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**Social Justice in the Knowledge Society:  
Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation**

In choosing the phrase "knowledge society" to name this conference, the organizers suggest that we stand today at the brink of a major social transition. I agree with this suggestion. Even if we cannot yet be sure how best to characterize the overall change, it is clear that several epochal shifts are underway. One important shift is from a fordist phase of capitalism, centered on mass production, strong labor unions, and the normativity of the family wage, to a postfordist phase, premised on niche production, declining unionization, and increased female labor-force participation. Another, related shift is from an industrial society, premised on the manufacturing technologies of the second industrial revolution, to what the organizers call a knowledge society, premised on the information technologies of the third. Still another shift is from an international order of sovereign nation-states to a globalizing order in which huge transnational flows of capital undercut national state steering capacities.

I take all these processes to be part of the idea of a shift to a knowledge society. And I believe all of them are connected to yet another key feature of the present constellation: the increased salience of culture in the emerging order. This new salience of culture can be seen in a number of ways: in the enhanced visibility of "symbolic workers" (in contrast to factory workers) in the global information economy; in the declining centrality of labor vis-à-vis religion and ethnicity in the constitution of many people's social identities; in heightened awareness of cultural pluralism in the wake of increased immigration; in intensified cultural hybridization, promoted not only by face-to-face transcultural contacts but also by electronically mediated communication; in the proliferation and rapid diffusion of images by visually-oriented global mass entertainment and advertising; and finally, as a consequence of all these shifts, in a new reflexive awareness of "others," hence in a new stress on identity and difference.

What most interests me, however, is the effect of culture's new salience on politics-and thus on the prospects for social justice. Thus, I want to sug-

gest that a further defining feature of the knowledge society is the widespread politicization of culture, especially in struggles over identity and difference—or, as I shall call them, struggles for recognition. Such struggles have exploded in recent years. Today, in fact, claims for recognition drive many of the world's most intense social conflicts—from battles around multiculturalism to struggles over gender and sexuality, from campaigns for national sovereignty and subnational autonomy to newly energized movements for international human rights. These struggles are heterogeneous, to be sure; they run the gamut from the patently emancipatory to the downright reprehensible. Nevertheless, such widespread recourse to a common grammar is striking, suggesting an epochal shift in the political winds: a massive resurgence of the politics of status.

The flip side of this resurgence is a corresponding decline in the politics of class. Once the hegemonic grammar of political contestation, claims for economic equality are less salient today in the knowledge society than in the fordist heyday of the Keynesian welfare state. Political parties once identified with projects of egalitarian redistribution now embrace an elusive "third way"; when the latter has genuine emancipatory substance, it has more to do with recognition than redistribution. Meanwhile, social movements that not long ago boldly demanded an equitable share of resources and wealth no longer typify the spirit of the times. They have not wholly disappeared, to be sure; but their impact has been greatly reduced. Even in the best cases, moreover, when struggles for redistribution are not cast as antithetical to struggles for recognition, they tend to be dissociated from the latter.

In general, then, the knowledge society is generating a new grammar of political claims-making. In this constellation, the center of gravity has shifted from redistribution to recognition. How should we evaluate this shift? What are its implications for social justice?

In my view, the prospects are double-edged. On the one hand, the turn to recognition represents a broadening of political contestation and a new understanding of social justice. No longer restricted to the axis of class, contestation now encompasses other axes of subordination, including gender, "race," ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and nationality. This represents clear progress over restrictive fordist paradigms that marginalized claims not centrally related to labor and its compensation. Consequently, social justice is no longer restricted to questions of distribution, but now encompasses issues of representation, identity, and difference. The result is a major advance over reductive economic paradigms that had difficulty

conceptualizing harms rooted, not in political economy, but in institutionalized value hierarchies.

On the other hand, it is by no means clear that struggles for recognition are serving to supplement, complicate, and enrich struggles for egalitarian redistribution. Rather, in the context of an ascendant neoliberalism, they may be serving to displace the latter. In that case, the recent gains in political culture would be entwined with a tragic loss. Instead of arriving at a broader, richer paradigm that could encompass both redistribution and recognition, we would have traded one truncated paradigm for another—a truncated economism for a truncated culturalism. The result would be a classic case of combined and uneven development: the remarkable recent gains on the axis of recognition would coincide with stalled progress if not outright losses on the axis of distribution.

That, in any case, is my reading of current trends. In what follows, I shall outline an approach to the knowledge society that responds to this diagnosis and aims to forestall its full realization. What I have to say divides into three parts, each of which corresponds to a more specific worry about the current trajectory of the knowledge society. First, I shall consider the worry that recognition struggles are displacing redistribution struggles, instead of enriching and complicating the latter. In response to this worry, I shall propose an analysis of social justice that is broad enough to house the full range of concerns in the knowledge society, including class inequalities as well as status hierarchies. Second, I shall consider the worry that the current focus on cultural politics is reifying social identities and promoting repressive communitarianism. In response to this worry, I shall propose a non-identitarian conception of recognition that is appropriate to the knowledge society, one that promotes interaction across differences and synergizes with redistribution. Third and finally, I shall examine the worry that globalization is undermining state capacities to redress injustices of both types. In response to this worry, I shall propose a multi-tiered conception of sovereignty that decenters the national frame. In every case, the conceptions I propose will be rooted in emancipatory potentials now unfolding with the emergence of the knowledge society. And the combined result will be the outlines of a political project aimed at promoting social justice in this society.

**1. Countering Displacement:  
A Two-Dimensional Conception of Social Justice**

One threat to social justice in the knowledge society is the result of an historical irony: the shift from redistribution to recognition is occurring despite (or because of) an acceleration of economic globalization. Thus, identity conflicts have achieved paradigmatic status at precisely the moment when an aggressively globalizing U.S.-led capitalism is radically exacerbating economic inequality. As a result, the turn to recognition has dovetailed all too neatly with a hegemonic neoliberalism that wants nothing more than to repress the memory of socialist egalitarianism. In this context, struggles for recognition are serving less to supplement, complicate, and enrich redistribution struggles than to marginalize, eclipse, and displace them. I have called this the *problem of displacement*.

Displacement threatens our ability to envision social justice in the knowledge society. To avoid truncating our vision of emancipation, and unwittingly colluding with neoliberalism, we need to revisit the concept of justice. What is needed is a broad and capacious conception, which can accommodate at least two sets of concerns. On the one hand, such a conception must encompass the traditional concerns of theories of distributive justice, especially poverty, exploitation, inequality, and class differentials. At the same time, it must also encompass concerns recently highlighted in philosophies of recognition, especially disrespect, cultural imperialism, and status hierarchy. Rejecting sectarian formulations that cast distribution and recognition as mutually incompatible understandings of justice, such a conception must accommodate both. As we shall see, this requires theorizing maldistribution and misrecognition by reference to a common normative standard, without reducing either one to the other. The result will be a *two-dimensional conception of justice*. Only such a conception can comprehend the full magnitude of injustice in the knowledge society.

Let me explain. The approach I propose requires viewing social bifocally, simultaneously through two different lenses. Viewed through one lens, justice is a matter of fair distribution; viewed through the other, it is a matter of reciprocal recognition. Each lens brings into focus an important aspect of social justice, but neither alone is sufficient. A full understanding becomes available only when the two lenses are superimposed. At that point, justice appears as a concept that spans two dimensions of social ordering, the dimension of *distribution* and the dimension of *recognition*.

From the distributive perspective, injustice appears in the guise of class-like inequalities, rooted in the economic structure of society. Here, the quintessential injustice is maldistribution, understood broadly, to encompass not only income inequality but also exploitation, deprivation, and marginalization or exclusion from labor markets. The remedy, accordingly, is redistribution, also understood broadly, to encompass not only income transfers, but also reorganizing the division of labor, transforming the structure of property ownership, and democratizing the procedures by which investment decisions are made.

From the recognition perspective, in contrast, injustice appears in the guise of status subordination, rooted in institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value. The paradigm injustice here is misrecognition, which must also be broadly understood to encompass cultural domination, nonrecognition, and disrespect. The remedy, accordingly, is recognition, understood broadly as well, so as to encompass not only reforms aimed at upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups but also efforts to recognize, and valorize, diversity, on the one hand, and efforts to transform the symbolic order, deconstruct the terms that underlie existing status differentiations, and thus change everyone's social identity, on the other.

From the distributive perspective, then, justice requires a politics of redistribution. From the recognition, perspective, in contrast, justice requires a politics of recognition. The threat of displacement arises when the two perspectives on justice are viewed as mutually incompatible. Then, recognition claims become decoupled from redistribution claims, eventually eclipsing the latter.

When the two justice perspectives are superimposed, however, the risk of displacement can be defused. Then, justice emerges as a two-dimensional category, which encompasses claims of both types. From this bifocal perspective, it is no longer necessary to choose between the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution. What is required, on the contrary, is a politics that encompasses both.

The emergence of the knowledge society makes such a politics possible in principle—and necessary. In this society, as we saw, identity is no longer tied so exclusively to labor, and issues of culture are intensely politicized. Yet economic equality remains rampant, as a new global information economy is fueling major processes of class recomposition. Moreover, today's diversified population of symbolic workers, service workers, manufacturing workers, and those suffering from social exclusion is highly con-

scious of multiple status hierarchies, including those of gender, "race," ethnicity, sexuality, and religion. In this context, neither reductive economism nor vulgar culturalism is viable. On the contrary, the only adequate perspective is a bifocal perspective encompassing both recognition and distribution.

Combining redistribution and recognition is no easy matter, however, as it requires bringing the two dimensions of justice under a common normative measure. What is needed is a single normative principle that can encompass both justified claims for redistribution and justified claims for recognition, without reducing either one to the other. For this purpose, I propose the principle of *parity of participation*. According to this principle, justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as *peers*. For participatory parity to be possible, at least two conditions must be satisfied. First, the distribution of material resources must be such as to ensure participants' independence and "voice." This I call the "objective" condition of participatory parity. It precludes forms and levels of economic dependence and inequality that impede parity of participation. Precluded, therefore, are social arrangements that institutionalize deprivation, exploitation, and gross disparities in wealth, income, and leisure time, thereby denying some people the means and opportunities to interact with others as peers. In contrast, the second condition for participatory parity is "intersubjective." It requires that institutionalized patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem. This condition precludes institutionalized value patterns that systematically depreciate some categories of people and the qualities associated with them. Precluded, therefore, are institutionalized value patterns that deny some people the status of full partners in interaction—whether by burdening them with excessive ascribed "difference" or by failing to acknowledge their distinctiveness.

Both conditions are necessary for participatory parity. Neither alone is sufficient. The first brings into focus concerns traditionally associated with the theory of distributive justice, especially concerns pertaining to the economic structure of society and to economically defined class differentials. The second brings into focus concerns recently highlighted in the philosophy of recognition, especially concerns pertaining to the status order of society and to culturally defined hierarchies of status. Yet neither condition is merely an epiphenomenal effect of the other. Rather, each has some relative independence. Thus, neither can be achieved wholly indirectly, via reforms addressed exclusively to the other. The result is a

two-dimensional conception of justice that encompasses both redistribution and recognition, without reducing either one to the other.

This approach serves to counter the risk of displacement. By construing redistribution and recognition as two mutually irreducible dimensions of justice, it broadens the usual understanding to encompass injustices of both status and class. By submitting both dimensions to the overarching norm of participatory parity, moreover, it supplies a single normative standard for assessing both the economic structure and the status order. Thus, it constitutes the broad understanding of justice that is needed in the knowledge society.

## **2. Countering Reification: A Non-Identitarian Conception of Recognition**

A second threat to social justice in the knowledge society arises as a result of another historical irony: struggles for recognition are proliferating today despite (or because of) increased transcultural interaction and communication. They occur, that is, just as accelerated migration and global media flows are fracturing and hybridizing all cultural forms, including those experienced as previously "intact." Appropriately, some recognition struggles seek to adapt institutions to this condition of increased complexity. Yet many others take the form of a communitarianism that drastically simplifies and reifies group identities. In such forms, struggles for recognition do not promote respectful interaction across differences in increasingly multicultural contexts. They tend, rather, to encourage separatism and group enclaves, chauvinism and intolerance, patriarchalism and authoritarianism. I have called this *the problem of reification*.

Like displacement, reification threatens our ability to envision social justice in the knowledge society. To defuse this threat, we need to revisit the concept of recognition. What is needed is a non-identitarian conception, which discourages reification and promotes interaction across differences. This means rejecting standard interpretations of recognition.

Usually, recognition is viewed through the lens of identity. From this perspective, what requires recognition is group-specific cultural identity. Misrecognition consists in the depreciation of such identity by the dominant culture and the consequent damage to group members' sense of self. Redressing this harm requires engaging in a politics of recognition. Such a politics aims to repair internal self-dislocation by contesting the dominant culture's demeaning picture of one's group. Members of misrecognized groups must reject such pictures in favor of new self-representations of

their own making. Having refashioned their collective identity, moreover, they must display it publicly in order to gain the respect and esteem of the society-at-large. The result, when successful, is "recognition," an undistorted relation to oneself. On the identity model, then, the politics of recognition means identity politics.

Without doubt, this identity model contains some genuine insights concerning the psychological effects of racism, sexism, colonization, and cultural imperialism. Yet it is deficient on at least two major counts. First, it tends to reify group identities and to obscure cross-cutting axes of subordination. As a result, it often recycles stereotypes about groups, while promoting separatism and repressive communitarianism. Second, the identity model treats misrecognition as a free-standing cultural harm. As a result, it obscures the latter's links to maldistribution, thereby impeding efforts to combat both aspects of injustice simultaneously.

For these reasons, I have proposed an alternative conception of recognition. On my account--call it "the status model"--recognition is a question of *social status*. What requires recognition in the knowledge society is not group-specific identity but the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction. Misrecognition, accordingly, does not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity. Rather, it means social subordination in the sense of being prevented from participating as a *peer* in social life. To redress the injustice requires a politics of recognition, but this does not mean identity politics. On the status model, rather, it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with other members.

Let me explain. To apply the status model requires examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative *standing* of social actors. If and when such patterns constitute actors as *peers*, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life, then we can speak of *reciprocal recognition* and *status equality*. When, in contrast, institutionalized patterns of cultural value constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible, hence as less than full partners in social interaction, then we must speak of *misrecognition* and *status subordination*. On the status model, therefore, misrecognition is a social relation of subordination relayed through *institutionalized patterns of cultural value*. It occurs when social institutions regulate interaction according to cultural norms that impede parity of participation. Examples include marriage laws that exclude same-sex partnerships as illegi-



timate and perverse, social-welfare policies that stigmatize single mothers as sexually irresponsible scroungers, and policing practices such as "racial profiling" that associate racialized persons with criminality. In each of these cases, interaction is regulated by an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that constitutes some categories of social actors as normative and others as deficient or inferior. In each case, the result is to deny some members of society the status of full partners in interaction, capable of participating on a par with the rest.

On the status model, finally, misrecognition constitutes a serious violation of justice. Wherever and however it occurs, a claim for recognition is in order. But note precisely what this means: aimed not at valorizing group identity, but rather at overcoming subordination, claims for recognition seek to establish the subordinated party as a full partner in social life, able to interact with others as a peer. They aim, that is, to *deinstitutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it.*

The status model of recognition constitutes a resource against reification in the knowledge society. Focused not on group identity, but on the effects of institutionalized norms on capacities for interaction, it avoids hypostatizing culture and substituting identity-engineering for social change. Likewise, by refusing to privilege remedies for misrecognition that valorize existing group identities, it avoids essentializing current configurations and foreclosing historical change. Finally, by establishing participatory parity as a normative standard, the status model submits claims for recognition to democratic processes of public justification. Thus, it avoids the authoritarian monologism of the politics of authenticity; and it valorizes transcultural interaction, as opposed to separatism and group enclaving. Far from encouraging repressive communitarianism, then, the status model militates against it.

In general, then, this approach fosters the sort of politics of recognition that is needed in the knowledge society.

### **3. Countering Misframing: A Multi-Tiered Conception of Sovereignty**

There is also a third threat to social justice in the knowledge society. Like displacement and reification, this one, too, is the result of an historical irony: the knowledge society is emerging despite (or because of) the decentering of the national frame. It is occurring, that is, just as it is becoming increasingly implausible to posit the national state as the so-

le container, arena, and regulator of social justice. Under these conditions, it is imperative to pose questions at the right level: one must determine which matters are genuinely national, which local, which regional, and which global. Yet current conflicts often assume an inappropriate frame. For example, numerous movements are seeking to secure ethnic enclaves at precisely the moment when increased mixing of populations is rendering such projects utopian. And some defenders of redistribution are turning protectionist at precisely the moment when economic globalization is making Keynesianism in one country an impossibility. In such cases, the effect is not to promote parity of participation. It is rather to exacerbate disparities by forcibly imposing a national frame on processes that are inherently transnational. I shall call this *the problem of misframing*.

Like displacement and reification, misframing threatens our ability to envision social justice in the knowledge society. To defuse this threat, we need to revisit the problem of the frame. What is needed is a multi-tiered conception that decenters the national frame. Only such a conception can accommodate the full range of social processes that create disparities of participation in the knowledge society.

The need for a multi-tiered conception arises because of mismatches of scale. For example, many of the economic processes governing distribution are clearly transnational. Yet the redistributive mechanisms we inherit from the fordist period are national in scale. Thus, there is a clear mismatch at present between them. Granted transnational institutions such as the European Union promise to help close the gap. But they too suffer from severe justice deficits, both internal (in their neoliberal proclivities) and external (in their tendency to erect Fortress Europe). Apart from scattered campaigns for a Tobin Tax and an unconditional Universal Basic Income, there is little on the horizon at present that promises to overcome this mismatch of scale.

Likewise, many of the cultural processes that generate distinctions of status are not confinable within a national frame, as they include global flows of signs and images, on the one hand, and local practices of hybridization and appropriation, on the other. Yet here, too, the mechanisms for redressing status subordination are largely housed within countries or, as we used to call them, nation-states. Thus, here too, we encounter a mismatch. Granted, emerging new transnational mechanisms for institutionalizing human rights, such as the World Criminal Court, hold out some promise for closing this gap. But they remain rudimentary and subject to pressure from powerful states. In any case, such organizations are probably too glo-

bal, and too oriented to universals, to deal with the many cases of status subordination that arise from cultural flows that are more "glocal" in scale.

In addition, there is no one frame that fits all issues of justice in the knowledge society. As we saw, justice here means removal of impediments to parity of participation. Yet, as we also saw, there are at least two different types of impediment, maldistribution and misrecognition, which do not map neatly onto one another. Thus, there is no guarantee that a frame appropriate to one dimension of justice will also benefit the other. On the contrary, there are many cases in which reforms framed from one perspective end up exacerbating injustice in the other.

Finally, the need for multiple frames is effectively built into the idea of participatory parity. That principle cannot be applied, after all, unless we specify the arena of social participation at issue and the set of participants rightfully entitled to parity within it. But the norm of participatory parity is meant to apply throughout the whole of social life. Thus, justice requires parity of participation in a multiplicity of interaction arenas, including labor markets, sexual relations, family life, public spheres, and voluntary associations in civil society. In each arena, however, participation means something different. For example, participation in the labor market means something qualitatively different from participation in sexual relations or in civil society. Thus, the meaning of parity must be tailored to the kind of participation at issue. In each arena, too, the set of participants rightfully entitled to parity is differently delimited. For example, the set of those entitled to parity in labor markets may well be larger than the set entitled to parity with a given voluntary association in civil society. Thus, the scope of the principle's application must be tailored to the arena in question. It follows that no single formula, quantitative or otherwise, can suffice for every case. Multiple frames are therefore required.

In general, then, no single frame or level of sovereignty can suffice to handle all questions of justice in the knowledge society. What is required, rather, is a set of multiple frames and a multi-tiered conception of sovereignty. As a result, the question of when and where to apply which frame becomes unavoidable. Henceforth, every discussion about justice must incorporate an explicit reflection on the problem of the frame. For every issue, we must ask: who precisely are the relevant subjects of justice? Who are the social actors among whom parity of participation is required?

Earlier, before the current acceleration of globalization, the answers to such questions were largely taken for granted. It was assumed, usually without explicit discussion, that spheres of justice were coextensive with states, hence that those entitled to consideration were fellow citizens. Today, however, that answer can no longer go without saying. Given the increased salience of both transnational and subnational processes, the country can no longer serve as the sole unit or container of justice. Rather, notwithstanding its continuing importance, the country is one frame among others in an emerging new multi-leveled structure. In this situation, deliberations about institutionalizing justice must take care to pose questions at the right level, determining which matters are genuinely national, which local, which regional, and which global. They must delimit various arenas of participation so as to mark out the set of participants rightfully entitled to parity within each.

In general, explicit discussion of the frame should play a central role in deliberations about justice. Only such explicit discussion can defuse the risk of misframing in the knowledge society.

#### 4. Conclusion

All three problems—reification, displacement, and misframing—are extremely serious. All threaten social justice in the knowledge society. Insofar as the stress on recognition is displacing redistribution, it may actually promote economic inequality. Insofar as the cultural turn is reifying collective identities, it risks sanctioning violations of human rights and freezing the very antagonisms it purports to mediate. Insofar, finally, as struggles of any type are misframing transnational processes, they risk truncating the scope of justice and excluding relevant social actors.

In this lecture, I have proposed three conceptual strategies for defusing these risks. First, to counter the threat of displacement, I proposed a two-dimensional conception of justice, which encompasses not only recognition but also distribution. Second, to counter the threat of reification, I proposed an account of the politics of recognition that does not lead to identity politics. Third, to counter the threat of misframing, I proposed a multi-tiered conception of sovereignty that decenters the national frame. All three proposed conceptions were rooted in emerging features of the knowledge society.

Taken together, these three conceptions constitute at least a portion of the conceptual resources we need in order to begin answering what I take to

be the key political question of our day: How can we devise a coherent strategy for redressing injustices of both status and class in the knowledge society? How can we integrate the best of the politics of redistribution with the best of the politics of recognition so as to challenge injustice on both fronts? If we fail to ask this question, if we cling instead to false antitheses and misleading either/or dichotomies, we will miss the chance to envision social arrangements that can redress maldistribution and misrecognition simultaneously. Only by uniting both objectives in a single effort can we meet the requirements of justice for all in the knowledge society.

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