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Social Space and the Ontology of Recognition

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ABSTRACT

In this paper recognition is taken to be a question of social ontology, regarding the very constitution of the social space of interaction. It will be argued that cognitive powers are constitutive powers more basic than deontic ones and play a role much broader than the one they in fact assume in Searle and in Brandom.

KEYWORDS: Searle, Brandom, Hegel, Recognition, Deontic Power

I. A metaphor?

What are we talking about when we talk about recognition? My observations regard some expressions that are very often to be found in philosophical discourses inspired by the Hegelian theory of *Anerkennung*. For example it is claimed that theoretical and practical self-consciousness have an intersubjective structure insofar as they are constituted through cognitive interactions; or that right (*Recht*) is a cognitive phenomenon insofar as it presupposes diverse forms of reciprocal recognition between individuals. When we speak of cognitive constitution of the structure of self-consciousness or of social institutions such as right or the State, are we merely using of vague and indefinite images or is this conceptual vocabulary to be taken seriously by theorists? These observations by no means intend to resolve and exhaust the full extension of the theories of recognition but, rather, limit themselves to capturing a specific but important aspect of the question.

The problem I intend to deal with is, in particular, the following: if we take these manners of speaking seriously, then should we not maintain that they speak to us of the *mode of being* of some phenomena, i.e., of how determinate aspects of their *ontology* are constituted through interaction?

II. Axes of recognition

To get my bearings in the tangle of recognizing, preliminarily I shall introduce a distinction between three axes or dimensions of recognition that converge in part with Paul Ricoeur's study.¹ We can thus distinguish between three dimensions of recognizing:

1. *Reidentification*: identification and perceptual reidentification of objects on the part of a subject;
2. *Self-recognition*: relation to self of a subject, of a type that is both reidentificative and performative/attestative;
3. *Reciprocal recognition*: relation between two or more agents who coordinate their interaction by reciprocally identifying one another, attesting their identity and referring themselves to variously codified norms of behavior (functional, implicit, informal, formal). The reciprocity of the relation has to be kept distinct from *symmetry* and from

equality: symmetrical relations and relations between equals simply two subsets of relations of reciprocal recognition.

III. Relational structure of recognition

When we speak of recognition, in these three senses, we always speak of it as some type of relation: relation between a subject and an object, self-relation of a subject, relation between two subjects; it appears, moreover, that we are dealing with intentional relations. Furthermore, the theories of recognition that I intend to discuss assume, in some sense of the term, the logical priority of the third axis (reciprocal recognition): it is assumed that the integration between the three dimensions of recognizing come about through the subsumption of the first and second levels in the third, that is, through the subsumption of reidentification of objects and self-recognition under reciprocal recognition. The constitutive function is in fact assigned to the third axis, i.e., to the relations of reciprocal recognition: it is these relations that constitute those holistic properties of the individual which we term theoretical and practical self-consciousness, as well as social realities such as right or the State. The relations that constitute these phenomena are understood, then, as *relations of reciprocal dependence*.²

The subjects of such relations are not necessarily singular individuals: they may, rather, be social realities *sui generis* or even collective entities (families, clans, classes, States). Recognitive relations of dependence appear to presuppose the presence in individuals of powers or capacities that are constituted, enabled and exercised within the relation itself. And in this regard we ought to ask: a) whether the relations are simply conditions of enablement to exercise powers already possessed; or b) whether they are co-constitutive (in the absence of such relations, these powers not only could not be exercised, but could not be developed or would end up by irremediably wasting away: it is thus the recognitive relation of dependence that permits us to enable specific functions with which we are naturally endowed and then to develop them into powers or capacities);³ or whether c) they create the powers *ex nihilo*.

IV. Socio-ontological approach

At this point I would like to frame the question I posed at the beginning somewhat better. If we are not talking in vain, when we speak of recognitive constitution:

1. we are dealing with an *ontological question*;
2. we are dealing with a *question of social ontology*;
3. the question regards the very constitution of the *social space*.

This social-ontological approach could be put to the test of an interpretation of the Hegelian texts, for example of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Here in fact Hegel assumes that certain social and institutional phenomena – holistic properties of individuals or social entities *sui generis* – are generated by free will; accordingly, he analyzes this process of constitution in terms of the recognitive relations which are the infrastructure of the development and implementation of free will: this is the case with the legal, moral, ethical person, as well as with institutions of the family, of right, of civil society and of the State.⁴ But this exegetic question oversteps the bounds I have set myself. Rather, I would like to concentrate on the question of whether certain aspects of the theory of recognition can be

translated into the terms of a socio-ontological paradigm: to do so, I shall make use of some conceptual tools derived from John Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality*.⁵

V. First approximation

As a first approximation, we may attempt to translate the vocabulary of recognition into a socio-ontological paradigm in the following Searlean terms:

1. Certain holistic properties of individuals and social realities *sui generis* are social phenomena – ontologically subjective or, more precisely, *ontologically intersubjective* – insofar as they do not exist independently of the existence of a certain type of interaction: which is to say, they do not exist independently of a certain type of interaction characterized by cognitive relations.
2. Cognitive relations can be characterized in terms of rules.
3. Such rules are not limited to regulating already-existing phenomena or behavior, but rather make new phenomena or behavior possible; we refer, then, not to *regulative rules*, but rather to *constitutive rules* (like the rules of chess) that have the following form: "X counts as Y in C".
4. The *cognitive powers* that individuals are enabled to exercise in an interaction are in the final analysis *deontic powers*, i.e., powers that make it possible to regulate the interaction between individuals and that consist in the power to impose and/or to assume responsibilities, rights, obligations, titles, authorizations, permits.
5. Since deontic powers appear to imply the faculty of language essentially – we cannot impose rights or obligations without words, symbols, markers; furthermore, even if certain norms can be followed unconsciously, to be such it must in principle be possible for them to be made explicit linguistically by someone – the cognitive powers are themselves essentially linked to the linguistic faculty.

VI. Constitutive powers

If, for the sake of argument, we grant that this translation is acceptable, we will have succeeded in three things: First, we have characterized recognition in wholly normative terms. Second, we have defined the ontology of recognition as a normative ontology. Third, we have succeeded in assimilating cognitive powers to deontic powers.

In what follows I shall endeavor to make it clear whether this characterization is satisfactory. In particular, the underlying questions in my analysis will be the following:

- a. what type of constitutive power – here understood as a power to constitute or concur in constituting some phenomena – are cognitive powers?
- b. does the nexus between recognition, language and interaction in human practice⁶ really mean that cognitive powers and deontic powers can be assimilated?
- c. and do deontic powers necessarily have to be modeled on linguistic powers?

VII. Nonhuman social space

To tackle at least some of these questions I shall begin with the idea that sociality is not just a specifically human feature. The idea, which has a long tradition – from Aristotle to Hegel, to Marx and to contemporary sociobiology – has two aspects:

1. Other forms of animal life characterized by sociality exist. The tendency to cooperate is a natural trait of many species and is, at least, no less natural than the non-cooperative tendency; and, on the other hand, also the aggressive traits of animal behavior are not in themselves antisocial but can depend on cooperative forms of social behavior (rites of courtship, aggressiveness as a naturally selected trait of the dominant male that sacrifices itself for the group).
2. Human sociality is not a mere cultural construction but is a natural trait of our biological form of life. The cultural elaboration of sociality is itself in part a product of adaptation to the environment, and cultural differences of this kind can be found also in animal species.⁷

VIII. The presuppositions of social facts

From this standpoint it is perfectly legitimate to speak of *nonhuman social spaces*. But I wish to tackle the problem directly in terms of social ontology. In fact also Searle admits that sociality is linked to biological nature and maintains that also other animals have the power to constitute social facts. What, then, are the presuppositions of the constitution of not specifically human social spaces brought to light by Searle?

These presuppositions⁸ can be listed as follows:

1. interaction;
2. cooperation;
3. collective intentionality (desires, beliefs) as a medium of coordination of the cooperation;
4. capacity of assigning (i.e. attributing) functions to objects on the basis of their physical properties.

On the basis of these presuppositions it is possible to understand, according to Searle, how in animal groups such social phenomena are constituted as, for example, the use of tools, cooperative behavior in the raising of offspring, in hunting, in courtship and in coupling, the institution of hierarchical relations and of dominance, and so forth.

IX. First intermediate observation

Engaging in these forms of complex cooperative behavior would not be possible without presupposing the capacity of sharing intentional states such as beliefs, desires and intentions. From this standpoint all facts that imply the shared intentionality of a plurality of agents are social facts. I do not intend to dwell here on the question of how such shared intentionality is to be understood: whether as an individual social entity of a new type (and whether Hegel asserted a thesis of this kind, as Searle accuses);⁹ or, as Searle would have it, as a collective intentionality *sui generis*, biologically primitive but to be understood as a form that individual intentionality can assume rather than as a new type of individual entity; or, again, as reducible to the intentionality of individuals and to their reciprocal beliefs ("I believe that you

believe that I believe that..."). What I wish to emphasize in this context is that, in fact, this shared intentionality intersects all the axes of recognition. In fact the agents, to be able to cooperate, have to:

1. recognize objects: be able, perceptively, to identify and reidentify the objects of the environment with which they interact;
2. recognize themselves: be capable of self-identification within the environment with which they interact and of attesting their own presence and role within cooperative behavior;
3. recognize one another: identify and reidentify themselves as belonging to the same species, to the same herd, as sexual or cooperative partners; and regulate their own adaptation to the environment and their own cooperative behavior on the basis of norms followed instinctually or learned through education.

The shared intentionality that is the basis of the constitution of social facts is thus most definitely entwined with cognitive relations even where it does not appear to be in the presence of the phenomenon of human linguistic self-consciousness. The intentional capacities that make social cooperation possible appear, moreover, to require cognitive capacities of a different kind. In the strong sense this thesis could mean that such cognitive capacities are essential for defining the intentional capacities of the cooperative agents. Here arises the further hypothesis – which I will discuss later – that reciprocal cognitive relations have priority and play a co-constitutive role not only in human self-conscious intentionality, but also in (individual and shared) animal intentionality. This, of course, would mean abandoning Searle's idea¹⁰ that intentionality is constitutive with respect to social facts but is not, in its turn, a social fact (but is, rather, an intrinsic feature): indeed, on the basis of this further hypothesis intentionality itself would come to be co-constituted cognitively.

X. Human social space

At this point I would like to return to Searle, to try to see what he views as the basic presuppositions of the ontology of human social space. For Searle, the distinguishing feature of human social space is that it contains institutional facts – language, exchange, money, right, State – that are not to be found in other animal societies.¹¹ The necessary presuppositions for understanding the constitution of these institutional – and therefore specifically human – social facts are, for Searle, the following:

1. capacity of attributing functions through collective intentionality;
2. capacity of attributing *status* functions through collective intentionality: these are functions that an object cannot perform only in virtue of its physical features; such causal features of the object can be necessary but are not sufficient to determine the function;
3. collective recognition: a status function exists as such insofar as it (its type or in certain cases its token) is (collectively or individually) accepted by the participants in the interaction (note that acceptance is not in itself free and rational and may come in degrees);
4. constitutive rules: social phenomena are constituted through rules that do not regularize preexisting behavior but rather produce new behavior;
5. deontic powers: the power of producing social phenomena through constitutive rules is thus presupposed. Such a

power is here understood as a deontic one insofar as it is a matter of rights, obligations, authorizations etc;¹²

6. recognition/acceptance of deontic power: deontic power does not exist independently of collective recognition, of acceptance of its being in force;

7. linguistic powers: language is constitutive with respect to deontic power; furthermore, language is in its turn a social institution that plays a constitutive role with respect to other institutions.¹³

XI. Second intermediate observation

Here are some remarks that connect Searle's analysis to the theme of recognition, and which show that these phenomena are found in animal interaction as well.

The first presupposition makes reference to a capacity that, if we look closely, is not limited to humans. The capacity of imposing functions on objects on the basis of their physical properties ---for example the capacity to use certain objects as tools – can in fact play a role in animal cooperative behavior and can be transmitted intergenerationally.¹⁴ In these cases, then, one should be ready to say that the attributing of functions comes about through collective intentionality.¹⁵

The capacity of attributing a status function is not specifically human. Structures of rank, hierarchical relations of dominance, which are established in certain animal groups, presuppose the attributing of status functions – for example, the status of dominant male – that can be modified over time also through conflict. By the same token, the intrinsic nexus between status function and acceptance of that function – the fact that they are ontologically dependent on recognition – is not specifically human (and since acceptance has different degrees, this does not imply the presupposition of free and rational non- human agents). Nor is the status of leader of the herd determined only by physical characteristics of the object on which it is imposed but has to be collectively accepted to be such, and in this regard situations of cognitive conflict are possible.

The status function attributed to certain individuals is connected with the exercise of powers of imposing certain forms of behavior on other individuals, in terms of obligations, responsibilities, authorizations. Such powers cannot be assimilated to brute force – even though they may make use of it – since they do presuppose some form of acceptance in order to be exercised.¹⁶ We might speak here of a lower threshold of *deontic constitutive powers*. Since the attributing of status functions follows the form "X counts as Y in C," it could be maintained, as regards lower-threshold constitutive powers connected with the exercise of such status functions, that they refer to constitutive rules.

XII. Collective intentionality and recognition

In general, with regard to Searle, my strategy has been to show that cognitive phenomena, which he isolates at the level of human interaction, are, rather, in part proper to animal interaction as well. Furthermore, this gives rise to the fact that cognitive relations play a constitutive role much broader than the one they in fact assume in Searle's theory of acceptance. This, moreover, could have consequences as far as the very conception of individual and collective intentionality is concerned, since it could be assumed that at least the collective form of animal intentionality is constituted cognitively through the cognitive powers with which individuals are naturally endowed and which are

activated and develop in interaction. Recognition relations would thus be a sort of middle term between collective intentionality and individual intentionality: and the latter may itself not be intelligible independently of collective intentionality and of its cognitive constitution, proving to be mediated by it. In this sense the notion of recognition would serve to render intelligible the very notion of intentionality. And this could be a starting point also on the path to a noncircular explanation of the intentionality that is accompanied by linguistic self-consciousness: the thesis for which individual self-consciousness would be a holistic property constituted through cognitive relations.

XIII. Consequences: the cognitive background

At this point I would like to draw some conclusions that derive from the preceding analyses:

1. The cognitive relations mediated by language are a subset of cognitive relations as a whole.
2. Nonlinguistic cognitive relations are constitutive of social phenomena.
3. Hence cognitive powers do not coincide with linguistic powers.
4. Cognitive relations are not wholly normative, at least in the sense of linguistic normativity. If there is a sense in speaking of behavior guided by norms in the case of animal cooperative behavior, then it is in a different sense of normativity – natural functional norms that have different degrees (ranging from homeostatic capacities of interacting with the environment and organizing it on one's own scale, to instinctual norms of cooperation, up to norms that have been learned but that cannot be made linguistically explicit, in the current state, by the participants in an interaction, and that presuppose some kind of acceptance, even if not a free and rational one, in contrast with social norms requiring free acknowledgement).
5. Hence cognitive powers are not in themselves deontic powers in the sense understood by Searle and Brandom,¹⁷ or deontic powers cannot be assimilated *tout court* to linguistic powers as nonlinguistic constitutive rules do exist.

These conclusions can be generalized by asserting that:

6. Some cognitive capacities are first natural possessions common to human beings and to other animal species.
7. Recognition that is culturally acquired, mediated by language and self-conscious, presupposes the existence of other nonreflexive lower cognitive capacities and would be impossible without them.
8. Reflexive and linguistic forms of recognition can themselves be exercised insofar as, through repetition and practice, they come to be incorporated in an immediate and nonreflexive form and thus come to function as second nature, out of habit: being the result of a process of development and social construction does not prevent them from acting as second nature, that is with a spontaneity and immediacy analogous to that of the simply instinctual and genetically programmed first natural processes. As Hegel maintained: "Thinking, too, however free and active in its own pure element it becomes, no less requires habit and familiarity (this impromptu or form of immediacy) ... It is through this habit that I come to realize my existence as a thinking being. Even here, in this spontaneity of self-centered thought, there is a partnership of soul and body (hence, want of habit and too-long-continued thinking cause headache)".¹⁸

In *The Construction of Social Reality* Searle broached the notion of "background," by which he means that set of capacities, i.e. of dispositions, abilities, practical tendencies and nonintentional – or protointentional – uses which

permit intentional states to function and which consist in a set of causal structures.¹⁹ Making reference to that notion, we could now maintain that the intentional and reflexive structures of recognition presuppose a set of nonreflexive and protointentional cognitive structures as a causal condition of their functioning. The notion of recognition, then, must in my view be included in the background: that is, recognition is operative not only in reflexive attitudes but also in their background; this also accounts for the cognitive function, noted by Searle himself, by which the aspect of familiarity with which nonpathological forms of consciousness present themselves would be a function of the capacities of the background.²⁰ The background in fact makes cognitive familiarity with aspects of the world possible precisely insofar as it is constituted by cognitive capacities – both merely first natural ones, i.e. genetically programmed and instinctual capacities, and second natural ones, i.e. capacities shaped through cultural habituation²¹ – that function in an immediate way and that are thus endowed with causal power.²²

XIV. Approaches to recognition

What, then, is the legitimate approach to the phenomenon of recognition? I shall endeavor to show how there are a number of legitimate approaches, each one of which takes into consideration an aspect of the phenomenon. I find illegitimate, however, the approach that, absolutizing one of these levels, ends up denying the phenomenon in its complexity and thus distorting it.

1. Naturalistic approach. It is most definitely legitimate to study the phenomenon of recognition from a naturalistic standpoint. After all, it is a fact connected with our biological first nature that we are endowed with cognitive capacities, both with the lower capacities and with the higher ones connected with language. It is a fact of *first nature* by which we avail ourselves of an organism and functions that, if developed socially through education and stabilized through habit, allow us to avail ourselves of certain capacities with the immediacy of a *second nature*. The interweaving of cognitive *first and second nature* constitutes the background of all human practices.

2. Anthropological approach. Even though cognitive functions and capacities are in part shared with other animals, they find in human beings a notable increase in degree that makes us *strong recognizers*. In some respects we may think of a qualitative leap that, however, is produced by a quantitative increase, and that allows us to deploy linguistic, reflexive and normative capacities. Thus an anthropological approach, designed to discover the sense in which recognition is the fundamental constitutive need of human nature, is legitimate: it is the idea expressed by Hegel, that "*Man is recognition*" ("Der Mensch ist Anerkennung"),²³ both in the sense of that which he is to begin with – Hegel himself knew that there are first natural cognitive capacities that we share with animals²⁴ – and in the sense of that which he has to become, by developing those forms of normative, reflexive, and linguistic self-conscious recognition that are so important for the constitution of the institutional sphere of spirit.

3. Ontological approach. The characterization of human nature in cognitive terms can also be understood as an ontological characterization regarding man's mode of being, which is to say, as an *ontology of the human*. On the other hand, in light of the breadth of the phenomenon of recognition that we have envisioned, it is also clear that the ontological role played by cognitive powers is wider than a mere ontology of the human and regards more generally an *ontology of sociality*.

4. Pragmatic approach. The ontological function of cognitive powers cannot itself be defined independently of a pragmatic analysis of the interaction of social agents. Here, we have the problem of how this pragmatics of recognition is to be modeled. Since at a certain level cognitive powers intersect with deontic powers, it follows that (a) certain cognitive phenomena, even if not all of them, will have to be examined in the framework of a normative pragmatics; and (b) furthermore the normative pragmatics adequate to analyze the phenomenon will not always be a pragmatics modeled on linguistic norms, if we assume the sensibleness of the idea that natural or prelinguistic norms of interaction can exist.

XV. On Brandom's Pragmatics: Model I

The necessity of an integration of the various approaches can be exemplified through a critical analysis of some features of Robert Brandom's philosophical conception. Brandom has utilized the pragmatico-normative model of deontic "score-keeping"²⁵ – which as such is a model to explain how the assigning and undertaking of deontic commitments in language games comes about – to clarify the structure of cognitive interaction. To that end, in his article 'Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism' (1999) Brandom began by drawing up a model (which I shall call *model I*) in which cognitive powers are assimilated to linguistic-type deontic powers and thus come to mark a sharp discontinuity between animality and humanity on the one hand and between naturality and normativity on the other. Furthermore, in Brandom's model normative pragmatics is, rather, a model for semantic analysis and is not linked up with a socio-ontological conception, even though this step can be easily taken on the basis of the presuppositions of *Making it Explicit*. Finally, from the fact that normative pragmatics is also detached from a naturalistic and anthropological approach, it follows that in Brandom's position individual deontic powers are reduced to socially authorized formal powers and appear to have no basis in the nature and in the ontology of individuals and of their functions and capacities. In the final analysis the pragmatics of deontic score-keeping appears to analyze a certain class of cognitive interactions, but cannot in itself account for the cognitive powers that make them possible: since, if it too were to explain the constitution of the phenomenon of linguistic self-consciousness, it would leave the nexus between deontic authority and the cognitive capacities of individuals presupposed and unexplained. (Could just anyone be socially authorized to exercise the deontic power of recognizing norms, or are there certain characteristics – abilities, dispositions to develop capacities – that have to be satisfied by the beings that can exercise this status?)

XVI. On Brandom's Pragmatics: Model II

Some of these difficulties appear to be tackled by Brandom in his more recent article 'The Structure of Desire and Recognition', included in this collection, in which he develops a model I shall call it *model II*) of analysis of recognition that is rather different from *model I*. Here, Brandom reconstructs the transition, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, from desire (*Begierde*) to self-consciousness. The phenomenon of self-consciousness thus comes to be explained as a reflexive form of recognition that results from the application of the triadic structure of desiring consciousness to itself. In desiring consciousness there are in fact distinguishable (i) an attitude toward the object – for example hunger; (ii) a responsive activity motivated by that attitude – eating; and (iii) a significance – responding to the object by treating it in a certain way, i.e. attributing it the significance of *food*. Desiring consciousness is thus understood as a sort of erotic

awareness – a form of primitive intentionality – that carries out a certain type of practical classification/evaluation of the environment.²⁷ Moreover, this desiring consciousness is conceived by Brandom as a disposition to respond differentially to objects and is distinguished from mere behavioral dispositions to react in a certain way – for example, iron's disposition to react to a humid environment by rusting – insofar as the assessment of the effect of the action and thus of the reliability of the response can modify the attitude and the activities of the agent in case the object does not satisfy the desire (for example if the object classified as food leads to poisoning). This practical classification would thus not have a deterministic but rather a hypothetical-dispositional character. Recognitive powers, resulting from the reflexive self-application of that causal structure, would thus appear to be conceived as second-order dispositions – dispositions to endorse the dispositions of others – that imply a change in the first-order dispositions and thus the endorsement of a normative attitude. In this sense Brandom's *model II* defines "simple recognition" as the disposition to attribute to the other the significance of desiring consciousness – which already implies the second-order disposition to endorse the normative authority of the other's desire – and "robust recognition" as the disposition to attribute to the other a desiring consciousness capable in turn of recognizing – which in turn implies the second-order disposition to endorse the normative authority of its recognitions. Even though the notion of desiring consciousness is of a naturalistic type, the transition from it to reflexive self-consciousness is nonetheless interpreted by Brandom in a sense that postulates, as in *model I*, a discontinuity between natural dispositions and cultural dispositions of a normative type. The problem of the relationship between recognitive capacities and deontic authority seems to remain unresolved, as does the need – which *model II* would appear to take into greater consideration – to give a base to recognitive powers in the nature and in the ontology of individuals.

In my view a broaching of the categories of first and second nature would be profitable here for an understanding of the relation between the two levels of awareness and their relative dispositions. The second-order dispositions could in fact be conceived on the Hegelian model of habit *qua* second nature. This ought to be accompanied by a broaching of the distinction, already employed by Hegel in his Jena writings, of two levels of recognition (first natural and second natural or spiritual recognition) whose dialectic can – in my opinion – more adequately describe the complex relation between first and second nature.²⁸ The very notion of normativity would prove to be modified in this new framework, since the second-nature normativity of simple and robust recognition (spiritual recognition, in Hegelian terms) ought to be understood as the development of a functional type of natural normativity, to which would thus correspond a form of first-nature recognition; furthermore, a non-dualistic approach would be reinforced by the fact that second nature habituation is not only a human phenomenon and can thus be conceived as something that occurs also within the animal kingdom (and this for Hegelian reasons too).²⁹ To the different levels of awareness ought to correspond also different levels of normativity, according to an idea that, at bottom, is also closer to the overall design of Hegelian *Naturphilosophie*, in which the *concept* to which an organism has to adequate itself is the natural norm that it has to satisfy, i.e. its intrinsic functional norm.³⁰ Brandom, by contrast, in placing normativity on the merely historico-cultural side, does not even fully account for that evaluative activity – the monitoring of the effects of one's actions that may lead to a change in one's attitudes – which is already intrinsic in his notion of desiring consciousness and which in Hegelian *Naturphilosophie* has its antecedent in *Gefühl*.³¹ At this point, however, recognitive powers themselves should no longer be modeled *tout court* on linguistic-type deontic powers: under this aspect *model I* appears to be in conflict with some consequences that, as we see it, could be dealt with by *model II*. In conclusion, note that if the practical classification – the assigning of functions – has a basis in the agents' natural dispositions, then it is part of their objective ontological constitution: and this also reopens the question – which goes back to the Hegelian critique of

Kantian teleological judgment, and which constitutes the basis of the idea that there is also a functional type of natural normativity – of whether functions are only subjectively attributed – as Searle and Brandom insist – or whether they are constitutive aspects of reality.

XVII. Perception or attribution? Realism or constructivism?

There is, then, a further question that concerns the analysis of cognitive interactions and thus also the pragmatics of recognition. I am referring to the alternative between the attributive and the perceptive models that appear to comprise many formulations of such analysis, lining up with one model or with the other.³² The alternatives can be formulated as follows:

1. *Perceptive model*: recognizing consists in reacting to properties already given and perceived as real.
2. *Attributive model*: it is the act of attributing such properties that constitutes them as such. The act of attribution confers or attributes a property that was not there before.

The alternatives could be translated in epistemological terms into:

- a. *Realism*: the properties of cognitive phenomena are real properties of objects, i.e. properties that exist independently of social construction.
- b. *Constructivism*: cognitive properties are constructed socially.

Brandom's first model appears to position itself in the second family, which in its radical versions can give rise to versions à la Goffmann. But then also Brandom's second model, despite its recourse to the notion of disposition – which contains the idea that one is disposed to react to something – appears to line up on the constructivist side. In fact cognitive dispositions are according to Brandom dispositions to perform attributions³³ – dispositions to attribute to something the status of normative agent – and are not commensurate with properties of the objects to which one reacts. Searle's model, too, would appear to come within this family, insofar as it claims that status functions are imposed on objects: but, here, there is a great deal more to be said. We also note how the alternative between the two models generates a sort of *paradox of recognition* analogous to Euthyphro's paradox:³⁴ Is something X because it is *recognized* as X, or is something recognized as X because *it is X*?

XVIII. Limits of the alternative

The truth of the matter is that the alternative is poorly framed. To delve into the question we need to bring out some of the limits of each position.

1. *Limits of the attributive approach*. This approach in the first place does not appear to be applied equally to all cognitive phenomena, and in particular to those that run along the axis of perceptive identification and that appear to presuppose a reaction to properties that are at least perceived as real. On the other hand this axis is always intersected by the other two axes of self-recognition and of reciprocal recognition. And this cannot but have some consequence for

the definition of the conditions of appropriateness of recognition also along the second and third axes: even though attestation and social construction have great effect here, the attribution of status is itself never detached from the arising of forms of immediate recognition in the form both of first-nature recognition (if erotic awareness is part of the metaphysical structure of certain entities, as Brandom appears to claim³⁵, then also *simple recognition* and *robust recognition* are reactions to properties given and perceived as real) and in the second-nature form of *seeing as* (for example, I cannot attribute you with a social stigma or a privilege without also seeing you as something already determined – this or that individual, person, human being... – on which I impose this and that other function).³⁶

In the second place, at least some ways of understanding the attributive approach in a strong constructivist and anti-realistic sense seem rather implausible. We have to observe that the idea that individual recognitive powers have constitutive character and contribute to the constitution of social phenomena *does not mean* that it is the singular act with which I as an individual impose a status, confer a property, that creates *ex nihilo* that property itself: it is the recognitive relations produced through individual powers and incorporated in the second nature of the habits of interaction that are constitutive. Furthermore, the individuals that with their constitutive powers intervene to constitute social phenomena – including such phenomena as self-consciousness and the legal person – also perceive these traits as real, as characteristics of the world, through their perceptive powers. Even if such individuals were systematically mistaken in observing these characteristics as real – as the constructivist may argue – their subjective constitutive powers would be nevertheless objective features of them as living, first natural beings, and would deploy processes and relations of systematic mistake that come to exist objectively in the world. Thus, the being of the features so produced depends not only on the appropriate subjective attitudes but also on appropriate objective features of the world, since on the one hand the being of these attitudes depends itself on the appropriate, objective properties of those first natural individuals, and on the other hand the attributive activity is always confronted with already given (even if partly imposed) properties of the objects.

2. *Limits of the perceptive approach.* The perceptive approach, on the other hand does not appear capable of giving a full account of recognitive phenomena in which an essential role is played by *performance* itself, by the added value of the very act of recognizing: the will to self-attestation, the modalities of expression of the recognition of others play an influential role in determining the characteristics of what comes to be recognized and the quality of the relation (for example in self-recognition, which is always also production of one's own identity). In recognition, the reaction to what is there – even if not in all cases – is also an act through which what is there proves to be further determined, specified, expressed.

XIX. An expressivist model?

In conclusion I would like to explore the hypothesis that an expressivist model of recognition, if adequately conceived, can contribute to solving the paradox. In this sense recognitive powers – at least those that follow the second and third axes – ought to be understood first of all as expressive powers: and the ontologically constitutive character of recognition itself ought to be linked up with expressive powers and with their imaginative roots. From this standpoint it may be claimed that:

1. There are individual powers, connected with first-nature natural endowments that are enabled and exercised through social interaction, on the basis of an educational context.
2. Unconscious cognitive interaction, in which these powers are developed and exercised, contributes to the constitution of higher-level cognitive phenomena of a self-conscious and linguistic type.
3. Recognition is an expressive labor of determination and of making explicit of the implicit: in this sense it is always the expression of something that is given but in an indeterminate form and whose determination is not independent of the labor of determination; the expressive labor consists in this contribution to the ontological determination of aspects of reality rather than in a *creatio ex nihilo*. This, in the final analysis, would be an expressivist ontology, i.e. an ontological model that incorporates the expressive work of determination as a feature that is both subjective and objective.

XX. Epistemological realism

We can also venture a response, then, to the alternative between realism and constructivism. Nothing, in fact, obliges us to link the perceptive model to some form of ontological realism. The fact that we perceive certain traits of persons and of society as real, and the very fact that such traits are objectively accessible, does not in itself justify the assumption of some extended ontological realism on the basis of which all these realities would be in themselves metaphysically determined independently of social interaction. The fact that many properties are not independent of collective intentionality and of cognitive interactions – their ontological intersubjectivity – is perfectly compatible with a form of epistemological realism, on the basis of which these properties are experienced as real by individuals or, in Searle's terms, are epistemologically objective. The ontological intersubjectivity of such properties clearly does not mean that they depend for their existence on the cognitive acts of an isolated subject. But this has also to mean that, if we speak of epistemological realism in the proper sense, individuals, whose cognitive powers concur in constituting social phenomena, have to be able to perceive, individually, the so-constituted phenomena as real. Hence the intentional constitution of reality through cognitive attribution – which comes about for the most part at the level of collective and unconscious intentionality, or at the level of a social productive imagination – is compatible with the idea that we really perceive the aspects of social reality so-constituted.

Notes

¹ See P. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 2007. For the classification of recognition see also A. Margalit, "Recognition II: Recognizing the Brother and the Other," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary*, vol. 75, 2001, pp. 127-139; H. Ikäheimo, "On the Genus and Species of Recognition," *Inquiry*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2002, pp. 447-462.

² See M. Quante and D. Schweikard, "... die Bestimmung der Individuen ist, ein allgemeines Leben zu führen." La struttura metafisica della filosofia sociale di Hegel," in *Hegel e le scienze sociali*, eds. A. Bellan and I. Testa, *Quaderni di Teoria Sociale*, no. 5, 2005, pp. 221-250.

³ See M. Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy," in *Liberalism and the Good*, eds. B. Douglass, G. M. Mara and H. S. Richardson, New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 203-252.

⁴ For an analysis in this direction see Quante and Schweikard, "... die Bestimmung der Individuen ist, ein allgemeines Leben zu führen".

⁵ J. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, London, Penguin, 1995 (second edition 1996).

⁶ See J. Habermas, "Arbeit und Interaktion. Bemerkungen zu Hegels Jenseit *Philosophie des Geistes*," in *Natur und Geschichte. Karl Löwith zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. H. Braun and M. Riedel, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1967, pp. 132-155.

⁷ See R.D. Masters, *The Nature of Politics*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1989.

⁸ See Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, chap. 1.

⁹ See *Ibid.*, chap. 1, p.25: "the idea that there exists some Hegelian world spirit [...] a super mind floating over individual

minds."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, chap. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

¹⁴ See W. Krummer, *Primate societies*, Chicago, Aldine, 1971, p. 188 (quoted also by Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, p. 40) on potato-washing in salt water as an established tradition between Japanese macaques. On tool use in animal cooperative behavior see B. Beck, *Animal Tool Behavior*, New York, Garland, 1980. Many studies show evidence of intergenerational transmission of tool use in animals such as macaques, crows, dolphins. Recent literature seems to demonstrate that genetic and ecological explanation for this behavior is at least in some cases inadequate and that a social explanation is further required. Thus intergeneration transmission would be also cultural transmission. See for example M. Krützen et al., "Cultural Transmission of Tool Use in Bottlenose Dolphins," *PNAS*, vol. 102, no. 25, 2005, pp. 8939-8943, on wild bottle nose dolphins who use sponges as foraging tools. There seems to be evidence that sponging has an almost exclusive social transmission within a single matriline from mother to female offspring.

¹⁵ This does not mean that every attribution of a function should in itself imply collective intentionality. Of course a lonely animal individual could occasionally come to attribute new functions to physical objects and hence discover new tools. But those tools that come into use in the animal group, and are further transmitted intergenerationally, would already imply, according to the model, some kind of collective intentionality at work.

¹⁶ Apparently more economical explanations that seek to understand these phenomena in terms of physiological conditioning through pain induced by the one who is physically stronger, seem to lose sight of the cognitive aspect of status attribution – the internal link between status and acceptance – which is central to the phenomenon itself to be explained and also accompanies the behavioral reactions of fear and pain and their physiological correlates.

¹⁷ See R.B. Brandom, "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism. Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms," *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1999, pp. 164-189.

¹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), eds. W. Bonsiepen and H.-C. Lucas, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 20, Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1992, § 410; trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971.

¹⁹ Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, chap. 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²¹ Note that if one assumes that social intergenerational transmission and cultural variation are traits of some non human animal groups – as argued in the above mentioned case of tool use in bottlenose dolphins---, then second nature capacities should not coincide with higher normative and linguistic capacities, since they should encompass also lower capacities ---such as the ones required for tool use – that are nevertheless culturally developed.

²² On the relation between the notion of second nature and the theory of social space see in particular I. Testa, "Nature and Recognition. Hegel and the Social Space," *Critical Horizons*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2009, pp. 341-370.

²³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III. Naturphilosophie und Philosophie des Geistes*, ed. R.-P. Horstmann, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8, Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1976, p. 215.

²⁴ On mate-recognition between animals see for example G.W.F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III. Naturphilosophie und Philosophie des Geistes*, ed. R.-P. Horstmann, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8, Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1968, p. 73. First natural recognitive capacities are presupposed in the *Phenomenology* by the desiring consciousnesses who struggle to achieve free self-consciousness; to do so, they must be already first naturally endowed with recognitive capacities of reidentification of objects in space and time, of performative self-reference, and of reciprocal interaction, encompassing all the three axes or dimensions of recognition listed above in paragraph 2. For a more detailed reading along these lines of the pre-phenomenological writings and of the Self-Consciousness chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* see I. Testa, *Riconoscimento naturale e autocooscienza sociale. Ricostruzione e ripresa della teoria hegeliana dell'Anerkennung*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Venezia, 2002; Testa, "Selbstbewusstsein und zweite Natur," in *Hegels Phaenomenologie des Geistes. Ein kooperatives Kommentar*, eds. K. Vieweg and W. Welsch, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2008, pp. 286-307.

²⁵ See R.B. Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1994.

²⁷ Note that the imposition of functions of which Searle speaks (*The Construction of Social Reality*, pp. 15-23) is a form of practical classification – in the broad sense of 'practical' used by Brandom, a sense that encompasses Searle's distinction between agentive and non-agentive functions – since the imposition of functions on objects implies that they are assigned relative to the interests of users and observers; imposition of function is thus an assignment of values: and linguistic meanings are for Searle just another type of values imposed on objects.

²⁸ On first natural and second natural recognition see Testa, "Hegel and the Social Space"; on first and second nature see also Testa, "Criticism from within Nature: The Dialectic between First and Second Nature from McDowell to Adorno," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2007, pp. 473-497.

²⁹ In the *Encyclopedie* habit (*Gewohnheit*) is introduced first in the treatment of the feeling soul (§ 409) ---at a level, then, that is not yet specifically human, but proper more in general to living and animal nature.

³⁰ See Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), § 352 Z.

³¹ *Gefühl* is a representation that contains evaluative information, under the form of sensations of the pleasant and the unpleasant, about the conformity between what an organism is and what it ought to be according to its intrinsic norm, and which thus makes reference to a natural level of normativity: see Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), § 356-359 and § 399-402.

³² On the alternative between these two models see the discussion between Ikäheimo , "On the Genus and Species of

Recognition,"; A. Laitinen, "Interpersonal Recognition: A Response to Value or a Precondition of Personhood?," *Inquiry*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2002, pp. 463-478; and A. Honneth, "Der Grund der Anerkennung. Eine Erwiderung auf kritische Rückfragen. Nachwort," in *Kampf um Anerkennung. Mit einem neuen Nachwort*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2004, pp. 303-341.

³³ See Brandom, "The Structure of Desire and Recognition".

³⁴ See Laitinen, "Interpersonal Recognition".

³⁵ See Brandom, "The Structure of Desire and Recognition".

³⁶ See A. Margalit, *The Decent Society*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996.