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A philosophical analysis on the relations between recognition and indignation

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Hegel's famous claim that "Philosophy is the child of its time" touches on how Philosophy incorporates new social issues that affect the lives of human beings. One of the main characteristics of philosophical thought, and a main line of research in classic and current philosophical works, lies in its contribution to explore how people face the risks, vicissitudes and changes that life presents. Love of wisdom, the search for wanting to know more, the radical continuous thinking that Socrates speaks of and that is at the core of Philosophy are attitudes that encourage the capacity for indignation. Only when we question reality, when we reflect and wonder about what occurs to us or to others and its causes, can we have a better understanding of the pros and cons of our claims and can therefore come up with nonviolent actions to undertake. From this conviction, I would like to display the points of view of a Philosophy for Peace, an applied Philosophy with the objective of empowering our human capacities for transforming human and environmental suffering by peaceful means. Hence, this essay aims at reflecting on the significance of "indignation," as it has recently emerged in social protest movements in Spain and elsewhere, from the genealogy of the notion of recognition.

In an increasingly difficult economic and social crisis in Spain, it is of utmost importance to reflect upon how the mass media routinely repeats a limited economic discourse to analyze and justify a range of social cutbacks which are provoking numerous civil protests. These protests demonstrate a growing indignation in the face of the restriction of economic, educational, health and other social policies. At the same time, they also show emerging practices of mutual recognition within civil society. In this scenario, as in the past, Philosophy has a role to play. Specifically, it can provide us with critical perspectives and entry points to address the crises in values as well as the outcomes of the economic crisis we are experiencing everywhere, even if within distinct historical, cultural and political conditions. In this essay, I aim to explore one particular

avenue of a Philosophy for Peace in this time of indignation in Spain: the debates on recognition to address the relationship between nonviolent social movements and social justice.

Approaching the complexity of present-day situations from the practical and applied significance of philosophical reflections has become a distinctive trend in Philosophy. At the UNESCO Chair in Castellón we have proposed to explore normative instruments that are able to include the perspective of feelings and affection for the nonviolent transformation of conflicts. This interest in developing a “practical rationality” dialogues with a considerable rise in recent years of literature focusing on indignation and the empowerment of social movements. Indignation is increasingly highlighted in these philosophical and Peace Studies publications as a main element in the struggles for mutual recognition in nonviolent protest movements.

Social movements like the 15M that began to articulate efforts in 2011, also known as the “indignants' movement” and “the Spanish revolution,” call for real participatory democracies in which the voice of civil society has a greater and more decisive role regarding policies of the state. They propose specific initiatives and ways to recognize and incorporate people’s needs, rights and participation into social policies. These nonviolent calls, actions and networks bring out the sense of citizenship from people’s feelings and show the importance of mutual recognition, dialogue and caring. In this era of globalization, new media quickens time, reduces geographical distance and favors connectivity and organizing strategies in civil society. It might also activate a sense of mutual recognition and responsibility. Immediacy and access to multiple sources of information may lead to increasing misunderstandings; yet, it is also true that it raises awareness about diverse issues that may cause feelings of indignation.

In etymological terms (from the Latin prefix *re* and the verb *cognoscere*), the word recognition means, “to know again.” Accordingly, “recognizing” a person means knowing more about him or her and understanding that person in depth, paying attention to his or hers idiosyncrasies. It is like a *re-look*, a “stop and look more closely,” a “taking that person into account.” Thus, a person who feels indignation does so, among other reasons, because he or she does not feel recognized or because he or she sees that the identities, opinions, difficulties or needs of other individuals have not been recognized. Therefore, the feeling of indignation empowers the figure of the indignant to organize nonviolent social movements in pursuit of mutual recognition. In this way, critical nonviolent social movements promote a peaceful transformation of the

social structures that cause injustice and inequality. This is so when they arise from the belief that the absence of recognition causes inequalities and, consequently, social injustice. Therefore, if these nonviolent social movements result in the increase of mutual recognition as the basis for social justice, as philosopher Axel Honneth argues, they will have an influence in the decrease of those inequalities.

As human beings, we have peaceful alternatives to transform our indignation. Vicent Martínez Guzmán's Philosophy for Peace and his proposal of an Epistemological Turn emphasizes this capacity to act peacefully and to transform our fragility and vulnerability by nonviolent means. Of course, we can feel fragile and vulnerable in our indignation due to a lack of recognition of ours and other's rights, and we certainly can respond to this fragility in a violent way. However, we can catalyze this indignation peacefully as in the case of social movement organized around nonviolent, innovative and dialogic interventions. I support this move towards mutual recognition because I believe it can play an important role in ending spirals of violence and enhancing attitudes nurturing cultures for peace.

Feeling indignant means feeling angry about something that has happened or that someone has done and that we consider unjust. Philosophy for Peace theoretical lens facilitates a reflection on the diverse possibilities for enhancing our capacities for the peaceful transformation of the structures, policies and actions that maintain social injustice. However, before we are able to express our indignation and struggle nonviolently for social justice, we must face and transform culturally constructed feelings of fear. The individual and social effects of fear have been deeply and broadly analyzed from many different perspectives. Benjamin Barber's *Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism and Democracy* provides a good example of this line of research. Barber argues that our capacity of feeling indignation and transforming it is related to the concept of freedom as an absence of fear. Thus, a first step towards indignation will be overcoming fear and not falling into its trap. Fear hinders our potential as citizens to act and favors the status quo. In contrast, living without fear means being able to make ourselves visible, make ourselves heard, openly expressing our indignation through actions calling for changes. Only in freedom and without fear can civil society make its indignation visible and give us the chance of peacefully and non-violently organizing critical social movements against unjust political and economic policies.

The concept of indignation I am putting forward here is rooted in Peter Frederick Strawson's *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, where he explores a Phenomenology of moral feelings. He distinguishes three attitudes that human beings can adopt in everyday life when they experience contempt, disrespect or indifference. Let me say that this distinction opens to a consideration of feelings that plays a significant role in the ways we conceptualize recognition and responsibility. Vicent Martínez Guzmán has elaborated on these three perspectives to propose that they imply an "originary intersubjectivity" through which we can be held responsible to each other for what we say and do: how do I feel about what others do to me; how do I feel about what I do; and how do I feel about what others do to third parties. It is well known that Strawson situates the feeling of indignation in the second relation. However, my reflection of present-day indignant movements requires broadening these perspectives by opening up the possibility of feeling indignant in any of the aforementioned three levels of relations. A person may feel indignant by the offensive actions that others do to each other (even though they do not affect him or her) as much as for those perpetrated against him or herself.

I would like to argue that indignation is closely related to mutual recognition insofar as the three perspectives of feelings are involved. The lack of recognition a person feels in relation to him or herself, or to other people, provokes indignation. Feelings, therefore, regain an important role and value in philosophical theory. Axel Honneth in *Pathologies of Reason* reflects on how Modern society manifests a pathological deformation of rational human faculties that cause human and environmental suffering. This suffering is due to the concepts of structural, cultural and direct violence insofar as they are actions generating social injustices and inequalities.

The absence of mutual recognition provokes indignation. A person may feel deeply indignant if he or she is not recognized or if she or he feels that other people are being degraded or treated with contempt. The importance of mutual recognition is explained by dialectic thought, such as Fichte's claim that in recognizing "you" I also recognize "myself." In that moment of the process of recognition, I acknowledge the traits we have in common and the ones that make us different. For instance, Paul Ricoeur, in his book *The Course of Recognition*, has emphasized that mutual recognition always implies an interrelation.

This philosophical debate is also elaborated in Honneth's writings. In his work *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Honneth analyzes the relation between the absence of mutual recognition and the organization of nonviolent social movements. Applying Honneth's terminology, one feels indignation at realizing that I feel responsible when someone is not recognized or when there is a lack of recognition for others. I believe indignation is also the reason nonviolent social movements are empowered and organized around the objective of achieving mutual recognition. It implies that indignation always relates to an interpersonal or even dialogical dimension based on reciprocal responsibility. However, following a Philosophy for Peace approach, I would argue that indignation is a force to organize the nonviolent social movements in terms of what Honneth has called *struggles for recognition*, putting an end to Hobbes and Machiavelli's *struggles for self-preservation*.

Honneth distinguishes three kinds of mutual recognition: *recognition of our physical integrity*, necessary for our self-confidence and linked to attitudes that arise within the domain of love; *recognition that we have rights and duties as members of a legal community*, necessary for our self-respect and linked to attitudes connected with respect; and *recognition of our different and particular lifestyles*, necessary for our self-esteem and linked to attitudes that arise within the domain of solidarity and tolerance. From the philosophical perspective, self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem are three values for which people that feel indignation struggle.

Honneth's emphasis on the value of mutual recognition for social justice is a pillar for the philosophical analysis of indignation. I would also like to acknowledge other positions for the achievement of social justice, such as the debate between Nancy Fraser and Honneth himself in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. Fraser defends the necessary combination between distributive policies and recognition to achieve social justice in contrast with Honneth's focus on normativity in his recognition theory.

Furthermore, Peace Studies has shown that the study of indignation in nonviolent social movements should not be limited to philosophical approaches, but also implies an interdisciplinary intervention. The idea that Philosophy has an imperative to build up a practical approach, as proposed by a Philosophy for Peace, needs to be compared and discussed through pedagogical projects based on the

possibilities that philosophical thought can help us imagine ways for transforming our realities. As Paulo Freire argues in his touchstone works, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Pedagogy of Hope*, we can learn to approach social injustice through non-violent social movements by incorporating mutual recognition into the processes of empowerment of the oppressed to transform the oppressive situations they suffer. These movements reveal and transform the unjust structures of society by broadening the philosophical dimension of everyday debates to other actors, not because they are directly oppressed by them, but because they are indignant in the face of injustice.

This awakened indignation interplays with hope and relates to freedom, contrasting with the social, media and cultural construction of fear I discussed earlier. As coined by Bertrand Russell, hope is a “propositional attitude” that when linked to indignation and guided by mutual recognition allows us to believe that change for the better and nonviolent approaches are possible. Of course these are dialogic and transformative processes in which conflicts arise. But these conflicts need to be faced through mutual learning. As Freire argues, these processes give us the opportunity to problematize, to *work* through problems, using debate and dialogue, and to mutually recognize all participants as having active roles.

As stated above, a Philosophy for Peace focuses on citizen participation and is concerned with the ways in which human relationships are generated, not as a product of instrumental rationality, but as a field infused with and incorporating feelings and affection. I believe that these feelings should be approached through a paradigm of intersubjectivity, which accounts for the necessary interrelation among people as social beings able to develop competences and abilities for making peace(s) and transforming conflicts. Furthermore, it re-evaluates the importance of feelings, such as the feeling of indignation, in order to recuperate them for our understanding of the transformation of social conflicts and struggles for social justice. Feelings have been usually understood in the private sphere and have been denied in the public space. However, a Philosophy for Peace considers that it is necessary to take them into account because of their cultural, political and structural role in our acts and resulting personal and cultural relations.

The paradigm of intersubjectivity and the re-evaluation of feelings are two points that let us put into question the modern concept of Reason, which is based on a universalistic pattern (usually understood from a European, white and masculine frame). In contrast, a Philosophy for Peace invites us to recuperate possible alternative perspectives and feelings “in the diversity of the others” by means of dialogue, interpellation and interrelation. Accounting for the intersubjective character of relations and the revaluation of feelings is relevant as they show us our capability of indignation. This task demands us to challenge philosophical and social thought and produce innovative narratives of today’s conflicts and its nonviolent transformation.

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Short Bio

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