

9. The Professional Form of Recognition in Social Work¹

by Petteri Niemi

The potential of the theory of recognition to be important for social work research and practice is beginning to be acknowledged (Houston, 2008, 2009 and 2010; Juul, 2009; Turtiainen, 2012). The theory of recognition addresses ethical insights that have been constitutive of social work. It has explicated them in detail, justified them and given them a compact form. What is more, the theory provides a clear, normative and reasonably thick articulation of the sociality that social work strives to promote, thus possibly contributing to its identity (see Ikäheimo, 2008, 2014b; Niemi, 2014). Equipped with this theory, social work can better identify the nature and roots of some social problems, which enables more efficient interventions.

Also, the theory of recognition benefits from partnership with social work. The field of social work provides an ultimate test laboratory for it: Are its ideas tenable and concrete enough to be applied successfully in real life complex decision making situations where people's lives are at stake? There are deeper connections too. Social work has special significance for the theory because of its role as helper of last resort. The recognition given by publicly funded social workers represents the recognition of the state itself. Their failure to care signifies the state's failure to care and, for some clients, failures on this last battle front result in psychological and social outcasting.

This article has three aims. The first is to elaborate a concept of recognition that fits the practical contexts of caring professions like social work. Recent conceptual distinctions made by Heikki Ikäheimo (2014a and his article in this issue) are central to this. What results is a description of a professional form of recognition. Next, this concept is applied to the field of social work research so that its viability and empirical adequacy can be demonstrated. The question is asked: what do professional respect, esteem and care signify in the world of social work? And thirdly, this concept is utilized in an analysis of three pathological tendencies in social care systems. How do disrespect, disesteem and indifference show themselves in social work?

Vertical and Horizontal Recognition in Social Work

Vertical recognition happens between a person and an institution in either an

upward or downward direction (Ikäheimo, 2014a). When a client recognizes the norms of a social work institution, recognition flows in the upward direction. Recognition given to *public* institutions represents indirect recognition of the state itself. However, there is room for discrepancies of certain kinds. A client may claim that he respects the state but not the institution because the institution is not properly performing its tasks provided by the state.

When the institution grants rights and provides institutionally defined services to its clients, recognition flows in the *downward* direction. At the most basic level, a person's clienthood is accepted so that his case is taken into consideration. Next, the client's entitlement to some particular service is either granted or not. The eligibility criteria are often strict and whether or not they are met can be controversial. The services themselves may represent more general rights. For instance, income support is one materialization of "the right to basic subsistence" written in the Finnish Constitution. What is more, social workers act sometimes as advocates for their clients trying to secure their rights more generally (see Hokkanen, 2014, 84–86).

Horizontal recognition happens between persons and has two subspecies: "institutionally mediated recognition" ² and "purely intersubjective recognition" (Ikäheimo, 2014a). In the former case, an individual recognizes another individual as the occupant of an institutionally mediated role, which normally means also that he accepts the person as a bearer of a set of deontic powers (i.e. rights and duties) that come with the role (see Ikäheimo, 2014a). For instance, a client accepts that a social worker has the right to demand that he fills in a certain form. It is possible to accept the role itself but not that a certain person occupies it, e.g. the client can claim that the worker has something personal against him and is for that reason not acting according to her institutional role. The contrary case is also possible, i.e. a client accepts a worker as a valid occupant of some role but does not accept the role itself. However, this case brings us back to the vertical dimension of recognition. At least, if you do not recognize any roles of an institution you do not recognize the institution itself. Obviously, institutionally mediated recognition is intimately connected with vertical recognition. It is not only that comprehensive institutionally mediated recognition represents vertical recognition of the institution itself, but that vertical recognition is often realized through institutionally mediated recognition.³ For instance, the above mentioned "right to basic subsistence" would not represent real recognition if some real person would not give you real money during some crisis.

The other sub species of horizontal recognition, i.e. "purely intersubjective recognition" (see Ikäheimo, 2014a), comprises the core area of the theory of recognition. A person is recognized independently of his or

her institutional roles. It is this form of recognition that has three dimensions: deontological, contributive and what Ikäheimo calls “axiological.” Humans treat each other as autonomous persons and as co-authors of the norms of their interaction; they esteem each other’s contributions to the common good and care about each other’s well-being. What is more, these recognitive relations are constitutive of self-relations in the following way: respect from other significant persons contributes to one’s self-respect, esteem to self-esteem and love to (positive) self-love (e.g. Ikäheimo, 2002, 456–458).

Ikäheimo makes one more important conceptual distinction. He separates conditional and unconditional “modes” of recognition. In the conditional version, recognition is given because it is mandatory or useful to oneself. In the unconditional version, one gives recognition to somebody for the sake of that person himself or herself. Respect, gratitude and love are the names Ikäheimo gives to the unconditional forms of the recognitive attitudes. (Ikäheimo, 2014a, 118–122.)

An interesting question is how purely intersubjective recognition is related to social work. If we interpret the term “pure” as “free from institutional mediation,” conceptual trouble lurks around the corner. How could recognition ever be free from institutional mediation in professional contexts? We have to be careful here. To be exact, Ikäheimo writes that institutionally mediated recognition signifies “action which conforms to rights and duties but is abstracted from the attitudes of actors i.e. recognizers” (Ikäheimo, 2014a, 116; translation PN). Hence, it is possible for social workers to recognize their clients in both institutionally mediated and purely intersubjective ways at the same time, even if this sounds paradoxical: the former type of recognition describes their actions from an external viewpoint while the latter describes their attitudes from an internal viewpoint. Still, we can ask whether this conceptualization does justice to the institutional reality behind professions like social work. Even from the institutional viewpoint it isn’t good enough that social workers merely appear externally to respect, esteem and care for the well-being of their clients. It is the real thing that is required by the institutions themselves because it makes the work both ethical and efficient. A purely external understanding of institutional recognition seems to implicate a formal and impoverished picture of institutions.

What is more, to a certain extent, even the unconditional mode seems to be required. An ideal social worker helps her clients, not just because she gets paid for it, but also for the sake of the clients themselves. Seen from the perspective of this ideal, an egoistic social worker who helps her clients just for selfish motives should consider changing her profession. There are other professions of a similar nature (e.g. nurses, doctors, teachers and nannies), where a reasonable amount of altruism is expected of the people occupying

them. In fact, the theory of recognition helps to explain why this is so. A genuinely respectful social worker, unlike a formal one, is able to support the self-respect of her immigrant client. A genuinely loving daycare teacher, unlike an egoistic one, elevates the self-confidence of the children under her care. And a genuinely caring nurse, unlike a condescending one, heightens the self-esteem of her elderly patient. But how much can be reasonably demanded from professionals? Can we institutionally obligate genuine respect, love and gratitude from them?⁴ This question is related to the conceptual trouble mentioned before: are respect, love and gratitude integral parts of the institutional roles themselves?

The Professional Form of Recognition

A clear way out of this conceptual trouble is to elucidate a distinct form of recognition specifically for professionals who support human development and well-being.⁵ This *professional form of recognition* will contain the three dimensions outlined by the theory of recognition. However, instead of love we must talk about care in this context. The place of love is on the side of the private sphere. Care, on the other hand, signifies an attitude which we can reasonably expect of professional helpers and educators. The most basic meaning of professional care is that the well-being (development, learning etc.) of each particular client (patient, pupil etc.) matters to the professional. She considers each client significant, as worthy of and entitled to her professional attention. The expression "I don't care about him" represents a non-recognitive attitude of professional indifference.

The question of mode is somewhat difficult. One might argue that the difference between the professional form of recognition and intersubjective private recognition is exactly that the former is typically conditional while the latter is unconditional. However, there are professions where the conditional mode is not good enough. Good professional helpers care for their patients also for the sake of the patients themselves, not just because they are paid for it. This applies to the two other dimensions of recognition too. Good professional helpers respect and esteem their clients not just because they benefit from it but also for the sake of those clients themselves. We are justified in expecting a reasonable balance between egoistic and altruistic motives. We are inclined to condemn fully egoistic and conditional ones.

Hence, it makes sense to distinguish a third mode for professional contexts. We can call this mode the *professional* mode. It combines features from both earlier modes but is not reducible to them. This is because it also contains features that have their roots in the ethics of professional care. For instance, the most significant medical ethics code, the World Medical

Association's *Declaration of Helsinki*, states that "The health of my patient will be my first consideration" (World Medical Association WMA, 2013 [1965]) and, according to the International Federation of Social Workers' *Statement of Ethical Principles*, "Social workers should not subordinate the needs or interests of people who use their services to their own needs or interests" (International Federation of Social Workers IFSW, 2002). While professional care allows for other interests and viewpoints, what is in the client's best interests has *prima facie* precedence.

Further distinctions are needed so that we can identify what exactly can be expected of professionals. Respect, gratitude and love are terms that are often associated with mere emotions. Indisputably, strong emotions cannot be demanded institutionally from professionals. What's more, too deep emotional involvement may bias one's judgment and make the work too wearing (see Thomson, 2000, 107–114). On the other hand, it might be the mutual mobilization of powerful emotions that initiates deep learning and recovery processes leading to great success stories in the helping and teaching professions. Still, one cannot force oneself or another person to feel.

Fortunately, the theory of recognition concerns attitudes, not mere emotions. The traditional social psychological story about attitudes is that they contain three kinds of elements: they include emotions but also include cognitive and behavioral elements. An attitude is something like "an overall evaluation of an object that is based on cognitive, affective, and behavioral information" (Maio & Haddock, 2009, 4). Changing attitudes may not be easy but it is possible. Changes occur to the extent that old cognitive, affective and behavioral information behind attitudes is replaced by new and hopefully more accurate information. A large part of the current discussion about attitudes going on in education and social psychology concerns educational means that can be used in the inculcation of enlightened attitudes. We do not need to go into detail here. The general idea is that, while one cannot force oneself to feel, one can insure that one's attitudes and practices are based on rationally defensible beliefs, not just on prejudices. When the cognitive and behavioral constituents of attitudes are in order, a good chance is also created for appropriate emotions to follow.

We can demand from professionals in a wide range of careers that they base their professional attitudes and practices on the best available knowledge. The theory of recognition itself represents this kind of knowledge, essential to all professions dealing with human relationships in a more than superficial and instrumental way. It articulates the constitutive role recognition has for human well-being and identity formation. When one learns to understand and appreciate this profoundly, room is created for the cultivation of more conscious and systematic cognitive attitudes in one's own client work. Of course, in practice, many professionals have already

developed these kinds of attitudes; the only thing lacking may be an explicit articulation of the theoretical foundations behind these attitudes.

Naturally, professional education has the most important role in teaching professionals the right kinds of attitudes. Also, workplace cultures influence attitudes to a large extent, not just via information circulation, but more directly through their practices. The latter point is worth stressing. In accordance with *cognitive dissonance theory*, people tend to develop attitudes that are in line with their daily practices (see Maio & Haddock, 2009, 131–153). Hence, the recognitive practices of an institution tend to produce recognitive attitudes in its workers. Unfortunately, the reverse influence is possible too. Too few resources, extreme hurry and a strong focus on financial issues are examples of institutional factors that can dampen the recognitive attitudes of someone who has developed them naturally.⁶

We can now sketch a rough classification of professions in regard to recognition. For some professions, recognition has no particular significance. For instance, the attitudes of a car mechanic towards the owners of the cars are not particularly significant, at least if he never meets them. However, it would probably be bad for business if the customers systematically encounter customer service staff whose attitudes are not recognitive at all. There are probably lots of professions where having recognitive attitudes is somewhat beneficial. In some professions, doing the job well requires recognitive attitudes. In other cases, not having them might somewhat hinder doing the work. General Practitioners fall into these two categories. Even to decide which pills to prescribe they have to identify problems, and rarely can this be done without communication based on minimal mutual respect, esteem and care. And finally, there are jobs that cannot be done at all without recognition. For instance, successful psychotherapy is hardly possible without reciprocal recognition.⁷

The Professional Form of Recognition in Social Work

Some social workers have jobs that do not require the professional form of recognition. If a benefit officer, whose task is to administer benefits, receives mail applications, makes decisions based on mechanic calculations and sends mail notifications, then all her interaction with clients is minimized and formalized so that there is not much room for recognition. However, the situation is drastically different in areas like family services, intoxicant and drug abuse services, immigrant and forced migration services and unemployment services. In many cases the professional form of recognition is the decisive factor which makes an intervention successful.

Arja Jokinen has investigated success stories of social work. Recognition is highly relevant especially in what she calls “relationship

stories" (Jokinen, 2014), in which a trustworthy and confidential relationship between the worker and the client is the key to success. The worker is attentive to the feelings and beliefs of her client. She lets the client set the pace of proceedings. In acute crisis, the worker quickly realizes the seriousness of the situation; she concentrates, gives as much time as needed and finds "the right words". In these kinds of stories, the "genuineness" of the care is crucial and the relationship often has the characteristics of a personal relationship. In such a secure relationship, the identity work of the client comes to the fore. The worker helps her client to cope with his feelings and to increase his self-esteem. At the end of the relationship, the worker knows when to step aside. She respects her client's autonomy and believes strongly in his possibilities (Jokinen, 2014, 205–210).

Jokinen does not refer directly to the theory of recognition but she talks explicitly about each of its dimensions. Additionally, the mode in question is clearly not purely conditional. Talk of the genuineness of care indicates non-conditionality as well as the personal features of the relationship. Hence, Jokinen's empirical results give support to the theoretical idea that in cases of a certain kind, recognition is essentially required in order for the workers to do their work successfully. Jokinen's analysis is based on interviews conducted with social workers, but clients themselves also long for recognition. Närhi, Kokkonen and Matthies (2014) interviewed young adults who are dependent on welfare services. The interviewees missed "respect, care and esteem" from their encounters with professional social workers (Närhi et al, 2014, 128). This is what one of their interviewees (pseudonym Arto) said:

And then comes a human from whatever background. No matter how poor it is, one really takes every person as valuable and for instance, hums in one's mind that every human is worth a song. One remembers that and takes not just work and such. Really, more heart to the game and that people are cared a bit more. (Närhi et al, 2014, 128-129; author's translation⁸)

Clearly, the purely conditional mode of recognition is opposed here. More "heart to the game" is asked for, as well as a "not just work" kind of attitude. There are plenty of examples like this (e.g. Juul, 2009; Granfelt, 2011, 2013; Turtiainen, 2012). Especially in "empowering social work" recognition is essential. Empowerment can be defined as "the means by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives" (Adams, 2003, 8). Methods like counseling are used to boost the "self-

confidence" of clients. Another good example is group support that enables "a person progressively to gain confidence and self-esteem, to the point where it is possible to make the transition from being helped to being the helper." Finally, empowering social work seeks "to affirm the worth and value of the personal qualities, attitudes and actions of the service users" (Adams, 2003, 64, 93). In other words, empowering social work is recognitive and, vice versa, recognitive social work is empowering. Of course, there are elements of both that cannot be reduced to the other.

The professional form of recognition cannot be fully conditional but it cannot be fully unconditional either. It is not just that professionals are entitled to have personal interests related to their work. Additionally, *there is another field of conditionality related to professions like social work*. The task of social workers is also to manage social problems and control marginalized populations which could potentially threaten societal peace by committing crimes, rioting and revolting. The traditional ideal has been that unpredictable troubled and unemployed disadvantaged people are transformed into good law-abiding and able-bodied working citizens (see Juhila, 2006, 49–101). There is sense in this ideal, but it has to be updated for our late modern post-Fordist era. Above all, the concept of work has to be interpreted widely, in the spirit of recognition theory: it is people's contributions to the common good that we can and want to promote, not merely their participation in paid work.

Publicly funded social workers have to take into consideration also the viewpoint of the whole service system. *They are the state's officials, bureaucrats and users of public power*. This side of their work cannot be and should not be downplayed. What is more, people who have work bear a crucial role in the funding of the system. This role has to be recognized too. For instance, cost efficient use of public money represents such recognition. Tax payers are entitled to know where tax money goes and to influence its movements. They are entitled to expect that their financial contribution to the common good is esteemed. And they are entitled to expect that their well-being is cared for in that taxes do not unreasonably narrow the financial possibility to advance their own well-being.

The double role of social workers inevitably creates tensions. As the Foucauldian research tradition has revealed, attempts to normalize the marginal may sometimes shatter its identity, and some decision making situations may force social workers to choose one perspective over the other in a way that is unjust. This tension cannot be resolved in an *a priori* and universal way. All we can hope for is a reasonable balance between these two types of interests in each individual case and social workers need to be conscious of and open about this tension. What is a real risk in times of economic scarcity is that the taxpayer's perspective begins to dominate.

What's more, excessive savings that actually cripple welfare services are not in the interests of tax payers themselves because they have the right to expect that potentially escalating social problems are managed successfully.

The reciprocity inherent in the theory of recognition implies that clients should recognize their social workers as well as the financial contribution of the working population. Professionals are entitled to expect recognition if they themselves do their work legitimately and recognitively. Clients cannot one-sidedly dictate the terms of meetings; their beliefs about their problems and possible solutions are important but not something that can be automatically followed. The welfare service system cannot be a department store from which client-consumers are entitled to demand any services they happen to want (see Niemi, 2008, 85–95; Koskiahio, 2008). Self-evidently, physical or psychological violence or threats cannot be tolerated and cheating the system reflects an instrumental and abusive attitude on their own part. The same can be said about happily living on benefits while not even trying to improve one's situation, provided that it is possible. These kinds of phenomena exemplify disrespect, disesteem and indifference on the part of clients.

Pathologies of Recognition in Social Work

In this section, I run through what I see as the most important pathologies of recognition in the area of social care. I will introduce three problematic attitudinal tendencies which become pathologies of the social care system in cases when they are *institutionalized* in the system, i.e. they are instantiated repeatedly and relatively often within some social work institution. Individual occurrences of them are of course problematic per se, but we are primarily interested in system level pathologies that regularly cause harm for a wide range of people. However, from the viewpoint of ontology, it is always through singular relationships that even systemic pathologies are realized.

In the case of *professional indifference*, the worker doesn't really care about her client. She doesn't respond to a fair work related request or delays the response. She doesn't pay enough attention or make an effort to dig out all of the relevant details of the case. She doesn't reveal all of the information that could benefit the client. In borderline cases, she bends the eligibility criteria so that she can deny claims to clienthood. Perhaps she notices subtle clues hinting at further problems but she ignores them. Other clients may seem more important. Indeed, in social work, as in many other professions, one sometimes has to prioritize cases. However, one must be careful with one's motives and justifications. Our moral justifications sometimes represent nothing more than moral disengagement mechanisms which we

exploit to wriggle ourselves out of personal responsibility (see Bandura, 2002).

Expressed in terms of the theory of recognition, both “singularity” and “particularity” are highly important to the love/care dimension of recognition (see Ikäheimo, 2002, 452–456). Both love and care always attach to some singular person whose well-being is put at the center of attention. Because the conditions, characteristics, fears, preferences etc. of that individual, be they unique or not, influence substantially his or her well-being, they have to be considered too. Professional care has to take into account the individual features of clients, in order to be both efficient and ethical. For this reason, using general stereotypes may be deeply harmful. A worker may quickly categorize her client, e.g. using his ethnic background as a category. She may then hasten to utilize some general solutions that have previously been used in (supposedly) similar cases. While these kinds of heuristic strategies sometimes work well enough, they may also misfire and lead to disastrous consequences (see Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Maybe the client is an atypical representative of his background. Or maybe the stereotype itself is deeply biased, violently unifying and racist. Hence, using stereotypes may represent misrecognition: a person is misidentified and he is treated in terms of some general category that does not really fit him.

In *professional disesteem*, the worker looks down on her client. She does not value any of his previous doings, nor does she believe in his future possibilities. The client may have a difficult personality and a bad attitude. Perhaps he doesn't do what he is told to do. He may be scary or appalling. His problems may seem numerous and unsurmountable or, on the contrary, trivial. Perhaps he is a welfare-dependent, egoistic and childlike free rider, or a sad wreck, crippled and incarcerated for good by devastating past conditions and happenings, waiting for it all to end. If the client is seen as incurable, containment and control seem the only options. It may seem a better idea to commit one's energies to others who can be saved. This attitude may reflect more general attitudes towards some group to which the client belongs. Perhaps she thinks that all who have a certain ethnic background are worthless. Dependency on others is in itself all too often seen as something that diminishes the value of a person in neoliberal societies, but it is the moral integrity of the society that is at stake here (see Vehmas, 1996). Does the society in question take care of its dependents, even when it is not easy, i.e. in economically harsh times? It is crucial that social workers do not give in to a condescending attitude, as a social worker may be the last person to make a difference in a client's life.

In the area of social work, *professional disrespect* has traditionally shown itself in the guise of a *paternalistic* attitude (see Juhila 2006, 20–28).

Here, the worker may genuinely care about her client, but the problem is that she does not treat him as a person who is capable of self-determination. Instead, she thinks that she knows best and dictates the terms of their encounter, controlling their discussion strictly. Perhaps she listens to him but is very picky about what she hears; she identifies the problems and decides upon the solutions on her own. Her only concern is how to make the client see what she thinks is best for him.

This kind of attitude has been widely condemned in social work research. Empowering social work is a prime example of a reform movement that fights against paternalism. Other similar movements have called for, among other things, dialogical work methods, more activation of clients, more freedom of choice and personal responsibility (e.g. Julkunen, 2008). The problems of these initiatives have been acknowledged. Here I have space to discuss only a couple of issues. At their best, activation measures rehabilitate people so that their autonomy is widened and their self-esteem is strengthened. But activation can also transform into formal, ritualistic, humiliating and compulsory measures that fail to respect autonomy, individual situations and the preferences of clients, and hence end up lowering their self-respect and self-esteem. The use of carrot and stick types of methods in the activation of individuals always involves the risk of individualizing and psychologizing problems that are social and structural in nature (see Taylor-Gooby, 1997; 2001). *Mis-targeted, non-individual, bureaucratic and compulsory activation measures represent misrecognition at its worst.*

Dialogical work and empowerment help us to stave off paternalistic power. Unfortunately, late modern high-tech power evades these kinds of countermeasures by penetrating individual subjectivities and using subtle means intimately connected to dialogues and identity work. The clients are supposed to confess what kind of person they are, in what kind of trouble they have ended up and why. Wordings and plot structures which they use in the articulation of their self-understanding represent power. Not all power is bad power, but some narrative resources circulated and reinforced in social work are not beneficial to clients. The individualizing and psychologizing analysis mentioned above is one good example. If the causes for some person's problems are mainly in his environment and social context (the answer depends on the case), strong internalization of guilt is bound to harm him. Still, social workers need some biographical information from their clients in order to help them. Again we have encountered an internal tension of social work that cannot be eradicated. Social workers need to be worried about it; it is something that needs to be discussed repeatedly, both generally and in the context of individual cases.

Recently, there has been a lot of talk about "wicked" problems (e.g.

Arnkil & Heino, 2014). In contrast to “tame” ones, wicked problems have, among other things, the following properties: they have no definite formulations; they have no “stopping rule,” i.e. you can always find better solutions to them; and each wicked problem is a unique “one-shot” operation so that there is no “trial and error” with them (Rittel, 1972, 392–394). In addition, clients with wicked problems are not properly recognized by the system. The related pathology is a combination of indifference, disrespect and disesteem. Nobody has an eye on the whole of the client’s situation, which causes inefficiency in helping. Sometimes a person is shunted from office to office because no institution is willing to accept him as a client. The problem might be structural: the structure of the service system itself may be defective in that it doesn’t recognize prevalent complex case types and hence is unable to react properly (see Arnkil & Heino, 2014, 284–285; Ikäheimo, 2014b). Consequently, some people may not find the help they need and are justified in expecting.

This problem may be worsened by the privatization of social services. In commercialization, the list of services is typically fixed and priced beforehand. However, it is not so easy to see beforehand exactly what kind of services are needed (Julkunen, 2008). In fact, social work is often “messy” and “unpredictable” (Arnkil & Heino, 2014, 295). One reason why wicked problems are so wicked is that they fall outside of the typical lists of problems and services that respond to those problems. Moreover, solving wicked problems requires a lot of resources and faith. Indeed, they may be unsolvable, in which case investment will not pay off. This means that they are not attractive to the commercial world. Still, those kinds of investment are not in vain from an ethical perspective because they represent respect, esteem and care on the part of the system.

Conclusion

Recognition is an essential part of efficient and ethical professional support for human development and well-being. In social work, to have the professional attitude implies that one respects the autonomy of one’s clients, esteems their good aspects and potentialities and cares for their well-being. Social workers need to be on guard with respect to their own attitudes. Am I really encountering this person, a client of mine, as the individual he is? Does what happens to him matter to me? Do I give him a genuine chance to influence my decisions? Do I know all of the relevant details? Might some stereotypes or prejudices bias my judgment? Disrespect, disesteem and indifference can lead to devastating consequences, perhaps even to the death of the client or people close to him.

When working in a public institution, a social worker is a

representative of the state. She is a representative of its bureaucracy and control but also of its respect, esteem and care. She is a humane channel for vertical downwards recognition. For many disadvantaged people, a social worker gives a face to the state's attitude, perhaps a face to other people in general. Is it a harsh or indifferent face that condemns you, that counts the expense of helping you, that tries to control or merely contain you? Or is it a friendly face that truly recognizes you? At the psychological and social borders of society, genuinely recognitive attitudes enable social workers to draw back on board people drowning in trouble, which is sometimes of their own making and sometimes not.

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Endnotes

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² In his article in the present issue, Ikäheimo writes about “normatively” instead of “institutionally” mediated recognition. This wording better captures the point he has in mind: this type of recognition is governed by some norms (see pp. 28, 41 fn. 11). What should we think about institutionally mediated recognition then? An obvious solution is to understand it as a sub-species of normatively mediated recognition where the norms in question are institutional. I continue with institutionally mediated recognition for a while because social work is conducted in the institutions of state, commercial and third sector. Eventually, I will move on to “the professional form of recognition.”

³ This is not always the case because, in Ikäheimo’s conception, legal norms can be acknowledged and followed outside proper institutions in a way that represents vertical upwards recognition of the state.

⁴ In his comments on the first version of this article (personal communication), Ikäheimo noted that “a duty to love written in the job description or law is senseless.” There is certainly something true in this idea.

⁵ Ikäheimo himself ponders the possibility that it might be fruitful to introduce a “level” between institutional and purely intersubjective

recognition (personal communication). While I see merits in this proposal, I want to test a bolder solution. My idea is that a version of three-dimensional recognition belongs integrally to certain kinds of institutional roles. It is not something in between institutional and private spheres. It is a sub-species of its own. The attitudes themselves seem somewhat different in professional and in private contexts. It is hard to judge the emotions associated with these attitudes, but at least the cognitive and behavioral elements behind them are different.

⁶ Sometimes genuinely recognitive attitudes may require professionals to violate the norms of their institution. In addition, the norms of an institution cannot possibly cover all of the possible cases which its professionals may encounter. For these reasons, the professional form of recognition should not be conceptually tied to following institutional norms. Although, of course, breaking institutional norms is not something that should be done light-heartedly.

⁷ Empirical investigations show that clinician's characteristics, attitudes and emotions significantly influence the efficiency of therapy (e.g. Najavits et. al. 2000). Some results are especially encouraging for the theory of recognition. For instance, Stephen Valle (1981) found out that "empathy, genuineness, respect and concreteness" on the part of counselors associate with the recovery of their alcoholic patients.

⁸ The original Finnish quotation is fragmentary and contains grammatical errors. I decided to translate it literally and not to correct or stylize it at all so that its original spirit is preserved.