Perceiving the Other

Case Studies and Theories of Respectful Action

Edited by Trygve Wyller
and Hans-Günter Heimbrock

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Trygve Wyller / Hans-Günter Heimbrock (ed.)

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In cooperation with
Kaia D. Schultz

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Preface

The relational encounter with others is one basic characteristic of professional practice. The persons met by professionals are those who are perceived as receivers of care and mercy. Religious institutions, their communities and Christian social organisations have this kind of merciful action as their competence. Today this kind of practice is extensively becoming the responsibility of other professionals.

This situation increasingly demands for more institutions to educate these professionals. This is true both in the field of health care and in social work. Such a need is seen in the public as well as in the private domains of these professions. In the wake of the Bologna process, this led to the introduction of new study programs in higher education notably in ethics of profession. These programs are linked to subjects and fields such as theology, social pedagogy and nursing sciences.

This book addresses the relevant professions mentioned. The aim is to perceive the other as other and not only as an object for help and care. We try to achieve this by developing new ways of perceiving people. This is an approach based on concrete case studies and which might lead to ethically sound and realistic practices.

For many years there has been a growing awareness of otherness. How can we really pay respect to the other and to their differences? How to avoid approaching everyone as if they were copies of myself? These questions are central in current continental philosophy, in anthropology, sociology, theology, just to mention some of the many disciplines currently occupied with the thematic.

The paradox, however, is that the crucial challenge coming from the demand from the other very often remains very abstract. While it is obviously necessary to develop and to deepen the theoretical question of otherness, we need still more research on the practice of otherness, on actually perceiving the other in the concrete. The present book focuses this part of the challenging problematic. The concrete goal is to give a relevant contribution to the field, for study programs and professional training of many types, in social work, nursing, pastoral counselling and teaching. These, and similar professions, are constantly challenged by the ethics of otherness. Professionals need to increase their relevant theoretical competence in the field. But this is not enough. They also need to understand the insights coming from prac-

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tice itself. And finally they need to combine the theoretical and the practical insights.

Teaching books in the fields already cover the issue of otherness and difference. But we think there is a lack of literature, which not only presents the problem, but also applies the insights into relevant and concrete research. The challenge in research is not really to state that one needs to take notice of the difference of the other, but how one really handles the challenge when it comes to research. Therefore we have divided the book into three chapters.

* *Chapter 1* presents and introduces the importance of the issue with regards to both research and professional action, and then takes the reader into some of the methodological reflections, how to do empirical work regarding the topic of otherness? This is an urgent issue, especially for the fields of professions we deal with. By doing this we present two ways of approaching and interpreting otherness by taking some basic insights from contemporary phenomenology into consideration.

* *Chapter 2* presents five case studies and three ”dimensions”. The authors have either recently defended their doctoral dissertation or are about to publish a larger study about their particular topic in the near future. There are differences between the studies, but what they have in common is the ambition of interpreting practice with phenomenology rooted in the same practice. Each of the five authors combines different kinds of empirical approaches with phenomenological reflections. In all cases the aim is to show how it is possible to reach at a more convincing perceiving of the other when taking the basics of interrelatedness and connectedness into consideration.

In addition to the five case studies, this chapter also presents three basic phenomena that are important for anyone who perceives an other. The phenomena Language, Body and Space need to be elaborated further in order to understand how complex the so-called everyday lifeworld really is.

* *Chapter 3* sums it all up, pointing to some impacts following from approaches like the ones presented. Aiming at perceiving the other from these new empirical perspectives has impact for how to do ethics in the field of professional work for the disadvantaged. One important point in this connection is the relevance of researchers (and professionals) own experience in developing the ethical position. Therefore we do not look at this book as a teaching book presenting models, which the students and the general reader should more or less copy. We aim at introducing the readers to modes of research and reflection, but without involving oneself in the

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phenomena of everyday life, one never reaches to the centre of the methodological thinking fundamental for all the authors in this book.

Not only due to the fact that some of the authors are Protestant theologians, but also due to the important role of religiosity and religion in some of the cases presented as well as in public debate, this book closes with reflections on the relations between phenomenology, practice and theology.

There is still more work and reflection needed to proceed to an even more well-founded methodology for the study of a practical perceiving of the other. But we do hope that this book can contribute with some insights and give some inspirations for advanced students on a master level in different countries.

The present book is in itself a result of ongoing research within two research groups, one in Frankfurt, Germany and one in Oslo, Norway. Both groups were engaged in cooperative work during the last three years. They had extended workshops on a regularly basis, both in Oslo and in Frankfurt. And this was a particular, though most fruitful way of "perceiving the other".

Being the senior professors in each of the groups and those responsible for this bi-national project, the editors wish to thank all participants in both groups for inspiring and demanding work. The head of the Norwegian group, Trygve Wyller, takes the final responsibility for this English edition of the book, which is also being published in German.

Thanks to contributions from the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) and the NFR (Norges Forskningsråd) and their common program for research cooperation between Germany and Norway, to make this project possible.

Next to these institutions we express our gratitude to other sponsors, among them especially to the Georg und Franziska Speyersche Hochschulstiftung Frankfurt am Main.

It is also urgent to thank the Publisher Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Editor Jörg Persch and editorial assistant Tina Grummel for their interest in this project and the willingness to produce both an English and a German edition of the book. The English proof reading was done by Professor John Ries at Carrol College (Montana, USA), who has done an extensive and tremendous job with the manuscript. In the last phase of the work we also received very good assistance from Andrew Thomas at the Faculty of Theology (Oslo). We are most thankful to both, especially for doing their work under considerable pressure of time.

Without the major contributions from Kaia Dorothea Schultz (Oslo) and Peter Meyer (Frankfurt) no books would have been produced at all. Thanks to their seriousness in taking responsibility for all big and not so big ques-

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tions regarding a book production, from substantial matters to the demands from the data technology.

Oslo/Frankfurt, 2010

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1 A Demanding Practice

1.1 Ethics and Phenomenology in the Context of Professional Practices and Theory (Trygve Wyller)

1.1.1 A Calling from the Connectedness

Professionals connect to people, this is their job. Whatever profession one belongs to, in most cases there are other people in your context, whether one is a nurse, social worker, teacher, minister, just to mention some professions. These others have different names. Sometimes they are called clients, sometimes patients, pupils or consumers. Different professionals call their fellow-citizens different things, obviously depending on the kind of profession to which they belong. But apart from the differences of these names, there is still much in common between groups of professionals.

Nurses, social workers, teachers and ministers have different kinds of education and their professions aim at very different things. They nevertheless share the connection to people. This is a book about some obvious ethical challenges that emerge from these kinds of intersubjectivity. We are well aware that the different professions act according to some explicit and many implicit rules and codes. For example, a social worker aims at fulfilling needs in the context of different social security systems, while a nurse has to perform the professional skills given in the competence and tradition of modern nursing science, just to mention two relevant professions. Still, both the social worker and the nurse meet living persons in their particular professions. The normative importance of the specific encounters and their specific contexts is in the crux of this book.

For students or ordinary readers beginning their studies in the ethics of professional work, reflections like those above may seem rather trivial. Nothing seems to be more obvious than the professional connecting to other persons in his/her job. The point is, however, that relating to connectedness has not been the most common approach in professional ethics. The most frequent ethical arguments have been found elsewhere, and not in the experience of being interrelated with others. The most frequent arguments have been related to the necessity of having *valid principles, norms and values*.

As a result, the more traditional professional ethics in our fields have been discussions on how the professional should apply important central

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principles to the practical challenges in their professional everyday life. In other words, in most of the professional ethics valid until a decade ago, the crucial perspective of connectedness has been overlooked.

Recently, however, there has been a paradigm shift taking place in global ethics, a shift that also has its impact in professional ethics. A key issue in this alternative way of doing ethics is to give increased significance to the ethical demands arising from our encounters with others and their contexts.

From one point of view, it could be said that the development we are pointing at is a development that earlier generations have already undertaken. Until the end of the 19th century, religious motivations dominated all kinds of ethical discourse among caregivers and volunteers. They were, with few exceptions, filled with a motivation given them from God who had called them to serve the poor and the needy. During the 20th century these kinds of religious motivations gradually faded among professionals and were replaced by more secular implicit and/or explicit codes of conduct. Traditions coming from the human rights movements substituted religious motives. The intention was to treat everyone on the same level, independent of religious convictions among the personnel. At the same time, there was the rise of the different models of welfare or strong social states in Europe (Esping-Andersen: 1990). Professionals in the welfare state were supposed to be neutral and living up to non-discriminating standards for the good of the equality ambition of the new caring professions in the welfare state.

The intention to give all clients and patients equal and fair treatment is obviously to be supported by everyone. The way to achieve this goal, however, is not so unanimous anymore. A shift of perspective has been going on, and this shift concerns what we here call the sources of normativity. Once the source of normativity came from God; then for many generations it has come from universally formulated human rights. Today the focus is returning to human connectedness; it is no longer explicitly connected to God, but to the demand coming from, the patient, the client, the poor, or in contemporary terminology: the ethical demand comes from the other (Løgstrup: 1997; Lévinas: 1969). The intent of this book is to contribute to this discussion, both theoretically and practically.

1.1.2 Current Ethical "Schools"

In her book *Ethics and Values in Social Work,* Sarah Banks (2006) presents a useful "map" of the different ethical "schools" relevant for the discussion of the normativity in her field. The most well-known are important "schools" belonging to the tradition Banks calls the "principle-based approaches". Some details relevant for these approaches will be presented

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below. But in the introductory paragraphs the name "principle-based" is more than enough. The paradigm shift is the shift in ethics from grounding the ethical demand in principles to the new tendency to discover the demand in the encounter with the other and in the context. Even if the field addressed by Banks is social work, this book is representative of many others in most of the discussions in the respective fields, from nursing, to teaching and ministry.

Two schools dominate the principle-based approach according to Sarah Banks. The first principle-based approach is the Kantian tradition. Here one presupposes that the principle of autonomy is decisive. One should act towards the client/patient in such a way that his or her autonomy is not reduced or belittled. One must respect the client/patient as a person, in his or her individuality and his or her will. The principle of autonomy has played a decisive role in the development of Western European ethical traditions and was also decisive in developing the first professional codes of ethics in the 1960s and 1970s. In this way, the principle of acting according to a rule has been one of the strongest traditions in modern ethics. For Kant himself, one had to follow a rule if the rule could be developed and used on a universal basis. As such, universality has become one of the most decisive traits in this tradition. The importance of universality for professional ethics is seen as one important guarantee for justice. One rule used in the same way in two different cases and two different contexts gives a guarantee that justice takes place, because the clients in each of the cases have been treated similarly. In this tradition one therefore usually claims an action to be good when it is performed according to a universal rule.

The importance of acting according to rules in professional ethics comes from this tradition and we content that this tradition is stronger and more influential even today than one often thinks. The frequent and rather populist discussions of ethics in media and among professionals often tend to be discussions of rules to be followed. Another aspect of the ethics of rules is the tendency to not distinguish between ethics and law. Law, in a simple way, often argues by reference to relevant juridical formulations and interpretations. Professionals are characterised by performing their skills according to officially accepted standards of procedure and regulations. A very simple way of arguing that an action is ethically acceptable is to argue that the action takes place according to established standards. Since the standards are normally established to do as much justice as possible, an action according to the standards is often argued to be the most ethical.

Another way of arguing principle-based ethics is the so-called teleological tradition. In a one-sided formulation, one could say that this is the opposite of the argument according to ethical rules and standards. *Telos* is Greek

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for goal and the teleological tradition pays more attention to the goal of the action than the rule or standard developed to achieve it. It is obvious for everyone that the tension between the ethical according to the rules and the ethical according to the goals of the action, has dominated much of the international discussion in this field for many years. This is not least true in professional ethics. Professionals need to be very concerned about the goals of their action. This is only natural, since the intention behind professionalism is to achieve certain goals, on behalf of society, on behalf of a larger community etc.

One trivial part of a nurse's program every morning is, for example, to see that each patient gets the correct medicine. If he/she makes mistakes in this part of the professional job, he/she could be blamed for not doing his/her job professionally. In addition, he/she could be criticised for not achieving the overall goal, the healing of the patient. A social worker, to use one other trivial example, is often busy trying to motivate and simplify the client's return into a job or a permanent position. The return into the job-market is the overall and dominating goal often prescribed by political agendas in society. The social worker will therefore traditionally be more led by teleological actions and tend to look at such actions as the more ethical.

Both in practical life and in theoretical discussions the two models – the argument according to universality and rules and the argument according to the achieving of goals – tend to mix. An argument only developed according to the rule or an argument only looking at the achieved goal is rare. Most common is the mixing of the two traditions. To achieve a certain goal one also has to follow a certain standard of procedure and to argue that an ethical rule is followed one normally also has to be convinced that the specific procedure really leads to some desirable goal.

In recent years, however, these two main ethical traditions have met different kinds of critique. While there are different backgrounds for this critique, most of the tendencies go in the same direction. The principle-based approach itself is the problem. The new approach is not uninterested in principles, but is looking for the source of the ethical demand elsewhere, not in one or another principle, even if it is a principle giving preference to a highly esteemed ethical principle.

The new approach first of all emphasises the impact of connectedness in professional work. The professional connects to people and it is precisely in the relating that the ethical source and demand is to be found. Secondly, it emphasises the other in the relation. When a principle is the norm, attention to the particular other might be lost. And thirdly, a principle-based argument might lead to a reduced focus on the character and virtue in the professional him/herself.

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The contributions in the following pages focus mostly on the first two aspects of the new paradigm, the connectedness and the particular other. The third point, the character and virtue of the professional, is also important and belongs to the significant rise of the Aristotelian tradition in late modern ethics. In his *Nichomachean Ethics* the Greek philosopher Aristotle (Aristotle: 1985) initiated the classical interest for virtues and morality as the formation of character. This tradition was strong in Western societies until the Enlightenment period in the 18th Century. With the influence of Kant and the modern philosophers, interest in virtue and character lost position. Today, however, the focus once again turns to virtues. The Aristotelian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and his book *After Virtue* reintroduced Aristotelian thinking in modern ethics (MacIntyre: 1981). A parallel contribution has come from the philosopher Charles Taylor (Taylor: 1991). Both Taylor and MacIntyre stress that the moral subject develops in an interaction with his/her context and that the virtues matured in this development are decisive for the ethical content of a specific action. This so-called communitarian tradition is a decisive part of the new paradigm-shift. We comment further on this tradition in the third chapter of this book.

1.1.3 The Influence of Phenomenology

Our focus in the following will therefore first of all be further reflections and analysis of what it means to look for the ethical source in connectedness and in the role of the particular other. The important tradition behind both these perspectives is phenomenology. The founding father of modern phenomenology was the German thinker Edmund Husserl. Husserl developed theories on what it meant that a thing never really existed "outside" the human mind or consciousness.

A phenomenon, a thing, is something that exists already in my consciousness about it. Therefore, when it comes to humans, it is wrong that one human would be an object for another human being. Two human beings can only describe each other through the impact they have upon each other. Husserl called this intentionality, i.e. another being or another thing exists for me only as something I have consciousness of. The other human or the other thing cannot be presented as a distinct object because the other human and the other thing is already part of my own subjectivity. There are phenomena given in our lifeworld and the aim of phenomenology is to analyse and interpret them.

In the first part of the 20th century, the Austrian Alfred Schütz (Schütz: 1972) developed Husserl's theory further as a fundament for social science. Schütz called attention to the basic insight that one could not describe an

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object or another human in a social context without describing the object or the human as part of the same context. In this way Schütz has had a significant influence on modern social science. The most famous among them is Jürgen Habermas, who has acknowledged Schütz as one important contributor to his theory of communicative action. Habermas himself thought that phenomenology lacked focus on the social. But he could not have developed his theory on communicative action without this basic phenomenological insight from Alfred Schütz.

Another important thinker from the second part of the 20th century is the philosopher and theologian K. E. Løgstrup. In his book *The Ethical Demand* (Løgstrup: 1989), Løgstrup went one step further than Husserl and Schütz. Based in the same fundamental phenomenological position that we belong to the same lifeworld, and that this lifeworld is given prior to any kind of subjectivity, Løgstrup explicitly points to the ethical significance of phenomenology. Since we are connected in a common lifeworld, we owe each other to care for each other in the interdependency to which we all belong. This is a position that has led the ethicist and theologian Svein Aage Christoffersen to present Løgstrup as a key critique of modern rationality (Christoffersen: 1999).

Filtered through several significant thinkers of the 20th century, among them Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jürgen Habermas, phenomenology has started to have an influential role in the shaping of general ethics as well as ethics for professional work. Dealing with particular others and having connectedness as a decisive part of their work, we contend that questions of normativity and quality in professional work ought to be developed according to these phenomenological insights. One aim of phenomenology is to investigate what it means that we live together connected and what kind of approach to others that this implies. The studies presented in this book's second chapter concern specific examples on different ways phenomenology can be used in order to open discussion on human dignity and responsibility in the field of professionalism.

The other side of professional work, however, is that it is not only dominated by connectedness in general, but also by people being connected under rather complicated and socially demanding circumstances. Some professionals (esp. social workers) relate explicitly to persons living as marginalised in society, some (nurses) care for the seriously ill and dying. Others (ministers and teachers) deal with everyone, but they often meet everyone in circumstances that might be experienced as humiliating and/or offensive. As a result, specific attention to what it means to connect to persons living in these kinds of challenging contexts also needs to be addressed in a book like ours. It is important to take the analysis of phenomenology further into professional work in order to discover if and how such

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connectedness to others could be a source of inspiration for the development of dignity and respect.

This all means that the new shift in professional ethics urges a combination of phenomenology and empirical research. This is the core perspective of the present book. The connectedness of phenomenology has in many ways had an important and lasting impact on contemporary ethics and culture. But the use of this approach in the field of practices and professionals has been much more complicated and hesitant. There have, of course, been valuable and important efforts, but we still need to develop this further. The combination of empirical studies and phenomenological interpretations is a complicated one. One reason is that phenomenology opens new discussion on what an empirically based study really is. The early phenomenological theory was based on a critique of traditional methods in empirical research. If intentionality and connectedness were the basic perspectives, given before anything was perceived, what would this mean for an empirical study? The present book tries to take this discussion a little further, presenting different approaches to what a phenomenologically based study would be. The crucial question for us is how one should collect and interpret the empirical level when phenomenology is the starting point. What is obvious is that the traditional "objective" gathering of material is not valid. The question is rather, how to proceed when traditional methods are under severe critique?

1.1.4 Michel Foucault and the Heterotopic

We must, however, discover and recognise that in the field of professional work, it is often exactly the connectedness, which gave the French philosopher Michel Foucault the material for his very influential critique of what he called disciplinary procedures. In current discussions Foucault is globally well-known for his studies of the history of "madness" (Foucault: 2001), of medicine and the history of prison. These studies present a broad historical material, mostly from the European Catholic (France) and Reformed (England, Holland, Switzerland etc) countries. Foucault's aim was to discuss and discover all the tendencies to disciplinary processes that had been taking place in these traditions. A short version of his position would be that most of the caring institutions and professions, that where established to give a better life for clients, users, pupils, fellow-citizens, etc., in reality had the opposite function. The institutions and their workers rather serve to "discipline" the clients, the users, the prisoners, the pupils – i.e. the others – into behaviours and practices that reformed them into "us". Foucault's critique is that the others in institutions and caring-giving practices

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were not really "helped", but were rather disciplined into life forms that "we" appreciated and wanted to be realised.

This is why the whole effort of "helping" others comes under heavy critique from Foucault's perspective. And so does the helping professions that followed the philanthropy of the centuries before (Villadsen: 2004). As such, Foucault's position makes one part of the post-modern paradigm. One no longer trusts all the good intentions of modernity; there are traditions that proclaim to take care of the others, but upon examination, their caring proclamation seems more like a wish to make the others like us. Instead of really helping and therein respecting the lifeworld of others, the focus has been too much on how to "normalise" the poor and the needy. Integration into the lifeworld of the broader society is often the result of the helping professions in the social or welfare state. As such, we must say, with Foucault and Lévinas, the approach has tended to stimulate "sameness" more than "otherness".

We think that this is a position that needs to be taken seriously in a book about otherness and normativity in professional actions. It is implicit in most of the case studies in the following chapter. When they develop practices and theoretical reflections it is intentionally to avoid such disciplinary tendencies. We think that one reason for developing these tendencies too fast happens when what phenomenology calls lifeworld is forgotten and left aside. The lifeworld is the everyday life and the obvious, which is present prior to any conscious decision or prior to any method. Instead of only thinking of the lifeworld as something empty and trivial, phenomenology approaches lifeworld with an opposing approach. Lifeworlds might well be sources of normativity, not empty containers that we are supposed to inscribe normativity into.

The discussion following the publication of Foucault's short, but very influential paper *Different Spaces* (Foucault: 2000) is, in our view, one specific effort to discover important sources for the normative in professional work. In this article Foucault introduces the term *heterotopia* (the other ("hetero") place ("topos")). By this Foucault introduced the concept of space and place an important analytical concept to understand modernity. Discussing heterotopia opens for an analysis of the places we live in and how they contribute to the way we interpret our neighbours and ourselves.

Foucault himself indicated that important heterotopic places were museums, asylums, boarding schools, monasteries etc. These were the places where society in a way was put into perspective, looked at from a different angle, so to speak. The heterotopic spaces could be critical or ironic or have other characteristics, but in one sense they were all identical: They all shed some specific, often critical light on "normality", the "homo"-topic society.

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In the international discussions following the publication of Foucault's article, the most intense discussions have taken place within social geography and the theory of architecture. The constructors and researchers of concrete places and buildings have obviously felt the most direct inspiration. But in recent years, there has also been growing interest in other disciplines. Theology, religious studies, sociology and ethics are among these, as can be seen in this book. The reason for this seems to be a growing interest for looking at the heterotopic as one important source for normativity. The lifeworld of the heterotopic contains important experiences, has specific places, and they are all significant for the discovery of normatively important experiences and structures. The authors in this book therefore often discuss the normativity of a certain practice with reference to the heterotopic.

1.1.5 Power, Society and the Professionalism of Calling

Above we have commented on some of the mainstream discussions on professional ethics by referring to Banks 2006. Banks has given a good overview to the most significant tendencies in current discussions in the field. We have already mentioned the distinction between ethics based on principle (rule-based and utilitarian) and ethics based on character and relationship. But she also presents the reader with topics like "Professionalism and Codes of Ethics", "Service Users' Rights: Clienthood, Citizenship and Consumerism", and "Social Workers' Responsibilities: Policies, Procedures and Managerialism". The present book does not explicitly examine all these issues, but has instead chosen to pursue the ethical significance of the phenomenological perspective.

We think there is a need for more concrete studies to discover and extensively discuss the significance of phenomenology for professional ethics. While there have been efforts by van Manen (van Manen: 1997) and others to introduce phenomenology in the study of teachers, we still think that there needs to be more and deeper elaboration on how phenomenology can be a way to discover what is demanded and what are the sources of professional ethics. This does not mean that we are uninterested in the other issues commented on by Banks; on the contrary, citizenship, social workers' responsibility and codes of ethics are definitely central issues in professional ethics. They belong to the social context and the social impact of the standards and procedures of professional work. It is obviously not possible to discuss professional ethics as a whole, without connecting to issues like these. Perceiving the other is also needed in order to recognise the other a citizen. Many clients do not have the experience of a real citizenship even if

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