, like Boltanski, were driven away exactly on this subject²⁵). Whoever interprets man solely through the matrix of power and conflict will not easily find alternative solutions – and the reader is left with an aftertaste of reductiveness, the feeling that the glare of the demystifier has deliberately or involuntarily overlooked other significant human experiences.

(I would like to make clear that this presumption harms, in particular, a tradition that evokes – in a programmatic way – the value of the “reality principle.” Whoever gets rid of every disparagement of the hidden side of recognition as an idealistic or utopian experiment forgets that only a reflection across the entire spectrum of the passions, or to speak in a less obsolete language, only a study of man that takes into account, more objectively and comprehensively, *all causes and all phenomena*, could put forward the ultimate challenge, *the achievement of anthropological realism*. Transcending the rigid logic of power/conflict does not necessarily mean betraying “la realtà effettuale della cosa” for “l’immaginazione di essa”²⁶: after all, two of the greatest realists in the history of Western philosophy, Augustine and Hegel, were fascinated by the problem of love.

3. I will now turn to one final example that I consider enlightening with respect to the particular theme of this paper. Pierre Nicole, in one of his most famous *Essais de morale, De la charité et de l’amour-propre* (1675), devised a way out of the impasse described by Hobbes with a small, but highly subtle, addition to his model. In defining *amour-propre* (the formula that the French used to translate the problem of *glory*²⁷), Nicole discriminates between two distinct elements, which express respectively the inheritance of the two traditions on which the moral psychology of Jansenism nourished itself: the desire for supremacy, corresponding to the Hobbesian will to power; and *le désir d’être aimé* – an echo of the Augustinian love of love, or love of being loved.

Now, according to Nicole, these two subspecies of *amour-propre* (both entirely “modern” and “natural” since they represent two complementary expressions of egoism as love of oneself²⁸) reach different levels of equilibrium depending on the subjects; but even though the desire for dominion often imposes itself with greater force, only the

²⁵ On the critical debate regarding Bourdieu, see A. Honneth, *Die zerrissene Welt der symbolischen Formen*, cit.; L. Boltanski, *L’Amour et la Justice comme compétences. Trois essais de sociologie de l’action*, Paris, Métailié, 1990 (in particular chap. 2, «Agapè» une introduction aux états de paix); A. Caillé, *Don, intérêt, désintéressement* (1984), it. trans. *Il terzo paradigma. Antropologia filosofica del dono*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1998, in particular chap. 2. (From a very different point of view, in which love is similarly opposed to symbolic violence, see also R. Girard, *Le Bouc émissaire* (1982), it. trans. *Il capro espiatorio*, Milano, Adelphi, 1987). For a general appraisal of the debate, which contradicts the thesis of “economism” in Bourdieu, see A. Boschetti, *La rivoluzione simbolica di Pierre Bourdieu*, Marsilio, Venezia, 2003.

²⁶ This is the stark choice offered by Machiavelli (See *Il Principe*, cap. XV).

²⁷ Using the French translation of *De cive, Le Citoyen* by Samuel Sorbière (1649).

²⁸ «Il n’y a rien de si naturel à l’homme que le désir d’être aimé des autres, parce qu’il n’y a rien de si naturel que de s’aimer soi-même. Or, on désire toujours que ce qu’on aime soit aimé.» P. Nicole, *De la civilité chrétienne*, in *Essais de morale*, ed. L. Thirouin, Paris, Puf, 1999, p. 18.

need for love can be considered a truly universal passion: there exist men who are indifferent to power, but there does not exist any man who does not want to be loved. On the basis of this simple – though not banal – finding, Nicole shatters the all-encompassing nature of the Hobbesian model, calling attention to that self-education of egoism – synthesized by the formula of *amour-propre éclairé* and exemplified in the worldly aristocratic ideal of *honnêteté* – which anticipates the Freudian way to *civilization*: even the most egocentric and power-hungry man needs to avoid social exclusion. Since, from the anger that others stir up in us we can easily deduce what they must feel in our own quarrels, there is no other choice (in the interest of self-love) but to soften the sharpest points of our narcissism and to learn to behave ourselves in society *as if* we truly loved those by whom we wished – at all costs – to be loved:

Ce que l'amour-propre recherche particulièrement dans la domination, c'est que nous soyons regardés des autres comme grands et puissants, et que nous excitions dans leur cœur des mouvements de respect et d'abaissement conformes à ces idées. Mais, quoique ce soient là les impressions qui lui sont les plus agréables, ce ne sont pas néanmoins les seules dont il se nourrit. Il aime généralement tous les mouvements qui lui sont favorables, comme l'admiration, la confiance, et principalement l'amour. [...] Si le désir d'être aimé n'est donc pas la plus forte passion qui naisse de l'amour-propre, elle est au moins la plus générale. Les vues d'intérêt, d'ambition, de plaisir en arrêtent souvent les effets, mais ils ne l'étouffent jamais entièrement. Elle est toujours vivante au fond du cœur, et dès qu'elle se trouve en liberté, elle ne manque pas d'agir, et de nous porter à tout ce qui nous peut procurer l'amour des hommes, comme elle nous fait éviter tout ce que nous nous imaginons qui nous peut attirer leur aversion²⁹.

In short, the remedy is in the disease: one of the aspects of our need for recognition, the desire for approval and love, disciplines the other more violent and asocial characteristics. Even if we cannot call it an ethical solution (self-education can limit itself to the exterior manifestations of behavior only, justifying the accusations of “hypocrisy”), we can nonetheless seek an escape route, wholly secular and worldly, from the war of all against all.

4. The thought of Nicole certainly cannot compete on the theoretical plane with the strength and coherence of the metaphysical system of Hobbes, nor can his idea of love naively transcend the historical limits of seventeenth-century anthropology (the domain of these problems today most likely belongs to the social sciences, and in particular, to that current of psychoanalysis that centers on “object relations”³⁰); but the

²⁹ P. Nicole, *De la charité et de l'amour-propre*, in *Essais de morale*, cit., pp. 386-387.

³⁰ This interpretive path has been opened up by *Kampf um Anerkennung* with its “systematic renewal” of the ideas of the young Hegel. Honneth has “naturalized” the theory of *Sittlichkeit* by eliminating its metaphysical foundation, no more sustainable today, and by comparing its philosophical content with the empirical results of psychoanalysis, social psychology, and sociology. I would like to do the same with the modern moralists (after all, the ideal vocation of hermeneutics really consists in these kinds of

psychological criticism of Nicole is subtle, and it suggests, in its effects, a crack in the model that bases itself on the exclusive reduction of recognition to a strategy of power. To reflect on the choices that shaped this first substantial historical explanation can help us to consider the value and wisdom of the interpretive models that guide us today.

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“renewals”) from Montaigne to Rousseau: their anthropological, psychological, and social reflections remain unsurpassed.