Recognition and Freedom

Axel Honneth's Political Thought

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CHAPTER 4

Sociality, Anti-Sociality, and Social Work

Political Imagination in a Social Democratic Welfare State in Decline

Heikki Ikäheimo

This chapter focuses on a concept that is central for social work, namely sociality itself. It suggests that after years of ever intensifying pressure in Finland towards marketisation of the public sector, social work included, there is serious need to stop and ask what the task description of social work should be in the first place, and to what extent it is compatible with the introduction of market-principles into the network in which social work takes place.[1] This requires thinking clearly about what 'sociality' is, what promotes it and what corrodes it. I will discuss two everyday ways to think of sociality and analogically two approaches to sociality in social theory. I claim that an ethically or morally neutral view of sociality exemplified by thinkers such as Max Weber and John Searle in social theory is too undifferentiated and thus unhelpful for the theory and practice of social work. On the alternative, morally or ethically non-neutral view that can be reconstructed from Axel Honneth's work the corner-stone of sociality are attitudes and relations of 'recognition' between persons. I elaborate on this Honnethian view, clearing up some of its remaining ambiguities and apply it briefly in social work. Along the way I propose definitions of the concepts of 'social problem' and 'social innovation' that avoid misleading ambiguities resulting from morally neutral conceptions of sociality. The chapter is written with the Finnish situation in mind, to address that situation, and it partly reflects presuppositions, intuitions and sensibilities

* Parts of this text were originally published in Finnish. See: Heikki Ikäheimo, "Sosiaalisuus ja epäsosiaalisuus sosiaalityössä" ["Sociality and Anti-Sociality in Social Work"], in Petteri Niemi and Tuija Kotiranta (eds.), *Sosiaalityön normatiivinen perusta* [*The Normative Foundation of Social Work*] Helsinki, Yliopistopaino, 2008. The original version was written mainly for social work professionals rather than for the profession of philosophers and theorists. The work on this version was funded by the Australian Research Council project 'The Social Ontology of Personhood' and The University of New South Wales.

1 The pressure towards marketisation of the public sector in Finland clearly reflects the international trend called 'New Public Management'. This term however has not caught public imagination in Finland (possibly due to the clumsiness of the Finnish translation 'uusi julkisjohtaminen'), at least to the degree that the term 'neo-liberalism' ('uusliberalismi') has.

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fairly natural in the context of a (waning) Nordic social democratic welfare state. I leave it to the reader to judge how natural they are in other societies.

1 Social Work and Anti-Social Innovations

In an article on what she calls a change of paradigm in welfare strategic thinking, Raija Julkunen, a professor in social policy and a well-known public intellectual in Finland, draws attention to "a kind of paradox of trust". What she has in mind is the fact that Finns broadly speaking still have a strong trust in the welfare state, despite the fact that there is "little trust (…) in parties, politicians, the government, the parliament, the market forces, the European Union, civil servants, associations or political movements".[2] Julkunen poignantly asks what exactly it is then that people have trust in when they have trust in the welfare state. She points out that there is in fact one particular profession that is undoubtedly highly esteemed and trusted by most Finns: the professionals of basic public services. Julkunen writes:

> I do not think this is only a matter of professional skills; rather, these professions are expected to be, in a sense, professions of caring. Their function is not only to care and medicate, but also to keep at bay the 'no-one really cares'-world where everyone only thinks of their own interest.[3]

In a world of ever more furiously globalising capitalism and neoliberal ideology, and an era of 'no-one really cares' or 'everyone only thinks of their own interest', to borrow from Julkunen, basic public services—childcare, elderly care and nursing especially, but also the police, the fire department and social work—are increasingly seen as the last institutional instances of care and sociality. An especially dark shadow in Julkunen's sombre vision is cast, however, by the fact that the functioning of these basic services as instances of caring, as mediators of sociality and solidarity, and as a 'cement of trust' is itself under serious threat today.

Julkunen believes that there are reasons to doubt whether the professions of caring and sociality would maintain their function if basic public services were

2 Raija Julkunen, "Hyvinvointistrategisen ajattelun muutos" ["The Tranformation of Welfare-Strategic Thinking"], in Petri Kinnunen and Kaisa Kostamo-Pääkkö (eds.), *Alueelliset hyvinvointistrategiat* [*Regional Welfare-Strategies*], Pohjois-Suomen sosiaalialan osaamiskeskus, 2003, pp. 36–7.

3 Raija Julkunen, *Ibid*., p. 37.

wholly marketised, and eventually (which she sees very likely) taken over by multinational corporations. It is worth asking what the professional ethics and conditions of work in care-work would look like in 'free market conditions', and with what kinds of motivations people would be drawn to the industries of welfare-production and care-business. As Adam Smith wrote a long time ago,

> [i]t is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.[4]

Smith's famous insight is that in a market-context, in the roles of buyers and sellers, producers and consumers, service-providers and customers, individuals do not (are not expected, encouraged, or allowed to) act out of immediate concern for the interests of others, but merely for their own self-interest. The interests of others have only instrumental significance as conditions or means of serving one's own interest.

When we talk about extending 'the market-principle' into the realm of basic public services, including social work, it is essential to keep in mind and talk honestly about this fundamental assumption of the selfish motivation of and thereby instrumental relations between market-actors, as an essential element of the market-principle. There is a sense in which relations between individuals, groups, institutions and enterprises organised purely according to market-principles are not social relations at all, but instrumental relations in which agents regard each other in an instrumentalising or reifying manner.

Smith's depiction of the purely selfish motivation of butchers, brewers or bakers of course depicts only an ideal-type or role-norm. A baker who in fact relates to his customers *purely* instrumentally, without even the *slightest* hint of immediate or non-instrumental concern for their well-being—thus fully living up to the role—is hardly the usual case, but rather a limiting case in real life approximated only by psychopaths. A face-to-face encounter with another human being triggers, in psychologically more or less normal people in more or less civilised and peaceful conditions, usually at least some degree of sympathy or ethical motivation that makes a *purely* instrumentalising or reifying way of relating to her almost impossible.

There are of course ways of trying to eliminate such 'being moved' and the social bond it creates. An efficient way is distancing: it is considerably easier to have disregard for people with whom one is not in concrete contact than it is

4 Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, London: Penguin Books, 1970, p. 119.

for people one regularly encounters face to face. Therefore, distancing strategic planning and decision making from the grassroots level of work necessarily affected by the bonds and therefore friction of social relations tends to be from a business-perspective the rational thing to do. The more distanced strategic planning and decision making is from the workers, the easier it is to get rid of them or worsen their working conditions without friction and emotional costs if required by the market situation.

The word 'social innovation' has recently been widely used in Finland in discourses on social policy. I believe there is serious need to stop and ask whether the marketisation of basic social services is more likely to produce or encourage social, or rather *anti*-social innovations. Let me cite Julkunen again:

> Marketisation is an unpredictable and creeping process, whose consequences are difficult to foresee. The logic of markets produces centralisation, multi-national chains and corporations. Retirement and life-insurance are largely the business of massive insurance companies, and the capitals of pension funds are among the largest concentrations of finance capital moving swiftly across national borders. Also care services are the object of increasingly centralised chains. The small care enterprises founded by Finnish women who often have a genuine motivation to provide better service could soon be pushed out from the market or swallowed by multinational chains, in a manner similar to what has happened in retail. Privatised service-business may also easier feed into technology-business; the privatisation of prisons and security-services feeds the rapidly growing security-technology and private welfare-business feeds welfare-technology.[5]

Julkunen refers at this juncture to experiences from the prison-industry in the United States, and to what she describes as 'repulsive' innovations—cages, fences, electric shock devices and so forth—which the cooperation and shared interests of security-business and technology innovators has produced.[6] Is it possible that also social work would eventually be privatised on a broad front, and if so, what kind of cost-efficient methods and instruments could the social industry together with technology innovators come up with? 'Human technology'—one of the buzzwords in recent years in Finland—by no means always means humane technology.

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5 *Op. cit.*, pp. 33–34.

6 *Ibid.*, fn. 4.

A little less dramatically, what kinds of social or anti-social tendencies does the introduction of the market-principle on a broad front in the service-networks in which public social work takes place involve? How to address multiple deprivation and the so called 'nasty' social problems in a situation in which social work has been disintegrated into distinct functions and many of the separated functions privatised? What will the cooperation of local public social workers be like with the extremely cost-efficient multinational care, therapy, consult, and education companies always sensitive to the sentiments of their share-holders—assuming that such companies will eventually win the local tenders and will thus be the address where individuals and families with multiple social problems are sent as their 'service users', or where they will end up with their social service vouchers?

Whereas it is not easy, due to the involved psychological costs, for a small local care-business to relate to its employees and customers in the instrumental or anti-social manner required by the market-principle, this takes hardly any effort from the executives of a multinational corporation. In this respect the structurally anti-social corporations will have a clear competitive edge to local care-entrepreneurs embedded in local networks of social relations and psychically attached to them.

There is a serious need to consider how the work motivation and relations to his clients of an employee of a care-business concern is likely to be affected by her knowing or believing that the executives and share-holders of the concern regard both its employees and customers in a radically anti-social way. Do we seriously expect that a communal social worker can—maintaining his intellectual and moral integrity—trust that his clients, typically in highly vulnerable situations in life, will be treated in a morally dignified manner in the various knots of a service-network that has to a large extent been taken over by the market-principle?[7]

Even less dramatically, supposing that the public service-network is not privatised on a broad front, how does the introduction of managerial principles and logic of industrial production in public social work—whether explicitly or implicitly—influence the nature of this activity? An innovation decisive for the birth of modern industrialism was differentiating the production-process into distinct acts along an assembly line, this being immensely more efficient than having the same thing produced by a craftsman. Yet, it is highly questionable

7 According to *Sosiaalialan ammatillisen työn eettiset ohjeet* [*Ethical Guidelines of Professionalism in Social Work*], Talentia, principle 1, "[e]very human being (…) has a right to morally dignified treatment" ("Jokainen ihminen on (…) oikeutettu moraalisesti arvokkaaseen kohteluun").

whether it really makes much sense to try to address at least multiple deprivation or "nasty" social problems by means of differentiated and distinct service-acts imitating the logic of industrial production.[8] There is no doubt that such atomistic performances are well suited for being measured with quantitative cost-efficiency indicators, and no doubt that often the measurements suggest the outsourcing of each separate performance to be the most rational thing to do. Yet, it is a completely different question whether rationality thought in these narrow terms has much to do with practical reason needed for actually performing the work well and judging to what extent its goals have been achieved.

The content of the concept 'social innovation' is not particularly clear, but as a starting point we should at least distinguish social innovations from clearly *anti*-social innovations. One characteristic of an anti-social innovation in social work is that applying it in practice actually impedes encountering and treating people in need as concrete persons with real lives, and promotes their reification into cost factors or objects of distinct service-acts. More generally speaking, I suggest as a *definition of anti-social innovation* the following:

> An antisocial innovation is a proposal directed to social relations or the institutional structures of the society, which promotes the corrosion of genuine sociality, weakening of social relations, or their replacement with relations that are not genuinely social.

Thought this way, a proposal for a change in social or institutional practices that promotes viewing the affected people exclusively in reifying or instrumentalising lights, such as exclusively as negative or positive cost-factors or objects of cost-elimination is an anti-social innovation *par excellence*.[9]

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8 Lasse Murto, "Sosiaalityö vastuullisen hyvinvointipolitiikan välineenä" ["Social Work as a Tool of Responsible Welfare Policy"], in *Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön monisteita*, 2004, 15, p. 50.

9 Even assuming that some amount of reification or instrumentalisation is an inevitable element of social life, we still need to call it by its real name to be able to constraint it into acceptable limits. *Whether* some amount of instrumentalisation of the other really is in fact necessary in human relations is an interesting and important question. It is widely held as self-evident that it is. I believe the air of self-evidence is at least partly based on a conceptual confusion, one which I discuss in Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen, "Esteem for Contributions to the Common Good: The Role of Personifying Attitudes and Instrumental Value", in Michael Seymour (ed.), *The Plural States of Recognition*, New York: Palgrave, 2010, pp. 98–121.

Marketisation is not a simple matter, and it can be executed in various ways and to different degrees. What seems relatively clear however is that if marketisation is accepted without reflection, ideologically, as the sole truth, it creates a favourable atmosphere for anti-social innovations, and in the worst case leaves little room for any other kinds of innovations. There is a very real risk that if social work is sacrificed to anti-social innovations, it itself becomes part of the 'no-one really cares'-world of Julkunen's bleak vision. In short, it becomes unable to function as an institutional instance of care, trust and sociality, and may even end up actively working against these, thereby itself corroding the ethical or moral foundations of the society.[10]

2 Social and Anti-Social Sociality

Let us now assume that we do not want to sacrifice social work to anti-social innovations. In order to have a better grasp of both social work and of social innovations, we need to take a look at the very idea of *sociality* and how it differs from that of *anti-sociality*. Let us approach the phenomenon of sociality first by considering the concept of a *social problem*. According to a recent Finnish definition relevant to our theme a 'social problem' is "a phenomenon having to do with the relationship of the individual and community, which is

10 Risto Heiskala, "Sosiaaliset innovaatiot ja hegemonisten mallien muutokset: kuinka tulkita Suomen 1990-luvun murrosta?" ["Social Innovations and Changes in Hegemonic Models: How to Interpret the Transformation in Finland in the 1990s?"], in Risto Heiskala and Eeva Luhtakallio (eds.), *Uusi jako—miten suomesta tuli kilpailukyky-yhteiskunta?* [*How Finland Turned Into a Competitiveness-Society?*], Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2006) discusses social innovations and their relation to interest-struggles. Heiskala proposes as a general definition of social innovation an innovation that implies changes in the institutional structures of the society and increases their functional efficiency (see: *Ibid.*, pp. 204–206). In talking about 'anti-social innovaions' my point is to emphasise that something can be a 'social innovation' according to this definition, and yet be 'anti-social' in ways that correspond to common sense conceptions of 'sociality' and 'anti-sociality'. Anti-social innovations may serve the interests of some, but they may in principle also serve no-one's interests. It is possible that the functional efficiency of an institution or section of public service increases in such a way that it will produce more efficiently results that are disadvantageous for everybody. Whether increase in functional efficiency is actually a good or bad thing wholly depends on the nature of the aims and results of the activity in question.

contrary to the values and norms prevailing in the society, is relatively widespread, and has a considerable effect on the society".[11]

This definition provides a useful starting point for further inquiry, yet it is problematic in two respects. First of all, limiting the concept of social problem only to relationships *between the individual and the community* is too restrictive. Surely social problems can also materialise in relationships *between individuals* or *between communities*. It seems furthermore fairly obvious that there are social problems having to do with relationships whose one party is an *institution*, such as an anti-social corporation functioning within the service-network, or municipal social administration single-mindedly focused on short term cost-efficiency.

Secondly, defining a social problem as "a phenomenon (…) which is contrary to the values and norms prevailing in the society" has highly problematic consequences. This has to do with the fact that the definition is morally completely neutral: according to it a phenomenon which is contrary to the prevailing values and norms is a social problem independently of the *content* of those values and norms. Hence, widespread opposition or protest against racism in a racist society is a social problem—since it is contrary to the prevailing values and norms of the society. This might seem perfectly consequent from the point of view of sociological value-neutrality, but it is deeply misleading, and at worst dangerous, from the point of view of collective self-understanding, political debate and thus concrete decision making. Surely the contents of prevailing values and norms can themselves be more or less social, or more or less *anti*-social.[12]

I suggest that in order to have an adequate grasp of sociality, anti-sociality and social problems we need significantly more robust conceptual tools, tools that can help us attain critical distance to the prevailing climate of values and norms. Let us reflect for a moment what it is that we normally mean by 'sociality' and 'anti-sociality' when we use these terms for characterising or evaluating individual characters and actions. What is a 'social' (or 'sociable') person like?[13] In everyday speech and thought this is understood in two importantly different ways. On the one hand, someone can be characterized as 'social' if

11 According to *Sosiaalityön sanasto* [*Vocabulary of Social Work*], Stakes Viestintä 2002, by STAKES (The National Institute for Health and Welfare). (http://sty.stakes.fi/FI/sanastot/index.htm)

12 Risto Heiskala and Eeva Luhtakallio, *Uusi jako* contain analyses of the changes in Finnish values during the structural transformations of the economy in the 1980s and 1990s. See: Risto Heiskala and Eeva Luhtakallio, *op. cit.*

13 The Finnish word 'sosiaalinen' covers both meanings.

she has good 'social skills', an extensive 'social network' or capacities to build one. We can also say that such a person has plenty of 'social capital'. Note that this manner of speech is morally or ethically wholly neutral: also a person who relates to members of her 'social network' purely or mainly instrumentally or manipulatively—a ruthless exploiter, narcissist or psychopath—is a 'social (or sociable) person' according to it.

On the other hand, there is a way of thinking and talking on which an individual who relates to others mainly instrumentally or manipulatively—however developed his skills for networking, negotiation or persuasion—is on the contrary an 'anti-social' (or 'asocial') individual. This manner of thinking is not morally neutral, since according to it what makes someone a 'social' person is not the extent or efficiency of his or her social relations, but their moral or ethical quality. A helpful way to articulate this morally or ethically charged manner of thinking and talking is that according to it a social person does not see her fellow human beings merely or even mainly as things, instruments, goods, investments, cost-factors or capital—but rather as *persons*. Let us call this concept and the phenomenon it grasps 'social or genuine sociality', to distinguish it from the 'antisocial sociality' of the exploiter, narcissist or psychopath.

3 Morally Neutral and Non-Neutral Concepts of Sociality in Social Theory

It is clearly the ethically or morally non-neutral view of sociality capable of distinguishing genuine sociality from instrumentalisation or exploitation that we should have in mind if we want to conceive of social work as an activity whose goal is to foster sociality. But are there means in social theory or social philosophy for articulating and rationally reconstructing this everyday idea in a more theoretically elaborate and 'respectable' way? Importantly, not every theoretical account will do since the duality in everyday ways of speaking about sociality just mentioned is also reflected in modern social theory or social philosophy. In what follows I will first take up two highly influential theorists—Max Weber and John Searle—as examples of an 'a-moral' approach to the foundations of sociality or social reality that actually does not distinguish between anti-sociality and genuine sociality. I will then turn to an ethically or morally non-neutral view present in the work of Axel Honneth that provides in this respect a much better starting point for thinking about sociality and its opposites, not only but also in the field of social work.

To start with Weber, his definition of *social action* in chapter 1 of his *Economy and Society* is one of the founding acts of modern sociology and still often cited

in contemporary philosophical social ontology.[14] According to Weber: "*Action* is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course".[15] A little later in chapter 1 Weber distinguishes non-social action from social action as follows: "Overt action is *non-social* if it is oriented solely to the behaviour of inanimate objects. Subjective attitudes constitute *social* action only so far as they are oriented to the behaviour of others".[16] Weber next proceeds to define 'social *relation*' via the concept of 'social action' as he has just defined that concept. There is a social relation between individuals "insofar as (. . .) the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus consists entirely and exclusively in the existence of a probability that there will be a meaningful course of social action."[17] There are a number of details here that would merit commentary, but to put things in a rough and ready way, on Weber's definition an action is social if the agent takes the behaviour of other agents into account in acting or in planning his actions. When two or more agents relate to each other in this way—taking each other's behaviour into account in their own action or action plans, or as Weber says in their 'subjective attitudes', or as we can say simply in their intentions—a social relation exists between them.

What is relevant for our purposes is that these definitions are, as such, completely neutral with regard to the *manner* in which agents take the behaviour of others into account, or, to be more exact, neutral with regard to the *ethical or moral quality* of the attitudes or motives they have towards each other. It does not matter for the definition whether A's attitudes or motives towards B are altruistic, cooperative, instrumentalising, or predatory. Insofar as A takes the behaviour of B into account in his intentions *in some way*, with whatever motives, his relevant actions are social; and insofar as both relate to each other in this way they have a social relation.

Searle, one of the most influential philosophical social ontologists today follows a similar a-moral or morally neutral strategy in his theory of the foundations of social life. On Searle's account 'status functions', which for him are the core phenomenon of specifically human social reality (or a core 'structure of human civilisation' to borrow the sub-title of his recent book) depend on what

14 For one discussion, see: Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 27–33.

15 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Essay on Interpretative Sociology* (ed. Günter Roth and Claus Wittich), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, p. 4 (my emphasis).

16 Weber, *Economy and Society, op. cit.*, p. 22 (my emphasis).

17 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

he calls collective 'acceptance or recognition'.[18] Something has the *status of*, and thus *is* money, or the government of a country, or someone's property, if it is collectively accepted or recognised as being that, or in other words attributed that status. But what is this 'acceptance or recognition' that has such an important foundational role in Searle's account of social reality? Searle wants to emphasise that it does not mean 'approval': "Acceptance, as I construe it, goes all the way from enthusiastic endorsement to grudging acknowledgement, even the acknowledgement that one is simply helpless to do anything about, or reject, the institutions in which one finds oneself".[19] And a few lines later: "I want to emphasise that 'recognition' does not imply 'approval'. Hatred, apathy, and even despair are consistent with the recognition of that which one hates, is apathetic towards, and despairs changing."[20] On this line of thought it hence does not matter whether one party imposes its will on another party and forces them to accept or recognise something as something, say, someone's property, or the government or ruler of a country, or whether the relevant parties give their acceptance or recognition freely and wholeheartedly. The relevant status functions come into existence in both cases and this is the main issue for Searle. As for Weber's definitions of social action and social relation, also for Searle's concept of 'acceptance or recognition' the ethical or moral quality of attitudes or motives that agents have with regard to each other, and thereby with regard to the relevant social entities or structures, is irrelevant. When it comes to the ontological foundations of social reality, ruthless exploitation and domination are as good as, say, mutual respect or brotherly love.

Whatever merits Weber's and Searle's accounts of the foundations of social reality have, they both share a deficiency: they are too undifferentiated to distinguish between what I called above 'antisocial' and 'social' or 'genuine' sociality, or in other words to distinguish between modes of 'sociality' that support or reproduce social relations and modes that corrode it. In other words, they do not distinguish between, on the one hand, the real foundations of sociality, and, on the other hand, phenomena that depend on these foundations and may even be parasitic of them. This means that these accounts are also too undifferentiated to be really useful for the theory and practice of social work.

Where should one turn then? What I will do next is to briefly reconstruct a robust and differentiated concept of sociality from some of the main elements of Axel Honneth's work in social philosophy. A central thought in this

18 John Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilisation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

19 Searle, *Making the Social World*, p. 8.

20 *Ibid*.

regard in his work is the thought that attitudes and relations of 'recognition' (*Anerkennung*) between persons are a central constituent of human sociality, or to use a term favoured by Honneth himself, of 'social integration'. I have elsewhere suggested that the best way to understand the constitutive nature of attitudes and relations of recognition is to conceive them as non-reifying or non-instrumentalising attitudes and relations whereby persons relate to, or see, or 'take' each other *as persons* in concrete interaction.[21] Following Honneth, there are three different recognitive attitudes between persons: *love, respect*, and a particular form of *esteem* which I will call *cooperative valuing*. Before discussing these, let me first thematise a certain unthematised ambivalence that is present throughout Honneth's writings on recognition.

On the one hand, recognitive attitudes can be conceived of as 'purely interpersonal' in the sense of independent of social norms, principles or institutions: I love you or care for your well-being for your sake, no matter what the norms or conventions of our society say; I respect you for your capacity for judgment or your constitution as a rational being, independently or whether or not there are norms saying I should do so; and I esteem or feel grateful to you for what you have done for ends I personally value, regardless of whether or not it is a norm or principle in our society that one should generally appreciate people for their contributions. Such a purely intersubjective conception or recognition seems to be what Honneth mostly has in mind when he speaks of the intimate psychological significance of recognition for the recognisee, especially in the early interaction of the infant with its parents.[22]

Yet on the other hand, Honneth also talks of 'principles' or norms of recognition prevailing in a society and determining who should be recognised, under what conditions and how.[23] The thought here is that the legitimacy of a

21 See: Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995; Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. On analysing recognition in terms of attitudes, see: Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen, "Analysing Recognition: Identification, Acknowledgement, and Recognitive Attitudes Between Person", in Bert van den Brink and David Owen, *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. On conceiving recognition in terms of 'personifying' attitudes, see: Heikki Ikäheimo, "Making the Best of What We Are: Recognition as an Ethical and Ontological Concept", in Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch and Christopher F. Zurn (eds.), *The Philosophy of Recognition: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington books, 2010, pp. 343–367.

22 See especially: Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition, op. cit.*, Ch. 4.

23 See for example: Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, London: Verso, 2003, p. 157: "principles of recognition that are considered legitimate by the members of the society themselves".

society to a large extends depends on the extent that the norms or principles of recognition of a society are, as Honneth puts it, "considered legitimate by the members of the society themselves" and generally complied with.[24] On this line of thought, recognition is hence not a purely intersubjective response to the other person unmediated by norms and institutions, but on the contrary regulated by norms or principles of recognition that are institutionalised as the society's particular 'recognition order'.[25] Thought in this way, loving, respecting and having esteem thus become responsive *also* to institutionalised norms or principles—perhaps *causally* so that one is moved to recognition at least partly by the norms or principles of recognition that one acknowledges as valid, but in any case *normatively* responsive in that if one fails to appropriately recognise some people according to the principles, one is vulnerable to criticism in terms of them.

This however introduces a problem: the idea of regulating genuine attitudes of recognition by norms, rules or principles is namely arguably a contradiction in terms. On most accounts 'loving' someone *because one ought to* is not genuinely loving at all, and the same goes for respect and contributive valuing as attitudes of recognition.

It is not my intention to try to solve this problem here, but only to point out that there is a problem, and that these two lines of thought—the purely intersubjective and the institutionally mediated—involve two different general views on the constitutive significance of 'recognition' for sociality or social integration.[26] On the latter, *institutional* view the central issue is members of the society collectively accepting or acknowledging the norms of recognition of their society and living by them. On this picture, two different senses of 'recognition' are of importance. For social norms really to bind members and thus

24 *Ibid*., p. 135 ff.

25 *Ibid*.

26 In my view this problem has so far not been clearly enough addressed by Honneth himself, and this has led to some lack of clarity in his picture of what exactly recognition is and what exactly is its constitutive role. I also suspect that at least part of the reason why Honneth was led to introduce a more "foundational", purely intersubjective form of recognition between the infant and its mother or relevant other is that in writing this book he was in fact thinking of love, respect and esteem as bound by norms and hence not purely intersubjective and not foundational enough. One starting point for clarifying and perhaps solving the problem would be to distinguish between the "that" (i.e. 'act') and "what" (i.e. 'content') of recognition. For recognition to be genuine *that* one has it cannot be prescribed, but at least in the case of esteem *what* one esteems others for can be in various ways, if not prescribed, nevertheless affected or determined by social norms and value-patterns. See: Axel Honneth, *Reification, A New Look at an Old Idea*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

to exist as norms, the members must *respect* their authorisers—in this case *each other*—as having authority on one. Let us call this *recognition as respect for someone as having authority on one*. But secondly, social norms establish 'deontic statuses or roles' consisting of entitlements or rights and responsibilities or duties: according to the norm p A is entitled to such and such and B has a duty or obligation corresponding to this entitlement.[27] If there are norms regulating appropriate recognition, then there will be people in roles where they are entitled to a particular kind of recognition, and correspondingly people in roles where they have the responsibility or duty to have this kind of recognition for the first mentioned people.[28] On this picture something like 'recognition' is actually involved in three positions:

(1) A recognises or respects some relevant others as having authority on the norms of co-existence;
(2) A recognises* or respects* B as having a right to something prescribed by the norms comprising of the society's 'recognition order', namely to
(3) recognition of some kind.

Let me make two remarks on this. Firstly, the 'ground-level' recognition (1) or respect for others as having authority on one constitutive of the bindingness of social norms on the other hand, and (2) recognition* or respect* for others as bearers of rights prescribed by the norms on the other hand are two different phenomena (hence the asterisk in the latter case). Whereas the attitude of recognition as respect is purely intersubjective, or independent of social norms (norms being dependent on recognition in this sense), recognition* or respect* is an institutionally mediated phenomenon in that it is a response to something that is there by virtue of the norms. Secondly, recognition has a paradoxical status in (3), since on the other hand it is something to which B is entitled and A thus obligated, yet on the other hand, as I pointed out, genuine intersubjective recognition—loving, respecting or having esteem for someone on Honneth's model—out of obligation is a contradiction in terms.

Simply to bypass this unsolved tension in Honneth's work, in what follows I will abstract from the idea of 'recognition-orders' or in other words norms and institutions prescribing recognition, and focus on the intersubjective attitudes of recognition thought of as foundational of human sociality. Though these are independent of social norms in the sense that they cannot be *prescribed*, it is

27 I borrow the term from John Searle, *Making the Social World, op. cit.*

28 This is of course compatible with the same individual, or all individuals, having both entitlements or rights and responsibilities or duties to recognition.

still a fact that they are something people *expect* from each other. Important in this respect is Honneth's repeated emphasis that the expectations of recognition are 'moral' expectations. I will next shortly reconstruct the three Honnethian attitudes of recognition in a way that cashes out this fundamental idea. Central to this reconstruction is not only that attitudes of recognition between persons are 'purely intersubjective' in the sense explained above, but also the idea that attitudes of recognition are 'personifying' attitudes, or ways of seeing or taking the other *as a person*.

Above I contrasted institutionally mediated or regulated respect* with purely intersubjective respect, but as I have already noted, on the Honnethian scheme respect is only one of the three intersubjective attitudes of recognition alongside with love and esteem or cooperative valuing. Starting with love, as a purely intersubjective and 'personifying' form of recognition it is experiencing (and thereby being motivated to treating) a person and his or her life as intrinsically or irreducibly important and valuable. Saying the same thing in other words, loving is caring about the well-being or happiness of a person for her sake, or grasping and treating her as an end in herself.[29] 'Caring' about the well-being of others can of course often be for selfish reasons, as when one takes their well-being to have instrumental value for oneself, yet loving as an attitude of recognition is not an instrumentalising or reifying, but on the contrary a personifying and thus genuinely social way of caring. As Honneth emphasises, the paradigmatic context of love are close personal relations such as those within a family, or between friends or 'lovers'.[30] Yet it is essential to see the significance of love or intrinsic concern also in social relations more broadly: it is a component of almost any normal human encounter or interaction. A baker who really does not have even the slightest hint of intrinsic concern for his customer is an extreme case the kinds of which we rarely meet in real life in civilised circumstances.[31] Quite generally, if members of a community or society have very little or no intrinsic concern for each other's well-being (say, beyond the immediate sphere of family and friends), one can hardly call the community or society particularly strongly socially integrated. Furthermore, one party evidently having *merely* instrumental concern for another party's well-being is by default experienced as offensive by the latter, and such negative moral emotions are a

29 I am bypassing here a number of conceptual details. On these, see Heikki Ikäheimo, "Globalising Love: On the Nature and Scope of Love as a Form of Recognition", in *Res Publica*, Volume 18, Issue 1, pp. 11–24.

30 See: Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition, op. cit.*, pp. 95–107.

31 If the word 'love' sounds too romantic or brings to mind associations that are not helpful, one can simply replace it with 'intrinsic concern'. The phenomenon remains the same.

disintegrating force in the relationship. Though instrumental concern for well-being is better than no concern at all, and though it can unify individual goals in ways necessary or useful for cooperation, instrumental concern does not fully unite persons with each other *as persons*, which is what intrinsic concern does. It unites and integrates them only externally as it were.

Respect as a purely intersubjective form of recognition is experiencing (and thereby being motivated to treating) a person as a rational being capable of self-determination (or at least as one having potentials for developing such capacities), and thus as someone commanding authority on the norms or terms of interaction with her. It is taking her as a co-authority on the justification of activities that concern her, or in other words as a subject whose views and judgements cannot be ignored in actions and measures in which she participates, or which affect her.[32] Treating a person capable of self-determination exclusively as a passive object of policy- or other measures, or ignoring her perspective on decisions that affect her, is a disrespectful and on this dimension reifying or non-personifying way of treating her. It is also 'anti-social' in that it triggers by default feelings of humiliation in the object-person, and this works as a disintegrating force within the relationship. Respect as a form of recognition is the defining virtue and central force of integration of a democratic form of social life. 'Democracy' does not here refer merely to state-level structures or procedures of political representation, but to all forms of human action and interaction that involve or influence more than one person.

It is important to note that though respect in this intersubjective sense does have a powerful presence in Honneth's writings, it is not clearly distinguished in them from what I called above respect* for someone as a bearer of rights.[33] Importantly, respecting* someone as a bearer of rights is perfectly compatible with having little or no respect for that person as autonomous in the sense of having authority on matters that concern her, including her rights. Individuals who merely respect* each other as bearers of rights, yet have little or no respect for each other as authorities on the norms or terms of their interaction do not take each other *fully as persons*. They relate to each other in a certain sense externally, and therefore do not form a collective or community that is genuinely socially integrated.

Esteem or *cooperative valuing* in the purely intersubjective sense is experiencing (and thereby being motivated to treating) a person as a partner in

32 I am drawing here also on Rainer Forst. See: Rainer Forst, "The basic Right to Justification: Toward a Constructivist Conception of Human Rights", in *Constellations*, Volume 6, No. 1, 1999, pp. 35–60.

33 See: Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition, op. cit.*, pp. 107–121.

cooperative efforts, as someone who contributes to some shared ends or is at least in principle capable and appropriately motivated to doing so. It is important to distinguish cooperative valuing from *instrumental* valuing. This distinction is not always completely clear in Honneth's writings, yet it is necessary to make if one wants to understand esteem or cooperative valuing as a *moral* attitude and expectations of it as *moral* expectations as Honneth does. An author can value his computer, a slave-owner his slave and a profit-seeking investor the labour-force of a company as useful instruments for his own purposes. But a computer is not for the author, a slave for the slave-owner, or a third world labour-force working in terrible conditions for the investor, a valued partner in cooperation. These relations are not personifying and thereby moral relations; hence they are also not genuinely social relations in the sense that I am after. The litmus-test of personifying, and thus moral and genuinely social cooperative valuing is *gratitude*. If Jack is grateful for Jill for her achievements, he does not value her (at least merely) instrumentally, but 'cooperatively'. Jack's cooperative valuing of Jill is thus a case of recognition, or in other words a case of valuing Jill *as a person* and not as an instrument or a thing.[34] Cooperative valuing or the gratitude that goes with it clearly integrates individuals socially in a stronger sense than mere instrumental valuing does. The latter, like merely instrumental concern for well-being, tends to be experienced as degrading by its object. However much they may be crowded out by other phenomena in the various contexts of social life (such as in the realm of paid labour), such experiences or feelings are a corrosive and thus anti-social force in social relations.

Honneth's guiding idea, one which I take to be sound and very fruitful, has been that the attitudes of recognition—love, respect and cooperative valuing—are a centrally important phenomenon for the constitution of the social world in two closely interrelated ways. On the one hand they are, as said, an essential element in what integrates societies or unites and socialises individuals so that they form a society or a collective in the first place. On the other hand, they are a more or less necessary condition for the development and maintenance of a healthy or harmonious self-identity. We develop into persons only in communities based on recognitive attitudes and relations, and such communities can only exist if the self-identities or personalities of their members are constituted in ways that make them possible.

On my account, the central thought in Honneth that recognition is a *moral* response to the other, and that expectations of recognition are therefore moral expectations, can be best cashed out by the idea that they are ways of taking

34 On gratitude and cooperative valuing, see Ikäheimo and Laitinen, "Esteem for Contributions to the Common Good", *op. cit.*

or seeing the other *as a person*—and this means *as* someone whose well-being has intrinsic importance, *as* someone who shares authority with one on the rules or norms of shared life, and/or *as* someone who has (or at least could have) something positive and gratitude-worthy to contribute to something one values. Being regarded in these "personifying" ways by others is essential for one's capacity to relate to oneself in these ways and thus to *be* a psychologically integrated and flourishing person. As we know, it is especially hard for a child or adolescent to learn to love, respect or value herself without having experienced others having such attitudes towards one. But even in the life of adults experiencing a lack of love, respect or cooperative valuing in the ways in which others treat one can easily generate cynicism, powerless apathy, or destructive hate. Anti-social or in other words reifying or instrumentalising treatment has a strong tendency to cumulate and lead to social disintegration.

4 Social Work as Labour of Love, Respect and Cooperative Valuing

Let us now return to the field of social work. In the *Dictionary of Social Work* (*Sosiaalityön sanasto*) cited above social work is defined as "professional activity whose aim is the well-being of individuals and collectives and the prevention, diminishing and elimination of social problems".[35] I find the definition useful as long as it is understood correctly. As health services can be understood consisting not only of prevention, diminishing and elimination of illness or of 'health problems', but also of *promotion of health*, also social work can be understood as consisting, not only of prevention, diminishing and elimination of 'social problems', but also of *promotion of sociality*.

One could indeed understand the promotion of conditions in which attitudes and relations of mutual love or intrinsic concern, respect and cooperative valuing can flourish, in which individuals have opportunities to experience

35 To be exact, this is the first definition of 'social work'. The second definition refers to 'social work' as an academic discipline. According to it social work is "a branch of science that studies social problems, develops social work, and that is utilised in the education of social workers". The dictionary also refers to the definition of social work by IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers): "The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work."

themselves as objects of love, respect and valuing, and in which they have psychological resources to have such attitudes towards others, as social work's central task. Thought so, social work is aimed, on the one hand, at promoting sociality, and, on the other hand, at preventing or diminishing social problems in the sense of lack of genuine sociality. Attitudes of recognition between persons that are the cornerstone of genuine sociality of course cannot be legislated (not merely because this would be undesirable but because it is a contradiction in terms), but they can certainly be facilitated.

What could this mean more concretely?[36] Something like the following: In the dimension of love or intrinsic concern social work is about protecting and promoting conditions in which individuals have opportunities to experience being loved and are likely to have resources for loving others, and thereby can experience their lives as meaningful and fulfilling. In this dimension the obvious field of social work are families, relations between adults and children and close personal relations between adults. What is at issue is fostering environments and resources that individuals need for building and up-keeping loving or caring relations in their lives. In the dimension of respect social work is about protecting and promoting social structures and conditions that are favourable for relations of mutual respect. By this I mean democratic structures and a democratic culture by virtue of which citizens, city dwellers, community members and service users can be, and can experience that they are, collectively in full control or their lives. In the dimension of cooperative valuing social work is about protecting and promoting conditions that have to be at place so that individuals can realise themselves in socially meaningful ways that can earn them each other's appreciation or gratitude, and so that they can psychically *afford* to appreciate each other in these ways.[37] What is at issue is the advancement and pluralisation of forms of collective action and promotion of resources for participating in them.

36 See also: Stan Houston, "Beyond Homo Economicus: Recognition, Self-Realisation, and Social Work", in *British Journal of Social Work*, 2010, 40, pp. 841–857.

37 Since the nineties, commercial television channels in Finland have pursued an intensive program of anti-sociality-education in the form of various survival- and zero-sum-game TV-formats, in which instrumental, manipulative and in this sense anti-social treatment of others is encouraged and awarded. When contexts of collective action are conceived of or construed as zero-sum-games, feeling grateful to others comes at great cost since it implies that one is dependent on them, and thus perhaps a 'loser'.

5 Social Innovations, What are They?

What are social innovations? I propose the following definition:

> A social innovation is an innovation that promotes genuine sociality, or a culture, atmosphere and structures favourable for genuine sociality.

The demand for social innovations is as boundless as the fabric of social life itself. I will mention here only two examples of areas in which there is clearly an acute need for social innovations in the Finnish society especially.

First of all, exclusion from participation in meaningful cooperative activities is a serious social problem. An experience of not being able to find a place in the society as a person who is seen as having something positive to contribute to shared meaningful goals, or not having opportunities to show that one could do something useful, can be devastating. An element of this problem is the fact that collectively or socially valuable activities are too easily identified with wage labour, and activities taking place outside of it are too often underrated as mere hobbies or past-time. The problem seems especially pressing in Finland, partly for cultural reasons, partly for reasons to do with the structure of the labour market. Until very recently, Finland was practically a monocultural country where there was very little imaginative space for ways of being a respectable person beyond the fairly monolithic cultural norm which especially for men centrally prescribed participating in wage labour. The strongly regulated and very highly professionalised nature of the labour-market on its part tended to aggravate the difficulties of those excluded from the labour-market to find their way into the system—a situation familiar not only for people who after participating in wage-labour had become unemployed, but also for immigrants who both due to cultural prejudices and formal incompatibility of professional qualifications were simply against a wall in the Finnish labour-market. Increasing immigration and overall pluralisation of the Finnish cultural horizon, as well as deregulation of the labour market—the latter of course hardly an unproblematic phenomenon in other respects—is inevitably changing the situation, yet problems remain.

In short: Finnish notions of socially useful and meaningful activities still tend to be relatively narrow. This is an especially difficult problem for the long-term unemployed, pensioners, or people with disabilities, who have capacities and motivation to do something meaningful and worthy of appreciation by others, but who are excluded from the labour-market and thereby from generally acknowledged contexts of cooperative activity altogether. To change this situation, a thorough revision is first needed in views on what constitutes

a socially meaningful and useful activity worthy of appreciation or valuing by others.[38] Any innovations that help addressing this problem are social innovations.

Secondly, mere 'toleration' of difference is not enough in multicultural societies (which is what even Finland is slowly transforming into). Mere toleration is in fact *demeaning* to its objects, since it involves a negative value judgment: what is tolerated is not desirable or wanted, but something that has to be tolerated since it cannot be expelled or eliminated.[39] As long as relations between ethnic, religious or cultural groups are imbued with mere toleration but with little or no respect showing in everyday interaction and communication, these relations are in fact inflamed—even if the inflammation maybe buried deep underneath, only occasionally showing up in symptoms. Without a sufficient degree of mutual respect it is unrealistic to expect that cultural groups can co-exist in harmony, not to mention integrate with each other in mutually enriching ways. In the long run, sooner or later, bitterness, fear, hate and violence are likely to set in. Any innovations that help in eradicating cultural narrow-mindedness and xenophobia, and in promoting genuine communication and exchange of views between cultural groups are social innovations par excellence.[40]

Needless to say, what we are talking about are broad societal issues that cannot be addressed by the means and resources of social work alone. Nevertheless, social work can function—if this is what we decide—as an institutional hub for the promotion of sociality, elimination of social problems, and development of social innovations. What this requires is intensive and unprejudiced

38 A simple definition of meaningful work could be: activity in which one realises oneself freely, contributing positively to aims valued by others and oneself. Needless to say, wage labour does not often live up to the definition.

39 If this sounds counter-intuitive, it helps to ask whether it would make sense to demand toleration for something that is generally considered as valuable or good. Goethe wrote: "Tolerance should be a temporary attitude only: it must lead to recognition. To tolerate means to insult". See: Johann Wolfgang Goethe, "Maximen und Reflexionen", in *Werke 6*, Frankfurt am Main Insel, 1981, p. 507. For more on this theme, see: Rainer Forst "'To Tolerate Means to Insult': Toleration, Recognition, and Emancipation", in Bert van den Brink and David Owen (eds.), *Recognition and Power, op. cit.*, pp. 214–236.

40 Kati Turtiainen focuses on both problem-areas and provides more concrete conceptual tools for addressing them in the practice of social work in Kati Turtiainen, *Possibilities of Trust and Recognition Between Refugees and Authorities*, Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research 451, University of Jyväskylä Publishing House, 2012.

cooperation of social work with all the relevant societal actors, as well as with multidisciplinary academic research.[41]

6 Conclusion

As the dream of forever growing material affluence in the European countries seems to be fading, a major rethinking and reimagining of the foundations of future European societies, and a serious attention at the broadly speaking moral foundations of social life and flourishing human existence is called for. As to social work as a branch of public services, the fact that there may be a diminishing pool of funding available in the future only increases the need to reflect on what the task-description of social work should be, and what, all things considered, is the wisest way to use the available resources. My suggestion is that something like the holistic approach sketched in this chapter, focused on strengthening genuine sociality and thereby promoting both social integration and psychological well-being, is likely to be the best way forward.

41 Petteri Niemi and Tuija Kotiranta have in recent years done pioneering work at University of Jyväskylä in establishing links of cooperation between social philosophy and the theory and practice of social work.