CHAPTER EIGHT

RECOGNITION AND DISSENT

SCHELLING’S CONCEPTION OF RECOGNITION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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In the present chapter I offer an alternative notion of recognition consisting in understanding it in terms of fundamental and foundational dissent. By dissent I primarily mean the action of not-accepting the (universal) validity of a proposition or a system of propositions (e.g. a law, a request, a right, a duty, a set of moral or ethical values or a particular vision of the world) without necessarily offering at the same time an alternative to what has been refused. Dissent is fundamental when it consists in not-accepting the principles supporting a determinate request. Dissent is foundational, when the discrepancy between the parts necessarily leads to the establishment of a new framework (set of values, set of rules for a rational discussion, etc.), in which the subjectivities involved in this act can be integrated as well as freely express and defend their positions without declining their original demands nor losing their original identities.

My thesis is that thinking of recognition in terms of dissent makes visible some problems in the usual understanding of recognition in contemporary debates on ethics, politics and right, such as the one about the conditions for a fair dialogue between cultures and/or religions. In doing so, this alternative to the broadly used concept of recognition opens up the possibility for reconsidering the way how the theoretic framework in such debates uses to be built up. This alternative comprehension of recognition is based on Schelling’s *New Deduction of Natural Right* (1795/96). I will firstly examine the widespread notion of recognition, according to which recognition basically consists in social inclusion of individuals in an already established social order or system of values and meanings. I will analyze two cases of the modern struggle for recognition and very briefly refer to Kant’s and Fichte’s accounts on recognition in order to illustrate this way of conceiving and materializing recognition and to identify its critical points. Then I will offer a reconstruction of Schelling’s concept of recognition and show at what extent his account on recognition can be
employed to solve the critical points in the traditional understanding of recognition and of some of its related concepts.

*Introduction*

Without a doubt the concept of recognition is one of the most significant contributions of German Idealism to the history of philosophy. Unlike other concepts and methodological tools developed by German Idealism, which also have been treated in other periods of the history of Western Thought (such as the deduction of the categories or the conflict between morality and law), the question of recognition belongs originally to German Idealism. Indeed, German Idealists have been the first philosophers who have made of this question a philosophical problem and who have conceived it as fundamental part of a philosophical system. Furthermore, the concept of recognition enjoys in our present a remarkable potential to question some presuppositions in the fields of politics, morals, ethics and philosophy of right as well as to philosophically open up the phenomenon of inter-subjectivity in its own complexity. This is why recognition—unlike other concepts of German Idealism, which in our days can only be a subject for a historiography of the philosophy—is present and at work in fundamental contemporary political philosophical debates such as the debate on distribution and recognition.¹

Nevertheless, the diversity of conceptions of recognition in German Idealism remains still almost unexplored. On the one hand, in current political philosophy, for example, it is taken for granted that Hegel's concept of recognition is the only one forged by German Idealism or it is the only one that deserves to be examined or criticized. The first claim can be traced back to a certain lack of information or to a narrow concept of recognition. The second claim is supported by the conviction that Hegel's account is the only one that has been consistently and completely developed. Accordingly, other conceptions of recognition are considered as uncompleted or deficient variations of the same idea and as such they can and must, for that reason, be subsumed in Hegel's account. However, a first exploration in the conceptions of recognition in the German Idealism (Schiller's, Schelling's, Fichte's and Hegel's perspectives on this topic) let see that the differences between them lie in fundamental points such

¹ See i.a. Fraser/Honneth 2003; Fowler 2009; and Jerlinder/Danermark/Gill 2009.