Article

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Mediational Recognition and Metaphysical Power: A Systematic Analysis

Abstract: Interhuman relations sometimes suffer from a lack of adequate recognition. Here I ask whether this can be caused by the "third" of representations of a superhuman ultimate object or source of recognition, that is, a personal God. In arguing for a positive answer, I articulate a notion of mediational recognition, and present a systematic analysis of a trilateral form of recognition in which one party claims to mediate normative judgements of another party to a third one. The analysis then focuses on the structure of metaphysical power that can be generated by religious groups and institutions.

Keywords: Recognition; Mediational recognition; Metaphysical power; Religious identity; Social pathology; Contemporary recognition theory.

1 Introduction

In this paper, I am taking my lead from Heikki Ikäheimo's (2019, p. 51; 63) question of whether the "third" of representations or theories of a super-human ultimate object or source of recognition – that is, a personal God – could be among the causes of lack of adequate interhuman recognition. In the following, I shall argue for a positive answer to this question. In constructing my argument, I will articulate some of the crucial structural factors involved, and thus also explicate some of the specific ways in which such causing could happen. In particular, my focus is on a form of recognition in which a religious authority claims to mediate the normative judgements of an ultimate divine source to a member or members of a religious community in such a way that this supposed mediational activity results in the lack of adequate recognition of the latter.

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One of the many recent developments in contemporary recognition theory based on Axel Honneth's (1995) foundational work is the study of various trilateral forms of recognition. In the most paradigmatic sense (cf. Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007), recognition-relations[1] are standardly understood as *bilateral* or mutual relations between two distinct (human) persons. However, in an analogy, the range of application is often taken to be extendable from strictly interpersonal cases involving two individual persons to ones including also groups and institutions (cf. Searle 2010; Tuomela 2013; Tollefsen 2015). In recent research literature on recognition theory, many *trilateral* aspects of recognition-relations involving a "third" of some sort have also appeared as the explicit objects of study.[2]

In this paper, my approach is decidedly systematic and theoretical in nature. Accordingly, in constructing my argument, I will simultaneously try to contribute to the further conceptualisation of contemporary recognition theory by providing a detailed systematic analysis of a trilateral form of recognition in which one party claims to mediate the acknowledgements or normative judgements (cf. Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007, p. 34–36) of another party to a third one. To distinguish this specific trilateral and "transmissive" form of recognition from the notion(s) of mediated recognition discussed in previous literature,[3] I shall call it *mediational recognition*. In the next step of systematisation, I then combine the analysis of mediational recognition with an articulation of certain structure of *metaphysical power* that can be generated by the theological contexts of religious groups and institutions.[4] To suggest some of the ways in which such metaphysical power can be socially constructed and enhanced, systematic connections between the notions of religious identity and social dependence are outlined. After all the relevant conceptualisations are in place, I will look at particular forms of lack of adequate recognition, discussing these in terms of recognition theory itself.

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1 These are conceived as relations of generally *taking the other as a person* and more specifically in the three dimensions of (i) *respect*, (ii) *esteem*, and (iii) *love/friendship/emotional support*.

2 In itself, the expression "trilateral" refers only to the *number of parties* involved in a recognition-relation without specifying whether these be persons, groups, institutions, or something else. For different notions of "mediated recognition", see e.g. Jones (2006a,b); Ikäheimo (2014); Brandom (2007); Rähme (2013); Koskinen (2017, 2019).

3 For example, forms of institutionally mediated recognition or trilateral forms of interpersonal recognition, where one person acts as a peace negotiator between two other ones.

4 The reason for using the terminology of "metaphysical power" is based on the idea that the assumption of God as a primary recognizer (or as a "third") is clearly a metaphysical postulation in a well-established philosophical sense of the term "metaphysics" (cf. e.g. Haaparanta and Koskinen 2012). Therefore, a form of power which relies on such a postulation can also be called metaphysical in nature.

I then conclude the paper by pointing towards a distinction between the internal and external domains of metaphysical power.

According to Ikäheimo (2019, p. 51), the modern philosophical tradition of thinking about recognition is for the most part emphatically secular. However, whatever one's personal views about religion might be, it is a relatively straightforward and undeniable empirical fact that *there are religions in the world*, and that in our societies, there are individual persons, groups, and institutions with religious identities. This empirical reality of religions is something that critical social and political philosophy cannot ignore either.[5] The empirical reality of religion(s) is also what motivates my philosophical discussion of the possible problematic implications of representations of a super-human or divine source and object of recognition with regard to our recognition for other human beings.

Although in the present analysis I am focusing on the problematic aspect of the misuse of metaphysical power in religious communities, it should be emphasized that my core argument concerns the *possibility* of one potential cause for lack of adequate recognition between concrete human beings, that is, in inter-human relations. It should also be clear that this in itself does not constitute any argument for or against religion as such, nor any claim that the analysed structure would be actualized in all religious contexts. Neither is my argument or analysis dependent on any metaphysical assumptions regarding the existence or non-existence of God. Moreover, the conceptual nature of my systematic analysis also means that on present occasion, I am not in the business of collecting empirical data or charting actual cases e.g. of sexual abuse, psychological violence, religious intolerance, or religiously motivated extremist action. In this context, I will simply assume that we can agree on there being more than enough actual cases that are at least partly justified by appeals to religious reasons or representations of the "third" of God.[6] This is already sufficient for the social and political relevance of the topic at hand.

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5 The themes of recognition and religion have indeed been increasingly treated in recent research literature, see e.g. Saarinen (2016); Koskinen et al. (2016); Kahlos et al. (2019).

6 For just a small fraction of some of the relevant empirical material, see e.g. the following topics of the BBC: https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/c9z6w6n469et/catholic-church-sexual-abuse-cases, and https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/topics/Religious_extremism. See also e.g. Hoffman (1995); Bottoms et al. (1995, 2004); White (2001); Pratt (2010). Although our focus here is on the "third" of God, it should be remembered that *religious* reasons for lack of adequate recognition between humans are more general than ones involving representations of a personal God, and thus *not* restricted to theistic contexts alone, cf. e.g. Jerryson (2009).

2 Analysis of Contexts of Mediational Recognition

Before turning our attention to the notion of *mediational* recognition, it would be useful to characterize more carefully the specific sense in which I am operating with the fundamental idea of *recognition* in this particular analysis. In ordinary English usage, the word "recognition" has at least three different meanings which are also systematically linked (cf. Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007, p. 33–36). In the widest sense, recognition can mean the *identification* of an entity as something, and this applies to anything whatsoever. In a narrower sense, recognition has to do with the *acknowledgement* of normative entities like values, principles, or rules. In the narrowest (and theoretically paradigmatic) sense, recognition has to do with *taking the other as a person*, where persons can be understood as a specific kind of normative entities. Within this narrowest paradigmatic sense, the further dimensions of respect, esteem, and love are then standardly distinguished (cf. Honneth 1995).

Since I am focusing on, and abstracting from, cases where a religious authority claims to mediate the normative judgements of an ultimate divine source or God to a member or members of a religious community, it is useful to operate with the specific notion of acknowledgement here. *Acknowledgements* and *normative judgements* can in the present context be taken to be similar in meaning, which is wider than the paradigmatic understanding restricted to mutual interpersonal cases. The purpose of this analysis is not in itself to downplay the role of *reciprocity* or *mutuality* in paradigmatic recognition relations, but merely to focus on certain specified aspects. However, since we are here using "recognition" in the wider sense of "acknowledgement", *objects* of recognition which cannot themselves be *subjects* of recognition are allowed, and such a possibility would seem to exclude reciprocity or mutuality (cf. Laitinen 2010).[7]

In trilateral forms of mediational recognition, we can distinguish three different subjects that can respectively be called the *primary*, *secondary*, and *tertiary* ones. On the one hand, these terms serve to make a purely numerical distinction between different subjects, and on the other, they also usefully refer to the assumed order of priority. With this terminology in place, we may now move towards a more detailed systematic analysis of mediational recognition in which the secondary subject claims to mediate the acknowledgements or normative judgements of the primary subject to a tertiary one.

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7 Iser (2019) writes of this extended notion of recognition based on acknowledgement and adequate regard that "the wide understanding allows for many objects of recognition that cannot themselves be subjects of recognition. However, so far this constitutes a minority position."

It seems that in such specified contexts, there is something, namely *a recognition* in the sense of acknowledgement or normative judgement that is initially mediated from a primary subject to a secondary one. Let us then begin with this semantic intuition as our starting point, and try to construct a schematic representation of what is going on in such cases. Utilising the A-B-X scheme of Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007, p. 35–36) as a notational basis, let us assume that "A-B-X" represents the general form of all cases of *some A taking B as X*. We can then use this structure to represent recognition-relations in particular, such that A is the *subject* or the recognizer, B is the *object* or the recognized, and X is the *content* or the specification of *as what* the object B is recognized. Using subscripts, we can further make a distinction between two numerically different subjects or recognizers A_1 and A_2. By placing these primary and secondary subjects in the appropriate "A" roles in the schematic A-B-X structure, we get *two different recognition-relations*, namely, A_1-B-X and A_2-B-X. The difference between these two relations is indicated by the two numerically distinct subjects of recognition, while the objects and the contents here can and do remain the same between the two relations.

After distinguishing by way of different subjects two distinct recognition-relations, we are now in a position to introduce a relational two-place symbol "▶" which takes recognition-relations as its arguments on both sides of the symbol. The result of such a syntactic operation is the following:

$$A_1\text{-B-X} \blacktriangleright A_2\text{-B-X} \tag{1}$$

As far as the semantics of this construction goes, we may postulate that the introduced symbol "▶" represents *mediational recognition*. The expression (1) can then be read as "A_2 mediates A_1's recognition of B as X". The idea of such a form of mediational recognition is precisely that the object and the content remain the same, while only the subject or the recognizer is different between the two.[8] In this way, we can understand the consequent recognition as mediating the antecedent one by ascribing the same content to the same object. This notation also very clearly and usefully makes it apparent that in the latter recognition, the subject A_2 takes the role of, or is substituted for A_1.

As a concrete example of A_2's mediating A_1's recognition of B as X, we could think, for example, of an individual member of a parliament claiming a piece of legislation regarding income taxation to be a beneficial policy on account of

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8 The symbol "▶" can thus only be meaningfully used in cases where B and X do refer to the same object and the same content in both the antecedent and the consequent recognition-relations.

her/his party's cabinet minister's publicly expressed views on the matter. In this example, A_1 is *the cabinet minister*, A_2 is *the individual member of the parliament*, B is *the piece of legislation*, and X is "*a beneficial policy*". In the example at hand, the cabinet minister is the antecedent recognizer whose original recognition the member of the parliament thus mediates. Our political example then constitutes an ordinary everyday example of a mediational recognition of a normative judgement, and its form can be represented by (1). Importantly for such ordinary inter-human cases, because A_1 is another human person like ourselves, we can question and problematize the normative judgement, or the "B-X" part itself, as well as demand justification for it in the shared social and political domain of giving and asking for reasons. Moreover, we may empirically inquire whether the suggested mediational relation in fact truthfully holds. In terms of our adopted notation, this question has to do with the truth-value of the whole expression "A_1-B-X ▶ A_2-B-X".

It would seem that necessarily, cases where *a religious authority* claims to mediate a normative judgement from *an ultimate super-human source* or God are fundamentally different from the more ordinary interhuman contexts involving only familiar everyday human subjects. The very notion of a religious authority already creates its own further systematic complications for the role of A_2. More-over, in whatever way the theological details are argued or conceived, the introduction or addition of the metaphysical third element of God as A_1 to the original empirical context radically changes the assumed social *ontology* of the purely inter-human situation. In addition to this fundamental ontological change, there is also a distinctive *epistemological* difference. While there may be a multitude of perfectly ordinary spatiotemporal, psychological, social, political, and economic reasons for why A_1 in a purely interhuman case remains epistemically inaccessible to us, the idea of God as a primary subject who is also the ultimate source of recognition arguably brings with it an epistemic opacity of a very different order or magnitude.

With respect to the fundamental difference between perfectly ordinary inter-human contexts and religious ones involving the third of God, it is interesting to look, as an illustrative example, to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This book constitutes a relevant textual document for our discussion as it sums up the belief-system of the largest Christian church in the world.[9] In the *Catechism*'s Part

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9 I am using the *Catholic Catechism* as an example because this easily available and influential text incorporates some well-articulated expressions of assumptions that I take to be typical to many religious contexts. By the use of this particular example, I do not intend to imply that the phenomena under discussion would be exclusively limited to the Catholic Church. Neither do I wish to suggest that all religious contexts would be similar in all respects to the Catholic Church. There obviously are differences between various Christian churches as well as between different religions, theistic and non-theistic.

One, Section One, Chapter One, Paragraph 37 states that "the truths that concern the relations between God and man wholly transcend the visible order of things". Paragraph 40 states that "our knowledge of God is limited", and talks about "our limited human ways of knowing and thinking". Paragraph 42 begins by saying that "God transcends all creatures", and ends by stating that "Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God". If we assume that such characterizations do *not* apply to ordinary humans and interhuman contexts, then it would seem that we have a significant difference between the purely interhuman cases and ones involving representations of the third of God.

If A_1 is thus taken to be God, and A_2 is assumed to be a religious authority claiming to mediate God's antecedent normative judgements, then it would be useful for us to have some notational device for representing the special opacity involved with assumptions of such an ultimate source of recognition. To mark the relevant distinction, we can represent the metaphysical and epistemic opaqueness of the antecedent recognition in religious or theological contexts involving representations of the third of God by using square brackets "[...]" with a subscript "$_O$", resulting in "$[A_1\text{-}B\text{-}X]_O$". If we then write this expression as the antecedent of a mediational form of recognition, we get the following structure:

$$[A_1\text{-}B\text{-}X]_O \blacktriangleright A_2\text{-}B\text{-}X \tag{2}$$

With these notational conventions in place, we can now schematically represent ordinary interhuman contexts of mediational recognition with the form of (1) above and religious or theological ones with that of (2). The difference between (1) and (2) is meant precisely to highlight the complex metaphysical and epistemic opaqueness that is built into the religious contexts of mediational recognition.

3 Opaque Structures of Metaphysical Power

In purely interhuman cases schematically represented by (1), A_1 is another human person who is, and whose normative judgements are, in principle something that can be inquired directly or otherwise observed or studied empirically. Thus, the primary subject of such mediational recognition does not "transcend all creatures". Neither do purely interhuman mediational relations "wholly transcend the visible order of things".[10] Whether the tertiary subject A_3 to whom A_2

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10 These are the same quotations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Paragraphs 37 and 42) that I cited in section 2.

mediates or transmits the B-X package from A_1 has actual epistemic access to A_1 (or A_1's normative judgements), or whether this access happens to be blocked by some selection of contingent factors is beside the point. What matters in the trilateral interhuman context of (1) is that the three subjects A_1, A_2, and A_3 are metaphysically speaking all on an equal footing in the sense that they are all empirical contingent human beings. This also means that on the basis of their shared and uniting humanity, their fundamental ontological relations are *horizontal* in nature.

In moving from structure (1) to (2), the ontological relationship changes radically, as the position of A_1 is then occupied by a representation of the third of God.[11] This ontological shift makes the relations between the primary subject A_1 and the secondary and tertiary subjects A_2 and A_3 *vertical* in nature.[12] The shift also brings with it the kind of metaphysical and epistemic opaqueness that was discussed above and is represented by the "$[...]_0$" of (2). It makes a significant difference whether the A_1 of the antecedent recognition is an observable ordinary human subject or an assumed ultimate divine subject and source of recognition. In the latter case, we only have standard epistemic access to A_2 and the empirically observable consequent recognition. In religious contexts, the rest regarding both A_1 and the antecedent recognition is based on the acknowledgement of factors like the following:

(a) The *religious authority* of A_2 in the mediational role between God and A_3;
(b) *Divine revelation* (scripture and tradition) as an evidential source in addition to the standard interhuman epistemic avenues of reason and experience;
(c) The specific *textual interpretations* supporting the recognition of B as X; and
(d) The *social backing* provided to factors (a)–(c) by the relevant religious community.

When both A_1 and the antecedent original recognition of B as X are opaque and directly inaccessible to A_3, and A_2 is taken to be situated between A_1 and A_3 as a religious authority, it is clear that the mediational position of A_2 becomes one of considerable power. As a result of their socially constructed normative statuses,

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11 B-X is then understood to be some religious normative content that is relevant for A_3. As a reviewer has suggested, one position that A_3 can take is that of B. Perhaps God has – according to A_2 – told something about the normative standing of A_3, and now A_2 (and others) are in privileged position to recognize A_3 (in a God-given way). Here the formula would be $[A_1\text{-}A_3\text{-}X]_0 \blacktriangleright A_2\text{-}A_3\text{-}X$. The other potential is of course $[A_1\text{-}B\text{-}X]_0 \blacktriangleright A_2\text{-}B\text{-}X$, and because of this, A_3 has some sort of relation to B-X (maybe something akin to A_3 [*ought to*] -B-X).

12 For horizontal and vertical forms of recognition, see e.g. Ikäheimo (2014) and Saarinen (2016).

religious authorities can be in a position to formulate influential doctrinal interpretations as well as to effect various normative decisions and social practices based on them. For an actual example of such a structure of power, the *Catholic Catechism* once again serves as an illustration, as it very clearly states that:

> "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. (Paragraph 85, a footnote omitted)[13]

For the opaque power structure itself, it does not really matter whether we place "the Pope", "the Pope and the bishops in communion with him", or "the Magisterium of the Church" to the position of A_2. In any case, the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God is in the hands of religious authority which is "exercised in the name of Jesus Christ". Similarly opaque power structures can of course be implemented in a number of religious contexts, whether of Christian and Catholic variety or not.[14]

A noteworthy aspect of such a religious authority position is that in it, A_2 wields an intensified form of power in relation to A_3 which could be characterized as metaphysical in nature. This is both because of the metaphysical nature of God and because the assumed existential stakes for A_3 are exceptionally high. The *Catechism*, for example, talks about "the source of all saving truth" (Paragraph 75), "the message of salvation" (76), and "the salvation of souls" (95). It seems reasonable to assume that due to the involvement of such deeply efficacious metaphysical assumptions concerning the eternal fate of souls, the normative statuses and consequent relations of power within religious communities gain a heightened importance. In religious contexts, the ordinary and already effective socio-structural mechanisms of power thus receive highly significant existential and metaphysical interpretations that increase their effectiveness considerably. To mark such special and enhanced relations in religious contexts, we can talk of structures of *metaphysical power*.

In terms of ontological structure, we can further analyse and represent the opaque religious contexts schematized by (2) above in the following manner:

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13 Paragraph 100 mentions the Pope and the bishops in reverse order to this: "The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him."

14 While the power structure and the position of authority of A_2 is based on horizontal recognition factors along the lines of (a)–(d), what brings in the opaqueness is precisely the vertical metaphysical postulation of the super-human ultimate object or source of recognition.
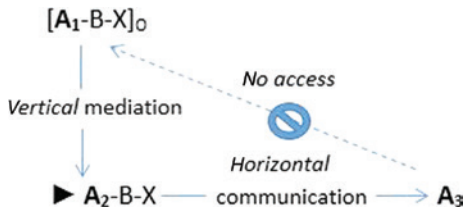
Fig. 1: Vertical mediation and horizontal communication.

Since the primary subject in Figure 1 is taken to be God, the initial step of mediating the B-X package from A_1 to A_2 occurs in a *vertical* dimension, from a "higher" to a "lower" ontological level. The *horizontal* communication and the second step of the mediational process between A_2 and A_3 then occurs on the secondary and tertiary subjects' shared interhuman ontological level.

However, in terms of power-relations, because of the normative status of A_2 as a religious authority, and because of the epistemic opacity of both A_1 and the original B-X to A_3, the horizontal relationship between A_2 and A_3 collapses into a vertical one, and we end up with the following type of power structure:

Consequently, in Figure 2 we have a clear vertical and hierarchical structure of metaphysical power in which the representation of the third of God is on top as A_1, the mediating religious authority is in the middle as A_2, and the member of the religious community to whom the recognition of B as X is communicated is on the bottom as A_3.
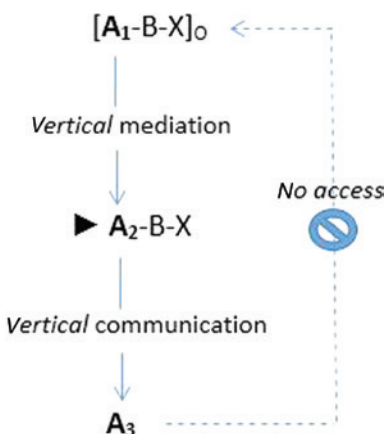

Fig. 2: Vertical mediation and vertical communication.

In the foregoing, in line with Ikäheimo's (2019, p. 51; 63) question that I started with, I have kept on talking about *representations* of the third of God. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the socially constructed metaphysical power structure depicted above can be fully real and effective with respect to A_2 and A_3 quite independently of the external metaphysical question of whether there actually is a God or not to occupy the place of A_1. The acknowledgement of factors (a)–(d) listed earlier is enough in itself to generate the metaphysical power structure of Figure 2. It is thus sufficient that the supreme divine authority is internally "available" within forms of life based on religious identities. As Risto Saarinen (2016, p. 28, italics mine) formulates the idea in connection with charting the conceptual components of recognition in his *Recognition and Religion*:

> Availability in this sense relates to *the thought world* rather than *the real world*. For instance, God is available in Western intellectual history so that people can recognize God or, on other occasions, be recognized by God. *This availability of God does not mean that a divine being really exists but only that God is available in people's mental framework*.[15]

Such intentional availability is provided by shared religious identities, and this is what is required, in addition to hierarchical structures of religion,[16] for the possible generation and sustenance of the metaphysical power structure of Figure 2 in religious contexts.[17]

4 Religious Identities and Social Dependence

To understand more clearly how God becomes available in people's mental framework, and how religious authority and metaphysical power can be socially constructed and enhanced by religious identities, we can take a look at some of

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15 This type of availability-relation in the thought world as a foundation for recognition relations arguably has its own problems. One thing that could be pointed out here is that *availability* seems to be even weaker than Boris Rähme's (2013, p. 28) background condition of *acquaintedness* regarding the dimensions of love and esteem: "*x* and *y* are acquainted with each other if and only if *x* knows that *y* exists and *y* knows that *x* exists".

16 As a reviewer has pointed out, one could easily imagine either a private religion where everyone has their own access to God or an egalitarian religion where there are no mediating priests. Even with God at the top of these structures, it does not *necessarily* create the inter-human power structure described here.

17 Even if we did assume God to really exist, the internal metaphysical power of religious authorities in religious contexts and communities is still dependent on social relations and constructions.

the systematic factors involved. *Identity* in general, in the sense relevant for our inquiry at hand, can be taken to designate something like a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being (cf. Taylor 1994, p. 25). This formulation focuses on the subjective role that identity plays in a person's interpretative self-relation.[18] We make our lives *as* men and *as* women, *as* Christians and *as* Muslims, *as* religious persons and *as* non-religious persons, etc. To speak of *living-as* in cases like these, is precisely to talk about identities (cf. Appiah 2005, p. *xiv*; 16).[19] Formulated in subjective terms of self-relation, collective identities like the ones listed above then provide loose norms or models which play a role in shaping our plans of life. They effectively function as kinds of *scripts* or *narratives* that individual persons can use in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories (Appiah 2005, p. 22). In addition to the patterns and narrative conventions built into them, identities also provide sources of *value* that help us make our way among many morally permissible options (cf. Appiah 2005, p. 24). Religions typically have a metaphysical story to tell as well as an accompanying horizon of values to offer.

In Kwame Anthony Appiah's (2005, p. 66–69) useful analysis, collective identities[20] have a tripartite structure which requires, first of all, the availability of terms or labels in public discourse that are used to pick out the bearers of the identities by way of criteria of ascription, so that some people are recognized *as* members of the group. This means that there have to be social conceptions of what it is to be a Christian, a Muslim, etc. These conceptions are typically shaped to varying degrees by religious authorities and religious communities. The second requirement is that at least some of those who bear the labels also internalise them as parts of their individual identities. This means that someone has to be willing to identify herself as a Christian, a Muslim, etc. The third requirement then is that there are patterns of behaviour toward the bearers of the identities such that they are sometimes treated as bearers of those very identities. If we call a typical label for an identity group "L", then we can say that we have a paradigm of a social identity that matters for ethical and political life when:

   (i)   A classification of people as Ls is associated with a *social conception* of Ls;
   (ii) Some people *identify as* Ls; and
   (iii) People are sometimes *treated as* Ls.

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18 Instead of the "what" of persons, or their personhood in general, *identity in the sense relevant here* concerns the "who" of persons, or their *qualitative self-identities*. These are *non-essential or accidental properties* of persons that can vary from one person or group to the other.

19 The discussion of identity in this section relies heavily on Appiah (2005). On the role of concepts in recognition and identity formation, see also e.g. Koskinen (2017, p. 72–75).

20 Identities are collective because they are *socially constructed* and because they can be *shared by different individuals*. In a sense, then, we build our *particular* identities from *universal* elements.

An identity L is always articulated through concepts and practices made available to individuals by religion, school, and state, mediated by family, peers, and friends (Appiah 2005, p. 20). *Religious* practices in particular are likely to represent deeply constitutive aspects of people's identity, and, as Appiah points out, religious groups are also among the more salient buttresses of identity in the West, constituting for many a paradigm of identity (Appiah 2005, p. 99; 83). When newcomers are initiated into the practices and ways of life of a religious group, whether in their families from birth onwards or after some form of later conversion, they learn and adopt the values and scripts that are internal to that particular religious identity. This is how God becomes *intentionally available* in people's mental framework as A_1. It is also how socialization into a religious community incorporates the acknowledgement of factors like (a)–(d) to construct both the religious authority position of A_2 and the power structure of Figure 2.[21]

The ways in which individual people actually do come to identify as religious Ls can differ widely, and there are also consequent differences in the degrees of autonomous choice with respect to the internalisation of L, and thus the actualization of clause (ii) above. Whereas people identifying themselves as Ls has to do with the subjective role that identity plays in a person's interpretative self-relation or understanding of who they are, clauses (i) and (iii) of Appiah's analysis more directly highlight the way in which social or collective identities are dependent on others. The availability of terms or labels for L in public discourse and the social conception and recognition of some people *as* L are matters that depend on interpersonal factors outside the limited sphere of subjectivity. The same goes for the existence of social patterns of behaviour and people's *treatment as* Ls. Collective identities are social not just because they involve others, but also because they are constituted in part by socially created and transmitted conceptions of how a person of a given identity L properly behaves (cf. Appiah 2005, p. 21). These external normative aspects of identities connect them with *religious authorities* and the potential use of *metaphysical power*.

As Taylor (1994, p. 32) puts it, people do not acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. Instead, we are introduced to these languages (and labels) through interaction with significant others, people around us who matter to us. This general heteronomical theme connects with the overall anti-atomistic

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21 Of course, as a reviewer has pointed out, an atheist could as well have a theoretical understanding of God as a potential recognitive agent, even if she would not be immersed in practices of a religious group. However, the point here would be that an atheist would then not herself be personally inclined to accept the relevant religious authority. This point is connected to the distinction between *internal* and *external* domains of metaphysical power that I make at the conclusion of the paper.

emphasis built into the foundations of contemporary recognition theory: The genesis of the human mind is not monological, not something that each person accomplishes on her own, but deeply *dialogical* in nature. Taylor (2004, p. 52) explicitly formulates this point in terms of religion and spiritual vocabularies:

> Now this fact, that the religious language, capacities, and modes of experience available to each of us comes from the society in which we are born remains true in a sense of all human beings. Even great innovative religious founders have to draw on a preexisting vocabulary available in their society. In the end, this shades into the obvious point about human language in general: that we all acquire it from the language groups we grow up in and can transcend what we are given only by leaning on it.

We define our identity always in dialogue with, and sometimes in struggle against,[22] the things our significant others want to see in us (Taylor 1994, p. 33). Hence, the "monological" clause (ii) of Appiah's definition is not sufficient alone, but needs to be complemented by the dialogical features articulated by (i) and (iii). The form of social *dependence* that comes with identity formation and recognition-relations is not narrowly defined in the sense that it would be tied to particular others or given specifications of L, but rather *generic* in the sense that identity and recognition are dependent on there being *some* social labels and patterns of behaviour that can function in the kinds of roles that have been described above.

As has already been argued, in contexts having to do with religious identities, because of assumed metaphysical factors like salvation and the eternal fate of one's soul, the existential stakes for individual members of religious communities in the role of A_3 are exceptionally high. Even if we were dealing with a form of religion without the ideas of soul and salvation, and with communities less hierarchical than the Catholic Church, it would seem plausible to assume that religious people typically care deeply about matters having to do with their own religion. Therefore, the themes of dependence and vulnerability in the interhuman relations to A_2 are also acutely intensified. In religious contexts, the ordinary and already very powerful socio-structural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion thus easily receive existential and metaphysical interpretations that increase their effectiveness enormously. And it is precisely this intensified effectiveness

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22 Honneth (1995) has more to say on the important aspect of *struggle* in all this. It should perhaps be noted in this connection that Taylor's and Honneth's theories of recognition seem to have rather different aims and scopes. While Taylor is more interested in the recognition of specific social identities, Honneth's theory has a much wider and more fundamental scope, as it deals with people in terms of their equal status as rightsholders, their social esteem, and their emotional vulnerability. Thus, Taylor's and Honneth's approaches should not be conflated.

that makes the promise of inclusion and the threat of exclusion such powerful generators and amplifiers of metaphysical power.

5 Lack of Adequate Interhuman Recognition

At this point, the way in which the third of representations of God could be among the causes of lack of adequate interhuman recognition should already have become relatively clear. However, something still remains to be said about the specific ways in which we understand *the lack of adequate interhuman recognition*. In completing the systematic analysis, we shall now move from the previously articulated structural causal factors to the analysis of the resulting (unwanted) effects. In utilizing the conceptual resources of contemporary recognition theory, we shall also move from the wider understanding of the term "recognition" as *acknowledgement* adopted in the beginning of Section 2 to the narrower paradigmatic meaning of *taking the other as a person* in the three standard dimensions of respect, esteem, and love (cf. Honneth 1995). This move makes it possible for us to consider what exactly is taken to be *adequate* in interhuman relations on the one hand, and what thus constitutes a *lack* of adequate recognition on the other. In other words, we need to have some *normative standard* against which the resulting lacks and inadequacies of recognition can be expressed and evaluated.[23]

The dependence between a person's interpretative self-relation and her relations to others arguably goes even deeper than the general availability of identity labels as in (i) above, and forms of treatment based on them as in (iii). Successful individual self-realization, understood as a process of realizing one's self-chosen life-goals, can be taken to *presuppose* things like a certain degree of self-confidence, legally guaranteed autonomy, and sureness as to the value of one's own abilities (cf. Honneth 1995, p. 174). Without these, we cannot develop into fully functional adult human beings. Since the prospect of basic self-confidence is inherent in the experience of emotional support and love, the prospect of self-respect in the experience of legal recognition, and the prospect of self-esteem in the experience of solidarity and the valuing of one's contributions (cf. Honneth 1995, p. 173), love, respect, and esteem as dimensions of recognition plausibly function as *necessary conditions* for individual self-realization, and more generally, for the development of full human personhood.

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23 The notion of *social pathology* (cf. e.g. Honneth 2001b, 2007, 2009; Zurn 2014; Särkelä and Laitinen 2018) could also be used in this connection.

The freedom associated with self-realization, which has a close connection with identities or Ls and *living as* something, is thus also dependent on other recognitional prerequisites that human subjects do not have at their own disposal. Subjects can only acquire freedom with the help of their interaction partners, and consequently, as Honneth (1995, p. 174) points out, love, respect, and esteem as the three standard dimensions of recognition represent intersubjective conditions that must be presupposed, if we are to describe the general structures of a successful human life (cf. also Zurn 2015, p. 68–74). What constitutes the standard according to which the lack of adequate interhuman recognition is evaluated is an ethical conception of social normality that is tailored to conditions enabling human self-realization. This ethical background is *formal* in the sense that it normatively emphasizes only the social preconditions of human self-realization, and not any specific goals served by those conditions (cf. Honneth 2007, p. 36).

In line with such an idea of formal presuppositions or necessary conditions, recognition has been called *a vital human need* (Taylor 1994, p. 26). Moreover, as a general observation, it could be pointed out that where there are needs, there is also *vulnerability*.[24] In particular, if there are recognition-related conditions that have to be fulfilled to constitute a good and fulfilling human life based on autonomy, then we are constitutively vulnerable to various forms of misrecognition and non-recognition (cf. Honneth 2001a, 2008). This is yet another aspect of the kind of intersubjective dependence that brings out the deeply social preconditions of an individual's development into an autonomous and fully functioning adult human person. We can be positively harmed by lack of adequate interhuman recognition, and when representations of the third of God are involved together with all the existential and metaphysical assumptions that are built into religious identities, the vulnerability already characterizing purely interhuman contexts becomes acutely intensified.

As has already been argued, the opaque metaphysical power structure of Figure 2 between A_2 and A_3 is based on factors like (a)–(d), and is independent of whether anything actually corresponds to the representation of A_1, or whether there actually is a God or not. Consequently, the possible lack of adequate recognition can also be seen as localized in the interhuman relations between A_2 and A_3, even when a representation of the third of God is involved in the context as A_1, contributing via intentional availability to the social construction of Figure 2. And indeed, the whole point of the complex systematic analysis presented thus

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24 There are authors like Cillian McBride (2013) who think that in contemporary recognition theory, too much emphasis is given to what he calls *the recognition deficit model.* According to him, this model focuses on the harms done by the lack of recognition, and does not do justice to the full complexity of our struggles for recognition.

far is precisely to demonstrate in a detailed systematic way how, and to argue that representations or theories of a super-human ultimate objects or source of recognition *could* be among the causes of lack of adequate interhuman recognition. It should be noted that this "could" constitutes modal talk, and refers to *possible* misuses of metaphysical power when structures of mediational recognition are implemented in religious contexts. Even if the possibilities were sometimes actualized, as they apparently are, this does *not* in itself mean that there would be any *necessary* connection between representations of God and lack of adequate interhuman recognition.

To highlight even more clearly what exactly the lack of adequate recognition in interpersonal relations means, we can look at the *negative* aspects of the standard dimensions of recognition. In place of taking the other as a person we then have phenomena like *social exclusion* and *social invisibility* (cf. Honneth 2001a, 2008) as types of hindrances to a status of full personhood and parity of participation (cf. Fraser and Honneth 2003, p. 36). In place of respect we have *the denial of rights*, in place of esteem we have *the denigration of identities or ways of life*, and in place of love or emotional support we have phenomena like *psychological violence* and *the violation of the body* (cf. Honneth 1995, p. 43; 2007). Moreover, the collective identities provided by religious traditions are constituted in part by socially created and transmitted conceptions of how a person of a given identity L properly behaves (cf. Appiah 2005, p. 21). These external normative aspects of identities connect them with the potential use of metaphysical power by the relevant community or its religious authorities, and can also make the related scripts or narratives *too tightly scripted*, socially and psychologically *restraining*, and thus further forms of *misrecognition*.

Without going too far into the direction of empirical study, it is easy to come up with possible and actual cases of lack of adequate recognition that are at least partly justified by appeals to religious reasons or representations of the third of God. When hate speech, contempt, or ridicule is directed to other individuals, groups, or institutions on account of their differing religious identities, different representations of God, or lack of religious faith, we have a case. When people with different sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions are denied equal rights as citizens or members of society based on religious reasons, we have a case. When religious authorities or communities threaten or punish their members with social exclusion and invisibility because they do not conform to the normative expectations built into the religious identities assumed by the authorities, we have a case. When religious authorities or individuals situated on higher levels of hierarchy in religious communities violate the bodies of other individuals through sexual abuse or other type of physical violence, we have a case. And so on, and so on. For the purposes of understanding the potentiality

as well as the unfortunate actuality of the empirical phenomenon itself, these characterizations should already be quite enough.[25]

6 Conclusions

In Section 2 above, I presented an analysis of mediational recognition in both purely interhuman contexts (1) and religious contexts (2) involving representations of the third of God. I also argued for the significant ontological and epistemological difference between the two contexts, introducing some notational devices to indicate the very distinction. In the following Section 3, I articulated a way in which contexts of type (2) can give rise to opaque and hierarchical structures of metaphysical power schematized by Figure 2. In Section 4, I considered the general function of identities. I also discussed how religious identities in particular can make (representations of) God intentionally available, and thus contribute to the generation, sustenance, and intensification of the metaphysical power given in religious contexts to mediating agents A_2 in their relation to A_3. In Section 5, I then utilized the standard dimensions of recognition theory to characterize ways in which the lack of adequate interhuman recognition can be understood. Bearing in mind that the initial question was whether the "third" of representations or theories of a super-human ultimate object or source of recognition – that is, a personal God – could be among the causes of lack of adequate interhuman recognition, it would thus seem that the elements for the argument for a positive answer are already in place, and the conclusion is clear.

Simultaneously with, and as part of constructing the argument itself, I have also tried to actively contribute to the further conceptualization of contemporary recognition theory. The main novelties of the present attempt which continues

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25 It is interesting just to note in this connection that Sami Pihlström and Sari Kivistö (2016) base their recent "antitheodicist" programme on the idea that theodicies fail to adequately recognize or acknowledge the meaninglessness of suffering, and typically treat suffering human beings as mere means to some alleged overall good. In combining philosophical and literary studies, they problematize the relationship between an individual human perspective and that of metaphysical, collective, or societal forces that aim to oppress the individual. In their analyses, individual autonomy is threatened when unknown superior forces or humans themselves practice and justify their violence against the individual by appealing to the just ways of God or other obscure authorities whose reasons cannot be understood by a human mind. Pihlström and Kivistö then explore the ways in which various authoritative and dominant voices (wrongly) appeal to good, holy or just intentions in their violent actions or to higher wisdom in explaining the reasons of unjust and painful experiences.

and further develops some interesting themes in recent research literature have to do with: (A) the analysis of the structure of *mediational recognition*; (B) the distinction between its two types of contexts, purely interhuman and religious or theological; and (C) the articulation on the basis of these of an opaque and hierarchical structure of *metaphysical power*. These novel analyses were then combined with some of Appiah's and Taylor's illuminating ideas concerning identity. Finally, the lack of adequate interhuman recognition was discussed in terms of Honneth's recognition theory.[26] The detailed construction of the argument thus resulted in conceptual extensions that were systematically connected and usefully compatible with the already existing framework of social and political philosophy.

In the course of this paper, my focus has explicitly been on a form of recognition in which a religious authority claims to mediate the normative judgements of an ultimate divine source to a member or members of a religious community in such a way that this supposed mediational activity results in the lack of adequate recognition of the latter. Such a setting could be characterized as limited to an *internal* domain of metaphysical power, because the relevant misrecognition or non-recognition is contained within the religious community itself. It should be clear, however, that the negative effects of pathological misuses of metaphysical power can also reach to *external* domains, beyond the limits of any given religious communities. Religiously motivated acts of terrorism encouraged and endorsed by religious authorities constitute an obvious and extreme example of this. Various other types of scenarios are also possible.[27] The specific undertaking of the present paper has been to analyse and articulate the core concepts of *mediational recognition* and *metaphysical power* primarily within the internal domains of religious communities themselves. The resulting systematic analyses can then be employed in discussing other related topics as well as in studying additional complexities e.g. in various group-related and institutional settings. For present purposes, however, those remain interesting topics for further research.

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26 For recent monograph-length overviews of Honneth's thought and contemporary recognition theory, see Thompson (2006); Deranty (2009); McBride (2013); Petherbridge (2013); Ikäheimo (2014); Zurn (2015); Wilhelm (2019).

27 One another type of interestingly different case where the mediational claim is *not* made by a recognized religious authority is George W. Bush's statement that "God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq", cf. e.g. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/07/iraq.usa.

following conferences: *6th Nordic Conference for Philosophy of Religion: Critique, Protest, and Reform*, Oslo, 31 May-2 June 2017; *American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting 2017*, Boston, MA, USA, 18–21 November 2017; *4th Witten Conference on Institutional Change*, Witten/Herdecke University, Germany, 1–2 February 2018 (Keynote Lecture); and the *XXIV World Congress of Philosophy*, Beijing, China, 13–20 August 2018.

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