

A TRANSFORMING ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CLIENT IN SOCIAL WORK: THE PRAXIS OF THE ANTIOCH SCHOOL OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND THEOLOGY

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Abstract

This article is an analysis of the historical roots and ethical semantics of the social work concept ‘a marginal person, a client’ (the Greek words ξένος, *kseinos* and ἄστος, *astos*). The question is relevant in modern social work in relation to the concept of ‘strange’ or ‘marginal’. The article analyses how the concepts ‘strange’, ‘other’ and ‘marginal’ have re-entered the modern world from the Ancient world, as they were used in Ancient Syria (in the fourth century), Greece, and Medieval Europe. However, nowadays in social work theory they should be described anew using the discourses of social work and anthropology. The article explores the question of how to communicate with the ‘other’ or marginal person, based on reciprocity and internal solidarity.

KEY WORDS: social work client, history of social work, marginal person, human anthropology.

Anotacija

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamos socialinio darbo sąvokos *ribinis asmuo – klientas* (gr. ξένος, *kseinos* ir ἄστος, *astos*) istorinės šaknys ir etinė semantika. Klausimas aktualus šiuolaikiniame socialiniame darbe, susijęs su *keisto* ar *marginalaus* sąvokomis. Straipsnyje analizuojama, kaip iš senojo pasaulio į šiuolaikinį sugrįžo sąvokos *keista, kita, ribinė*, kaip jos vartotos senovės Sirijoje (IV a.), Graikijoje, viduramžių Europoje. Šiais laikais socialinio darbo teorijoje tai turėtų būti atskleidžiami iš naujo, pasitelkus socialinio darbo ir antropologijos diskursus. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas klausimas, kaip bendrauti su „kitu“, arba marginaliu, asmeniu, remiantis tarpusavio sąveika ir vidinio solidarumo jausmu.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: socialinio darbo klientas, socialinio darbo istorija, marginalus asmuo, žmogaus antropologija.

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Introduction

This article is an analysis of the historical roots and ethical semantics of the social work concept ‘a marginal person, a client’ (the Greek words ξένος, *kseinos* and ἄστος, *astos*). The concept is used neither in the sense of the American sociologist Robert E. Park,¹ nor in the context of the OECD report (Schleicher, 2014). It is

¹ The concept of a marginal person first appeared in European sociology at the beginning of the 20th century in the essay ‘Human Migration and the Marginal Man’ by the American sociologist Robert E. Park. He used the concept ‘marginal man’ to denote a ‘spiritually instable, discontent, restlessness and rejected man’ (Holdo, 2020). Park believed that a marginal person is somebody who is in an ambiguous position between being a countryman and an urban man. His usual culture is being destroyed, and he has not yet found himself in the new culture. For this reason, his behaviour is not always acceptable in the urban social environment. Park developed this term from the Latin word *margo* meaning ‘border, margin, edge’. Thus people who lived on

used with the understanding that its substance is at least 2,000 years old. It is used within an ancient theoretical framework in which marginalisation is perceived neither in relation to the social performance of a person, nor in a comparison of their social capacity to that of others, nor as a status in relation to one's income. Instead, it is understood as a person's own perception of their life, in which they analyse and evaluate their experience. For this reason, the concept of marginality has historically designated the *interior experience* of a person, of which others might not be aware. It is the internally felt and experienced attitude that is received from other people because of which a person perceives themselves as excluded, rejected, different/other, or marginal.

The concepts 'strange' 'other' and 'marginal' have re-entered the modern world from the Ancient world. They were used in Ancient Syria, Greece, and Medieval Europe. However, today, since these concepts are used in discourses of social work and anthropology, they should be described anew in the context of social work theory.

Ethical archetypes for working with a marginal person within client-oriented social work were provided in texts from the Ancient Antioch school (John Chrysostom, 347–407; Theodoret of Cyrrus, 393–457; Ephrem the Syrian, 306–379, and others). These texts, together with the works of Alexandrian and Ancient Greek thinkers, form the foundation for ethical protonorms in social work. The contemporary author of the concept of protonorm, the Canadian philosopher and anthropologist Charles Taylor (1931), says that every person exists 'in a normative moral space. A protonorm is a basis for human conversation so that it can be carried out within a framework of truth, instead of delusion or lies. A protonorm is related to the maintenance of value aspects and the avoidance of humiliation in conversation' (Rotman, 2016; Hoffer, 2014). What he describes is basically the concept of *philoxenia* formulated by the Antioch school. *Philoxenia* (from the Greek φιλοξενία, *filoksenia*, literally 'a love of strangers or that which is strange, foreign') or 'presence' and 'hospitality' are ethical protonorms in working with a client who is in a crisis situation. They can foster significant changes in them.² These concepts continue to be relevant in the contemporary understanding of social activation. The concept of *proxenia* (from the Greek προξενία, literally 'those who treat strangers well') defines the foundations of the substance of client-oriented work. The ancient *proxeni* were the first 'social workers' who helped their clients by applying their

the margins of various social strata but did not join in any of them were considered 'marginal' (Burgess, Park, 1921).

² The concept 'horizons of social culture' is used in the anthropological sense, and as a criticism of the practice by which the Marxist approach to man, based on economic, political and sociological conditions, continues influencing the understanding of culture. In this article, the concept is used as an innovation, and it encompasses memories and the sense of inequality of a person in their social environment.

anthropological knowledge in practice (Ascetical Homilies of St Isaac the Syrian, 2011).

In contemporary theory of social work, the problem of the attitude towards 'the other' is a significant issue. 'The other' has been a fundamental category in human thinking since the very beginning. No social group can identify itself without naming the parameters of 'otherness'. The concept of the other has also introduced a new paradigm in the history of philosophy. 'The other' was introduced to modern society by the American sociologist George H. Mead in his classic work *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead, 1934). Today 'the other' is central to sociological analysis as the identities of both the majority and minority are constructed. Sociologists focus on social identities which reflect certain social categories: culture, gender, class, etc. These social categories affect our ideas about the way in which we want to or are able to perceive other people.

Ideas of similarity and otherness are important in the conversation between a social worker and their client. The client can gain a sense of identity and social belonging, because, as the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas argues, both the Self and the Other form an ethical unit, and, in it, the Self forms its identity. 'A mutual dialogue can take place on this ethical foundation because the Self is more responsible for the Other than *vice versa*. The Self and the Other are mutually complementary in a conversation' (Sarukkai, 1997).

This approach to working with clients was developed by the Antioch school of theological anthropology and exegesis³ (according to fourth-century authors, Antioch was 'the capital of Eastern wisdom', located in present-day Syria). In Antiquity, the question of 'the other' and 'marginal' was not asked in the context of human discrimination or exclusion, but it was considered as an *anthropological problem*. It was to be understood as the practical possibility of an attitude of pushing away the other person or perceiving them from a distance. The concepts of marginal and the other (or strange) were considered and used as synonyms, because their meaning originates in a strategy of distancing, which should be restrained and overcome in human relationships.

Every person forms their personality and identity in openness to the other person: this is a contemporary thesis of Martin Heidegger. It is recognised in ontology, epistemology, communication and the social sciences. But still, in reality, a reverse tendency can be observed: a desire to distance, to withdraw, to seclude oneself from others. It creates a deformed perception of the other, which then takes the place of the real person.

³ Exegesis is from the Greek word ἐξήγησις 'to bring out, interpret'. The concept is used when working with Ancient Sumerian Mesopotamian and other cultural texts, including the Bible. Exegesis is a science dealing with methods for the best interpretation of Ancient texts.

The German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels (1934) defines the phenomenon of delimitation by summing up its three main aspects:

1. A person who is outside the sphere of ownness (Latin *externum*, English 'foreign').
2. A person who belongs to a different group (English 'alien').
3. A person who is different, heterogeneous (English 'strange').

In the process of delimitation or distancing, the first aspect is the most important. It is a person who is outside the sphere of ownness. This understanding, often used by professionals, treats a person as an object. It asks, 'Would I like to have it for myself?' Then the 'strange/other/marginal' is that which I do not want to have for myself (Вальдерфелс, 1999). It is a person whom I should help, but I see them as somebody who needs only to be responded to. The need for response becomes the foundation for a *new phenomenological approach to working with clients*. It means that the so-called responsive phenomenology is dominating. Its roots are well described by Edmund Husserl in his concept of angst/anger/nervousness. If the other person is perceived as marginal/other/strange, as somebody who needs 'only to be responded to', then the responsive forms of phenomenology are sufficient (Husserl, 1991). But the conversation is not meaningful, and there is no understanding of the other person's situation. Responsive phenomenology does not require to understand or to explore the client's situation. These tasks are substituted by responsiveness or 'quasi-dialogue', in which the 'strange/other/marginal' receives a formal answer instead of a meaningful dialogue.

Currently, the differentiation of the 'strange/other/marginal' is dissolving, because in each of them something 'dangerous' or 'evil' is hidden. A truly 'strange' client is one with whom a professional would not like to enter into a dialogue and probe into their personality. The neutrality between a professional and a client is dissolving, their attitude becomes emotional and is based on subjective emphases. An illusory hierarchy of values emerges: 'one's own' emerges who is both different from the 'strange/other/marginal' and also 'higher', 'of greater value' and more 'proper'. As this attitude increases, the 'strange' easily becomes an enemy.

Communication with the 'other', a marginal person, is a movement of internal solidarity of humanity. Of course, not every client is 'a marginal person'. However, every client is the 'other', and thus they can become the 'strange(r)'.

In administrative language, these concepts tend to shift towards psychological opinions about clients which then become foundational to the linguistic acts of social workers.⁴ It appears that modern social work does not have its own discourse.

⁴ A 'linguistic act' is a concept from the science of philology which denotes direction in conversation: a dialogue with a client can take place neutrally, then it is called a dialogue. But if a social worker uses the ideological pressure of their own personality or of another kind towards their client, then it is neither a conversation nor a dialogue, but a linguistic act. The direction of a conversation in terms of cognitive linguistics should

Clients are labelled as ‘people with a communication handicap’, ‘psychologically disturbed persons’, ‘emotionally and mentally split people’, etc. Sociologists, in their turn, point out that ‘the other’, ‘marginal’ clients are ‘people who are in the care of the social services’, and it is ‘difficult to enter into a dialogue’ with them because of their ‘social isolation and exclusion’. At times it is emphasised that clients are ‘professionally marginal’, and therefore should be considered ‘subjects with a communication handicap’. In conversations with them, ‘ethical difficulties and barriers’ emerge. Some legal sociologists suggest developing ‘new, innovative communication models for the clients of social services, which methodologically are based on the communication difficulties with them, because a special communicative competence is needed’ (Di Fabio, Pallazzeschi, 2016).

At the beginning of our era, a unique interdisciplinary approach to the human personality significantly and conceptually contributed to the exploration of interaction with the ‘strange/other/marginal’. It was formulated and implemented by ‘expert anthropologists’, exegetes and historians from Syria (with Antioch being a significant centre of culture and education in Ancient Syria). Their anthropological insights have provided European civilisation with a formulation of ethical protonorms and an approach to the social activation of human beings. Outstanding personalities, such as Ephrem the Syrian, John Chrysostom, Isaac the Syrian (613–700), and others, developed Classical anthropology from the fourth to the seventh century AD, contributing to Eastern Christian anthropology, which then re-entered Western thought in the Middle Ages. Their contribution is invaluable to the development of the modern human sciences. It has been embedded in world philosophy as an exceptionally important scientific foundation for anthropology as a science, and for humanist ideas in European culture.

Antiochian anthropologists address problems from the perspective of realistic humanism, building on the anthropological tradition of Aristotle and Plato, which conceives the person holistically, as a unity of the spirit, soul and body. They formulate answers to questions such as: What is a person? What is their self-awareness, self-sufficiency? What are their various addictions and ways of healing them? They verbalise an understanding of the infinity of the human creative capacity, and reflect on issues such as human death and immortality.

The Antioch school of anthropology conceives the concepts of ‘strange/other/marginal’, namely ‘one who should be helped, or a client’, within the ethical paradigm of stewardship or economy (from the Greek οἰκονομία, *oikonomia*). Not welcoming and accepting the other in the ‘common space of stewardship’ is considered as not looking into their face, as happens in the so-called profes-

be avoided. A dialogue with a client should go on without a preconceived desire to influence the person to achieve administrative or political goals.

sional approach where ‘a human being is forgotten, and a person fights only with themselves’ (Бажанов, 1907). Every client is ‘the other’ and ‘the strange(r)’, not somebody who has not joined the socio-economic system. This is a truly innovative approach to the marginal or other person in the history of social work, which is possibly worth considering in the context of so-called problem-oriented social work.

The research conducted by Stephen M. Rose in 1985 and 1992 (Rose, 1985; 1992) with several focus groups of social work clients shows that clients are not satisfied with their interaction with social services professionals for the following reasons:

1. There is an abyss between the client’s world and the world represented by the social worker. They are two different lives and lifestyles. Clients suggest that changes are needed in the life perception of professionals.
2. During discussions in the focus groups, clients point out that they need mostly encouragement towards choice and personal support in specific choice situations, not general help. They need understanding and a conversation which shows it.
3. Clients describe social workers as lacking trustworthiness and empathy.
4. Clients note that social workers treat them as ‘static categories’. At times, stigmatising language is used, especially if the client is an addict or has been unemployed for a long time. It seems paradoxical to clients that social workers do not anticipate positive results, but instead foresee preset negative results in the client’s life.

The consequences of anthropological and ethical aspects in the practice of social work are often negative. It is clear that social workers need anthropological knowledge in their conversations with clients so that they can plan for change. From the perspective of anthropology, social work practice should be called *praxis potential*, ‘praxis of potential’ (from the Greek φρόνησις, *fronēsis*, ‘wisdom’ or ‘intelligence which releases positive praxis’, namely, it is a method which gives the desired result in social work) (Prabakaran, 2011). In client-oriented social work, the ethics of communication with clients is principally important because it has consequences for the social activation of clients towards positive results.

The contribution of Syrian anthropologists in this context is very important. The conclusion that ‘innovative communication models should be developed’ by itself leads nowhere. The crisis of human identity continues to deepen and becomes a more pressing problem in the modern so-called risk society. It is crucial to understand in practical terms how to ‘renew the anthropological framework of social cohesion, solidarity, “one’s own” and “the other”’ (Rose, 1985). It is important to activate those practical approaches from previous centuries which have been

tested and proven effective. Modern social work has developed in three stages: 1) social work as an ethical and moral position; 2) as a therapeutic striving; and 3) modern social work which develops as a management work or project. But, before it, in the Ancient world, social work started as a free-will service, as an expression of human solidarity and charity. It was both a freely willed commitment and an obligation to address the impact of social problems on people. It existed many centuries before the Industrial Revolution. In Ancient empirical practice, ‘social work’ was based on ontological anthropology.⁵

1. The historical origins of the concepts of ‘marginal’ and ‘other’

The Ancient Antioch school of exegesis, anthropology and theology is a treasury of knowledge for European Christian civilisation. The Antioch school developed an interdisciplinary approach to man by bringing together anthropological, philosophical, metaphysical, social, biological and theological insights. Its versatility of wisdom and ethical erudition was attuned to the issues of its time. It is also attuned to the issues of Europe, conceptually growing into the European understanding of humanity.

The Greek word *ksenos* (ξένος) is difficult to translate because it contains several dimensions of meaning (Lidell, Scott, 1996). Thus ‘a client’ is:

The first dimension of meaning: *a person who is strange, different, barbaric, eccentric.*

The second dimension of meaning: *a person whom I do not know, someone from ‘outside’, delimited and delimiting themselves, poor.*

The third dimension of meaning: *a stranger but a dear guest.*

The fourth dimension of meaning: *a guest who has come to get something and should be welcome with honour; one to whom I should be present.*

The first dimension of meaning: the client as ‘strange, different, barbaric’. These meanings are supplemented by descriptions such as ‘incomprehensible’ and ‘complex’. In Antiquity, the application of this dimension of meaning to clients was considered an ethical violation, because it treats people as ‘specimens’ or ‘objects’. They bother or disturb; when relating to them, distance should be maintained. Thus, a person is perceived in an illegitimate way, as an individual, not as a personality. The conversation with them is conducted in a formal way, anticipating disassociation from everything that could be mutual or solidary binding.

⁵ Ontology (from the Greek words ὄντος, ontos for ‘existing’, and λόγος, logos for ‘word, teaching’) is one of the so-called first principles without which it is impossible to think of all other aspects of reality. The concept of reality is ontological itself, because there is nothing which is not ‘reality’.

The main characteristic of a personality is their awareness of the special value of their uniqueness, the difference from others. According to the great theologian Vladimir Lossky, a personality is ‘the non-conformity of a human to nature, because the main [characteristic] of a personality is the self-awareness that allows humans make choices’ (Лосский, 1997).

In order to designate the uniqueness of a human being, the concepts of ‘person’ and ‘personality’ are used. They are the opposite of the concepts of ‘individual’ and ‘nature’. An individual is a member of a class, expressed by the collective (for example, ‘a wolf is an individual from a wolf pack’). If a human being is called an individual, then they are perceived as an animal living in a group. However, in the European anthropological tradition, every human being is a personality, and it implies their freedom, their sovereignty, their ‘I’ in differentiation from all others, independence and authority, orientation towards their internally held values, instead of those enforced from outside. Self-confidence is foundational to a personality; but an individual does not have to possess it (Лосский, 1995; Shmally, 2005; Buss, 1995; Emery, 2011).

To perceive a human being just as an individual means to violate the basic ethical premise which lies at the foundation of humanist convictions of previous centuries. Then the ethical canons of humanity start to seem insufficiently universal; a professional can view them in order of decreasing importance and call them a matter of ‘taste’ or ‘professional etiquette’. Indeed, how is it possible that we work distantly with a uniformly ‘professional’ approach to the other person and consider it a norm? In Antiquity, it was mandatory to see one’s client as a personality, as a special value, one who cannot ethically be given a formal answer. The concept of a client denotes a human being who is in need of assistance on their road towards self-awareness and social functioning. A ‘client’ means a free person who listens to the other person because they themselves are not aware of their rights and are dependent on a patron or protector.⁶

The second dimension of meaning: the client as somebody ‘standing aside’, ‘pushed aside’, ‘poor’. John Chrysostom demonstrates why poverty should not be looked on negatively, because ‘worse is a person who desires many goods and begins to judge another person by his own attitude to goods’, seeing in their client nothing more than ‘an aside-standing object who has few goods’ (Творения св. отца Иоанна Златоуста, 1903). He continues: ‘Wherever we go, to the mar-

⁶ It might seem that there existed no concept of the ‘client’ then. However, this is not true. The existence of the concept of ‘client kingdom’ in the first century AD is attested to by, for example, finds in the Emesan dynasty cemetery in Syria, where the inscription ‘a client kingdom’ has been found. It was used to designate a politically or socially weaker kingdom. Thus, the concept of ‘client’ was used in Ancient Syria in the same way as it is used today. This concept from Antiquity has re-entered the modern world, and it also existed in all Ancient societies (Michelson, Doxtator, 2002).

ketplace, the square in the city centre, to some island or dry land, royal apartments or citizen councils, people are preoccupied everywhere with mundaneness; everybody, absolutely everybody, thinks about their *koilia*; the main measure of a person is their stomach.⁷ And if a stomach is empty and a person is poor, is there anything else you can say? Only aside-standing, only marginal? Is the measure of a person the number of horses in his stable or how many horses he possesses and in what kind of carriage he rides? Or is a person measured by a line of camels in his herd? What if he possesses nothing? How will you look at him? How will you describe him and understand him? Does everybody just think of their stomach as the deepest, the most insatiable part of their body? And that is all? What shall I eat, drink, how shall I dress my stomach? If somebody cannot do it, he is a stranger, because he cannot do what each of you can; then he is a stranger and simply marginal?!' (*Ibid.*).

The Syrian anthropologists' ethical perspective of an egoistic, complacent person is intolerant: poor is the person who does not see the other person as a personality worthy of admiration. They also conclude that so-called righteous people are used to conceiving of others as 'objects with faults'.

In practical social work, a marginal person 'highlights' the pitiful state of a professional's ethical world. A professional is socially active and knows how to settle in comfortably, but perceives the other person as eccentric or marginalised, only because they are experiencing a life crisis.

The Syrian anthropologists emphasise the ethical significance of poverty: 'Poor is not he whose pockets are empty and clothes are worn out, but he in whom, upon meeting him, you could not awaken or see dreams;' 'Poverty is the mother of wisdom; many marginal people are wiser and more honest than the rich, wealthy, knowledgeable,' write the Syrian anthropologists (Бажанов, 1907). At times, the soul of a poor person is like gold, hidden under rags. Truly poor is the person who wants the other person to own many goods.

The third dimension of meaning: the client and presence *per se*. *Proxenia* (from the Greek προξενία, *proxenia*) is presence: this was the name of client-oriented social work at the dawn of our civilisation. 'Presence', 'unconditional acceptance' and 'hospitality' were imperative towards the strange, other, marginal personality. This attitude was implemented in the preparation of special rooms for welcoming 'strangers'. In this way, specialised social work institutions were developed where *proxeni*, the first social workers, worked by embodying the presence. First of all, they took care of their clients' participation in religious life, because they saw every person as a spiritual being: the ability and inability of one's

⁷ The Greek word *koilia* means 'depth, the deepest part of a person'. It is one's stomach, even though it should be the heart (καρδιά, *kardia*).

soul and body derive from the power of the person's spirit. *Proxeni* also explained a person's social and political rights to them. In Syria, then in Greece and later in Europe, *proxeni* were highly esteemed; this work was taken up even by leading politicians (Smith, Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 1957). In the following periods, the professionals of these institutions were replaced by a more centralised office which was disconnected from the citizens. The phenomenon of *proxenia* continued in Europe for a long time, and became an integral part of the Church and its life. Institutions were developed for 'the strange and those living on the margins' as places for special spiritual care and care of the soul.

John Chrysostom described this work during the period of Constantinople (400–405) (Пентковский, 2002). Then the important concepts for European sociology and social work, the concepts of *mutuality* and *presence*, were clarified. This work was described by the Greek word λειτουργία, liturgy, outlining the main obligation of the state and the city: 'The connection of goodness and generosity among people, giving and receiving help without judging anybody for what they possess or do not possess.'

The fourth dimension of meaning: the client and presence as an ethical norm, *philoxenia* and *xenophobia*. The concept of *philoxenia* is understood as a social work protonorm 'to be present' with the other person, 'to implement a charitable attitude towards every guest'. In the Syrian language, the construction *rahem aksnaye* means 'an eccentric, my friend' (Smith, Smith, 1957). 'Presence' is understood as an unconditional acceptance of the 'stranger, poorer, other person', without any judgment or discussion of the reasons for their life problems. Presence is the awareness that 'the same or even something worse can happen to me too.' Presence, from the perspective of the Syrian anthropologists, is *filantropia* (from the Greek φιλάνθρωπια, literally 'a love of mankind'). Its opposite is *miso xenia* (from the Greek μίσος των ξένων, literally 'a hatred of strangers'), which is an ethically impermissible 'looking at one's client from above', imagining that 'I know what they need.' *Miso xenia* is expressed as one's inability to perceive the other person as a being created by God. *Xenophobia* is a concept of hate anthropology; it describes a setting where the goal is not to understand the outline of the client's life but to come to them with hate which can accidentally be expressed in unkind, dismissive phrases. Instead, clients should be perceived as those 'blessed by my Father' (Matthew 25:34–36).

Ephrem the Syrian writes that 'we must not work for a marginal person but together with him, in unity with him, acknowledging goodness which is neither sentiment, nor emotion but an ethical value: YOU are significant to me!' (Hymns and Homilies of St Ephraim the Syrian, 2012). Every client

has a desire for spiritual fulfilment in life; in this way, humans differ from animals which have only physical needs. When spiritual needs are not met, people experience indefinable anxiety. The main spiritual need of a personality is a need for *mutuality* and *security*. This is provided by a proper ethical attitude to them. As Ephrem the Syrian writes: ‘All that is needed is to accept a human as he is. Acceptance is an unobtrusive presence, human warmth, mutuality. It is an attitude which does not demand immediate change. I accept and listen to the thoughts and feelings of the other person as though he is both my guest and host at the same time. The other person feels this warmth, and it provides a foundation for his self-worth: “I might be worthy of somebody’s love... I must start with myself”’ (*Ibid.*).

It might seem that the Ancient anthropologists issued a call for altruism. But it was not so; their logic is more complex. For them, presence has a different ethical substance. It is well revealed in Homer’s *Iliad*: Glaucus and Diomedes meet on the battlefield, and suddenly they realise that they are both human, they both belong to the family of humans (not gods). Diomedes closes their interaction with these words: ‘So now I am your host and friend in the heart of Argos, you are mine in Lycia when I visit your country’ (Homer, 1991). It is followed by an exchange of gifts that, according to researchers, was an obligatory condition of hospitality if they wanted to establish mutual trust.

‘You looked at me, a stranger; you wanted to be beside me for a moment,’ writes John Chrysostom. ‘God will make you a citizen of heaven’ (Бажанов, 2007). Why? Because ‘one’s own’ and ‘the strange/other’ merge together in the ethical norm of presence as two sides of a coin. Presence gives strength to the weakest because, on a social level, mutuality is implemented with the purpose of ‘helping you so that, from now on, you can help yourself’. Today this task of supporting clients’ abilities is called ‘subsidiary presence’ (Katuvinec, 2007). It fosters the direction of a person towards the common good. ‘Everyone who in a democratic, civil society desires to receive support and help should not be allowed to become a passive receiver from the state. A person should be involved in a community essentially, not formally or administratively. They should feel presence and the other person’s interest in their situation ... For this reason, the principle of subsidiarity is an important principle in the European Union’s mission to serve its every citizen,’ writes M. Katuvinec, a senior researcher at the European Centre for Workers’ Questions (Katuvinec, 2007)

In contemporary research, this approach is being developed by synergic anthropology, which enquires into philosophical and transdisciplinary concepts of how humans perceive the other person and what the possible results of openness towards the other are. It is a universal paradigm, as anthropology is becoming the

foundation for social work (Horujy, 2021; Maksimova, Fedotova, 2017). Research shows that clients' experience of interaction with others settles in their consciousness, it sums up, archives and develops a peculiar 'person's own resumé of themselves', some quintessence of themselves. It can be called the foundation of a client's self-identity which they possess internally. At the same time, every human being has a need for meaningful communication. It can play a significant part in the awakening of their social activity, but with the condition that a professional is able to synergically 'open' their client's possibilities of the 'potential personality', those which form the foundation of human self-identity. The possible, the other/different, in a client is 'the possibilities which are wrapped up in a bundle in their personality' (Делез, 1999).

This is a fundamental attitude in working with clients, it is a '*singulier*' (French for 'unique, extraordinary') competence of opening. The social ability or inability of one's client is directly related to the attitude towards them as a singularity or a unique personality. Presence releases the potential of energy in a person. 'To be together' is a competence of being solidary, a cultural fact which makes a human being recognise the value of their own personality. But a formally administrative approach awakens in a person 'a deadly desire to escape', as Isaac the Syrian puts it (Ascetical Homilies, 2011).

In the interaction between a social worker and their client, the quality of dialogue is very important. In client-oriented social work, both social inclusion and an understanding of truth are important. Of course, if the social work is performed within the concept of management (Ferguson, 2001; Jordan, Jordan, 2000; Lymbery, 2001; Lorenz, 2001; Dominelli, 1997), which is dominated by empirical practice and system management, the opinion of the client-personality, their life values and culture are often subjected to reduction, because the social work options are limited by fixed and standardised formulas (Prabarkan, 2011).

2. The strange (Greek *ksenos*) is the host (Latin *hospes*): An ethical paradox in working with a client

The rich ethical semantics of the Greek word ξενος, *ksenos* ('strange, marginal') also include the meanings of 'guest' and 'host'. Anybody who comes for help is a guest. Guests should be welcomed with hospitality. How? Both these words express the paradoxical substance of presence. When working with a marginal person, the 'winners' should be both client and professional. The weakest should awaken wisdom in the other's heart, and vice versa (Бажанов, 2007).

Antiochian anthropologists believe that hospitality towards one's client is measured not by the number of office hours but by one's respectful attitude towards

them and care for them. Theodoret of Cyrrus points out that in the Old Testament the owner of the house, or the host, did not order his servants to meet the stranger or beggar, but instead met them himself. *Philoxenia*, first and foremost, is openness and honesty towards one's client, towards 'the strange(r)'. It is mutuality and exchange with a hope-giving solidarity. When these ethical protonorms are present in one's professional stance towards the client, they release the professional for strategic action, and give a direction to social change in the client's life.

Conclusions

The professional culture of modern social work should not neglect or deny its cultural heritage. It transmits into the contemporary practice of social work the foundational codes and norms that in the course of history have proven themselves as axioms of human mutuality.

We live some 1,500 years after the time when Antiochian anthropologists, in their analytical way, reflected on their work with clients and the importance of ethical protonorms. Foreign words, such as *xenos*, *proxenia*, *filoxenia*, *misoxenia* and others, sound strange to our modern ears, but these concepts are in the 'life blood' of European nations, and they significantly influence the professional culture of European social work. It should be reiterated that these concepts are foundational to the modern concepts of mutuality, reciprocity and solidarity.

The approach we can learn from the Antioch school can also become ethically effective and fruitful in the paradigm of social work in Latvia for several reasons. Firstly, it emphasises that it is ethically impermissible to depersonalise a person and to standardise one's subjective opinion. Secondly, it points to mutuality by exchanging gifts: knowledge, time, trust and mutual enrichment. Thirdly, it shows how presence anticipates mutual obligation and excludes ignorance and arrogance in one's attitude towards the client. Finally, it fosters an awareness that the task of a professional is to provide their client with the common fraternity of humanity in the deepest sense of the word.

The client-oriented approach, based on ethical protonorms, leads us to consider how, in our conversations with clients, we could reach deeper, beyond their psychological identity. Every person is a paradox: clients know that they are different, that they have encountered difficulties, but they long for security and mutuality, for respect. Every client is a suffering human being, and it is the professional's presence and hospitality that can help in their social activation. Presence and hospitality are essentially therapeutic and social.

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