Struggling without Recognition
Anthropology and Representation in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*

by Nicola Marcucci

*Introduction*

Is it possible – and if so in what terms – to talk of a Hobbesian theory of recognition? This is the question that I will try to answer in the following pages. Before proceeding in this direction, however, it is be important to specify the meaning of this question.

It is known that the topic of acknowledgement has become a central aspect of moral reflection and modern politics, starting from Fichte and Hegel’s German idealism. In particular, the latter is credited with the codification of the concept of the inter-individual relationship within the scope of an historical vision of the slave/master relationship. The Hegelian codification takes form within a polemical relationship with the natural law and contractualism tradition, of which Hobbes is held as one of the greatest representatives. In order to speak of a Hobbesian theory of recognition, I will thus start from this juxtaposition, evaluating its most salient aspects and highlighting some points of continuity (I).

Once I have centred - or, perhaps more correctly de-centred - Hobbes’s reception in Hegel’s thought, I will try to spread some light on the theoretical framework in which we find the Hobbesian theory of recognition. The rooting of the theory of recognition in Hobbesian anthropology is highlighted by the centrality of the passions of honour and glory, and confirmed by the existence of the laws of nature (II).

I will then concentrate on the theory of authorisation and representation, intending it as a condition of possibility and the paradoxical neutralisation of the political implications of the theory of recognition. In this way, I will also motivate the choice of investigating the theme of acknowledgement starting from the *Leviathan*, i.e. starting from the text in which Hobbes introduces the new terms of the theory of representation (III).

I. *Hobbes in Hegel*

As is known, Hobbes is central to the development of Hegel’s political thought even in his early work. Hobbes’s presence is assiduous, although Hegel often avoids

---


2 With the expression representation we understand the twofold dispositive based on the authorization of the sovereign and the representation of people. Of authorization and representation

quoting his work directly⁴. It will thus be a case of summarising briefly the ambivalent and strategic role played by Hegel’s reception of Hobbes in the elaboration of his theory of recognition.

In the text On the scientific ways of treating natural law, Hegel criticises those whom he considers to be the two main modern attempts to scientifically treat natural law: empiricism and formalism. Hobbes becomes central in relation to the former. The main characteristic attributed by Hegel to the empiricist approach is determined by its proceeding through individual determinations - the axiom form being its most characteristic one - through which it divides nature, then reconstructing it by construction⁵. Empiricism thus lacks the synthetic intuition of the unity of nature⁶. The empiricist method operates a deconstruction of nature by resorting to a psychology that limits itself to enumerating the "abilities found in man" and a reconstruction "thanks to the imagination" in the case of the state of nature⁷. This hypothesis therefore represents a universal abstract, which Hegel emphatically defines as the “cloudy notion of an original and absolute unity”⁸. What this notion of unity is lacking is, in other words, the time of the negative, and thus it is not possible to understand the immanent movement of nature, consequently condemning the abstraction hypothesis. The Hobbesian “war of all against all” represents the peculiar image of this concept:

it is necessary to conceive of the abstract ethical energies in their natural state, or in the abstract man, as in a mutually annihilating war. But precisely for this, it is easy to demonstrate that these qualities, while they are decidedly opposed to each other and thus [reduced] to mere ideals, do not consist, in actual fact, as they should, of this ideal and this abstraction, but [in this] they are suppressed, and reduced to nothingness⁹.

On the other hand, the concept of ethics exposed in this treatise and in the System of ethics represents - in the author’s opinion and beyond the disastrous answer of Kant’s formalism - the solution that allows one not to think about nature abstractly, managing to conceive of “the identity of the state of nature and of sovereignty”¹⁰. Nevertheless - and this is one of the positive characteristics of the Hobbesian contribution according to Hegel – Hobbes made the problem of power take root in the concept of human nature by refusing to conceive of it as “something to be foregone”¹¹. Although the outcome of this attempt should be considered as a failure, as it was also mentioned in the Lectures on the history of philosophy¹²: “Hobbes therefore implies, in its correct meaning, that it is a state of nature, and he does not give in to empty talk on the goodness of the natural state”¹³.


⁴ Peperzak, Hegel and Hobbes revisited, cit., p. 205.
⁶ Notoriously, according to Hegel is Spinoza that author that has to be credit for this “discovery” of the the synthetic unity: Hegel, Lezioni sulla storia della filosofia, III. 2, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1944, pp. 104-144.
⁷ Hegel, Natural Law, cit., p. 41.
⁸ Ivi, p. 43.
⁹ Ivi, p. 45.
¹⁰ Ivi, p. 47.
¹² Hegel, Lezioni, cit., pp. 171-176.
¹³ Ivi, p. 174.
Hobbes’s further merit would be given by his scientification of practical philosophy and his refusal of the ancient opposition between *episteme* and *phronesis*, without prejudice to the Hegelian refusal of the empiricist notion of the Hobbesian *episteme*14. The point is thus for Hegel to be able to conceive of the nature of ethics starting from Hobbes, as regards the natural - and therefore scientific - concept of power, but despite him, for what concerns the relationship between nature and civil state.

The theory of recognition, as early as in the Jena writings, allows for the exact concept of this unity of the ethical life, which would otherwise be annihilated by the opposition between the state of nature and the civil state, since the legal state:

consists in what man must necessarily recognise. This necessity is intrinsically his, and not in our thought in opposition to that content. The way in which it is recognised is movement, and this movement suppresses its natural state: which is to recognise; the natural element only exists, it is not spiritual.15

This is therefore an initial aspect highlighting the relationship between the Hegelian theory of recognition and his reception of Hobbes’s thought. Hobbes reflects, in a modern manner, on the concretion between nature and power but, by transforming this reflection into the abstraction of the state of nature, he does not grasp its processuality, i.e. he does not grasp the intimately historical nature of ethics, unlike the theory of recognition, which by contrast manages to do that. In this sense, acknowledgement represents “the speculative truth of the covenant”16, its overcoming it, its *Aufhebung*.

A different reading of the relationship between Hegel and Hobbes, precisely in relation to the issue of acknowledgement, was given by Leo Strauss in his famous interpretation of Hobbes17. Strauss also puts the emphasis on the problem of acknowledgement, but unlike the above-mentioned interpretations, he argues that Hobbes can be considered the inspirer of the Hegelian concept of acknowledgement, rather than his main polemical object. The importance of fear of a violent death is central in this respect:

The conscience of the slave is essentially determined, according to both Hegel and Hobbes, by fear of death; and, in principle, slave consciousness represents a higher stage than master consciousness, for Hegel as well as for Hobbes18.

If the reference to the Hegelian slave-master dialectic is intuitive, the reference to Hobbes is less so19. Strauss reinterprets Hobbes’s moral concept by highlighting in

---

15 Hegel, *Jensener Realphilosophie*, II, a cura di J. Hoffmeister, Meiner, Lipsia 1931, p. 206. The carachterizaton of the concept of recognition, is at the core of Hegle project since his early works. T has nonetheless to e distinguished the confrontation with this topic in the Jena writings from the one more canonical presented in the phenomenology. In this respect, I will here only make reference to two writings that I will take in consideration after A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1992; A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Gallimard, Frankfurt 1947
19 La lettura di Strauss è su questo largamente informata dalla lettura kojeviana sebbene, come vedremo, Kojeve ne prenderà parzialmente le distanze. Si legge a questo proposito: «Kojeve knows as well as anyone living that Hegel's fundamental teaching regarding master and slave is based on Hobbes' doctrine of the state of nature. If Hobbes' doctrine of the state of nature is abandoned en pleine connaissance de cause (as indeed it should be abandoned), Hegel's fundamental teaching will lose the
particular what he considers to be a legacy of the aristocratic vision, of Aristotelian origin, of human virtue. From this perspective, the emphasis placed by Hobbes on the passions of glory and honour would indeed derive from this culture.

As from the *Leviathan*, however, Hobbes would have distanced himself from this concept, by virtue of an anthropology built on egalitarian principles. The original value of fear of a violent death would indeed characterise this departure from the aristocratic values.

Strauss, however, stresses how Hegel owes to Hobbes’s work not only in terms of the anthropoietic function of death and acknowledgement. Indeed, an awareness of historicity, on which the Hegelian theory of recognition is built, would seem present in embryo in Hobbes’s thought. As previously mentioned, one of the merits that Hegel recognises to Hobbes is that of having rooted his concept of power in human nature, or in the words of Strauss:

> As Hobbes makes the Commonwealth, or the need for the Commonwealth, emerge from the natural state, Hegel makes absolute knowledge arise from natural conscience.

This “immanent” concept of power would enable Hobbes to categorically reject the “morals of obedience”, with the result that:

> Now, this premise, which initially pushed philosophy to turn to history, ends up making philosophy itself take on the typical nature of history. For Hobbes, however, history in the end becomes unnecessary, because for him political philosophy becomes a history, a typical history.

Only from here, from this subsumption of history into the history of philosophy, will that convergence of real and conscious originate, whose trademark will be represented by the Hegelian theory of recognition.

In addition to the identification of fear of death as an anthropological universal, Hegel’s critique of the bourgeoisie will be deeply rooted in this historical contextualisation of philosophy, pointing out, again according to Strauss, the centrality of Hobbes’s contribution:

> Even if Hegel rejects Hobbes’s "views" as "superficial and empirical", he nevertheless admits that "the reasons and theories that he brings forward are original, as they are derived from natural needs". Hegel’s criticism of the bourgeoisie was made possible not only by the new interpretation of Plato’s political philosophy, but also by the new way to understand the justifications of the bourgeois ideal, which must be traced back to Hobbes.

We are therefore faced with two conflicting interpretations of Hobbes’s role in the elaboration of the modern theory of recognition. In one case, Hobbes would be the main polemical object of the Hegelian theory of recognition; in the other, its main inspiration.

There is, however, a third version of this problem, as expressed by Kojève’s in a letter of his epistolary with Strauss in which, although acknowledging Hobbes’s evidence which it apparently still possesses for Kojève, Hegel's teaching is much more sophisticated than Hobbes', but it is as much a construction as the latter. Both doctrines construct human society by starting from the untrue assumption that man as man is thinkable as a being that lacks awareness of sacred restraints or as a being that is guided by nothing but a desire for recognition; L. Strauss, *Restatement*, in Id., *On Tyranny*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 2000, p. 192. It is Strauss himself to recall his project with Kojève, never accomplished, to work on Hobbes influence on Hegel. Strauss, *The political philosophy of Hobbes*. cit. p. 58.

importance to the Hegelian theory of recognition, he highlights a significant limitation of this interpretation. It is no coincidence that the relationship of Hegel towards Hobbes was so ambivalent given that, although the centrality of fear of death is a common anthropological denominator between the two thinkers, we must also introduce the crucial aspect of work in relation to Hegel’s thought. Only through work, since he could thus conceive dialectically of the relationship between the slave and the master, would Hegel manage, according to Kojève, to theorise the problem of acknowledgement in full:

Hobbes does not acknowledge the value of work. Fear of death is not enough to lead man "to reason". The scared slave reaches science (and the idea of freedom …) only if (in and through fear) he also works, and he works for the master, in other words only if he serves. This explains history as "class struggle", i.e., as a Slave-Master dialectic with a final synthesis23.

In Hobbes, this relationship to the third element is missing, and as a consequence, the two states, the natural and the civil states, cannot enter into a productive relationship.

But is the third element really missing in Hobbes’s anthropological and political thought? If put in Kojève’s terms, the answer is undoubtedly affirmative. Nevertheless, asking this question in Hobbesian terms obliges us, as I will show in the following paragraphs, not to confine the problem of acknowledgement only at the level of anthropology, but to extend it up to capturing the political sublimation and neutralisation of this issue in the theory of representation. As Leo Strauss had intuited, but for different reasons, it is only from the Leviathan onwards that these two dimensions of the Hobbesian thought become joined.

Before proceeding in this direction, however, it will be necessary to clarify how the concept of recognition is considered in a threefold meaning here.

1. In a first meaning, linked to the anthropology of Hobbes, I will analyse recognition by intending it as a dynamics of social approval of individual value based on the relational nature of power.

2. In a second meaning, I shall refer to the recognition of the equal value of individuals stated in the ninth law of nature, which, by introducing an element of apparent verticality within anthropology, subtracts from the primary sociality of the attribution of honour its function as the only transcendental capable of determining individual value.

3. Finally, recognition will be understood as the foundation of the authorisation/representation dynamics that marks a decisive turning point in Hobbes’s anthropological concept, starting with the Leviathan.

It should be noted that, in the first two meanings, Hobbes uses the corresponding English verb to acknowledge. In the first case this verb is used to highlight the circulation of power through the reciprocal approval of honour24. In the second case he uses this verb in relation to the ninth law of nature, which sets out the moral necessity of men to recognise others as their equals25.

In a different manner, in the third case he uses the verb *to own*, which means both possessing as well as acknowledging; but generally translators have chosen the verb "to recognise" to translate this passage. In addition, it should be pointed out that, in another passage, in the context of the sovereign’s authorisation, Hobbes uses the verb *to own* as well as the verb *to acknowledge*.

Apart from these philological aspects, this interpretation of the Hobbesian concept of recognition may be strengthened only by showing how the anthropological and moral concept of recognition is a fundamental conceptual complement in the Hobbesian theory of representation.

II. Anthropology and morals of recognition

A long and consolidated interpretative tradition has identified the core of Hobbes’s anthropological concept with conservative compulsion and personal interest. Hobbesian individualism was the term under which this characterisation was often summarised.

In my opinion, this interpretation is only partially valid, for two main reasons. Primarily, the concept held by Hobbes is an anthropological concept that is defined within a polemical relationship with what we can define as one of the paradigms of modern individualism: Cartesian subjectivism. In the third objections to the second Meditation by Descartes Hobbes highlights how the *cogito*, the meditative activity, has no ontological function to certify the thinking existence of the subject. Hobbes’s objections, as is known, consist in showing how the shift from an ontic plane to an

---

26 «Of Person Artificiall, some have their words and actions Owned by those whom they represento», Ivi, XVI, p. 112. Both in Italian and French translation this passage is translated with the verb *recongnize*: "reconoscere", "reconnaître" trad. it. Levitiano o la materia, la forma, e il potere di uno stato ecclesiastico e civile, a cura di A. Pacchi, con la collaborazione di A. Lupoli, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1997, p. 132; trad. fr. Léviathan traité de la matière de la forme et du pouvoir de la république ecclesiastique et civile, trad. par F. Tricaud, Sirey, Paris 1971.

27 «Which is as much as to say, to appoint one Man, or Assembly of men, to bear their Person; and ever one to own, and acknowledge himself to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Person, shall Act, or cause to be Acted, in those things which concern the Common Peace and Safeté», Ivi, XVIII, p. 120


29 « I myself, who think, am to be distinguished from my thinking; and my thinking is not separate from me, but different from me, just as dancing is distinguished from the dancer (as was pointed out above). But if M. Descartes has shown that the one who understands and the understanding are one and the same, we shall fall back into the scholastic way of talking: ‘the understanding understands’, ‘the sight sees’, ‘the will wills’, and, to use an exact analogy, ‘the walk (or at least the faculty of walking) walks’», René Descartes, *Meditations on first philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 177. About this issue: A. Lupoli, *...omnia est impossibile cogitare se cogitare..., in Hobbes oggi*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1990, pp. 447-469; T. Sorell, *Hobbes’s objections and Hobbes’s system*, in R. Ariew, M. Grene (edited by), *Descartes and his contemporaries*, The Chicago University Press, Chicago 1995, pp. 83-96.
ontological one hides an obvious contradiction in logics. By contrast, Hobbes proposes, in all of his work but with greater emphasis starting from his later writings, a radically nominalist concept that necessarily puts in a relationship individual identity with a shared linguistic context, within which the subject may certify his existence\textsuperscript{30}.

The second reason, i.e. Hobbes’s concept of acknowledgement, exposed mainly in the first part of the \textit{Leviathan}, is the one on which I will concentrate in this discussion. As I will point out, critics have addressed this issue by favouring some of its constituent aspects rather than the question as a whole.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{a. Honour and glory}
\end{itemize}

Honour and glory are contiguous but not identical concepts that are central to the Hobbesian concept of passions, and therefore to his concept of human nature.

The concept of \textit{glory} is central to the whole Hobbesian political production, although it is indeed less emphasised in the \textit{Leviathan}\textsuperscript{31}. The history of this concept in the moral thinking of the seventeenth century is quite articulated, but it will suffice to consider two aspects here. Hobbes distinguishes this term from \textit{self-love (amor sui)}, which is equally present in the English moral and theological language of that time\textsuperscript{32}. Nevertheless, the meaning of this concept is close, in many respects, to that of "self-love" that is particularly influential in the French Jansenist thought of the seventeenth century\textsuperscript{33}.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish the concept of "glory" from that of "self-love", showing the respective definitions of these concepts that Hobbes puts forward in the \textit{Leviathan}.

Hobbes defines the concept of glory in chapter VI of the \textit{Leviathan}:

Joy arising from imagination of a man’s own power and ability is that exultation of the mind which is called \textit{GLORIFYING}\textsuperscript{34}.


\textsuperscript{34} The influence of Hobbes on French moral culture is confirmed by the fact that in the first French translation of the \textit{De Cive}, edited by Sorbiere, the word glory has been translated on French with \textit{amour propre}. This translation contributed to the diffusion of Hobbes’ thinking in the France of XVIIth century. In this respect see: A. M. Battista, \textit{Nascita della psicologia politica}, ECIJG, Genova 1982.
This relationship between imagining one’s own power and glory is already confirmed in the Elements of Law\textsuperscript{35}. Glory is thus a passion that puts us in a relationship with others. It can be justified in different manners:

if grounded upon the experience of his own former actions, is the same with confidence; but if grounded on the flattery of others, or only supposed by himself, for delight in the consequences of it, is called VANAGLORY\textsuperscript{36}

Glory is thus at the origin of the ambivalent value-based relationship with the self. In the first case, it represents a disposition to the relationship built on one’s past individual experience: trust; in the second, it establishes an instrumental relationships towards others, which is selfish in its nature: vainglory.

In the Leviathan, the concept of self-love is not as present and central. We can find a useful definition in Chapter XVIII, which is worth quoting in full:

For all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses (that is their passions and self-love) through which every little payment appeareth a great grievance, but are destitute of those prospective glasses (namely moral and civil science) to see afar off the miseries that hang over them and cannot without such payments be avoided\textsuperscript{37}.

As well as vainglory, self-love prevents us from giving the right amount of importance to ourselves, emphasising our afflictions rather than our self-esteem. Unlike glory, however, which is an ambivalent passion, self-love seems to necessarily produce distorting effects in our perception of reality (multiplying glasses) rooting itself in the very “nature” of men. Thus, it would appear that glory is an open and ambivalent human tendency that, nevertheless, by reason of self-love, often turns into vainglory. It is interesting to note how Hobbes has recourse to a further use of adjectives (vainglory) or to a different term (pride, arrogance) when he intends to give glory a negative connotation. Glory is first and foremost a form of social relationship based on comparisons.

This distinction between self-love and glory may in some ways be joined with the definition - which is absolutely central to Hobbes’s anthropology and his theory of recognition – of conatus, endeavour\textsuperscript{38}. Hobbes’s anthropology is mainly an anthropology of desire.

As Hobbes recalls, this desire can be distinguished between vital and animal\textsuperscript{39}. While the first relates to bodily functions, such as nutrition or blood circulation, the second consists of dependent imaginative functions. While the first kind of desires is moved by mainly utilitarian needs (passions for the useful), the second is

---

\textsuperscript{35} Elements of Law natural and politic, F. Tönnies (edited by), Chap. IX, p. 36, trad. it. Elementi di legge naturale e politica, IX, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{36} Leviathan, cit., Chap. VI, p. 42, trad. it. p. 47.

\textsuperscript{37} Leviathan, cit., Chap. XVIII, p. 129, trad. it. p. 154.

\textsuperscript{38} B. Carnevali, inspired by Strauss interpretation grounds principally the distinction between amous de soi and glory, what she calls the ‘hobbesian model” of recognition: B. Carnevali, Potere e riconoscimento: il modello hobbesiano, «Iride», XVIII, 46, 2005, pp. 313-335. What seems very problematic in Strauss reading – even if he has underlined the relational passion of glory – is that he considered the abandon of heroic virtues has the caracterizing aspect of bourgeois modernity of Hobbes’ Leviathan. Focusing on the analysis of these passions, showing how these are essential to understand Hobbes theory of recognition, we uses Strauss interpretation against the grain. For other critiques of Strauss see: D. Weber, Hobbes et le désir de fous, cit., pp. 58-60; Slomp G., Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory, cit., p. 48.

\textsuperscript{39} Leviathan, cit., Chap. VI, pp. 37-38, trad. it. p. 41.
distinguished by a need for mental gratification (passions for glory)\textsuperscript{40}. While the first order of passions refers to a purely material economy of needs, the second is defined within what Pierre Bourdieu would have called an “economy of symbolic goods”\textsuperscript{41}.

This dualism defines the conceptual space of Hobbesian anthropology and opens up to a field of forces in a continuous tension, inside of which the Hobbesian theory of recognition is constituted. The theory of honour is the logical and conceptual engine inside which Hobbes develops this tension.

The division between two different kinds of desires is echoed by the division between different kinds of power. In Chapter X of the Leviathan, Hobbes distinguishes two types of power; \textit{natural} and \textit{instrumental}. The first is based on the eminence of the faculties of the body and mind, while the second is the result of those powers that become means to acquire even more powers\textsuperscript{42}.

In this paragraph, Hobbes exposes a \textit{phenomenology of power} entirely based on this distinction\textsuperscript{43}. In this phenomenology, Hobbes shows how all human abilities, qualities, privileges and knowledge can be understood as powers.

It is possible to note how, in addition to the distinction made explicit by Hobbes between natural powers and instrumental power, it is possible to distinguish the two forms of power by reason of the fact that instrumental power is always socialised, in the sense that its quality is induced by the collective consideration of this quality. Given, however, that natural power is a harbinger of instrumental power, power itself reveals its eminently social nature. In the \textit{Leviathan}, although the distinction between these two types of powers is confirmed analytically, it appears to be attenuated by reason of a vision that seems to solve this distinction within a unitary vision of human nature.

Thus, fame “is power in itself because it is endowed with the participation of those who are in need of protection”, and more generally, power is:

Any quality that makes a man be loved or feared by many, or the fame of possessing such a quality, because it is a means to get the assistance and service of many people\textsuperscript{44}.

In other words, all of those qualities exposed to collective acknowledgement (as in the case of success, affability, reputation etc.) represent a form of power. Even science itself has its place within this order, although its recognisability is limited, due to the fact that it “is by nature such as that no one can recognise it, unless they possesses it in good measure”\textsuperscript{45}.

This relationship between power and social acknowledgement is the basis of the Hobbesian theory of \textit{value}.

The \textit{value} or WORTH of a man is, as of all other things, his price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his power\textsuperscript{46}.

The radically anti-axiological nature of this passage is evident in the definition of the value of a person understood as his price. Rather than the market as a metaphor

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Leviathan}, cit., Chap. X, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{44} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, Chap. X, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{45} Ivi, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{46} Ivi.
for social life as interpreted by Macpherson\(^{47}\); Hobbes is here stating the absolutely social nature of the value of a person, according to which it “is not [...] an absolute value, but it depends on the need and the esteem of others”\(^{48}\).

Honour thus comes to coincide with the socially approved value. The value of a person, unlike his glory, is not linked in the first instance to the adequate or excessive imagination that one has of one’s value, but it coincides with the social acknowledgement of the latter, mitigating the effects of vainglory and self-love:

For let a man, as most men do, rate themselves at the highest value they can, yet their true value is no more than it is esteemed by others\(^{49}\).

This does not mean that honour and glory can be opposed by virtue of the fact that the first would be, unlike the second, a relational passion. Rather, glory is the subjective relationship, through imagination, to the acknowledgement of one’s value, while honour is the very same value in the perspective of the same action of attribution\(^{50}\). Therefore, what becomes essential is not the possession of natural qualities by the single individual, but the dynamics of acknowledgement of social value:

“The manifestation of the value that we attribute to each other is what is commonly called honouring and dishonouring”\(^{51}\). In this sense, as explained by Hobbes in De Homine, glory is a subjective effect of the attributive dynamics of honouring: “a certain joy that is born from the thought of being honoured is called glory”\(^{52}\).

This dynamics of approval also includes the definition of those practices apparently connected with spontaneity and subjective predispositions that can thus be interpreted as attributions of honour, noting as a result their eminently social nature. Praise, consideration, skill, trust are all part of these practices\(^{53}\).

All these attitudes can be interpreted as direct attributions of a person’s honour. In other words, they presuppose a relationship of direct interaction between two individuals. Nevertheless, the dynamics of honour exceeds the simple inter-individual relationship and is complicated by virtue of a dynamics of indirect attribution of honour. This mechanism is essential to understand how the problem of the third element is already introduced in the Hobbesian theory of recognition as from its anthropological foundation:

Doing onto another what he considers to be a sign of honour, or which the law or custom make as such, means honouring him, because by approving the honour that is bestowed by others, he recognises the power that others recognise to him\(^{54}\).

With a repetition, we could say that in this instance it is a case of honouring honour, i.e. recognising as valid the singular or collective world of the values of the person whom we intend to honour, thus implicitly recognising some qualities to him:


\(^{49}\) *Ivi*, p. 63.

\(^{50}\) On the difference about honour and glory Slomp uses the metaphor of two mirrors: “Glory and honour can be described as mirrors reflecting the power of a person; indeed, they are distorting mirrors, in so far as glory tends to enlarge the projection of one’s power while honour tends to reduce it, because ‘every man’s passion weigheth heavy in his own scale, but not in the one of his neighbour’”. G. Slomp, *Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory*, cit., 2000, p. 39.


\(^{52}\) *Ivi*, p. 63.

\(^{53}\) *Ivi*, p. 161.

To honour those another honours is to honour him; as a sign of approbation of his judgement.

The indirect nature of the acknowledgement of honour introduces, then, the problem of the third element in the Hobbesian theory of recognition. Recognition is not only an inter-individual dynamics, but it poses the problem of a - symbolic and material - context within which this honouring is legitimised. What is interesting to note with respect to this extension of the Hobbesian concept of acknowledgement is how it maintains its own validity both in the state of nature as in the civil state, despite the fact that in the civil state two different types of attributions are introduced:

All these ways of honouring are natural, and as well within, as without Commonwealths. But in Commonwealths where he or they that have the supreme authority can make whatsoever they please to stand for signs of honour, there be other honours.

To paraphrase the famous Weberian expression, we can say that according to Hobbes, outside the state of nature, the Commonwealth holds the legitimate monopoly of honour:

So that of civil honour, the fountain is in the person of the Commonwealth, and dependeth on the will of the sovereign.

The question of legitimacy - a term which in its modern sense was certainly unknown to Hobbes and that in this context must be simply understood as the strategy of a rational justification of power – is precisely what causes the problem here. The question can be posed in this way: in what way does honour “depend on the will of the sovereign”?

The attributions of honour and, therefore, the acknowledgement of value, are based on a principle of circulation for which those who are honoured by the Commonwealth will be in turn honoured by third parties:

and men honour such as have them, as having so many signs of favour in the Commonwealth, which favour is power.

Therefore, the very principle of the third element introduces a criterion of circularity in the Hobbesian concept of acknowledgement. In this way, the link between acknowledgement and power is definitively established: “Honourable is any possession, action or quality that is a demonstration and a sign of power”. On the basis of this new definition of honour, Hobbes exposes a taxonomy of behaviours, such as courage, hope and safety, that are assessed in the light of their recognisability and thus the power that they can guarantee.

In this respect, it is important to point out how the logics of the approval of value puts the symbolic dimension in the forefront, so much so as to also justify the setback and failure of an action, provided that it can be placed within a dynamics of acknowledgement:

---

55 Ivi, p. 65.
56 Ivi, p. 65.
57 Ivi.
58 Ivi.
59 Ivi.
60 Ivi, p. 66
Actions proceeding from equity, joined with loss, are honourable; as signs of magnanimity: for magnanimity is a sign of power\textsuperscript{61}.

Acknowledgement becomes, in this sense, the transcendental of the individual action, its principle of justification\textsuperscript{62}. The constitution of this transcendental structures the associated life of individuals, supplanting in actual fact the political, truth-revealing function of justice:

In terms of honour, things do not change in view of the fact that an action (provided it is large and demanding and therefore a sign of a lot of power) may be just or unjust. Honour, indeed, is only in the opinion of power\textsuperscript{63}.

Nevertheless, the existence of this transcendental of the relationship is not enough to stabilise social relationships, because they are always exposed to conflict. As we shall see, apparently Hobbes reopens the problem of justice by entering an element of verticality within the circular dynamics of acknowledgement, and moving the problem of the third element to the moral sphere.

\textit{b. Equality, conflict, laws of nature}

The problem of the relationship between equality and acknowledgement crosses the entire theoretical system of the Leviathan. It has been observed how all signs of power are considered honourable and therefore socially recognised. This anthropological foundation of acknowledgement is connected to a concept of desire that makes the search for power potentially infinite:

Nor can a man any more live whose desires are at an end than he whose senses and imaginations are at a stand. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter. The cause whereof is that the object of man’s desire is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of his future desire\textsuperscript{64}.

We can add to this exponential condition of human desire the fact that it is accompanied by the observation of the actual equality of men in the state of nature. Equality, as is known, is based on equal exposure to violent death, as every individual can, potentially, be the murderer of another\textsuperscript{65}.

The dynamics of acknowledgement does not result only from individual propensity to glory, but finds its own dynamic principle in a condition of conflict, resulting from the “equality of abilities” from which follows an “equality in the hope of achieving one’s purposes”\textsuperscript{66}.

---

\textsuperscript{61} Ivi, p. 66
\textsuperscript{63} Ivi, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{64} Ivi, Chap. XI, p.70.
\textsuperscript{65} Ivi, Chap. XII, pp. 86-87.
\textsuperscript{66} Ivi, p. 87.
The need for acknowledgement, in the egalitarian context of the state of nature and out of collective conditions capable of stabilising the attributions of honour, thus becomes one of the original places of conflict:

Therefore, in human nature we find three main causes of contention: in the first place, rivalry; secondly, distrust; thirdly, glory. Glory, recalls Hobbes shortly after, will be one of the main reasons in pushing people to fight “for their reputation”.

The absolute indifference of power to justice, which is a consequence of Hobbes’s radical nominalism, turns into the impossibility of any pre-State justice:

From this war of every man against every other man, it also follows that nothing can be unjust. The concepts of right and wrong and justice do not arise. Where there is not a common power, there is no law; where there is no law there is no injustice.

Given that justice resides “in the opinion of power” and that the state of nature is without a common power, it follows that the same concept of justice is not applicable to the state of nature.

The problem of the third element that was previously introduced through the indirect approval of honour - which not as a coincidence called into question customs and tradition, i.e. forms of historic stabilisation of these attributions - thus seems to be nullified. By contrast, the circulation of individual value appears to be consigned to the radical anomie of the state of nature, and individuals are unable to determine any value-based relationship to reality.

On the other hand, it is precisely through this apparent nullification of the subject-matter of the third element that the need is introduced to extend this concept beyond its simple use as key for the attribution of honour. In other words, posing the problem of the third element requires recourse to the stabilisation of a joint power, i.e. it needs to shift the problem of acknowledgement, so far tackled primarily on an anthropological basis, to a strictly moral and then political sense. Hobbes already tackles this problem in relation to the laws of nature, i.e., already from a point of view exceeding the singularity of rights, which for Hobbes are always and only subjective, in the name of a common rule, discovered by reason, the Lex Naturalis.

The stabilisation of common power operates primarily through the injunction when exiting the state of permanent conflict, as sanctioned by the first and fundamental law of nature.

The problem of the third element is then introduced by reopening, in actual fact, the problem of justice in the third law of nature, according to which: “that men perform their covenants made”. If justice lies in the opinion of power, all behaviours intended to maintain the covenants that allow this power to be stabilised, must be considered righteous.

And in this law of nature consisteth the fountain and original of JUSTICE. For where no covenant hath preceded, there hath no right been transferred, and every man has right to everything and consequently, no action can be unjust. But when a covenant is made, then to break it is unjust and the

---

67 *Ivi*, p. 88.


70 *Leviathan*, Chap. XV, p. 100.
definition of INJUSTICE is no other than the not performance of covenant. And whatsoever is not unjust is just.\footnote{Ivi.}

In this way Hobbes reintroduces the problem of the third element without in actual fact contradicting what is said about the relationship between honour and power. Acting rightly means keeping the conditions capable of stabilising the dynamics of acknowledgement and approval of honour.

As noted by Paul Ricoeur, however, it is in the ninth law of nature that Hobbes introduces the problem of acknowledgement\footnote{P. Ricoeur, 2004, Parcours de la reconnaissance, Stock, Paris pp. 257-270.}. Hobbes reminds us of how inequality is “introduced by civil laws” and is not a property attributable to the nature of individuals: “As if master and slave had been introduced not by the approval of men, but by the difference in intellect, something that is not only against reason but also against experience”\footnote{Hobbes, Leviathan, Chap. XV, p.107.}.

Therefore, the problem is that of making men’s moral equality act on their condition of civil inequality, and the acknowledgement of others as their equals is exactly what is required by the ninth law of nature, which reads as follows:

If nature therefore have made men equal, that equality is to be acknowledged: or if nature have made men unequal, yet because men that think themselves equal will not enter into conditions of peace, but upon equal terms, such equality must be admitted. And therefore for the ninth law of nature, I put this: \textit{that every man acknowledge another for his equal by nature}\footnote{Ivi.}.

For the first time the Hobbesian problem of acknowledgement faces a shift from a purely anthropological and passion-based dimension to a more properly moral one. The laws of nature do not contradict, however, the previously described dynamics of the approval of honour but, rather, they seem to ensure its functioning by neutralising its excesses. In this case, this takes place by ensuring that the dynamics of the attribution of honour is guaranteed from the risk of vainglory. Indeed:

“The breach of this precept [the ninth law of nature] is pride”\footnote{Ivi.}

For this reason, according to Paul Ricoeur, Hobbes represents a founding moment for the history of the theory of recognition as he provides, through the theory of the original mis-acknowledgement, a concretely emancipatory function to the first theory. Only once you have determined mis-acknowledgement as a civil condition, may a dynamic concept of justice, in terms of the theory of recognition, be activated. Only starting from the laws of nature does the shift from natural equality to moral reciprocity operate. This is the challenge that even Hobbes, according to Ricoeur, has to face\footnote{Ricoeur, \textit{cit.}}.

On the other hand, in the theory of recognition, in my opinion, the Hobbesian theory of recognition transforms the anthropological and moral problem of the third element into a fundamentally political problem; at the cost, however, of neutralising the political specificity of acknowledgement, i.e. its ability to constitute value.

The laws of nature introduce an element of verticality within the dynamics of acknowledgement, by subverting in actual fact the economy of values represented by this presupposition; they do not manage, however, to stabilise this very same dynamics through the use of a communal power. The laws of nature, as Hobbes states, only oblige in foro interno:

The laws of nature oblige in foro interno; that is to say, they bind to a desire they should take place: but in foro externo; that is, to the putting them in act, not always. For he that should be modest and tractable, and perform all he promises in such time and place where no man else should do so, should but make himself a prey to others, and procure his own certain ruin, contrary to the ground of all laws of nature which tend to nature's preservation78.

This does not mean that the laws of nature do not have a central role in defining the Hobbesian theory of recognition, but that they lead us off-track if they are interpreted as sufficient reasons for the “progress” from state of nature to the civil state79. The laws of nature take on the paradoxical role of providing a principle of transcendent meta-stability in relation to the circulation of social value; but at the same time they are inadequate to this end you because, while they are capable of regulating the conscience of the individual, they cannot regulate his external behaviour. Indeed, Hobbes’s invention of the theory of recognition intends to solve this paradox. Representation in actual fact allows for the standardisation of the external behaviour of individuals. The acknowledgement logic also acts at this level through the principle of authorisation, and transforms the problem of the third element into that of the representor. Recognising one’s own representor means stabilising the social relationship with value, thus depriving individuals of the need for a third element.

Unlike the Hegelian theory, it is not a question for Hobbes of founding politics on a historical conception of dominion relationships, but of rooting anthropology and morals in a conceptual device that abolishes the political implications of the theory of recognition, i.e. stopping acknowledgement from constituting value independently from the representing sovereign, and from neutralising the autonomy of anthropology and historical time through the government of bodies and temporality.

Rather than reading the Hegelian theory of recognition in terms of the “speculative truth” of the Hobbesian contract80, I believe indeed that what goes beyond Hegel’s interpretation can reveal the significance in current terms of the Hobbesian theory of recognition.

III. Authorising by acknowledging, acknowledging by representing

The beginning of Chapter XVI of the Leviathan states:

78 Hobbes, Leviathan cit., Chap. XV, p. 110.
80 Vigneault, La reconnaissance comme puissance spéculative du pacte sociale, cit.
PERSON is he whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether truly or by fiction.\(^{81}\)

This sentence describes an association and a distinction that seem to define the ontological domain of the concept of person. The distinction is between those to whom certain actions or words belong, and those who represent the words of another. The association operates between a true attribution and a fictitious one. By reason of the validity of the kind of attribution, we will distinguish between a true attribution and a fictitious attribution, and not, as one might think, between a true attribution and a false attribution. An attribution will be, namely, true or fictitious, but equally likely.

We may then distinguish quite easily between a natural person and an artificial person:

When they [the words or actions] are considered as his own, then is he called a natural person; and when they are considered as representing the words and actions of another, then is he a feigned or artificial person.\(^{82}\)

Nevertheless, it will be necessary to find a criterion to distinguish a true attribution from a fictitious attribution. Paradoxically, following this distinction between a true attribution and a fictitious attribution - which are equally likely - a madman as well as a king could be considered to be the representatives of a people. Excluding, therefore, the opposition between a true attribution and a false attribution, the problem will be how to identify the mechanism of legitimisation of an attribution.

According to Hobbesian nominalism, once a steady meaning is attributed to words, the truth of a proposition is established through the predication relationship. The truth does not belong, namely, to things, but to the words through which they are formulated and the predication relationship through which they constitute a language.\(^{83}\) The problem then, as in the case of language, will be how to identify a criterion by which the meaning of artificial person can be stabilised. This criterion is introduced by the concept of authorisation, i.e. owning the actions and words attributed to someone as theirs:

Of persons artificial, some have their words and actions owned by those whom they represent.\(^{84}\)

---


\(^{82}\) _Ivi_.

\(^{83}\) Pettit, _Made with Words_ cit., pp. 42-54.

\(^{84}\) _Leviathan_ cit., Chap. XVI, p. 112.
This mechanism will recreate a distinction within the apparent continuity between a real attribution and a fictitious attribution: "then the person is the actor, and he that owneth his words and actions is the AUTHOR, in which case the actor acteth by authority."

You can thus isolate three stages:

1. The distinction between a natural person and an artificial person.
2. The homogenisation within the artificial person, between a true attribution and a fictitious one, which are equally likely.
3. Finally, there is a further distinction between an authorised attribution and a non-authorised attribution, as a function of its acknowledgement.

The author acknowledges the actor thus authorising the representation of his person. The question that then arises is: who acknowledges what? Hobbes argues that every individual is an author, thus every individual must acknowledge, or authorise, his own representative:

And because the multitude naturally is not one, but many, they cannot be understood for one, but in any authors, of everything their representative saith or doth in their name.

As noted above in regard to the mechanism of the attribution of honour, the question of acknowledgement introduces problem of the third element. How to stabilise the acknowledgement of the artificial person through authorisation considering that this set of authors that Hobbes calls a multitude, cannot be considered as a subject but a disconnected set of individuals? The double movement of representation, i.e. the authorisation through the acknowledgement of the sovereign and the institution of the people through representation, provides an answer to this question. The multitude, as it cannot be considered to be an author, cannot acknowledge.

The political enemy against whom Hobbes addresses himself in this regard are the "classics" government theories based on the rulers/ruled opposition. The classic opposition between the Hobbesian individualistic paradigm and the classic Aristotelian one is, in this respect, misleading for three reasons. First of all, because it does not let us understand how Hobbes’s attempt to overcome the rulers/ruled opposition does indeed involve him in the elaboration of a theory capable of placing the inter-individual relationship within a power device that puts the problem of acknowledgement at the centre of his anthropological reflection. Secondly, because it does not succeed in showing how the concept of community is a totally modern concept, and thus inapplicable, as such, to the ancient world. Finally, because it does not show how the "community", although officially expelled from the Hobbesian system, has a central role in defining what we could call a community of authors, in other words, all of the subjects of the covenant who, despite the precepts of Hobbesian egalitarianism, exclude madmen, women and foreigners from the covenant, thereby communitising the political body. Rather, the theory of recognition intends to answer this question: how can we conceive of a mechanism for the construction of individualities without risking making the people - as the total of

---

85 *Ivi.*
86 *Ivi*, p. 114.
88 I previously used this expression of “community of authors” in N. Marcucci, *La souveraineté en personne*, cit.
those who are ruled - an instance of legitimisation of political power? Hobbes’s answer is: by showing how the people would be established by acknowledgement, and not vice versa.

A multitude becomes a single person, when the men [who constitute it] are represented by a single man or by a single person and this is done with the consent of each individual belonging to the multitude89.

In this sense, representation legitimises the anthropological theory of recognition, and not vice versa. The apparent ambivalence between the movement of authorisation (acknowledgement of the actor) and that of acknowledgement (the institution of the people) is thus refused also a few sentences later:

For it is the unity of the representor, not the unity of the represented, that maketh the person one. And it is the representor that beareth the person, and but one person: and unity cannot otherwise be understood in multitude90.

The multitude is, in actual fact, excluded from the representative dynamics. In this way, apparently the artificial person’s collective identity is sanctioned through the acknowledgement by every single author, of the actor (the sovereign). Nevertheless, a collective identity cannot be established by two individual identities. The authorisation, i.e. the individual acknowledgement of sovereign power must be able to circulate among individuals. As in the case of direct or complex attributions of honour, the problem of the third element is introduced in the acknowledgement dynamics. The covenant can enter into force only if is socialised:

I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition; that thou give up, thy right to him, and authorise all his actions in like manner91.

Unlike the problem of the attribution of honour, however, for which a simple attribution would strengthen within a regime of complex attributions, in this case, the acknowledgement of the artificial person of the sovereign is strengthened through its socialisation among individuals. In other words, the hiatus between the anthropological and moral foundations of acknowledgement and the condition of the natural conflict of the state of nature, which originated from the excesses of pride and vainglory, is healed through the interference of sovereign power. This distinction opens the way to the Hobbesian problem of governability, i.e. the over-determination of anthropology through politics. It is not a coincidence that one of the functions of the Commonwealth will thus concern the attributions of honour and value:

Considering what values men are naturally apt to set upon themselves, what respect they look for from others, and how little they value other men; from whence continually arise amongst them, emulation, quarrels, factions, and at last war, to the destroying of one another, and diminution of their strength against a common enemy; it is necessary that there be laws of honour, and a public rate of the worth of such men as have deserved or are able to deserve well of the Commonwealth92.

90 Leviathan cit., Chap. XVI, p. 114.
91 Leviathan, Chap. XVII, p. 120.
92 Hobbes, Leviathan, Chap. XVIII, p. 126.
The attribution of honour depends entirely on sovereign authority, while any other kind of claim is discredited by Hobbes as vainglorious:

Of the passions that most frequently are the causes of crime, one is vainglory, or a foolish overrating of their own worth; as if difference of worth were an effect of their wit, or riches, or blood, or some other natural quality, not depending on the will of those that have the sovereign authority.\(^{93}\)

The transformation of the collectivity of individuals (multitude) into a personified collective (the people) also moves the problem of acknowledgement to a different level. Honour is distributed by the Commonwealth and belongs, as pointed out by Hobbes in Behemoth, to the people.\(^{94}\)

If acknowledgement is the logical outcome of the Hobbesian theory of recognition, introduced at the level of anthropology by the third problem, it also represents its partial placement under political protection. The anthropological dynamics of acknowledgement is over-determined by sovereign power through acknowledgement, which counteracts the mobile and procedural element of the conflicts of acknowledgement. Acknowledgement thus remains at the centre of the Hobbesian anthropological concept, but what is counteracted is its autonomous ability to produce value regimes, i.e. to constitute itself politically. The constitution of value through acknowledgement is thus replaced by the institution of value through acknowledgement.

---

\(^{93}\) *Ivi*, Chap. XXVII, p. 205.

\(^{94}\) Cit. in Slomp, *Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory*, cit. p. 40