La filosofía intercultural y la dinámica del reconocimiento / RAÚL FORNET-BETANCOURT

*I*ntercultural philosophy and the dinamyc of recognition

Raúl Fornet-Betancourt

The Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Chair is an academic space created in the Catholic University of Temuco, inspired by the legacy of Padre de las Casas, which seeks to safeguard the essential value of the individual in order to take a fresh look at citizen coexistence and generate new practices of intercultural dialogue in the regional community and the country.

This university chair promotes reflection on themes which cut across the University and indeed society as a whole, such as justice, recognition and truth; a critical analysis of development models; and the relation between education, culture and knowledge, and the consideration of this relation in decision-making by various social actors.

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*I*ntercultural philosophy and the dinamyc of recognition

Inaugural address of the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Chair of Universidad Católica de Temuco

Dr. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt

Prologue

We are pleased to present the second volume of the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Chair Book Collection, containing the Chair's first Masterclass entitled "The Dynamic of Recognition". It was given by philosopher Raul Fornet-Betancourt in the main hall of the University in October 2009, packed with an enthusiastic audience, in the presence of university authorities, academic staff, students and guests.

The ideas of the Cuban philosopher on interculturality aroused great interest. He applauded the idea of the UC Temuco authorities of assuming the rich legacy of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, and encouraged academics and students to measure up to this legacy. During the week he made contact with various academic departments, Mapuche organizations and important actors in the development of Chile's southern macro-region. In his address, Dr. Fornet-Betancourt expounded an important part of his

work on intellectual philosophy and the importance of opening up to the other in the many cultural contexts of globalization.

In his extensive intellectual production, drawn from Latin American critical thinking and contemporary philosophy, especially Sartre, he sets out, in the manner of Raimon Panikkar, to propose a set of ideas connected with overcoming multiculturalism, speaking out for a critical interculturality which will allow the voices of others to be heard: indigenous peoples, the poor, migrants etc.

In his recent books, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt has proposed a project for a critical intercultural philosophy, in which such philosophising would not be obliged to renounce universality and communication, and where interculturality appears as a "legal requirement which wells up from the very reality of our historical situation, and from the challenge of co-existence under terms of solidarity, in a humanity designed by unique, irreplaceable differences" (Interculturality put to the test, 2006, p.51). In his important book "The Transformation of Philosophy" (2003) he vigorously proposes a philosophy practiced under a universal, contextualised form, defining a dynamic constitution of human subjectivity. In other words, he wants to open philosophy up to the "practice of a concrete universalism centred on the values of hospitality and justice" (Interculturality and Philosophy in Latin America, 2003, p. 141).

His address "The dynamic of recognition" sketches a set of struggles for recognition in a multicultural society, allowing us to find out a practice which responds to the fact of human plurality and the need to seek better forms of human coexistence; in both

cases he questions whether this policy of recognition can be separated from the legal framework of formal liberal democracy. For Fornet-Betancourt therefore, intercultural philosophy has a great contribution to make to a dialectic of recognition: "As a way of becoming aware of the limits and the measure of what we can express culturally, recognition of contextuality is inseparable from the experience that differences are irreplaceable". Thus recognition theory presupposes sustaining that the socio-cultural field can only be analysed through the concrete study of social conflicts, implying analysis of a dialectic of recognition which exists in the societies of both north and south. When we engage in this dialectic, we can go into the strength of resistance forces and movement in greater theoretical and practical depth, and with greater rigour, and clarify the important differences which exist in the ways of understanding recognition and critique of these processes in theory, as well as the practice which arises in the face of the social conflicts between societies of north and south. Fornet-Betancourt tells us: "By leading to the development of new historical and theoretical conditions for human coexistence, these movements generate an expectation of recognition in a new sense: to recognize is to make good. To do justice."

The author presented his work in the Araucanía Region, which is in the throes of conflict in the context of demands by the Mapuche which are denied proper spaces for dialogue with the State and the majority society. In this context, his theoretical proposal presents a "recognition" and a "conflict" merged in a dialectical relationship, because for the author "the question of recognition… means, as it has always meant, speaking of the scandal of the social, political, religious – and human! – etc. divisions which make

those who are equal, unequal, by causing some human beings to be worth more and count for more than others..."

The power of Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's words stirs consciences and leaves us a fertile academic legacy, which in the ensuing period has become autonomous through the production of works, theses and other projects now in progress which respond to his philosophical appeal: "the liberation of plurality is rooted in a will to share the world and humanity which generates mutually liberated worlds". It challenges us to a recognition which requires dialogue and critical commitment for social reconstruction based on Human Dignity.

Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Chair.

*I*ntercultural philosophy and the dinamyc of recognition

Inaugural address of the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Chair of Universidad Católica de Temuco

Dr. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt

1. Introductory remarks

First of all a word of sincere thanks for the honour implied in inviting me to give the address to inaugurate the activities of the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Chair, which the Rector of Universidad Católica de Temuco, Mr. Alberto Vásquez, has just officially founded, reminding us moreover of the commitment signified by the historical figure after whom this new Chair is named.

And I must admit that while, as I have just said, I am sensible of the honour which this invitation to me represents, at the same time it places me in an uncomfortable situation. "Uncomfortable" because of the responsibility implied in speaking to the shadow of this name; because the name of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas signifies for all of us a name which condenses an exemplary testimonial of liberating and prophetic christianity. His thoughts and deeds in favour of the humiliated and the impoverished of this world are still a living example to this day of the practice of christian thought, always concerned to measure up to the gospel. And that is why the prophetic tradition

condensed in his name challenges us with a question which we find "uncomfortable". It is the question as to whether or not we measure up to our best traditions. This, if you will permit me, esteemed Rector, is the question which should always guide the activities of this Chair. In other words, it is our responsibility to ensure that this Chair is a site to foster the "ennobling" of all of us, so that we measure up to our liberating christian traditions, as the patron of this Chair always did. But let us turn to the subject of this address.

In the brief reflections which we propose to present, we start with an understanding of "recognition" which, as we will attempt to expound and illustrate with arguments in the exposition, underlines the fact that recognition is not only a theoretical process, but also, and perhaps above all, a practical, everyday process involving many dimensions: social, political, personal, etc. That is to say that we understand recognition as a task which, apart from being cognitive, and capable of explanation at this level by many theories, is a practical arrangement which may or may not be carried out in daily life. In other words, we start from the understanding of recognition as a complex theoretical-practical process, which must also be considered as an open process which achieves fragile conquests or gains.

Because, due to the very structural complexity of the recognition process, we cannot exclude in advance the possibility, for example, of contradictions between theory and everyday practice (here we are thinking, for example, of the contradiction between the official policies of today's societies and/or the concrete behaviour of large sectors of their citizens on the one hand, and the

theories which are rhetorically stated as principles on the other). But we are thinking also of contradictions which may arise from finding "non-simultaneities" or temporal divergences between the different dimensions of the recognition process, for example in a person who knows in theory that another, a foreigner, is a human being, but rejects him as a neighbour because "he smells", etc. ...

For this reason we prefer to speak of the "dynamic of recognition", and not simply of recognition. However, the decisive point for understanding the central thesis which we want to propose for debate in these reflections, is that it is a dynamic which develops in a context of conflict; more, that it is a dynamic of conflicts, both in the history of the question of recognition and in the present struggle of whole peoples which demonstrate that speaking of recognition means, as it has always meant, speaking of the scandal of the social, political, religious –and human!– etc. divisions which make those who are equal, unequal, by causing some human beings to be worth more and count for more than others.

When we speak of recognition, we speak of a problem of inequality, and when we speak of inequality we speak of conflict and injustice. This is the history which still continues today with respect to recognition.

But we must note that if this history of conflict still continues today, it is explained by the fact that recognition has been an inadequate response to cure the pathology of those who believe themselves superior, and thus entitled to trample on the human dignity of others. And it would even be appropriate to ask (with a pedagogical-critical intent, to rouse citizen consciences from

the soporific effects of a dominant ideology which conceals the asymmetries of power and confuses contract with recognition) whether recognition, considering its past history and the anthropological assumptions on which it is based, more than a response, is in fact part of the problem which challenges us in the question which it raises.

2. A little History

As an ethical-anthropological requirement for recognising the other, recognition, in its broadest or most general sense, offers a *human* response to a fundamental human need of every human being, which is precisely that his humanity be recognised. In this sense then, recognition, in so far as it is understood as the human response *owed* to humanity by every human being, is by no means a spectacular discovery.

But, why then do we talk so much about recognition as a great novelty, and of recognition policies as substantial progress in the order of human coexistence in our present-day societies?

Our hypothesis is simple: what is spectacular is not recognition, but the problem to which we seek to respond by this perspective. In other words that it is the scandal of the negation of the humanity and the corresponding rights of the other, and above all the fact that we are part of a history (of inhumanity) in which that scandal is not narrated as an "accidental", ephemeral

episode, something "abnormal", but as a fundamental reference for determining the normal and the standardised in human behaviour, which lets us see the requirements of recognition as spectacular progress.

What is, or should be, spectacular, is the pathology of a cultural and social history which has normalised theories and practices of negation and oppression of the other. This is the history in the light of which the possibilities and limits of the theories and policies of recognition should be examined, in order to ask from that historical contextualization the uncomfortable question of whether recognition as a response continues to pay tribute to that history.

It will be understood that, in the framework of these brief reflections, we cannot reconstruct this history to which we refer as the conflictive background which gives meaning to the theories and practices of recognition, and raises it above mere banality. We will therefore limit ourselves to a schematic indication of just a few moments which seem to us especially revealing of the logic of systematic diminution of the human in this history, which seeks to convert, or rather to reduce, human dignity to the privilege of elite groups. These are the moments:

- The birth and dissemination of a flawed political philosophy which repeats with Aristotle the division of the human race into free beings and slaves, in other words, into beings capable of governing and participating in "public affairs", and others who –by their nature!– must remain shut up in the private sphere, in "domestic service", signifying their exclusion from the sphere in which human beings can recognise one another as equals.

- The expansion in the Middle Ages of an imperial christianity, which, betraying the ecumenical catholicism to which it is obliged by its own conception of the human being as *"imago Dei"*, reduces humanity to *"ordo christianus"* and reproduces the division between citizens and slaves or barbarians of antiquity in terms of christians and pagans, taking it as understood that pagans cannot be recognised as human beings with full rights.

- The emergence and consolidation of a capitalist modernity which in the name of money and merchandise makes "social relations" the tomb of *human* relations, and thus also of society as a place for the growing humanisation of human beings. For we believe that Marx was right when he found that in this modernity the centre is not the subject but the market, and that: "The persons exist for one another merely as representatives of, and, therefore as *owners of, commodities*. In the course of our investigation we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are but the personifications of the economic relations that exist between them"[1]. And we must remember that this process is possible because bourgeois modernity has "buried personal dignity under money..."[2]. And this means, for the subject with which we are concerned here, that with the consolidation of capitalist society there is a radical change in the conditions of subjectivization of human beings. (For example, praying, thinking or contemplating is not the same as counting money, in other words it does not have the same consequences for our way of constituting ourselves as subjects.) As there is no community, and as, consequently,

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1 Karl Marx, Capital, vol. 1, La Habana 1965, pp. 51-52.
2 Karl Marx / Friedrich Engels, The Manifesto of the Communist Party, Mexico 1961, p. 75.

the idea is repressed that a good which is not a common good is not a good, the selfish possession of oneself, and the private appropriation of things, become fundamental references on which one bases oneself as a subject, that is, as a being capable of self determination and of establishing contracts with others. And how can we deny that this context of social history is the real horizon in the light of which all the liberal political philosophy of modernity must be read, and especially its theories of recognition?

- The imperialist expansion of European colonialism, which in the name of the new civilization of capitalist progress not only sacked the natural riches of other peoples, but also redefined the contrast civilization–barbarianism from the new paradigm of "human development", discrediting the other and his culture as underdeveloped.

- The explosion of political and cultural resistance by the colonized peoples in liberation movements which unmasked the falsity of a bourgeois humanism which lived by applying "au genre humain le *numerus clausus*"[3] and which in this way created new historical and theoretical conditions for human coexistence. Because by their very historical protagonism they stake their claim to "recognition" in a new sense of reparation and justice which implies going beyond the political horizon of integration into today's "international community". These liberation struggles and their projects to reorganize co-operation between peoples (such as the "Alternativa Bolivariana para América Latina y El Caribe", ALBA [Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean]

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3 Jean-Paul Sartre, Situations, V, Paris 1964, p. 175.

for example) show that liberal theories of recognition fall short, because the point is to give a new basis to relations with the other, at both the personal and the collective level.

3. The dynamic of recognition as the possibility of going beyond the liberal horizon in recognition of the other

In the light of the historical moments mentioned above we are obliged to concede that recognition of the other –in all its variations and despite the limitations which we may wish to criticise in these– offers a response which may allow us to correct the chronic problem of a history of inhumanity which today threatens us with a growing acceleration of its "human sacrifice" mechanisms[4]. It is, as we have said, a *human* response to a problem which is perceived to be the result of a history of racism, colonialism and imperialism, but obviously also of the ideological history written by philosophers and theologians, among other "thinkers", in developing theories to justify the maintenance of the "numerus clausus" imposed on humanity (of which Sartre speaks) and thus sanction the inhuman practices which became "necessary" for expanding domination of the other in his own home.

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4   Cf. Franz J. Hinkelammert, Sacrificios humanos y sociedad occidental, San José 1991; and also his new book: El sujeto y la ley, Caracas 2006.

In this context, it seems to us that theories of recognition, as well as the policies which derive from them (here we are thinking in concrete terms of authors like Jürgen Habermas, Will Kymlicka, Paul Ricoeur or Charles Taylor, among other models), represent a severe rebuke to the critical conscience of humanity, calling on it to recover and activate its "memory of humanity" and suppress the "numerus clausus" which has been imposed on the human race by a history of negation of the other, be he barbarian, pagan, savage, citizen of an underdeveloped country or poor migrant.

Thus we recognise that it is a respectable contribution which makes manifest the legal and political limitations of western societies, while at the same time opening up perspectives of a considerable improvement in the conditions of human coexistence in today's world.

But at the same time it is this same history of inhumanity, that is to say, the dimension of the anthropological, political, cultural, etc. damage caused to the other, which also shows us that western conceptions of recognition are insufficient to guarantee the historical reparation owed to the other who has been ignored and humiliated. And they also appear to us equally insufficient for an understanding that –as we wished to suggest with the final moment indicated of the eruption of the protagonism of the "non-recognised" in contemporary history– the other does not need "advocates" to speak on his behalf so much as a change in the "judges" and/or the rules of the game.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, we will enumerate some of the points which illustrate this insufficiency most clearly, and are

thus important elements for a critique of the western conceptions of recognition. They are, briefly, as follows:

- At the anthropological level: an inappropriate universalization of anthropology (or of the theories of human subjectivity), developed against a background of the expansion of capitalism and the consequent absolutization of the "bourgeois human type" as a prototype of humanity. Construction of a possessive individuality and a contractualist citizenship thus become paradigmatic references for measuring the "progress" in humanity of human beings. In other words recognition of the other in this context aims fundamentally at recognition between individuals and citizens.

- At the social level (and consequently that of the anthropological reduction mentioned above): the substitution of the flesh and blood human being by a legal concept of "citizen", "proprietor", "subject with formal rights", etc., which, in addition to making human beings "representable" in their irreplaceable and "needy" living corporality, dissolves real, conflictive sociality in a legal discursive structure about the rights and obligations of people who are supposedly equal. This substitution of the living being by the legal subject brings with it at least two important consequences (which give concrete reality to the idea of the dissolution of society in discursivity), namely: first, the tendency to mask, or not give due weight to, the asymmetrical relations of economic, political and military power, in the framework of which recognition of the other is discussed; and second, that the "material" question of guaranteeing the real living conditions of the living being (with all that that implies in its various dimensions) passes to a plane of secondary importance.

- At the political level: a certain exclusivity in the affirmation of the society of discourses and contracts with its recognised institutions of "negotiation" as *the modern* political way in which the problem of recognition of the other must be resolved today.

- At the economic level: a lack of sensitivity towards giving concrete form to the demand of the other for recognition, through a critical view of the globalization of the neoliberal economic system as aggression against the concrete form of reproducing and maintaining the life of the other.

- At the cultural level (and related to the concepts noted in the previous level): inconsistency in the articulation of the struggle for recognition of the identity of the other with the struggle for social, political and economic justice. The culture of the other, if it is to be a living place for the identity of living beings, needs to *become a world* and *be a world*. In other words, the recognition of the (cultural) identity of the other cannot be reduced to an act of cognitive acceptance of a more or less abstract difference which does not "disturb" the prevailing order. If, as Sartre showed, the human being is a being-in-situation, recognition of the other implies recognising his situations, and thus his ways of being in the world. (Cultural) identity must not be privatised or interiorised. It must be seen also as the process of a being-in-situation (cultural, political, etc.), and therefore its recognition must imply a struggle for the world that he needs to develop as such.

These five levels, which we have indicated as example moments, seem to us to show how, in the ethical demand for recognition of the other, a dialectic is latent whose basic conflict

refers to a fact consummated by the history of inhumanity as written until now, namely, that the negation of the other has functioned as a "pretext" to occupy the other's world, to invade his space and time, to declare his soul and his worlds "void" of life in order to fill them with the "products" of the dominant civilization. But from this we may see that, in its dynamic, recognition is fundamentally a struggle for the liberation of occupied diversity, in other words a very concrete struggle between subjects (peoples or individuals) for the right (and the real exercise of that right) to their own world, which means the right to be different not only in the "cosmetic" but also, and above all, in the decisive: how they are governed, how they act economically, how they educate, communicate between, or defend themselves.

Understood then as a struggle for the liberation of plurality, the dialectic of recognition confronts us, as we see it, with a number of anthropological, political, cultural, economic, social and religious claims, satisfaction of which requires us to go beyond the theoretical-practical horizon of western liberal modernity and its ideal of "tolerant societies". For the liberation of plurality is rooted in a will to share the world and humanity, which generates mutually liberated worlds; that is to say, real worlds belonging to individuals but which "recognise" one another as co-founders of human reality. Recognising the other and his world is, then, in this dynamic of the liberation of plurality, an awareness that one is born through it to humanity and the world together. And the human being who behaves according to this awareness, whatever his personal world, transubstantiates the idea of tolerance, since this (in the horizon of liberal thought) is conceived from the border between what (from the angle of the dominant culture) is considered to be socially

established and what is profiled as unacceptable; while from the intercultural perspective which radicalizes recognition in the sense of a willingness to be *re-born* to the world and humanity together with the other, tolerance is resignified as a process of reciprocal acceptance, of interaction and real participation in the "affairs of the other", which – it must be stressed– become, precisely through the dialectic of re-birth, "common, shared affairs"[5].

In a word, here a new, utopian horizon opens up which liberalism cannot "tolerate", namely, that of a humanity which goes beyond the "minimum" of a more or less peaceful co-existence in tolerant *multicultural* societies, to work for the "maximum" of a humanity reconciled in *intercultural* coexistence.

In short, to see and practice what Saint Augustine resumed in a pithy sentence, that we tolerate what we do not love.

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5   Cf. Hamid Reza Yousefi / Klaus Fischer / Ina Braun (eds.), Wege zur Kommunikation. Theorie und Praxis interkultureller Toleranz, Nordhausen 2006.

4. Final remark

Although from the constellation of philosophical reflection which is presently dominant –at least that which occupies space in the media and the big publishers– it may appear to be a "pre-modern" resource, we would like to risk the idea that an intercultural critique of the liberal European conceptions of recognition, and the consequent radicalization noted above of the very concept of recognition, are impossible without the resignifying recovery of the category of *human dignity* in the precise sense of a combative concept which condenses the first and most fundamental *common (public) good* which we share as human beings, and from which we extract the "evidence" that each and every human being has *human* rights over and above any contract. It is not "papers" which make a human being worthy of recognition but precisely that dignity which Kant –with intuitive understanding of the mercantile logic which was being imposed on everything by capitalism– said did not, and could not, have a *price*, and which therefore was not replaceable by anything else; in other words, that there was no *equivalent* for dignity[6].

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6   Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Hamburg 1965, pp. 58 ff.

It may be, as we have said, a "pre-modern" category which points to "pre-political" metaphysical remnants in the opinions of many today, but the real history of peoples speaks clearly: the feeling of dignity is universalizable; more, it is a constant source of *indignation* in the face of injustice. And in this respect we think that the category of human dignity in the context of intercultural dialogue is indispensable for developing a more radical and consistent perspective of recognition, as for example in the task of the *universal dignification* of the human being[7].

This task supposes, however, returning to the idea with which I started this address: a continuous, sincere effort to measure up to our best traditions of humanization of the human being, and the political and social consequences which arise from these, as was shown by Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas in his commitment to the unprotected and humiliated of his time. It was his way of measuring up to the Gospel as a strong tradition of humanity and of appealing for full recognition of the other.

Temuco, 30 March, 2009

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7   An example of the currency of this proposal is offered by the Latin American philosophical tradition with the development of a humanism of human dignity. See int. al.: Arturo Andrés Roig, "La 'dignidad humana' y la 'moral de la emergencia' en América Latina", in his book: Ética del poder y moralidad de la protesta, Mendoza 2002, pp. 107-207; Adriana Arpini (ed.), Razón práctica y discurso social latinoamericano. El "pensamiento fuerte" de Alberdi, Betances, Hostos, Martí y Ugarte, Buenos Aires 2000; and Liliana Giorgis, José Martí. El humanismo como filosofía de la dignidad, Mendoza 2006.
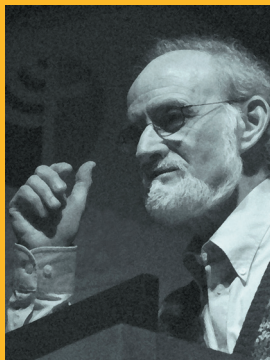
Raúl **Fornet-Betancourt** is one of the most distinguished philosophers of Latin America. He was born in Cuba and holds Doctorates in Philosophy from the Universities of Aachen (Germany) and Salamanca (Spain). He obtained his qualifying doctorate in the University of Bremen, where he teaches philosophy. He has been Director of the Latin American Department of the Missio Institute of Aachen, and honorary fellow of that university. He is Director of Concordia – International Journal of Philosophy, and Co-ordinator of the North-South Philosophical Dialogue programme and of international Intercultural Philosophy Congresses. He is the principal representative of the Latin American project for intercultural philosophy, compiling the Minutes of the Intercultural Philosophy Congresses held in India, Spain and Germany.

He has written a large number of works, the most recent include: Intercultural Transformation of Philosophy (2001), Transformation of Marxism (2001), Philosophical Thought for our time in an Intercultural Key (2004), Intercultural Critique of Latin American Philosophy (2004), Interculturality put to the test (2006); and in 2007, the Latin American philosophical community paid him homage with the title Intercultural Bridges, (2007). Recently out is Religion and Interculturality (2009).