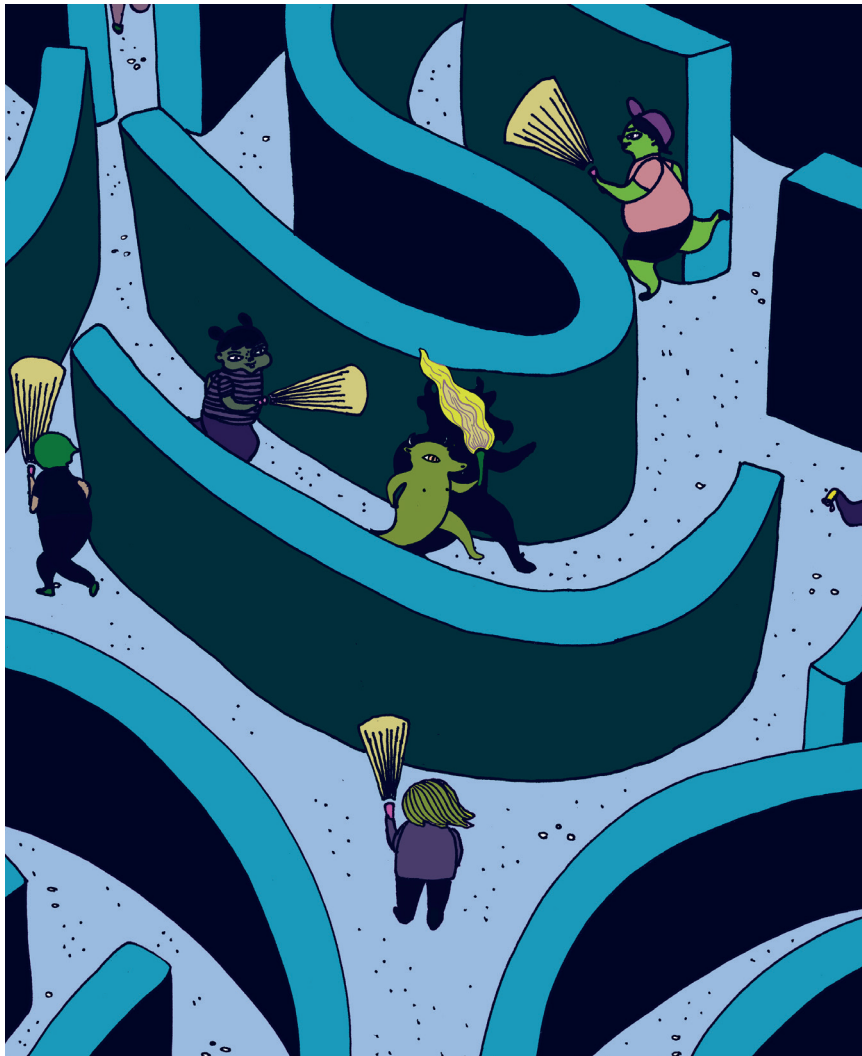


JYU DISSERTATIONS 185

Heidi Elmgren

On the Problematic of Meritocracy



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston vanhassa juhlasalissa S212
tammikuun 25. päivänä 2019 kello 12.

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by permission of
the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Jyväskylä,
in building Seminarium, auditorium S212 on January 25, 2019 at 12 o'clock noon.



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2020

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Cover illustration: Sirpa Varis

This project is supported by



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Permanent link to this publication: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-8030-6>

ISBN 978-951-39-8030-6 (PDF)

URN:ISBN:978-951-39-8030-6

ISSN 2489-9003

ABSTRACT

Elmgren, Heidi

On the Problematic of Meritocracy

Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2019, 60 p.

(Name of the series here

ISSN 2489-9003; 185)

ISBN 978-951-39-8030-6

The present study deals with the problematic nature of contemporary meritocracy. Meritocracy appears today as procedures or practices that are used to differentiate between people on the basis of their qualifications and their acquired or (supposedly) innate qualities, and they can be used to justify the exclusion of some people.

The common understanding is that meritocratic procedures are fair in their exclusion. They discriminate based on skills and qualifications, not based on the gender, ethnicity, etc. However, many things are left unquestioned when demanding or implementing meritocratic procedures. These include, for instance, the division of labour and the system of values attached to different jobs; division of access to education; and the merit system's conception of human beings and their abilities. The aim of this dissertation is to call the attention to these matters and clarify why and how they create social problems.

The dissertation consists of four articles and an introductory chapter. The introduction goes over the history of the concepts of merit and meritocracy and its links to 19th and 20th century eugenics and the beginning of IQ testing. Philosophers have condemned meritocracy as a political order but it persists as a social practice. Sociology is utilized in illuminating how meritocracy with the closely connected ideal, equality of opportunity, fail to meet their promise of creating a fairer society and help produce the individuals' failures they claim to reflect. The merit based mode of activity that meritocracy advocates is challenged with the help of Hannah Arendt's concepts of *amor mundi*, love of the world, and action, which enable conceptualization of acting for the sake of the action itself, without preconditions or demands for excellent results.

Article I presents and analyses Dominique Girardot's theory of the ideology of merit. With the help of this conceptualization, the link between meritocracy and social inequality can be revealed. The articles II and III deal with the relationship between merit and recognition relations. Article IV is an empirical study on Finnish music school students' experiences of merit based exclusion.

Keywords: merit, meritocracy, merit-based exclusion, impotential, Dominique Girardot, Hannah Arendt

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2019, 60 p.

(Name of the series here

ISSN 2489-9003; 185)

ISBN 978-951-39-8030-6

Tässä väitöskirjatyössä tutkitaan nykymeritokratian problematiikkaa. Meritokratia ilmenee nyky-yhteiskunnassa käytäntöinä ja menettelyinä, joita käytetään erottelamaan ihmisiä heidän ansioidensa, kuten loppututkintojen ja hankittujen tai (väitetysti) sisäsyntyisten hyvien ominaisuuksiensa perusteella. Niiden perusteella voidaan oikeuttaa joidenkin ihmisten ulossulkeminen esimerkiksi oppilaitoksesta tai tavoitellusta työpaikasta.

Yleisen käsityksen mukaan meritokraattiset menettelyjen kautta tehdyt ulossulkemiset ovat reiluja. Ne syrjivät taitojen ja pätevyyksien, eivätkä esimerkiksi sukupuolen tai etnisyyden perusteella. Kuitenkin näissä tilanteissa unohdetaan kyseenalaistaa kulttuurimme luomia taustaoletuksia ja -arvotuksia, kuten työnjako ja töiden eriävä arvostus, miten pääsy koulutukseen on jakautunut yhteiskunnassa, sekä meriittijärjestelmän ihmiskäsitys ja sen näkemys ihmisten taidoista ja niiden kehittymisestä. Tämän väitöskirjan on tarkoitus tuoda esiin näitä asioita ja selkeyttää, miten ne aiheuttavat yhteiskunnallisia ongelmia.

Väitöskirja koostuu neljästä artikkelista ja johdantoluvusta. Johdanto käy läpi meriitin ja meritokratian käsitteiden historiaa ja sen yhtymäkohtia 1800-luvun lopun ja 1900-luvun alun eugeniikkaan ja älykkyystestien syntyyn. Filosofit ovat tuominneet meritokratian poliittisena järjestelmänä, mutta se on edelleen toiminnassa sosiaalisissa käytännöissä. Johdantoluku hyödyntää sosiologista tutkimusta osoittaessaan miten meritokratia ja siihen kiinteästi liittyvä mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvon ideaali epäonnistuvat pyrkimyksessään luoda reilumpi yhteiskunta. Sen sijaan ne ovat osaltaan luomassa ihmisyksilöiden epäonnistumisia, joita väittävät heijastelevansa. Ansioihin perustuva toiminnan muoto kyseenalaistetaan Hannah Arendtin *amor mundin* ja toiminnan käsitteiden avulla, jotka mahdollistavat toiminnan itseisarvon käsitteellistämisen, ilman ennakoedellytyksiä tai vaatimusta erinomaisista tuloksista.

Artikkeli I esittelee ja analysoi Dominique Girardot'n teoriaa meriitin ideologiasta. Tämän käsitteellistykseen avulla saadaan näkyviin meritokratian ja yhteiskunnallisen epätasa-arvon välinen yhteys. Artikkeli II ja III käsittelevät meriitin ja tunnustussuhteiden yhteyttä. IV artikkeli on empiirinen tutkimus suomalaisten musiikkiopisto-opiskelijoiden kokemuksista meriitteihin perustuvasta ulossulkemisesta.

Asiasanat: meriitti, ansio, meriitteihin perustuva ulossulkeminen, impotentiaali, Dominique Girardot, Hannah Arendt

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could have never finished this work without the help of many people around me, near and around the world. I would like to start by thank my supervisors Olli-Pekka Moisio, Anita Kangas and Hannele Harjunen for encouraging me and allowing me to follow my vision throughout this project. Without Olli-Pekka's help this project would have never started. Thank you for taking my ideas and me seriously. I would like to thank Anita Kangas and Hannele Harjunen especially for their help with the empirical part of the dissertation as it was the first time for me, a philosophy major, attempting anything of the sort.

I feel working on this dissertation only actually started a year after I had come up with the subject. I kept going through research on meritocracy but there always seemed to be something missing, something that I felt was there to be found, but I had trouble pinpointing it exactly. Then, by accident, (because books by Girard and Girardot are next to each other) in a bookstore in France, I stumbled across a book called *La Société du mérite – idéologie méritocratique et violence néolibérale*. The title almost scared me: perhaps everything I had hoped to say was already there! Fortunately, this was not exactly the case and instead, *La Société du mérite* has provided a firm foundation for my own work. I wish to thank its author Dominique Girardot for her immense contribution to the field in general and also for personally taking the time to comment my work and encourage me.

I have been fortunate enough to find commentators for my articles in our department willing to help even though they have not been my official supervisors. Two people have been particularly helpful in this respect. Professor Sara Heinämaa helped me significantly with the second article and provided me with instrumental references. Even more importantly, Martina Reuter read (and re-read, and then re-read again) and commented my third article - I lost count but there were likely nine rounds of comments...! Reuter also guided me through writing the introductory chapter in the autumn and winter of 2018-2019. Her professional skill in seeing where any given text is trying to go and then guiding it gently towards that direction approaches some sort of academic magic. Thank you so much!

My research would not have been possible without the generosity of the Aino and Kaarlo Tiisala Fund, The Finnish Concordia Fund, Kone Foundation, and the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä. Moreover, the Finnish Doctoral Program of Philosophy has given me the opportunity to travel to several important conferences. I wish to thank Seija Paananen and Jari Kaukua who have helped me with practical matters during the winter of 2019 and by doing so, enabled me to finish the dissertation. Thank you, Markku Nivalainen, for translating my first dissertation article in English and thank you Alison Beale, Albion Butters, and Matthew Wuethrich for doing a great job language proofing my articles. I wish to mention especially Matthew Wuethrich who, in addition to doing excellent work, also always wrote a few appreciative comments concerning the substance matter of the articles, which always made my day.

I would like to thank two projects that have taken me on and given me a framework around which to build my own thinking. Thank you Marja-Leena Juntunen, the head of the research group Basic Arts Education for all in the Uniarts project ArtsEqual, for taking me on the team. The research group has been just right for my music school project, thank you for commenting my work and for the encouragement. I hope our collaboration continues in the future as well. Thank you also to Arto Laitinen for including me in the Pathologies of Recognition project. It enabled me to concentrate on questions of recognition that turned out to be so important that I rewrote my thesis plan and continued on this thematic in the third article.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the reviewers of my thesis Emmanuel Renault and Ansgar Allen for their thorough work and encouraging comments. Special thanks to Ansgar Allen for accepting the invitation to be the opponent of the dissertation.

Many thanks to my peers, the other PhD students in philosophy (many of whom are already doctors!), in particular Saana Jukola, Teea Kortetmäki and Onni Hirvonen. I want to thank the whole philosophy staff of our department for the warm environment of our subject here in Jyväskylä. Its characteristic openness to different approaches to philosophy has made it possible for me to write my dissertation on this particular topic and, in general, do philosophy in a way that I find most interesting and motivating. I am not sure I could have done this work anywhere else but here. Thank you also for the possibility (yet crucially not obligation) to teach and thus engage with the students and gain important work experience for the future.

In philosophy, much, if not all the work is done on one's own. By contrast, two projects, one on group dynamic with Tiina Nikkola and our wonderful 'female complaint' project with Tiina Sihto, Annukka Lahti and Raisa Jurva introduced me to a whole new world of writing together. I would like to thank you all for the great working atmosphere and for the shared flow of thought. The female complaint project also served as an initiation to empirical research, which greatly benefitted me when I started analyzing data for the music school article.

As mentioned, philosophical work is often quite lonely. A vital antidote to this, and almost a requirement for finishing the work, have been those moments when no work is done (see also the Introduction chapter, section on impotentiality...). I'm referring to our lunch breaks, coffee breaks, tea breaks, and the occasional sweet cappuccino breaks, courtesy of Simo Oinas, made with some of the mysterious equipment he has dragged to the cellar coffee room (including a small electrical milk whisk). These breaks and the conversations we have had over hot or lukewarm beverages are the salt of this line of work and an expression of the lively academic culture we enjoy in our department (even if the topic of conversation is the fierceness of honey badgers). Thank you for everything, especially my old office mate and friend Hans Arentshorst, other cellar dwellers Joel Kaitila and Tim Riggs, Rasa Žakevičiūtė, Simo and all the others with whom I have had the pleasure of sharing these moments during the past years.

During the breaks, I have made the acquaintance of some of my dearest friends, such as Annukka Lahti and Tiina Sihto. Your warmth, humour and sympathy have been a constant support during these years. Thank you to the lovely Armi Mustosmäki and Laura Mankki, the rest of our Huonot feministit collective. The uncompromising yet warm approach all four of you have on research and feminism but most importantly on life in general is a daily source of joy for me.

Life is not (fortunately) all work and coffee breaks. I wish to mention a few people who have significantly contributed to my mental health and overall happiness during the PhD years: my musavisabeibet/boardgame company/musailtaihmiset, or as I secretly refer to you in my head, rakkaat erikoismieheni: Ilkka Rautiainen, Antti Moilanen, Jaakko Vuori, Olli Rautiainen, and Ville Luoma-aho. In addition to these, thank you my dear constant companions for lunch, (sometimes very bad) movie nights and PhD peer support group: Ida Vesterinen, Lauri Julkunen and Juho Polet. Also my bandmates Kimmo Räisänen and Ville Vainikka; thank you Kimmo for your support and endless, wonderful musical ideas and Ville for your creativity, presence and energy.

Haluan kiittää myös muutamia ihmisiä, joiden ystävyys ja tuki on ollut ensiarvoisen tärkeää jo silloin kun en vielä tehnyt väitöskirjaa, ja joita ilman en ehkä olisi koskaan sitä tehnytkään. Ilman Taija Humistoa en olisi luultavasti selviytynyt ekoista opiskeluvuosista ja vaikka olisin, miten mittaamattomasti tylsemmät ne olisivatkaan olleet ilman sinua. Kiitos Taijalle ja Emmi Laitilalle ihanista ja vaikeista opiskeluaajoista, vertaistuesta ja erinäisten tielle osuneiden ääliöpoikien (ml. kuolleet filosofit) loputtomasta kyseenalaistamisesta. Kiitos maisterintutkimani mainioille ohjaajille, Mikko Jakoselle ja Mikko Yrjönsuurelle, joilta saamani kannustus on ollut merkittävää jatko-opintojen aloittamisen kannalta. Kiitos kaikille yliopistoajoja edeltäville opettajilleni. Erityisesti haluan mainita Kaisu Pöyliön ja Juhani Paunun: kiitos mielikuvitukseni ja kriittisen ajattelukykyäni ruokkimisesta, kiitos kirjoittamaan opettamisesta. Kiitos Jukka Pommelin, ensimmäinen filosofinen keskustelukumppanini, ystävydestäsi kaikkina näinä vuosina.

Viimeiseksi haluaisin kiittää perhettäni, erityisesti äitiäni Tuulaa ja siskoani Hilppaa loppumattomasta kannustuksesta, välittömyydestä, huumorista ja rakkaudesta, joita saan teiltä osakseni. Haluaisin kiittää vanhempiani myös siitä, että olette ymmärtäneet tätä outoa ammatinvalintaa ja tukeneet ja kannustaneet kaikin tavoin - vaikka toki voitte miettiä myös omaa rooliinne tässä, kun lapsuudesta saakka on tuettu kaikenlaista asioista selvyiden ottamista ja lukutoukkakäytöstä esim. tervehenkisen urheilun sijaan! Koti, sekä Toejoki että Viasvesi, on ollut minulle koko opiskelujeni ajan paikka, jonne voin aina tulla, jonne tulen aina mielelläni ja jossa voin olla suorittamisen sijaan oma väsynyt ja tylsäkin itseni. Kotoa on peräisin myös taukojen arvostaminen: olen saanut oppia jo lapsena kahvitaukojen merkityksen yhteisenä hetkenä mahdollisten kiireidenkin keskellä. Kiitos tästä erityisesti isän puolen isovanhemmille, jo poismenneille Aunelle ja Erkille, joiden luona vietin lapsena valtavasti aikaa ja joiden hyväksyvä läsnäolo tuntuu vieläkin.

To sum this all up, to all our coffee breaks and other times not spent efficiently, these words by Dominique Girardot:

“These activities are forcibly counter-productive: as their objective does not belong to the field of utility they are open to the possibility of being totally inefficient. This, of course, does not mean that they are necessarily inefficient; it means that their evaluation in terms of efficiency does not make much sense, because it is something else that is at stake. In these activities, the defining characteristic is not mastery but *being together*; we do not try to produce a tangible and measurable result but to manifest – to make visible ... a certain way to be with others and understand this community.” (Girardot 2011, 64; translation & emphasis HE.)

Kiitos yhdessäolosta.

Jyväskylä 6.1.2020

Heidi Elmgren

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ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 THE VERY BEGINNING

In 2011, when I was starting my dissertation in which I wanted to combine philosophy and cultural policy, a story in *Helsingin Sanomat* (Luukka 2010) came to my mind. The story ran in a series that re-imagined how to renew the funding of the arts in Finland. In the story, a suggestion was made: how about not hiring whole orchestras as permanent workers for cities but having musicians audition for every concert, in order to find the best ensemble for each performance? This was posed as a minor change to the current system, which was framed as expensive and stagnant, favouring institutions and discriminating against independent artists. While the critique was at least partly justified, I thought that the solution offered in the article was completely out of line. This idea of constant competition and never-ending auditions struck me as a strange kind of torture.

Yet there was also something undeniable in the way the writer had stated his point: to make sure the audience gets the best ensemble for each performance... Of course, that should be a top priority in public service! The job should go to the one who deserves it and can do it best. Is this not obvious? But, then again, all of the players let go from the orchestra would be professionals. Also, organizing auditions is quite expensive and tiresome; to have a concert twice a month, this would need to happen every fortnight. Finally, orchestras offer one of the few steady jobs available in the field of the arts in Finland. To further spread precarity seemed cruel to me. And what about the orchestra as a community? Did that not matter at all?

However, there was some truth to the core ethos of the story: a more talented and skilled player would deserve the place more than a mediocre one. And different kinds of pieces demand different types of expertise. Would not the suggested system of constant auditions be a great way to ensure as great performances as possible?

With those conflicting thoughts, I arrived at two of the most important characteristics of meritocratic reasoning. One is that it is in itself quite compelling. No matter what objections one can think of, from a practical or human point of view, the call for better quality and merit still rings true. The second is that there is something true and simultaneously hurtful about this line of reasoning. In the

article, the musicians' level of professionalism and the meaning of their work are fundamentally and yet so quickly cast into question. Moreover, the way this is done suggests that they ought to simply follow the proposed change. If there is nothing wrong with the quality of their work, they have nothing to worry about. Being treated like this, it is implied, should not be an issue, as the simple act of questioning it already makes one suspect. Yet, it can be experienced as deeply offensive.

This chapter serves as a complementary introduction to my dissertation articles, treating questions that I have not been able to previously address due to the density of the article format. In the following subsections, I will cover the history and meaning of the concepts of merit and meritocracy, as well as previous research on meritocracy in philosophy and other disciplines. Then I will review the essays that comprise my dissertation.

Meritocracy in contemporary society is a complex phenomenon that has roots in ancient philosophy and common-sense understandings of justice, as well as a shared history with eugenics, being thus related even to the Holocaust. I show how seemingly harmless practices (such as IQ testing) that explicitly aim at social justice and objective selection in hiring can create socially harmful and unjustified exclusion, and make understanding and engaging in specifically human activities more difficult.

1.1 What is meritocracy?

Meritocracy literally means the rule of the meritorious, of those who have acquired merits. According to Oxford English Dictionary, 'merit' means an abstract quality, defined in theology as 'the quality (in actions or persons) of being entitled to reward from God', or in general as the 'quality of deserving well, or of being entitled to reward or gratitude' (OED Online 2018). Crucial here is the link between merit and desert, that which is deserved. The linkage is visible already in the etymological roots of 'merit', in Latin *meritum* 'desert, reward, merit' and *merere* 'to earn, obtain, deserve, merit' (Klein 1971).

The neologism *meritocracy* was made famous by Michael Young in his 1958 novel *The Rise of Meritocracy*. The word itself is a combination of the English 'merit' and the appendix '-cracy', deriving from the Greek *-kratía* 'power, rule', which is usually used to denote a form of government. In Young's novel, meritocracy refers to the government of the meritorious. He describes a dystopian society where a strict formula of 'effort + IQ' is used to determine a person's social position and possibilities in life. Young intended his novel to be a warning of the dangers of the idea of meritocracy, but much to his chagrin (Young 2001), it quickly became a word filled with positive connotations, depicting an ideal society rid of corruption and incompetence.

Nowadays, the idea of meritocracy as a political order that would replace democracy is not popular (see Section 2.2 for a philosophical critique of political meritocracy); rather it is usually used in its adjectival form, 'meritocratic'. This

refers to a choosing practice (for instance, in education or the job market) that concentrates on the qualifications and aptitude of the applicants: *meritocratic* depicts a procedure that aims at finding out who has the qualifications and skills to do the job or aptitude to achieve an educational degree. Historically, according to Richard Sennett (2006, 109), the military was the first organization to endorse a kind of meritocracy, that is, 'careers open to talent'. From there, the principle spread to other professions in the civil society (Sennett 2006, 110).

The call for merit creates a situation where it is possible to criticize a given choice for an employee, for example, by saying that the chosen person does not meet the criteria demanded by the work. It can be argued that they have been chosen unfairly and do not deserve (merit) what they have gotten. In this way, meritocratic practices are connected to our conceptions of morality and justice; in principle, they aim at creating a fairer world (see Girardot 2011, 22–23). This possibility to demand standards or criteria for fair selection is, of course, often positive, as it is a way to help differentiate unqualified and/or unskilled candidates from better ones. A call for meritocratic procedures thus always has a critical tone, which objects to undeserved privileges and discrimination.

Despite this initial dimension of social critique, many things are left unquestioned when demanding or implementing meritocratic procedures. These include, among other things, the division of labour and the system of values attached to different jobs; division of access to education; and the merit system's conception of human beings and their abilities. A call for merit can also be aired out of context as a rhetorical tool. As pointed out in the last paragraph, a call for merit nearly always invokes an air of social criticism and tackling injustices, but precisely due to this, it can be used to serve other ends. In this dissertation, I have set out to challenge these kinds of self-evident beliefs and value systems, which can be combined with meritocratic practices and used to create a façade of justice while preserving old privileges.

What interests me with meritocracy is the rhetorical power of the idea. Numerous studies have been able to show that meritocracy is in many ways only an illusion (see, e.g., McNamee & Miller 2004; Thornton 2007; Hutchinson & Jenkins 2013; Breen & Goldthorpe 1999; Skeggs 1997, 2004). Reynolds & Xian have shown that faith in meritocracy reflects a person's location in social hierarchy (2014). They conclude that their findings are 'fairly consistent with the claim that exposure to non-meritocratic elements influences beliefs about meritocracy. ... [M]inority status, age, and to some extent being lower class were associated with a belief in non-meritocratic elements and thus a weaker overall belief in meritocracy' (Reynolds & Xian 2014). These groups face more discrimination, and their experiences refute the meritocratic claim that everyone's chances of success are based on their efforts and abilities. However, signalling the power and importance of meritocratic beliefs, the people who are struggling and whose realities and experiences could tell us that a given society is far from meritocratic can instead be used in a flipping operation, in an ideological and rhetorical surprise move, to in fact bolster the imagined meritocracy. As they do not have much or

anything to show for their abilities and hard effort (such as property or qualifications), they supposedly deserve their problems and dire situations. This kind of circularity thus seems to give a kind of ‘self-sustainability’ to meritocratic beliefs.

1.2 The definition of merit in this dissertation¹

What merits are exactly is not the key question here. It is thus not my aim to formulate criteria to differentiate ‘true’ merits from ‘false’ ones. For the purposes of this dissertation, merit is anything that is viewed as a positive quality or qualification in a given situation.

The conditions for something to be seen as a merit are that it needs to be possible to (a) give reasons that (b) some of the others can understand and (c) accept when considering it to be a merit. This means that the merit needs to match certain criteria that are dependent on the situation in question.

I shall give an example. Let us imagine we could find statistical evidence that shows that pet owners are more responsible than people who do not have pets. Due to this, an employer with the intention to hire a responsible person might consider it a merit if the candidate for the job had a dog. I think this could easily be criticized as a ‘false’ merit, even if the statistics were not made up. This is because simply having a dog, as such, does not make anyone responsible. For the sake of the animal we can only hope that this is the case. Thus, owning a dog is not really a merit. Also, the ability to keep a dog may, for instance, depend on a person’s financial situation. Not having a dog is then not a sign of irresponsibility, but it may, on the contrary, actually signal responsibility: understanding that one cannot responsibly take care of an animal due to financial or other reasons.

What I find central here is the possibility of anything (like owning a dog) becoming understood as a merit. What counts as merit is always relative to the historical and social conditions surrounding the situation where merit is evaluated.

There are justifiable conditions for something becoming understood as merit. In the last example, for instance, owning a dog is considered a merit because it is thought to reflect a good quality, the responsibility, of the candidate, functioning as a proof of reliability, even a certificate of responsibility, if you will. Given that the job in itself is such that responsibility is needed on the part of the person that undertakes it, the demands of the job thus define the criteria that are needed to do it and this directs what can be counted as merit.

It is clear that in many situations, we want merit to be clearly defined. For example, we have reason to demand that surgeons undergo careful training and obtain official qualifications of having done so. In matters of life and death, this

¹ This formulation is based on my initial definition of merit in Section 3 of the ‘Merit, Competition, Distinction’ article (attached).

kind of defined, less subjective use of merit seems indisputable. There is also a hierarchy of merits. I might imagine that owning a dog would not be very high in the hierarchy of a surgeon's abilities demanded by the job (but, of course, this is provided that the hiring board consists of reasonable and responsible people). In many cases, the standards of a given activity (say, plumbing) define certain actions as successful (fixing a leaking pipe) and others as failures (causing further water damage). However, in some contexts, such as in artistic settings, matters are less clear-cut. When no one's life is at imminent risk and the aim of an activity is rather the activity itself, the standards, methods and reasons for acting in the world are varied and their evaluation is not a self-evident task.

In order to maintain the possibility for something new to emerge, the reasons given for considering something a merit may be new criteria in that situation, because a distinct performance can make it possible to question the earlier norms.

1.3 The definition of 'meritocracy' in this dissertation

I originally set out to study 'meritocracy'. However, as the term literally only refers to a form of government, I have wanted to find another definition for the phenomena that I want to study and criticize. As mentioned earlier, meritocracy appears today in terms of 'meritocratic procedures' or 'meritocratic practices', rather than as a form of government. Such procedures are used to differentiate between people on the basis of their qualifications and their acquired or (supposedly) innate qualities, and they can be used to justify the exclusion of some people. The common understanding is that meritocratic procedures are fair in their exclusion. They discriminate on the basis of skills and qualifications, etc., not based on the gender, ethnicity or other features of the person which are not relevant to the person's ability to accomplish a given task. In other words, they exclude on the basis of merits.

Meritocratic practices thus become instruments of what is generally considered justified exclusion. With this in mind, during the course of the dissertation, the focus of the critique is ultimately aimed at 'merit-based exclusion'. Defining meritocracy in contemporary society as merit-based exclusion is also my own contribution to philosophical and sociological discussion on merit and meritocracy.

2 PHILOSOPHY AND MERITOCRACY

Meritocratic ideals start with philosophy. The Greek classics – Plato, in particular, as well as Confucius, perhaps the most influential thinker of East Asian philosophy – all endorsed a kind of meritocracy.

Confucius (551–479 BCE) advocated “rule by virtue” (Van Norden 2002, 247), although his thought is varied and also features elements of aristocracy and traditionalism (Van Norden 2002, 23). For Plato, the starting point of meritocracy, (or aristocracy, referring here to the literal meaning of the word, rule by the best) was a distrust of democracy. For both Plato and Confucius, government by the people includes risks. In the following passage, for example, Confucius does not trust the abilities of the common people: ‘The Master said: “You can make the people follow the Way, but you can’t make them understand it”’ (Hinton/Confucius 2014, 8.9). When justifying political meritocracy, Plato makes an analogy that underlines the importance of expertise: “‘For consider, if one chose ships’ captains on grounds of wealth, and never gave a poor man a command, even if he was the better sailor-- “You would have some pretty bad navigation”’ (*Republic*, 551c). Just as the ships’ captains ought to be good at their job, so should the leaders of a republic be experts at their task. For Plato, democracy, which to him means an excess of freedom, threatens to become a tyranny, which to the former citizens would mean ‘the harshest and bitterest of servitudes, where the slave is the master’ (*Republic*, 562–570c). To prevent this development, Plato envisions another kind of republic, one ruled by philosopher-kings (*Republic*, 473d, 476a–b). His ideal state has also been called ‘epistocracy’: the rule of knowledge (David Estlund 2003).

2.1 Old ideas, ever relevant

It seems to me that our current understandings of meritocracy are not so far from Plato’s conception as one might expect, considering the temporal distance. For

Plato, philosophers are the most suitable to rule, and it is a careful task to differentiate from an early age those who are prone to being one. (Plato 1998, 484a–486a.) Philosophy is, according to Plato, impossible for most people (Plato 1998, 494a), but understanding philosophical, unchanging matters (*ideas*) behind changing appearances is the most important quality of a ruler. Here we can see the conception of the rarity of true human intellectual ability and of rare geniuses, which is also present in Kant, as I have demonstrated in my article ‘Recognition and the Ideology of Merit’ (2014, attached).

Plato has an idea of a morally and intellectually superior nature that is distinguishable from early childhood: ‘[W]e agreed earlier that [a child with a philosophical nature] must be quick to learn, have a good memory, and be brave and generous... With such gifts a man is bound from childhood to take the lead among his fellows, especially if he is as gifted physically as mentally’ (Republic, 494b). However, despite this advantageous starting point, a character of this quality can still be corrupted by people who seek to benefit from him. Plato thus emphasizes the importance of the right kind of education. Hence one finds the aforementioned point by Estlund (2003) about Plato’s republic being an *epistocracy* (the rule of knowledge). Despite this, it is clear that for Plato, education cannot help everyone and is not meant for everyone. He writes of people ‘unfit for education’, who, when dabbling in philosophy will only produce ‘sophistry’, as they are lacking in ‘true wisdom’ (Republic, 496a). Meritocracy, for Plato, is thus partly an epistocracy (Estlund 2003), meaning that the ones with the most knowledge ought to rule. Yet, the knowledge stems from having the right kind of material to cultivate. Plato himself speaks of *aristocracy*, the rule of the best (Republic, 445d).

Regarding what is still relevant in current conceptions of meritocracy, what is crucial in Plato’s account is his commitment to the idea of innate ability. Innate ability or being of the right material makes attaining true knowledge possible in the case of the philosopher. Nowadays, innate ability usually refers to something that cannot be taught or something that makes high-quality performances possible, even if learning the basics is possible for most. One example of this line of thinking can be found in a conversation described by Sally Haslanger, where a senior member of the faculty proclaimed to have never seen a first-rate woman philosopher; he did not expect to see one either, as, he thought ‘women were incapable of having seminal ideas’ (Haslanger 2008). Womanhood, for this man, seems to have meant being of the wrong material.²

It seems that the idea of some people being of the right kind of material for something is still present in the world of today. Another idea already present in Plato is that what is thought to be innate talent or ability is a rare phenomenon. These conceptions are still present in current understandings and visible in meritocratic procedures that aim at excluding those not considered suitable for a given job, task or education.

² To keep things clear, I wish to add that for Plato, women’s potential is not as simple as this.

2.2 The failure of meritocracy and its philosophical condemnation

As a political model, meritocracy is usually considered a failure in spite of its original appeal (e.g. who would not want competent leaders instead of incompetent ones?). Plato was famously criticized for his totalitarian ideas by Karl Popper (1945). David Estlund (2003) considers in particular the milder version of epistocracy advocated by John Stuart Mill, which is called *scholocracy* (the rule of the educated), a system where more votes are given to those who are more educated. Estlund concludes that this cannot be supported, as there is always reason to suspect the most educated group will be demographically distinct and will thus be biased in some way that will counter the positive effects on their ability to govern created by their education. This leads Estlund to suspect that the whole idea of epistocracy is not supportable in any form. (Estlund 2003, 68–69.)

Philosophers have expressed their doubts concerning meritocracy in other respects as well. John Rawls rejects it as a distributive principle (dubbed ‘justice as desert’) and even uses it in a derogatory sense, wanting to make sure his own principle of fair opportunity does not lead to ‘a callous meritocratic society’ (Rawls 1971, 100, 106–107). For different reasons, Robert Nozick also wishes to avoid the idea of distributive justice as desert, as it to him represents a patterned distributive principle that he wishes to avoid (Swift 2006, 39; Nozick 1974). The idea of competent leaders, and thus also meritocracy, may be attractive at first, but as Rhodes and Bloom (2012) point out, this is quite misleading. The critique of incompetent leaders usually does not amount to critiquing the system that places so much power in the hands of these people (sometimes just one person), who may end up being completely unsuited for their task. Rhodes and Bloom note that the critique instead solidifies the original distribution of power, only hoping to pass it into more competent hands. (Rhodes & Bloom 2012.)

Still, despite the philosophical objections, a simple conception of meritocracy – where those who merit or deserve certain things are also considered justified in obtaining them – prevails. It seems to play such a crucial role in our understanding of what justice in general is that it is hard to criticize. In his influential work *Utilitarianism*, John Stuart Mill described the connection between desert and justice:

[I]t is universally considered just that each person should obtain that (whether good or evil) which he deserves; and unjust that he should obtain a good, or be made to undergo an evil, which he does not deserve. This is, perhaps, *the clearest and most emphatic form in which the idea of justice is conceived by the general mind.*

(Mill 2009 (italics added).)

Mill’s formulation highlights that he sees this connection as self-evident. Along the lines of Mill, Adam Swift lists understanding justice as desert as a conventional view that is endorsed by ‘most people’ (Swift 2006, 40).

To be able to question this seemingly self-evident connection, we need to direct our attention away from thinking about situations where people who do not deserve something still obtain them – which is surely often wrong. We need to see what is finally at stake with meritocracy: that it is a principle to justify inequality. To find scholars that share this view of meritocracy has been difficult. One such example is British educational sociologist and philosopher Ansgar Allen. Allen (2014) notes that the critics of meritocracy often complain about biases that affect assessment of abilities. Yet, as Allen points out, this is insufficient as it still works ‘within the same system of meritocratic assumptions’ (Allen 2014, 5), such as the idea that those who possess merit ought to get ahead of others in life. In the bias-focused context, the problem to be solved is that biases thwart the assessment of who ‘really’ merits these advantages. In this pro-meritocratic and bias-focused context, it is possible to elucidate and criticize that some people get advantages unfairly. However, it does not question the meritocratic justification of inequality in the distribution of these advantages. Nor does it politicize situations where many people meet the criteria (have the necessary merit), but the thing(s) that are supposed to be distributed based on those merits are so few that not all of them will obtain them. This is the situation, for instance, in the job market, where equally good candidates apply for jobs that are very scarce. This inequality is not obvious, and it needs to be addressed to become visible.

How is it that some people due to differing abilities and choices should be justified in having something while someone else is not? Why should they have something because of something that they possess or have done? We are dealing with Hume’s guillotine here – *no ought from is* – and going against it. To make chains of deduction that break Hume’s guillotine, it must be acknowledged that it entails taking a stand and making a decision that concerns values. Deciding what is valued over something else may well be done; it is called politics! But the choice of values is not self-evident. Problems start when these chains are understood as natural and logical, not negotiated, and, indeed, negotiable.

2.3 Sociology and meritocracy – the failure of philosophy

Meritocracy, social justice and inequality are very complex and intermingled in people’s living realities. Meritocracy has been extensively researched in sociology, and due to this I will next take a look at sociological accounts of meritocracy. It also helps to elucidate why the philosophical method and philosophical accounts cannot often see the problems of meritocracy very clearly.

Our current understanding of the problems of meritocracy are usually conceptualized as the ‘meritocracy myth’ (see, e.g., McNamee & Miller 2014; Jenkins 2013). The ‘meritocracy myth’ refers to a well-documented situation where many people, especially in Western democracies, falsely believe that they are living in a meritocracy where the success of a given individual is determined by their personal abilities and the effort that they make in achieving their goals (see, e.g., Reynolds & Xian 2014). According to most sociological research, this is only an

illusion, hence the term ‘meritocracy myth’. However, the myth framing fails to address the deeper issue: even if meritocracy was not a myth, the society would still be far from ideal.

Sociological research is able to show meritocracy to be illusory also in societies where many – and even most – inhabitants believe that they are living in one (McNamee & Miller 2014; Reynolds & Xian 2014). In philosophical accounts, conclusions are unfortunately often drawn on the basis of what seems ‘plausible’. Such common-sense, false beliefs may even affect the quality of research. One such example is from Adam Swift’s introductory book on political philosophy (2006). Swift falls prey to common, optimistic assumptions about meritocracy even in his critique of market mechanisms that supposedly reward merit: ‘The most important thing to keep in mind, however, is that the market makes virtually no attempt to disentangle these various components of people’s marketable skills. I say “virtually” because *two identically skilled people will tend to earn less or more than one another depending on how hard they work*’ (Swift 2006, 43; italics added).

In fact, sociological and intersectional research shows that the differences in the pay of people with identical skills are not the result of their personal efforts but rather of other qualities, such as ethnic background and gender. A recent report on the pay gap in the USA states: ‘when men and women with the same employment characteristics do similar jobs, the woman earns 97.8 cents for every dollar earned by the man’ (Payscale 2018). The State of Wage Inequality in the Workplace report (Hired 2018), which focuses on tech industries in the United States, concludes that White women make \$0.96 for every dollar made by White men. Asian women make \$0.95, and Black and Hispanic women make \$0.90. The same report states: ‘More than half (54%) of women reported they had found out they were paid less than a peer of another gender in their same role – compared to 19% of men who reported the same experience throughout their careers.’ (Hired 2018.)

According to Swift’s interpretation, it seems probable that women are considered to be less hard-working than men and this is reflected in their pay. Again, however, the reality is likely the opposite of what Swift suggests: in order to deflect the effect of negative stereotype, many groups of people will have to work much harder than their non-stigmatized peers in order to get the same treatment (for instance, the same pay). For example, in their article on peer review in science, Wennerås and Wold (1997) calculated that women had to work 2.5 times as hard as men to achieve similar competence scores as men.

On a wider scale, philosophical approaches to meritocracy seem to settle for quite little. Despite philosophical objections, the role of meritocracy as a central Western value is unwavering. Having done their share – namely, naming the issue and condemning it – philosophers move on to other problems. This is possible because meritocracy has indisputable positive qualities, such as denial of privileges. Due to this, it is often considered unavoidable. Taking the challenge of meritocratic exclusion seriously demands rethinking the foundations of our society: why is merit-based exclusion deemed necessary, whose power positions does it support and what alternatives could be imagined?

2.4 Meritocracy as substitute for justice in class society

From 1996 to 2002, Peter Saunders, Richard Breen and John H. Goldthorpe engaged in a debate on the state of meritocracy in Britain. In 1996, Saunders claimed in his article that Britain was indeed a meritocracy; the title of his article confessed it was perhaps 'unequal but fair'. Against his claims, Breen and Goldthorpe (1999) were able to show that Saunders bypassed certain aspects in his analysis. They concluded that children from poorer living conditions had to show more merit than those with greater advantages to end up in similar class positions. (Breen & Goldthorpe 1999, 22; Giddens & Sutton 2006, 322.) Thus, they were able to show that Britain was, in fact, not a meritocracy. Yet, whether it is or is not is not the core problem.

Despite the different conclusions, the problematic is the same in both studies. The meaning of class in such a classist society as Britain seems to be misunderstood in both cases. Being able to position oneself in and as middle class is a sign of success and the expected goal of a meritorious individual in both of the articles. Both Saunders and Breen & Goldthorpe, though oppositional at first glance, see functioning social mobility as a criterion of a just society. None are able to deconstruct the notion of the necessity of social, 'upward' mobility.

Beverley Skeggs' work on class and gender (Skeggs, 1997; 2004) shows working class background as something the women she studies would make an effort to hide. They did not speak of it. Instead, as Skeggs notes, '[i]t was the structuring absence' of their existence (Skeggs 1997, 74).

Yet whilst they made enormous efforts to distance themselves from the label of working class, their class position (alongside the other social positions of gender, race and sexuality), was the omnipresent underpinning which informed and circumscribed their ability to be.

(Skeggs 1997, 74.)

The meaning of social class in these women's lives cannot be reduced to questions of the possibility of social mobility.

It seems Skeggs' subjects also suffered from the so-called stereotype threat, namely, the danger of becoming negatively stereotyped (Steele 2010). Claude Steele has observed that being faced with a stereotype that adheres to one's group (e.g. social or ethnic) gives the person a constant additional task. Not only are negatively stereotyped persons trying to live their lives but they are also forced to disprove something being assumed about them. This means constant multi-tasking (Steele 2010, 111). Having to 'slay a ghost' in the room (for instance, by whistling Vivaldi in the street to give White passers-by a safer feeling of oneself, as one of Steele's interviewees tells) has consequences that are not included in Saunders' or Breen and Goldthorpe's analysis.

Whether or not one can move from the class position one has been born into, the question becomes framed in a hierarchical way: that in order to have one's

life culturally understood as successful, one must move 'upward' to the middle class.

In her book, Skeggs does not mention 'meritocracy' or 'merit'. They are out of context in her treatment of the subject. By referring to her work, I wish to point the attention to just that. What meritocracy finally stands for is justification of hierarchies: if the emphasis is on everyone's possibility of aiming for their personal best and deserving their place in society, it is clear that it does little to question the 'places', the differential values given, for instance, to different professions. The life, income level and job opportunities of the lower classes are framed as having less value. If a society has different levels that are assigned different cultural value, the society is not just, even if through personal merit one can 'rise' from one level to another.

British society in particular, but also Finnish society (Erola (ed.) 2010; Käyhkö 2014; Järvinen & Kolbe 2007) are class societies. Living in a class society means that people have such different starting points in life that granting some kind of possibility of social mobility is not a satisfactory solution to the problem. There are people who have to try and move 'up' and people who are already there.

Skeggs describes in very tangible terms the difficulties the women she interviewed faced due to not being middle-class. In her later book, Skeggs brings forth that 'culture as a resource is not equally available to all' (Skeggs 2004, 173). Instead, 'culture can be used by the middle-classes as a resource to increase their exchange-value, establishing relations of entitlement, but that same culture cannot be converted for the working-classes' (Skeggs 2004, 173-174). This means that attempts to 'help' the working-classes gain cultural capitals associated with the middle-classes will not necessarily help them achieve the acceptance and respect that capital brings to the middle-classes. Questions of cultural appropriation are also connected to this: White women who have hairstyles that derive from Black culture, such as dreadlocks or braids, are considered attractive or 'cool', but Black women may be asked to straighten their hair to appear more 'professional' at workplace. Skeggs' interviewees also wonder how it is possible for wealthy people to go outside looking as 'scruffy' as they do; the working class women feel they always need to give the impression of tidiness and respectability. (Skeggs, 1997, 91.)

In the contemporary the impossibility of a working-class self is not articulated widely (although still present in political rhetoric); instead, a universalistic self is presented as if it is available for all, when in fact the access to the resources to make the self is not equally available.

(Skeggs, 2004, 176.)

The system of class hierarchy puts some people in a place from which they are almost necessarily looking to escape. Other people are born into a position from which they can with ease assume different subjectivities and even consciously distance themselves from their 'middle-classedness' by taking on cultural attributes from other classes (e.g. the assumed 'scruffiness' of a poor person) without

losing any of their ability to 'use and capitalize upon their cultural capitals' (Skeggs 1997, 91).

The crucial thing about meritocracy is that it always works hand in hand with these kinds of (sexed, classed, racialized, ableist, etc.) hierarchies. It does not undo the culturally formed orders of what a society values, or dismantle power positions that take part in the creation of hierarchies and the orders of value. Rather it solidifies them. In a meritocratic order, the existing cultural capitals become portrayed as important and worth pursuing. They are the currency, or merit, that justifies and makes possible better life conditions for those who have them or who manage to acquire them. In practice, this translates as subscribing to the idea of a society where it is 'okay' to place different value on different types of work – even though most jobs, especially those which are less appreciated or appealing, such as cleaning and waste management, are crucial for the working of the society as a whole. To claim that this kind of 'meritocracy' or 'equality of opportunity' is just is misleading. Yet the rhetorical play these concepts enable hides problems efficiently.

To summarize, the danger that is hidden in the idea of meritocracy or merit-based exclusion is deeper than most of the philosophical critics can see. The self-evidence that Mill described ('the clearest and most emphatic form [of] the idea of justice'), combined with the practice of excluding those who do not, according to some standards, merit inclusion, will not necessarily lead to just solutions and situations. This is why I have turned to French political philosopher Dominique Girardot and British educational sociologist and philosopher Ansgar Allen. Both thinkers have a clear understanding of politics and sociology, and this allows them to escape typical philosophical prejudices concerning meritocracy (e.g. regarding its unavoidability and, most importantly, ignoring its political significance after its philosophical value has been denounced). Combining philosophical and sociological analysis enables me to better elucidate the problematic.

3 POLITICO-PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO MERITOCRACY

I will next consider two philosophical approaches to meritocracy from the 2010s, namely, Ansgar Allen's Foucaultian take on meritocracy in the context of education and Dominique Girardot's conceptualization of the workings of the ideology of merit that has an Arendtian background. Girardot's thought is at the centre of my dissertation articles. Due to this, I will here concentrate mostly on introducing Allen's thinking.

Both thinkers, Allen and Girardot, are worried about the consequences of meritocratic ways of thinking on our conception of the value of human life. Allen links meritocratic pursuits with eugenics, and this line of thinking can also be found in Girardot's work. I will next outline Allen's argument and then compare it with Girardot's conception.

3.1 Ansgar Allen on eugenics and its connection to meritocracy

Ansgar Allen studies how all life has now become 'examined life' (2014, xv), examined both by ourselves and by authorities, such as teachers in schools and policymakers. He draws on Michel Foucault to study the control mechanisms and measures that are taken to keep track of, for instance, each student's personal advancement in school. With Foucault, he reminds that power is not only power when it is a 'brazen, openly patriarchal and unashamedly naked force' (Allen 2014, 5), but it works in more subtle ways by creating subjectivities and possibilities of being (living). Allen claims that the progress made in knowledge production to better assess the merits of each person is often interpreted as progress 'of justice, fairness and liberty' (Allen 2014, 5). It thus connects to the wider Western campaign for advancement. It is thought that the better it is possible to assess merits, the fairer the world supposedly becomes. The aim is to achieve 'greater equality of opportunity through more perfected meritocratic techniques' (Allen

2014, 5). Allen criticizes the way that better control is thought to represent progress of Western values, as well as the goal of equality of opportunity. As I elucidated in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, equality of opportunity and social mobility do not free societies from more profound inequality.

Ancient eugenics?

Following Allen, I wish in this section to clarify the link between meritocracy and eugenics. It is perhaps not so surprising that Plato's ideas about the organization of his ideal, meritocratic or aristocratic republic already followed a kind of eugenic logic (although, of course, the expression 'eugenic' is anachronistic here). When discussing the upbringing of the guardians of the republic, the character of Socrates begins by asking his collocutors about the breeding of farm animals and then quickly moves on to the necessity of the rulers of the republic to control the guardians' reproduction, albeit in secret from the subjects:

We must, if we are to be consistent, and if we're to have a real pedigree herd, mate the best of our men with the best of our women as often as possible, and the inferior men with the inferior women as seldom as possible, and bring up only the offspring of the best.

Republic, 459d.

Meritocracy, epistocracy, aristocracy (in Plato's sense, as the rule of the best) and eugenics have a common denominator: the idea that some people are superior to others. It varies from one instance to another to what extent this superiority can be used as grounds for inclusion and exclusion. To Plato, it meant that the offspring of those considered to be 'inferior' did not need to be brought up (*Republic*, 459e). What will be done to them is left unanswered.³ At the end of the continuum there is the idea that due to not being good enough, some people are unnecessary, superfluous and even expendable (Girardot 2011, 22; Arendt 1951/1973, 457).

Eugenics proper

To return from ancient Greece, Ansgar Allen argues that the development of modern eugenics since the 1860s, following Darwin's discoveries of the development of species (1859), is paralleled by another political programme, that of meritocracy. For Allen, meritocracy refers to those policies aimed at the construction

³ What Plato in fact meant is not self-evident. The Greek *τρέφω* refers to supporting, and also literally to feeding and nursing. Timothy Riggs suggests that another verb would have been used to indicate that the offspring were not, for instance, educated; this suggests rather that they were 'left to the elements', that is, abandoned by society (personal communication, 9 January 2019). A similar interpretation is also suggested by Desmond Lee, for whom, in his translation of the *Republic*, the passage brings up the question of 'whether and how far Plato sanctioned infanticide'. (*Republic*, 181, fn. 2.)

of a society that would place each individual in a place suitable for them, according to their personal merit (usually according to intelligence). After the loss of reputation of eugenics in the 1940s, meritocratic ideals preserved what Allen calls the positive dimensions of eugenics rationality. These are, according to Allen, still present in contemporary society. (Allen 2014, 97.)

Next, I will trace with Allen the history of eugenics. 'Improving the stock' (for instance, in the sense of improving livestock) is an age-old practice, as we saw in the example from Plato. In eugenics, this logic of improving the stock was taken to the level of human populations. Eugenics was motivated by the will to correct socially induced thwarting of the natural order of things: social interventions were thought to prevent what was considered the natural process of the survival of the fittest and this needed to be, in turn, corrected. (Allen 2014, 93–94.) The idea of survival of the fittest already shows the meritocratic undertone of the reasoning: the fittest are thought to naturally prevail. Superiority is understood to create a claim for a better position in life.

Aiming at improving the suitable kind of life, Allen points out, posed a practical problem for eugenics: how to separate between those 'who transmit superior qualities [and] those who transmit degenerate ones' (Allen 2014, 101). Francis Galton (1822–1911), a British eugenicist, statistician and sociologist, concluded that 'eminence', a position of superiority, could be used as such a standard of natural gifts, given that we consider 'social and professional life as continuous examination' (Galton (1868), *Hereditary Genius*, 6, cited in Allen 2014, 101). Galton sees the recognition that is only given to certain individuals as proof of their superior rank, as it is the result of life-long examination.

All in all, the notion of examination becomes important. Eminence, Allen notes, most often manifests only later in life, which makes eminent persons less eligible for breeding. This is why tools to assess innate ability, which might be detected earlier, were required. (Allen 2014, 101.) To come to such a conclusion, that there is something to be found that enables future success, is telling of a certain conception of human abilities – that they are innate. This also reveals a certain kind of determinism, that these abilities have some likelihood of leading to eminence. According to Allen, Galton also seems to have adhered to a belief of this sort: '*talent* and *character* are exhaustive: they include the whole of man's spiritual nature so far as we are able to understand it'. (Galton (1865), *Hereditary Talent and Character*, 322, cited in Allen 2014, 109; emphasis in original.)

Politically, the eugenics project understood the good of the nation as equivalent to the good of the biological species (Allen 2014, 108–110). Allen depicts how this thinking introduced a new morality, where good and bad were defined in terms of the welfare of the society, for instance, as 'social' and 'antisocial' behaviour. This new understanding of morality saw ignorance as a key reason for the incapability of 'moral action'. (Allen 2014, 110–111.) In other words, there was an assumption that social problems are caused by the low intelligence of certain people. This assumption informed, for instance, the development of intelligence testing. Ignorance being considered the problem, education became a means to alleviate this issue. Allen tracks a development from the need to examine innate

ability to the place where this examination could take place: the elementary schools that had just been established. (Allen 2014, 110–113.)

Human abilities were understood (as to some extent is still the case) to follow a normal distribution curve. This means that some people were considered beyond the scope of education's ameliorating effects. The development of the school system in France required the institution of a parallel system of specialist schools for those who were not considered able to pass the standard education. To differentiate who would go to which school, further testing was needed. The school thus became a place where children are taught to the extent that their abilities allow, where the measurement of their abilities takes place, and where the statistical creature – the 'normal' child – is developed. (Allen 2014, 110–113.) Controlling the possibilities of reproduction of those who represented limit cases to normalcy – such a person was called *débile* in French⁴ and *moron* in the American⁵ context – was considered important, and was expected for its part to decrease for instance, poverty and crime (Allen 2014, 115).

The passages Allen quotes are sometimes reminiscent of today's discourses. Henry Goddard (1914, cited in Allen 2014) pointed out that people who 'in the past and under simpler environments' could have functioned normally are experiencing difficulties, as 'the present environment has become too complex'. These kinds of addresses are similar to the discourse on long-term unemployment in present-day Finland and the discussions anticipating the future where (estimations vary as to what extent) many of today's jobs will be automated. This is taken to mean that many will face unemployment due to not having suitable skills to offer to the job market – and, more importantly, not having the propensities to learn new skills that are in demand. Similarly, the explicit worry of Raymond Cattell from 1937, of 'sub-men' outbreeding 'the superior' (Allen 2014, 126) reminds of the discussion on the lowering birth rate of Finland in the autumn of 2018 with desperate calls for (White) Finnish women to give birth to more babies – all the while that Finland is reluctant to take in more immigrants and even deporting refugees who, with their children, have spent years in the country, getting an education and learning the language. The political nature of such worries, both now and then, seems obvious: it is in the interest of certain groups of people (the upper classes and nowadays in Finland especially White Finnish people) that some are branded as 'innately' defective and subjected to control mechanisms.

With the beginning of IQ tests in the early 20th century, the motivation behind testing abilities was to educate children into citizens who could measure up to the demands of the state, in terms of both their abilities and their morality (Allen 2014, 111). Thus, Allen is able to establish a link between eugenic politics (equating the best of the nation with the biological success of the species) and the birth of general education and IQ testing.

⁴ From the Binet-Simon IQ test, the first practical IQ test, which was developed by Alfred Binet in 1904 and revised in 1908 and 1911.

⁵ From Henry Goddard, who translated the Binet-Simon test into English in 1914.

From eugenics to modern meritocracy

Due to the fall of Nazi Germany and the exposure of the mass murder of Jews, Roma and disabled people, and the eugenic justification for this, the reputation of eugenics collapsed. Allen, however, claims that this did not mean the end of eugenics. Instead, he argues that its 'technologies and perspectives', namely, 'tests of individual differences and modes of statistical treatment', continued to be used. (Allen 2014, 137.)

Allen describes how eugenicists such as Raymond Cattell (1905–1998) envisioned that eugenics would take on the task of religion and the good of the society/race/humankind to become the new vision of God. This would mean that people would be *motivated* rather than disciplined into acting for the common good. (Allen 2014, 137–144.) People having a personal interest in developing positive qualities and educating themselves and their children are new ways for eugenic aims to find their way into society without explicit external direction by authorities.

To summarize, for Allen, meritocracy has historically meant policies that try to combine suitably skilled people with suitable work. This historical meritocracy is closely connected with 1) eugenic logic, such as a) seeing certain people as unfit to do certain jobs and b) seeing a lack of intelligence (merit) as an important factor in both this suitability and as a cause for social unrest; 2) eugenic practices, such as intelligence testing to find out which person fits in which place; and 3) eugenic aims, namely, promoting the best of the society by ensuring that those people who are deemed 'best' are given opportunities to flourish, such as more education and support, compared to those considered less deserving.

In relation to this, working to have one's merits recognized or more generally taking to heart the task of developing oneself is a new development. According to Allen, modern meritocracy is no longer interested in distributing human resources efficiently, which used to be its main rationale (matching each person with an appropriate job). Instead, he claims, nowadays meritocracy still works as a form of social regulation but not by directing ambitions in suitable directions. Finding one's place in society is no longer the direct concern of the society but instead the responsibility of the individual. The current version of meritocracy is more fluid than the earlier forms; the assessment of merit has become each individual's personal task and interest, instead of it working as an external force enforced by the authorities. (Allen 2014, 132–133.)

Allen's comparison of the older meritocratic/eugenistic project and modern meritocracy⁶ makes it possible to point out an interesting difference between the two. The current version of meritocracy is seemingly doing away with a problem that was visible in the old idealized conception of meritocracy – but, crucially,

⁶ Allen's use of the term 'meritocracy' is different from my own. What he describes is a form of social engineering that aims at creating a meritocratic hierarchy of societal positions based on the intellectual characteristics of individuals. The 'current version of meritocracy' below thus refers to the present-day way in which the meritocratic distribution of jobs is thought to be achieved.

this 'new meritocracy' is not solving it. The old meritocracy project needed to face the question of justified inequality, which it was inflicting on its subjects. People were educated with the common good in mind, and less attention was paid to their personal preferences. This meant that everyone could not win. The eugenicists thought that a well-organized working life would in itself bring stability to society. (They did not, obviously, think of other reasons why there might be unrest other than having a job that was too difficult to handle due to a lack of innate ability.) Most people would be allocated to jobs that were not very esteemed and not well-paying either. Being told beforehand that trying to achieve more than that would not be possible could, in itself, create feelings of injustice. The system would have to deal with this.

Instead, in the new meritocracy – or more precisely, contemporary society's attempts to create situations where jobs go to competent people – the problem of not being able to change one's position and living conditions remains, but it does not need to be addressed publicly. In the old meritocracy, not everyone could win. In the current working life, everyone can *try* to win – at least in principle. This creates a façade of equality of opportunity while the old obstacles to reaching societal goals are still in place. Being allowed to try means failing will be interpreted as a personal failure, rather than it being someone else's or an authority figure's fault, such as in being tied to one's place by external forces. Allen summarizes: 'Societies that are "unjustly unequal" are easier to bear than those that are "justly unequal"' (Allen 2014, 244). I do, however, differ from Allen's conclusion that this new system would be unjustly unequal. Allowing everyone to take part (at least in principle) in the competition is still working on the principle of (supposed) justice: the supposedly justified exclusion is made to seem even more just by the façade of equality of opportunity. This is how meritocracy, in the sense of a society where people are imagined and expected to reach esteemed places due to their own talent and hard work, will seem to be in effect. Furthermore, as it works seemingly all on its own, as if led by an invisible hand, any harm inflicted will seem to be no particular person's fault but either deserved or a tragic fluke, such as an illness that could not be foreseen.

3.2 Dominique Girardot and the problem of 'superfluous' human beings

French meritocracy critic Dominique Girardot links the problems of meritocracy to totalitarian logic, where the value of human life becomes conditional. Girardot writes of '*the ideology of merit*', following Hannah Arendt's definition of ideology as the logic of an idea. This logic of one idea becomes the sole model of explanation and justification, covering and finally tearing reality in order to make it fit the conception of reality dictated by the logic.

Girardot does not create a genealogy of meritocracy or eugenics, but with her roots in Arendt's thought, a connection with Allen's project is discernible. For

Girardot, the attempt to measure (for instance, by testing) human abilities and the meritocratic demand of everyone deserving their place in the world is connected to the wider possibilities of measuring by proxy the worth of human lives.

Girardot connects the meritocratic ethos with utilitarianism. Interestingly, Allen also considers the work of the original founders of utilitarian thought, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. The new morality depicted by Allen, which emerged in the early 1900s, defined good and bad in terms of the welfare of the society and was connected to utilitarianism. (Allen 2014, 17, 110.)

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory that looks at the consequences of an action to determine its moral value. In the context that Hannah Arendt and Dominique Girardot use the term, the debate is less about, for instance, John Stuart Mill's (1861) refined formulation of utilitarianism. Rather, utilitarianism in the two thinkers' work is invoked as a general principle that concerns measurable utility and guides political decision-making. This utility risks losing sight of things that have value in themselves. This means that all human activity will become a never-ending chain of means. Hannah Arendt (1958) differentiates between utility and meaningfulness, a difference that can be expressed as utility 'in order to' and utility 'for the sake of'. As the two are confused, as 'in order to' becomes the content of 'for the sake of', we are in danger of losing all meaning: 'utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness' (Arendt 1958, 154).

Girardot sees the need to justify one's place in society as linked to what Hannah Arendt has described as the *superfluity of men*. By superfluity, Arendt was referring to situations where certain people in a given society no longer had a clear place in it, such as the French nobility after they had been stripped of power in the revolution of 1789, or when the Jewish people in Germany were left 'with nothing but their wealth' (Arendt 1951/1973, 4). Arendt analyses that the capitalist system continuously produced superfluous capital and men: for instance, the gold rushes created a surplus of capital even as the gold-diggers rushing to make their fortune became (in Arendt's interpretation) a residue of the same societal processes as the increased production of gold, in practice being 'spat out' by their societies (Arendt 1951/1973, 189). According to Arendt, this (seeming) superfluity is always a dangerous position; she saw superfluity as one of the reasons why the genocide of the Jewish people in Europe was possible.

Girardot claims that in today's society, keeping the social machinery working is considered the main purpose of human beings. What matters the most about people is their efficacy in relation to that goal. This means that some people become cumbersome for the process, or even superfluous from the point of view of society (Girardot 2011, 193-194). She writes, 'In a society that does not need everyone for its functioning, certain have a right to respect and a place [in the society], whereas other do not' (Girardot 2011, 194). According to Girardot, the ideology of merit, as she calls it, helps create an impression that there are no places for everyone and threatens to take us on a 'furiously deleterious path' (Girardot 2011, 22). Girardot's claim must be put into context lest it seem overly cautious. It is based on Arendt's analysis of superfluous people, with the mass destruction of human beings by the Nazis and Bolsheviks as its background:

[W]e may say that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous. ... The danger of the corpse factories and holes of oblivion is that today, with populations and homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous if we continue to think of our world in utilitarian terms. Political, social, and economic events everywhere are in a silent conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making men superfluous. ... The ... factories of annihilation ... demonstrate the swiftest solution to the problem of over-population, of economically superfluous and socially rootless human masses... Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man.

Arendt 1951/1973, 459.

Since 2011, when *La Société du Mérite* was published, fascist undertones in nearly all Western societies have but amplified. The superfluity of human beings manifests itself in two ways. First, a recent call for writings revealed that the Finnish unemployed face feelings of unworthiness and even suicidal tendencies (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2019). In Finland, their plight is met by the newly established paradoxical obligation to work to qualify for unemployment benefits (dubbed the 'active model' of social security). This reflects a conception that society is in constant danger posed by some of its citizens – interestingly the same worry as in Allen's depiction of the eugenicist statistician. Such processes create a constant need for those deemed as suspect to justify their utility to the society. I have traced this logic in my article 'Remarks on the Ideology of Merit' (attached). Secondly, and in unison with the rise of fascism, hopeful citizens such as immigrants and refugees are also seen as superfluous and, more pressingly, as a threat to the general safety of the society. In racist discourses, they are seen as a risk both for the system and for individual persons (e.g. risk of financial abuse, physical violence and loss of national identity).

In 2019, with the political forces presently in power all around the world (Russia, United States, Brazil, the rise of extreme right in Europe), more severe dangers are starting to seem less like distant horrific echoes of the past but as more imminent threats. The following passage from Arendt links the developments in the sphere of social organization and working life (described by Girardot) and in education (described by Allen) to the ever-increasing problem of global refugeeism.

The insane mass manufacture of corpses is preceded by the historically and politically intelligible preparation of living corpses. The impetus and what is more important, the silent consent to such unprecedented conditions are the products of those events which in a period of political disintegration suddenly and unexpectedly made *hundreds of thousands of human beings homeless, stateless, outlawed and unwanted, while millions of human beings were made economically superfluous and socially burdensome by unemployment*. This in turn could only happen because the Rights of Man, which had never been philosophically established but merely formulated, which had never been politically secured but merely proclaimed, have, in their traditional form, lost all validity.

Arendt 1951/1973, 448 (italics added).

Arendt's depiction of mass unemployment and mass statelessness is chillingly familiar. As both Allen and Girardot point out, eugenic techniques, mindsets and motivations are present in the world of today. The constant implicitly and explicitly posed question of the utility of an individual person to the society leaves too much room for excesses and plain abuse. Human rights are equally – if not more – vulnerable as they were in 1951. Not being able to prove one's usefulness may lead to abandonment by societies.

Being useful is already difficult to prove and it may become even harder in the future. As automation is estimated to increase in the relatively near future, it is likely that ever more people risk becoming 'useless'. At the moment in Finland, the answer to the challenge of lack of work is to demand the unemployed nevertheless to find work under penalty of unemployment benefit cuts. This has proven to be very difficult, and as a consequence the benefits of approximately 40% of beneficiaries have been cut (Kela/Active model 2019). The eugenicists' worry of unhappy, incapable masses is very much present. But unlike the eugenicists, who (even though extremely problematic in their views, underlying logic and practical ideas) tried to figure out ways to alleviate the situation, as demonstrated by Allen (2014), the current political answer to the difficulty is to shift the responsibility for the situation to those suffering from it and excluding people randomly from the society (for instance, by demanding that the borders be closed).

Hannah Arendt points out in *The Human Condition* (1958, 4-5) that what used to be the dream of mankind, freedom from work, has now become its nightmare. This is something to ponder. I believe that the possibility of freedom from work will be a most pressing question in the future. What will we do if there is nothing that we must do? Will we do anything if the worth of our activities, when measured in comparison to the efficiency and quality of work by machines, is nil?

I will try to create room in the fourth part of the introduction chapter for action that is not concerned with utility or mastery (in the sense of both domination and perfect execution). This action would be something that is done for the activity itself and that we take part in, in the words of Girardot, 'to be with others and to show them who we are' (Girardot 2011, 64). I believe there is still life left for us to live and meanings yet to unravel – if not for the superior machines, then for those like us, flawed, confused and alone, in need of others.

4 MUSIC AND *AMOR MUNDI* AS A CHALLENGE TO MERITOCRACY

4.1 Singing as *amor mundi*

According to Maija Pietikäinen (2010), singing and music have partly disappeared from the *Lebenswelt* of human beings, due to having diverged into its own expert culture that is reserved only for professional musicians. With her work, she wishes to restore singing's role as an organic part of the life of human beings and to extend singing as a 'human right': to enable 'the actualization of the potential possibilities inherent in a singular human voice'.⁷ To achieve this, Pietikäinen conceptualizes singing as Arendtian '*amor mundi*', love of the world. (Pietikäinen 2011, 10–12). I am interested in Pietikäinen's project, as it seems to me a direct antidote to situations where acting in the world becomes conditioned by merit.

Pietikäinen interprets singing as a 'call or appeal toward a communicative relationality between people, and as loving the world' (Pietikäinen 2011, 12) As singing is also an art, she argues that singing can become a form of a human being's relation to the world, and she sees it as the basic activity of caring for the world. Singing is a way to connect with others and the world, which human beings can build together. (Pietikäinen 2011, 12.)

With the rise of the expert culture that Pietikäinen mentions, we often leave singing to professionals. Many people suffer from negative experiences of school music education (see Numminen 2005, 19) and simply refuse to sing. Through Pietikäinen's conceptualization, it is possible to see how limiting the access to this basic activity to only those we deem, so to speak, good enough to sing means narrowing the world of others. In her dissertation, Ava Numminen (2005, 19)

⁷ All translations from Pietikäinen 2011 by the author.

suggests there is a cultural belief system surrounding singing, according to which 'it is impossible to teach singing to someone who does not naturally stay in tune'. Not surprisingly, then, when asked to sing, many people turn down the offer in horror and/or with laughter. 'My voice is fine but contact with air contaminates it immediately' is maybe the most elaborate way I have heard someone describe their inability to sing. To sing 'poorly' is culturally self-evidently ridiculous. Some people refrain from singing even at public events where their voice would only form a minuscule part of the whole; thus, they are not able to experience the unity with others that singing together can provide, due to not considering themselves worthy of it (Numminen 2005, 19). The wish to join others in singing but refraining from it – because of shame and feeling that this form of togetherness does not belong to oneself – is tragic but also, I believe, a form of unnecessary suffering brought about by the knowledge-powers and meritocratic logic concerning music. Enjoying participating in music is yet another thing that may become something that one needs to deserve.

4.2 *Amor mundi* versus the absolute conception of music

Singing is an activity that is loaded with meanings and beliefs in our culture. I grew up believing that the ability to sing was a self-evident sign of musical talent. Consequently, not being able to sing was a clear sign of lacking that talent. This line of thinking is questioned in the pedagogical work of Ava Numminen, who has studied the process of learning to sing by people who originally described themselves as unable (Numminen 2005). According to Numminen, what is meant by 'ability to sing' is far from being an individual's innate talent. Instead, it is defined in a cultural context, and this context affects singing on multiple levels. Numminen states that the cultural context 'has a strong effect on how an individual person experiences their singing and, even, on how the voice works on the physiological level'. (Numminen 2005, 21.)⁸

Numminen recognizes the idea of singing ability as reflecting general musical talent, which I used to take for granted, as part of an 'absolute conception of music' (Brandström 1997, cited in Numminen 2005, 43). These kinds of considerations about music are widespread across the sphere of influence of Western classical music. According to Numminen, the absolute conception of music has long prevailed in music education in Finland and elsewhere, and as a result it is also strongly institutionalized. Sloboda et al.'s research on folk psychology shows that common-sense conceptions about musicality are in line with the views of absolute music conception, and as Numminen notes, 'they are generally considered true' (Sloboda et al. cited in Numminen 2005, 44). McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner (2012, 2–3) also depict similar widespread and erroneous views of musical talent.

⁸ All translations from Numminen 2005 by the author.

During her pedagogical project, Numminen's students who originally considered themselves unable to sing all became 'developing singers'. By the end of the project all were able to sing a melody in tune either alone or with others or with accompaniment. (Numminen 2005, 165.) Numminen's research is extremely important, as she is able to show how a strong cultural conception of musical abilities is, in fact, wrong. With suitable help, everyone can learn to take part in music by playing and/or singing. This is not so surprising, as against popular views, many musicologists have concluded that music 'is a general human capacity that all of us possess' and careful training rather than 'mysterious talent' is the key reason for expert musicians' great skills (McPherson, Davidson & Faulkner 2012, 2).

Claimed differences in 'innate talent' have been used as this kind of justification for exclusion throughout history, as my earlier examples from Plato showed. Heidi Westerlund (2019) has written about 'learnification', 'brainification', and 'genetification' in arts education. All these different approaches see 'talent' as something that ought to be located with ever-increasing intensity, seized and used as grounds for differentiating people according to the likelihood that they will reach great learning results. Westerlund wonders 'whether in the future there will be brain imaging and gene tests to guarantee that arts education is not wasted on those who will not, according to scientific evidence, become experts'. (Westerlund 2019.) Even if we could do this, which Westerlund criticizes, why would it make everyone else's ability to learn and enjoy music irrelevant?

Using differences that may be found through testing as grounds for exclusion from arts education needs to be politicized, as it *is* politics: a decision based on certain values rather than others; for instance, valuing the efficiency of learning, or producing only experts rather than also amateurs. Politics is the method of building the world of human beings, and I am highly doubtful that the world of testing and exclusion will be the one where human flourishing will best be achieved.

In my article 'Merit-based exclusion in Finnish music schools' (Elmgren, forthcoming), I was able to discern a recurring phenomenon recounted by some of the music school students who were considered 'talented'. A few respondents framed talent as potential that their parents or teachers thought needed to be actualized. Talent was used as a justification to pressure the student to study (by the parents and/or teacher). These examples from music school reveal a problem which seems to be overlooked when concentrating on those who produce the best outcomes. There is not necessarily a causal relationship between great results and motivation. This means that being able to produce wonderful results (which are generally taken as proof of 'talent') does not necessarily indicate motivation or enthusiasm for music. Here arises the question of negative freedom: the freedom not to pursue a career or an activity even if one seems to have a 'knack' for it. (I will continue on the theme of negative freedom in Section 4.4.)

With these remarks, I wish in part to break these excluding beliefs and encourage people to explore their own ways of expressing themselves through music and thus take part in building the world with others and creating meaning for

their lives. However, some boundaries need to be drawn, in order to secure negative freedom and to not instrumentalize human beings to external goals.

4.3 Meaning versus utility

On the practical level of cultural policy, creating spaces where *amor mundi* and Arendtian action could be realized is difficult. Using public funds to support everyone's possibility of artistic participation needs to be justified, and the justifications have consequences on the policies that are realized.

Tuulikki Laes and Pauli Rautiainen (2018) discern a change in the rhetoric relating to lifelong learning: what started as a right to learn at every age is now increasingly an obligation to learn. Individuals are expected to stay useful and cost-efficient from the point of view of society. The rhetoric on lifelong learning has thus started to focus on the instrumental value of arts and culture, such as positive effects on health and overall well-being. The beneficial effects on health from arts and culture become a means of realizing the societal goal of cost-efficient, active citizens. (Laes & Rautiainen 2018.)

Enhancing the capacity to work is now a central justification for the public funding of cultural hobbies. In the case of the elderly, society 'expects [pensioners] to look after [their] wellbeing with the help of arts and culture so that [they] produce as few expenses to the society as possible' (Laes & Rautiainen 2018, 135–136; on instrumentalism and its problems in cultural policy, see also Belfiore 2002).

Dominique Girardot (2011, 64) writes about the threat of evaluating human life and practices only in relation to utility. This tendency is also discernible in the operating logic of policies that see the arts as a means of cutting back expenses. This utilitarian paradigm holds activities that are an end in themselves as superfluous and counterproductive; the only way to make sense of them in this paradigm is to see them as instrumental. However, this means not being able to grasp what is really at stake in those activities.

Girardot points out that such activities are, in fact, necessarily counterproductive: 'as their objective does not belong to the field of utility, they are open to the possibility of being totally inefficient' (Girardot 2011, 64). This, however, as Girardot notes, is beside the point: 'their evaluation in terms of efficiency does not make much sense, because ... [i]n these activities, the defining characteristic is not mastery but being together; we do not try to produce a tangible and measurable result but to manifest ... a certain manner of being with others and understand this community (togetherness)' (Girardot 2011, 64). In this defence of 'uselessness', Girardot appeals to Hannah Arendt's category of action. When the level of action is deemed too expensive and superfluous, the risk is the narrowing, even the disappearance of the human world.

4.4 Possibility versus obligation, or how to turn the dark maze into a playground

The Art of waiting

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
for hope would be for the wrong thing;

Wait without love
for love would be love of the wrong thing;

There is yet faith
but the faith and the love and the hope
are all in the waiting.

Wait without thought,
for you are not ready for thought;

So the darkness shall be the light,
and in the stillness the dancing.

T.S. Eliot

To further illustrate the problematic of the obligation to learn, I will now turn to Tyson E. Lewis' (2011) research on learning how to learn. 'Learning how to learn' refers to teaching students to be able to handle situations and solve problems independently, as well as acquiring a certain attitude: 'willingness and readiness', as it is put in the Finnish Agency for Education's report, to use what one knows in new situations. (Hautamäki et al. 2003. See also Elmgren 2014, an article (in Finnish) on learning and (im)potential based on Lewis' and Giorgio Agamben's work). Lewis criticizes 'learning how to learn' and the ideology behind it based on Agamben's interpretations of Aristotle's effective and general potential.

'Learning how to learn' and the attitude it encourages create an overemphasis on actualizing potential, that is, the so-called general potential. Lewis fears that this overemphasis will make effective potential disappear. This, according to Lewis, is no small loss. What, then, does effective potentiality mean? For Lewis it refers to the possibility to *not actualize* one's potential, or the impossibility to do so – in a word: impotential. It is the potential of the poet not to write poetry, their freedom to reside in their potential (for example, gaining insight or resting). To remain in one's potential, not actualizing it this way or that, thus also comes to refer to negative freedom: freedom from coercion, freedom not to. (Lewis 2011, 588.)

As I already referenced in Section 4.2, in my article that was based on written data collected from Finnish music school students (Elmgren, forthcoming), a few of the respondents saw talent as potential that their parents or teachers thought needed to be actualized. It seems arguable to me that this kind of attitude of the parents or teachers reflects the emphasis on generic potential. The possibility to actualize potential is taken as a self-evident reason to actualize it and in the process to instrumentalize the students to the learning process. These respondents wrote about being considered good but not enjoying music anymore; they referred to advancement as an obligation and having been expected to dedicate their lives to music against their own wishes. It seems that music becomes more important than the young music students in these situations.

Agamben writes of *time of study* to describe impotential. According to Lewis, learning is often considered metaphorically as following a light out of a dark maze. In Lewis' interpretation, however, time of study is time spent in the 'dark maze' rather than following a light out of it. This means that the process of learning mostly consists of remaining in the zone between *no longer* and *not yet*, as Lewis puts it (2011, 592), that is, remaining in potential ('all in waiting', as in T.S. Eliot's poem). I think two things can be derived from this. One is the time of learning and the process of learning, towards which Lewis is pointing the attention: that learning is difficult and that above all it takes time. Learning is a slow process that need not necessarily be optimized. In 'learning how to learn', and in the obligation to learn that follows from it, however, optimizing learning is the main goal.

If learning becomes the operative cognitive logic of labor, then so too does labor become the logic of education. As opposed to this formal equation, Agamben asserts the radical separation of studying from labor, and instead suggests that all study is a form of *play*.

Lewis 2011, 594, italics added.

Learning is difficult and slow. However, the metaphor of play creates a possibility to look at the dark maze in a new light: in the light of a torch, with children running around the maze, torch beams glowing in the darkness. Behind the obligation to learn (all through one's life) is the politically chosen and fabricated seriousness of life. Results must be reached, learning must be actualized and remaining in potential is a problem both for the individual and the system. The lightness of play is too costly and inefficient. To change education towards play would also entail changing the society, not having to 'make' one's life and deserve everything. In this dissertation, it has been my aim to illustrate how this kind of thinking that circles around desert and merit is erroneous and destructive.

I would claim that everyone is a cornucopia of potential and we are capable of much more than meritocratic evaluations can ever grasp. However, as soon as this is taken seriously, the potential (lately dubbed *multipotentiality*; see Riihimäki 2019) also becomes economic potential and human beings' potential utility thus expands commensurably. Actualizing even more efficiently this newly found po-

tential becomes more important than ever, which is visible, for instance, in research literature that concentrates on better guiding the career choices of the *multipotentialite* (see, e.g., Muratori & Smith 2015; Chen & Wong 2013; Collins 2017). Therefore, declaring everyone's multipotential and encouraging learning is not an innocent and harmless enterprise. Multipotential and the need to actualize it emphasize the cultural importance of generic potential, and the significance of staying within impotential is again forgotten.

It is thus a fine line that I have to walk here in my wish to encourage everyone to actualize their potential. The critical questions that must be asked are: Actualizing their potential *for what cause?* And actualizing it *to what extent?* *By which resources* does this actualization take place? The possibility to remain in impotential must be secured, for it is in impotential that these critical questions can be posed and answered, and the one who is expected to actualize their potential can instead of agreeing say, 'I'd prefer not to' (Agamben 1999, 255, cited in Lewis, 2011, 593, 595).⁹ Without this precaution, there is a risk that people are instrumentalized to learning and through their actualized abilities become instruments of actualizing such societal goals that are harmful to building and conserving the world of human beings through action.

In their article, Laes and Rautiainen (2018) aim at finding a new justification for supporting possibilities of the elderly to engage in arts and culture. They suggest redefining the social utility that can be gained from taking part in arts and culture. Effects on health are not the main reason for participation in culture, but a possible side effect; instead, at the core of the artistic experience are the possibilities to grow as a human being, to discover new identities (say, as a musician) and to find meaning in life. (Laes & Rautiainen 2018, 136.)

What is interesting in Laes and Rautiainen's redefinition is that they try, and I believe rightly, to direct the discussion towards *meaning*. This means turning away from utility, which is foreign to what is at stake in arts and culture. In a similar vein, I wish to point attention to the meaning of arts and culture, not as a means to an end but as an inherently important part of human culture.

To follow their lead, I would like to create space on a conceptual and political level to differentiate between the *possibility* to advance and the *obligation* to advance. Creating possibilities to develop oneself is a meaningful human goal that need not be confused with economic ends, although in practice they often are. Support for education may be only afforded to people who are expected (to be able) to make a living financially with their new skills, and this obviously affects the content of education (for instance, in health care). Another example is the Finnish policy of subsidizing public psychotherapy only for those who are estimated to be useful for the working life. The aim of the therapy is precisely to rehabilitate people in order for them to re-join the workforce. (Kela/Rehabilitative therapy 2019.)

⁹ Agamben is referring to Melville's character Bartleby.

5 IN CONCLUSION

Meritocratic logic grants permission to participate only to the best. In the process, the wider cultural meanings of arts and culture are diminished to demands of mastery and excellence. With limited access to training to develop the needed skills for mastery, this view leads to the exclusion of many, if not the majority, from the meaning-creating processes of the arts. A different approach, which sees participation in arts and culture as a form of loving the world and caring for the world, could come to see participation in the arts as a right, as singing is for Pietikäinen (2011). Numminen's (2005) research shows that exclusion based on poor skills is based on a false conception of abilities and thus not justifiable. Lewis' interpretation of Agamben's thought shows that a new paradigm of learning is possible: spending time in the darkness of the maze is frustrating, but it can also signify freedom, reflection and play – participation in playing torch tag in the darkness.

In tangible terms, playful and slow learning could mean, for instance, performing with pride in a Näppärit orchestra after having learned to play just one note. The Finnish folk music based Näppäri pedagogy is one example of a concrete practice that enables participation for all, without preconditions. It shows that people in different phases of their development can play together without having to exclude some in order for the 'more developed' to feel truly recognized. Näppäri pedagogics is not devoid of the ideology of the rare talents (Näppärit 2019). However, as a real-life application that explicitly seeks to bring music back to everyday life, to bring young and old, differently skilled musicians together in music, and to offer a means of dividing evenly the human capital that music can provide, I find it delightful – and to an extent also radical (Näppärit 2019).

Another concrete example of playing torch tag in the darkness can be found in my data for the music school article. One respondent reminisces back to her music school years and writes about spending time in the music school cafeteria with her friends, with people coming and going to and from their music lessons. The respondent describes a lightness of friendship and happy loitering, which was not, according to her, 'frowned upon' by the institution. Interestingly, she mentions not remembering the atmosphere as competitive and wonders if it was

due to the fact that almost everyone in her group of friends played different instruments. This freedom from competition brought about by the diversity of instruments could be interpreted as the possibility to try and attain one's, if not completely original, then at least *personal excellence*, a version of distinction (see Elmgren 2018): 'I do not remember experiencing competition, it was more like just doing things together.' The lightness of being also seems to stem from the lightness of the hobby as a hobby, 'just doing things together' – not concentrating on optimal learning or landing future careers. The story is not simply one of bliss and musical freedom; the respondent also wished that the teachers had spoken more openly about her own possibilities of becoming a professional in music, which, she writes, for some reason never really even crossed her mind. However, the freedom and lack of competition did not mean that group members were not advancing, as is often thought: some of the group did become professional musicians. The respondent herself also continued her studies in the conservatory later, and nowadays she both works in music and plays it in her free time. The students, it seems to me, were left in peace to waste time together, and to develop in their own pace. Maybe this is how the darkness in the maze of slow learning becomes light, and the stillness the dancing.

6 OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLES

In addition to this introductory chapter, the dissertation consists of four articles. They all examine merit-based exclusion from different perspectives. The first two are more strongly affected by the thought of Dominique Girardot (2011). The first one ('Remarks on the ideology of merit', translated from Finnish by Markku Niivalainen) is the most clearly political of the four in its analysis of social inequality and the politics of having to deserve one's place in the society. The second article ('Recognition and the ideology of merit') considers Dominique Girardot's notion of recognition and studies the pathological conception of merit. The third article ('Merit, Competition, Distinction') is twofold. On the one hand, I criticize meritocratic competition by introducing the concept of distinction (based on the work of Girardot) and arguing that meritocratic competitions ought to take distinction into consideration. On the other hand, I elucidate how 'tweaking' meritocratic procedures by adding new concepts can only tackle certain problems, which are produced by the general acceptance of the societal value of merit. The deeper social exclusion created by this is overlooked, and it may even gain strength as the overall trust in meritocratic procedures is reinforced due to the tweaking. In the fourth article ('Merit-based exclusion in Finnish music schools'), an empirical piece on former music school students' experiences of excluding practices in Finnish music schools for children and youth, I applied the conceptual knowledge I gained when writing the theoretical articles.

6.1 'Remarks on the ideology of merit'

The article presents and analyses Dominique Girardot's theory of the ideology of merit. With the help of this conceptualization, the relationship between meritocracy and social inequality becomes clearer. According to Girardot, the concept of merit has expanded from its sphere of pertinence and become overly systematized. On the basis of Hannah Arendt's critique of ideology, Girardot argues that the concept of merit has turned into an ideology and that this ideology of merit

can be used to explain and justify social inequality. The ideology of merit creates operational preconditions and justification for neoliberal social policy. Neoliberalism and the ideology of merit are criticized by comparing them to Marcel Mauss' paradigm of the gift, as interpreted by Alain Caillé.

In the article I am able to show how seemingly justified inequality (merit-based exclusion) is capable of dissolving our conception of unconditional rights. The difference between things that ought to be deserved (such as admiration for great deeds) and things that ought to be available without any preconditions is diluted. This dilution becomes possible because the ideology of merit conflates a political relationship (such as between a state and its citizen and between citizens) with an economic contract. Girardot's concept of reified social contract elucidates this change: a social contract is understood as a literal contract that must not be breached. Political relations, in Girardot's thought, ought to pertain to negotiations on how to live together. However, in the framework of a reified social contract, these negotiations are considered to be over and the relationship of a citizen with their community becomes understood in terms of an economic contract. Citizens who somehow breach that contract are thought to not be entitled to their rights, which are enforced by the society. Rights, in other words, become conditional; citizens are entitled to their rights if they fulfil their part of the social contract. If they do not, they may be excluded by (and even from) the society (cut from welfare services, incarcerated and even deported).

In the article, I elucidate how the thought models that Girardot associates with the ideology of merit are compatible with neoliberal social policy and how they can be used to justify it. I also sketch out a 'Girardotian' model and justification for a basic income. The analysis of Girardot's ideology of merit reveals that neoliberal practices aiming to widen income equality and increase inequality are at least partly justified by referring to an ideological conception of merit. The ideology of merit normalizes the attempt to introduce neoliberal practices into working life and social policy. In framework of the ideology, they start to appear as both logical and justified.

6.2 'Recognition and the ideology of merit'

The article discusses the pathological forms that the ideal of merit takes in ideological uses of meritocratic ideas. According to Dominique Girardot (2011), our possibility of genuinely recognizing one another is impaired by the ideology of merit: this new ideology standardizes recognition and forces competition, thus creating hierarchies and what Axel Honneth calls social pathologies. The ideology also threatens the category of action in the sense of Hannah Arendt's (1958) use of the term. The article elucidates Girardot's stance and sketches a comparison between Honneth's and Girardot's views on recognition. Despite the explicit connection to Honneth's theory, Girardot actually creates an Arendtian theory of recognition. It is against the backdrop of that theory that the pathological forms of contemporary meritocracy may be best brought to light.

I start the article by going through the Arendtian concepts that define Girardot's theory. I then discern and examine five issues that, according to Girardot, pose a risk to the possibility of attaining recognition. It is important to point out that the main risk involves things that are emerging as new and that earlier standards cannot grasp (brought about due to Arendtian plurality). This kind of newness cannot be properly dealt with by means of procedural, standardized approaches, such as quantitative methods or standardized testing. When this is, nevertheless, attempted the newness cannot be recognized. The problem lies partly in the newness of the deeds but also in the fact that the tests will rule out the singular in great deeds, that which makes one deed – and not another similar deed – unique. In fact, the point is not simply the deed. Girardot argues that standardized approaches cannot give proper recognition (in her terms 'admiration') to human beings in their 'singularity'. What is interesting in Girardot's theory of recognition is the combination of aspects that Honneth keeps separate, at least in his first formulations of recognition theory. The concept of singularity – the uniqueness of all human beings reflected in each person's actions, and which people hope to have recognized – is absent, I think, in Honneth's theorizations.

Girardot's conceptualization thus enables grasping a new element in human beings' need for recognition: it is not just a need for recognition for one's great actions, but a need for recognition of the person as a whole, for all that they are and, crucially, all that they are longing to become (Girardot 2011, 146), including that others could see them as someone who is capable of admirable deeds. According to Girardot, something crucial is lost when only performances are weighed. 'Measuring evaluates what is done' (Girardot 2011, 132), whereas recognition concerns who acts, the singularity of the person that is manifested in action.

The five problematic issues that threaten the granting and attaining of recognition are cases of objectified recognition: 1) the threat that only measurable things are taken into consideration and recognized; 2) reified recognition, where only certain pre-set activities are considered as merits; 3) when pre-set activities are recognized simply by giving out a set reward, which inflates the meaning of recognition; 4) when only the efficiency of activities, measurable results, etc. can be recognized and are automatically rewarded, and action in Arendt's sense is rendered superfluous, incomprehensible and unnecessary; and 5) the conception of human potentiality in measurement and testing limits (in the words of Girardot) the subject to actualities, such that their potential is nullified unless it is somehow already 'actualized'.

Girardot also opens up interesting ways of seeing pathologies of recognition. In this Girardotian view, a pathology of recognition is not necessarily a situation where recognition is not given, even though from some point of view it ought to be given. Importantly for Girardot, recognition is not something that can be demanded as due. Instead, it is a freely issued gift. However, if recognition is not given even though it is in some way 'due', this may be wrong or tragic. I argue that the pathology of recognition, according to this Girardotian model, is

when this necessarily precarious recognition is replaced by the standardized rewarding of certain merits. This is accompanied by constant evaluation, which further standardizes the conception of human action. True recognition in the Girardotian sense becomes ever more difficult to attain. Also, genuine newness and the possibility of change start to appear impossible.

6.3 'Merit, Competition, Distinction'

The article presents a critique of competition by introducing a concept called distinction. Competition is thought to work as a guarantee of the fairness of meritocratic procedures. However, fairness created by competition is, even at its best, only relative. This critique is then used as part of a wider critique of the role of merit in society.

In this article, I continue with questions that had to be left aside in the second article. I wanted to delve deeper into the implications of Girardot's formula: 'competition creates hierarchies, it does not distinguish'. Thus, I first differentiated between Girardot's two divisions, conflict versus competition and hierarchy versus distinction, in order to bring out the importance of the concept of distinction for the critique of competition.

Competition is often taken as a guarantee of the fairness of meritocratic procedures. Also, sometimes people are thought to be able to distinguish themselves most efficiently through competition. My analysis, however, focuses the attention to the inherent limitations of competition: that it forces similarity and thus makes actually distinguishing oneself harder. By using problems created by competition in the academic world as examples, I am able to show that a procedure that could recognize distinction could help amend some of the problems created by competition. However, the problematic relates to structural issues and cannot be fully mended without also changing structures. For instance, when two equally good but distinct candidates apply for the same position, their distinction cannot be truly recognized if only one person can be hired. In the same vein, I conclude the article with a warning: tweaking merit-based procedures so that they might in some ways recognize distinction is not a complete solution to societal problems caused by merit-based, exclusive competitions.

Yet, as I am able to show in the fourth section of the article, the concept of distinction has its own value. Recognizing distinction opens the way for newness to emerge in society. I argue that in order to recognize distinction, something that in Hannah Arendt's terminology we could refer to as miracles, we need active Irigarayan wonder, as interpreted by Sara Heinämaa (2016). To prevent this recognition from becoming completely intuitive and thereby marked by our prejudices, I argue for procedures of recognition that, as theorized by Helen Longino (2002) and Saana Jukola (2015), can utilize the diverse biases of people making decisions and, accordingly, approach objectivity rather than just imagine achieving it.

6.4 'Merit-based exclusion in Finnish music schools'

In this article, I analyse merit-based exclusion in Finnish music schools for children and young people. The basis of the study is my earlier research on meritocracy and written data collected online from current and former music school students in the autumn and winter of 2015–2016.

In light of my earlier examinations, the creation of hierarchies is crucial to meritocratic practices (Elmgren, 2015; 2018; Girardot, 2011). Therefore, depictions of hierarchies that could be found in the data were chosen as one theme of the analysis. My research questions were:

1. What kinds of hierarchies, if any, are there in music schools?
2. What are the hierarchies based on?
3. How do the possible hierarchies affect the students' experiences of music school and possibilities of learning?

14.2% of the respondents reported having noticed hierarchies in music school. According to the respondents, the hierarchies were based on differences in the perceived skills of the students. I therefore argued that hierarchies are meritocratic (rather than nepotistic, for instance). The analysis shows that there are implicit and explicit hierarchies in music schools. The respondents were often aware of their own standing in them. Hierarchies have been shown in earlier research (Perkins 2013) to affect 'how and what' students learn. In Davies' (2004) account, merit-based exclusion from performances meant exclusion from important learning opportunities for students. Thus, hierarchies potentially create self-fulfilling prophecies concerning students.

I was able to classify the hierarchies into four categories: 1) hierarchies among students of the same teacher (favouritism); 2) hierarchies among students who play the same instrument; 3) hierarchies on the level of the whole music school; and 4) hierarchies among teachers.

The question of innate talent, which I also trace in this introductory chapter, is often present in meritocratic thought models. Music school students who advance more quickly than their peers are often considered talented and, vice versa, those advancing less quickly are thought to lack talent. I wanted to study how respondents related to the concept of talent and I asked in the call for writings if the respondents had felt that their 'motivation, application and talent were recognized' in the music school. Some respondents (5.8%) reported that being considered talented was a positive psychological resource, which could, for instance, increase motivation to practice. As a kind of a parallel to this result, 8.3% mentioned thinking of themselves as not talented enough, as being average or mediocre players, or having a low consideration of their level of musicality. For most of these respondents, this negatively affected their self-esteem as musicians.

The respondents used the concepts of 'talent' and 'being good' to explain the hierarchies in the institutions. These could be invoked as a self-evident way of creating a 'natural' hierarchy among the students. Thus, the hierarchies were not usually seen as unfair. In one response, the hierarchical grouping of students

was criticized, but not because the hierarchy itself was unfair. Instead, the respondent felt that the ones who were higher in the hierarchy were 'exceptional talents'. She criticized the hierarchical division of students into groups that were never mixed. She could not argue that the hierarchy was unfair, but its permanence and, I would argue, the underlining of the different levels of the students' skills 'caused problems not just for [the respondent] but for many others'.

This and other examples from the data focused attention on how hierarchic practices and conceptions of 'talent' as an innate gift that cannot be learnt created situations where students' potential was overlooked. In Girardotian terms, the students were limited to their factualities. For instance, the teachers could interpret the students' current and particular problems in music as more general indicators of the students' low musical abilities and potential.

Another interesting find was that, for some respondents, being considered talented became a burden. (See also this introduction, Section 4.2.) Teachers and/or parents interpreted these students' 'talent' as something that compelled further commitment to music. Advancing in one's studies could thus become an external obligation rather than a personal goal, and talent was understood as a reason to instrumentalize the student. As I explicate by analysing two particularly compelling data cases from two persons who had a professional degree in music, not even success in one's studies guarantees feeling included or freedom from harmful thought models related to talent and potential.

I was able to elucidate how meritocratic practices can produce failures that they only pretend to reflect. Merit-based exclusion from concerts, longer lessons and giving special attention to those who are considered better or more 'talented' are justified by meritocratic logic, according to which the best ought to be rewarded and given the most possibilities and incentives for their advancement. In practice, this means excluding some students from learning opportunities, making it impossible for them to learn the same things as those who are more recognized by the institution.

My analysis highlights that while the meritocracy in the music schools may well be 'real' – the most recognized may indeed be the best players of their respective instruments – this situation seems at least partly created by not allowing all students to acquire all the needed abilities. For instance, lack of practicing, which in one respondent's text was described as due to a lack of motivation, was interpreted by the teacher as lack of talent. When this student started practicing, in his own words, 'more than just in the morning before the music lesson', the teacher became more encouraging. Some respondents complimented their teacher for motivating them. In the above example, the teacher did not seem to be aware of their student's practicing habits (or, rather, lack thereof), and instead of motivating them they suggested a change of instrument or quitting music altogether. This difference in music school practices relating to motivation is arguably another example of how differences in skills may be the result of the practices rather than reflect innate differences of the students, such as talent.

In the article, I could discern several merit-based exclusive practices in Finnish music schools. In light of the students' experiences of them, these meritocratic

processes started to seem questionable. Therefore, my conclusion is that we should not aim at improving the working of meritocratic processes and practices in music schools – they may be working quite well! Instead the question is how to enable everyone to have access to all the learning processes at a given educational institution.

Data and methods

The survey data for the research project were collected during the late autumn of 2015 and the winter of 2016. It was gathered online with a call for writings on a Jyväskylä University webpage. The survey was mostly distributed via Facebook and some mailing lists. The survey consisted of an introductory text, a short survey concerning background information, and a space in which the respondents could recount their experiences. The scope of the inquiry was limited to the last 20 years, namely, to people who had studied in music schools during the years 1995–2015. There were 117 usable answers. (One respondent had not studied during 1995–2015, and one did not indicate the time of study and considering their age had most likely not studied during that time, and so they were disqualified. Another respondent did not leave any background information, so their (short) answer was not considered.)

The creation of hierarchies is crucial to meritocratic practices (Elmgren, 2015; 2018; Girardot, 2011). Therefore, depictions of hierarchies were chosen as one theme of the analysis. I coded the data according to specific traits and depictions of situations where the respondents had felt excluded.

Most responses narrated several – even conflicting – experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Someone who was well-recognized and included by their instrument teacher could feel like an outcast during music theory lessons or in orchestra, or vice versa. Positive and negative feelings also seem to have alternated during the years of studying in music school, due to, for example, the teacher changing or varying practices, such as voluntary activities becoming compulsory.

Studying experiences is not a self-evident task. The concept of experience is not ‘innocent’; it is already an interpretation by the person verbalizing their experience and by the researcher analysing it (Säilävaara, 2017; Saresma, 2010). Following Saresma (2010), the analysis elucidates how experiences of exclusion are formed, and what sorts of situations and practices are described in relation to exclusion. I searched for depictions of different situations and practices that were related to inclusion and exclusion, and I classified them according to patterns that I was able to extract: mention of competition, mention of hierarchies, talent as a personal resource, mention of not having enough talent/considering oneself unmusical/average, feeling like an outsider, feeling included, feeling included due to hierarchy, playing together as a positive thing, having a say in one’s studies, perfectionism/creativity, norms/having no say in one’s studies, and questioning the function of music school. From these I chose the themes for this article that related to hierarchies and talent. In the future, I will hopefully have the chance to write about those themes that had to be set aside.

The method of analysis was theory-driven qualitative content analysis (Alasuutari, 2012). As the theoretic foundation of the study, I used my own framework of meritocracy, which the three theoretical attached articles provide. The data also allowed me a limited possibility to test some of my 'hypotheses' on meritocratic procedures, such as how competition affected the possibility to attain 'distinction' (in Girardot's sense of the term). However, in the end I did not have the space to include in the article these parts of the analysis.

YHTEENVETO

Tässä väitöskirjatyössä tutkitaan nykymeritokratian problematiikkaa. Meritokratia ilmenee nyky-yhteiskunnassa käytäntöinä ja menettelyinä, joita käytetään erottelemaan ihmisiä heidän ansioidensa, kuten loppututkintojen ja hankittujen tai (väitetysti) sisäsyntyisten hyvien ominaisuuksiensa perusteella. Niiden perusteella voidaan oikeuttaa joidenkin ihmisten ulossulkeminen esimerkiksi opilaitoksesta tai tavoitellusta työpaikasta.

Yleisen käsityksen mukaan meritokraattisten menettelyjen kautta tehdyt ulossulkemiset ovat reiluja. Ne syrjivät taitojen ja pätevyyksien, eivätkä esimerkiksi sukupuolen tai etnisyyden perusteella. Kuitenkin näissä tilanteissa unohdetaan kyseenalaistaa kulttuurimme luomia taustaoletuksia ja -arvotuksia, kuten miten työnjako on järjestetty yhteiskunnallisesti, töiden eriävä arvostus, miten pääsy koulutukseen on jakautunut yhteiskunnassa, sekä meriittijärjestelmän staattinen ihmiskäsitys ja siihen kuuluva näkemys ihmisten taidoista ja niiden kehittymisestä. Tämän väitöskirjan on tarkoitus tuoda esiin näitä kysymyksiä ja selvittää, miten ne aiheuttavat yhteiskunnallisia ja ihmisten välisiä ongelmia.

Väitöskirja koostuu neljästä artikkelista ja johdantoluvusta. Johdanto käy läpi meriitin ja meritokratian käsitteiden historiaa ja sen yhtymäkohtia 1800-luvun lopun ja 1900-luvun alun eugeniikkaan ja älykkyystestien syntyyn. Tämä genealoginen katsaus on toteutettu Ansgar Allenin *Benign Violence* -teoksen avulla. Filosofit ovat tuominneet meritokratian poliittisena järjestelmänä, mutta se on edelleen toiminnassa sosiaalisissa käytännöissä. Johdantoluku hyödyntää sosiologista tutkimusta osoittaessaan miten meritokratia ja siihen kiinteästi liittyvä mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvon ideaali epäonnistuvat pyrkimyksessään luoda reilumpi yhteiskunta. Sen sijaan ne ovat osaltaan jopa luomassa ihmisyksilöiden epäonnistumisia, joita koko meriittijärjestelmän oletetaan vain objektiivisesti heijastelevan.

Ansioihin perustuva toiminnan muoto kyseenalaistetaan väitöskirjassa ensinnäkin Hannah Arendtin *amor mundin* ja toiminnan käsitteiden avulla. Ne mahdollistavat toiminnan itseisarvon käsitteellistämisen, ilman ennakkoedellytyksiä tai vaatimusta erinomaisista tuloksista. Toisekseen huomion kohteeksi nostetaan Tyson E. Lewisin teoretisoima impotentiaalinen käsite, joka pohjaa Giorgio Agambenin filosofiaan. Impotentiaali tarkoittaa potentiaalia, joka ei aktualisoidu ja saa tämän kautta poliittisen merkityksen: se tarkoittaa mahdollisuutta kieltäytyä toiminnasta, esimerkiksi liian vähäisten taitojen tai moraalisyiden vuoksi. Tämä tarkoittaa käytännössä negatiivista vapautta, vapautta pakosta. Tämän puute voi näkyä arkielämässä esimerkiksi mahdollisuuksien muuttumisena velvollisuuksiksi, esimerkiksi vaatimuksena saavuttaa harrastustoiminnassa tiettyjä tuloksia. Tämä voi tarkoittaa kaikille kuuluvan ihmisarvon unohtamista ja ihmisen välineellistämistä esimerkiksi oppimisprosesseille tai muille arvoille kuten taiteelle tai taloudelliselle tulokselle. Väitöstutkimus hahmotteleekin käsitteellistä ja poliittista tilaa, jossa edistymiselle ja kehittymiselle on tilaa ja mahdollisuuksia mutta samalla ne eivät ole edellytystä toiminnalle tai sen välttämätön ehto.

Artikkeli I esittelee ja analysoi Dominique Girardot'n teoriaa meriitin ideologiasta. Tämän käsitteellistyksen avulla saadaan näkyviin meritokratian ja yhteiskunnallisen epätasa-arvon välinen yhteys. Artikkeli osoittaa, miten yhteiskunnallinen eriarvoisuus voidaan selittää ja oikeutta niin kutsutun meriitin ideologian avulla vetoamalla ansioihin. Tämä meriitin ideologia luo edellytyksiä uusliberalistiselle sosiaalipolitiikalle ja toimii sen oikeuttajana.

Artikkeli II ja III käsittelevät meriitin ja tunnustussuhteiden yhteyttä. Artikkelissa II käydään läpi Dominique Girardot'n arendtilaisen tunnustusteorian eroja Axel Honnethin käsityksiin nähden ja tuodaan esiin viisi mahdollista tunnustuksen patologiaa, jotka nk. meriitin ideologia aikaansaa. Artikkelissa III kritisoidaan pyrkimystä kohentaa yhteiskunnan oikeudenmukaisuutta meritokraattisten menetelmien toimintaa hiomalla. Menetelmät itse kuitenkin ylläpitävät syvempää eriarvoisuutta. Lisäksi se käsittelee Girardot'n teoreettisen kehyksen tarjoamaa mahdollisuutta teoretisoida aivan uuden ja ennennäkemättömän tunnustusta.

IV artikkeli on empiirinen tutkimus suomalaisten musiikkiopisto-opiskelijoiden kokemuksista meriitteihin perustuvasta ulossulkemisesta. Tutkimus osoittaa joissakin musiikkiopistoissa olevan meriitteihin perustuvan ulossulkemisen käytäntöjä, kuten neljän eri tason hierarkioita. Lisäksi lahjakkuuden kategoria voidaan käyttää itsestään selvänä ulossulkemisen perusteena. Nämä käytännöt luovat itseään toteuttavia ennusteita ja vaikeuttavat ulossuljettujen opiskelijoiden mahdollisuuksia hyötyä koulutuksesta yhtä paljon kuin hierarkioissa korkeammalle sijoittuvat opiskelijat.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

HUOMIOITA ANSAITSEMISEN IDEOLOGIASTA

by

Heidi Elmgren 2014

(English translation by Markku Nivalainen provided for the pre-examiners)

Tiede & Edistys vol 40(2), 123–140.

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HUOMIOITA ANSAITSEMISEN IDEOLOGIASTA

JOHDANTO

Tarkastelen artikkelissani kriittisestä yhteiskuntafilosofisesta näkökulmasta länsimaisissa yhteiskunnissa vaikuttavaa ansaitsemisen tai meriitin ideologiaa (*idéologie du mérite*). Käsitteen kehittäjä ja pääteoreetikko on Suomessa vähän tunnettu ranskalainen filosofian opettaja ja tutkija Dominique Girardot. Hän kuuluu ranskalaiseen MAUSS-liikkeeseen ("Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les sciences sociales": Yhteiskuntatieteiden antiutilitaristinen liike) jonka on perustanut filosofi Alain Caillé. MAUSS-liike lähtee nimensä mukaisesti liikkeelle antropologi ja sosiologi Marcel Maussin tutkimuksista (ks. Graeber 2008; Caillé 2000).

Artikkelini tarkoitus on selvittää, miten meritokratia, keskeinen länsimainen erinomaisuuden arvostamiseen ja tasavertaisiin mahdollisuuksiin liittyvä eronteon periaate, luo edellytyksiä uusliberalistiselle sosiaalipolitiikalle ja toimii sen oikeuttajana. Meritokratia ilmenee esimerkiksi työnhaku- ja opiskelijavalintakäytännöissä henkilökohtaisen ansiokkuuden tarkasteluna sekä ihanteena yhteiskunnasta, jossa kukin yksilö kykenee toteuttamaan koko potentiaalinsa ja sijoittuu sosiaalisessa hierarkiassa objektiivisen arvioinnin osoittamalle, ansaitsemalleen paikalle. Tämä yhteiskunnan järjestämisen ihanne toimii uusliberalistisen sosiaalipolitiikkakäsityksen (esim. Britanniassa New Labour (Barry 2005)) taustalla ja vaikuttaa ihmisten väliseen kanssakäymiseen. Meritokratiaa ja uusliberalismia kritisoidaan artikkelissa rinnastamalla ne antropologi Marcel Maussin tutkimaan lahjan paradigmaan, yhteisöjen vä-

liseen antamiseen ja vastavuoroisuuden veloitteeseen perustuvaan tapaan toimia.

UUSLIBERALISMI¹

Yksi Dominique Girardot'n kritiikin pääkohteista *La Société du Mérite* -teoksessa on uusliberalismi. Girardot luonnehtii kritisoimaansa uusliberalismia käsitteellä "suuntaus" (*orientation*) ja puhuu muun muassa uusliberalistisista teeseistä ja uusliberalistisesta yhteiskunnasta (Girardot 68–75). Vaikuttaa siltä, että uusliberalismi on Girardot'lle jonkinlainen oppi, joka vaikuttaa yhteiskunnallisiin käytäntöihin ja erityisesti Girardot'n tutkiman meriitin ideologian kautta ihmisten ajattelumalleihin ja uskomuksiin maailmasta.

Tätä uusliberalismin määrittelyä on vielä syytä tarkentaa. Uusliberalismikriittiselle David Harveyille uusliberalismi on ensisijaisesti poliittisen taloustieteen teoria, jonka mukaan hyvinvointia edistetään parhaiten luomalla yhteiskunnallinen viitekehys, jossa yksityiset, yrittäjyyteen liittyvät vapaudet voivat vaikuttaa vapaasti. Tämä viitekehys muodostuu vahvoista omaisuus oikeuksista, vapaista markkinoista ja vapaakaupasta. Uusliberalismin nousu keskeiseksi politiikan tekemisen tekniikaksi ja taustaideologiaksi tapahtui Margaret Thatcherin ja Ronald Reaganin valtakausina 1980-luvulla Britanniassa ja Yhdysvalloissa (Harvey 2005, 8–9). Harveyn määritelmä on jossain määrin yksioikoinen, ja siksi uusliberalismia määriteltessä on hyvä tutkia myös muita tapoja hahmottaa sitä. Toinen kiinnostava määritelmä

on pitää sitä yhtenä niin sanotun kilpailuvaltion hallintastrategiana muiden joukossa: Bob Jessopin jaottelun mukaan hallintastrategioita on ainakin neljä. Ville-Pekka Sorsan mukaan Suomessa on nähtävissä näistä strategioista uusliberalismin lisäksi myös neostatistia sekä neokorporatismia. (Sorsa 2014.) On kuitenkin huomattava, että Girardot tarkastelee teoksesaan vain uusliberalismiin liittyviä ongelmia.

Harveyille uusliberalismi tarkoittaa konkreettisia käytäntöjä, joiden tarkoituksena on palauttaa valta-asema pienelle taloudelliselle eliitille. Uusliberalismi ei siis ole Harveyille niinkään ideologia: sen sijaan ideologiaa käytetään luomaan yleinen uusliberalismille myönteinen mielipideilmasto (Harvey 2005, 40). Harveyn mukaan hallitsevaan asemaan pyrkivän ajatusmallin täytyy käyttää apunaan intuitioihimme ja vaistoihimme vetoavaa käsitteellistä koneistoa. Harveyn mukaan uusliberalismin pioneerit lähtivät liikkeelle ihmisarvon ja yksilönvapauden poliittisista ihanteista, joiden he näkivät olevan uhattuina ilman uusliberalistista talous- ja yhteiskuntapolitiikkaa. (Harvey 2005, 5.) Uusliberalismin taustalla vaikuttavat ihanteet vetoavat länsimaisen kulttuurin pitkiin perinteisiin. Tästä syystä uusliberalismin omaksuminen tuntuu luontevalta, ja se selittää, miksi uusliberalistisia käytäntöjä on niin vaikea kyseenalaistaa. Uusliberalismin taustalla vaikuttavien ideologioiden purkaminen voi helpottaa uusliberalististen, talouspoliittisten dogmien ja käytäntöjen asettamista uudelleen tarkastelun kohteeksi. Artikkelini keskeinen väite on, että liberalismien arvojen lisäksi uusliberalismin taustalla vaikuttaa toinenkin ideologinen voima, ”käsitteellinen koneisto”, joka vetoaa intuitioihimme ja vaistoihimme: meritokratia.

Girardot’n teorian tarkastelua varten on hyödyllistä lähestyä uusliberalismia sekä Jessopin ja Harveyn käsitysten kautta. Uusliberalismi ei väritä kaikkea poliittista elämää Suomessa. Meriitin ideologia, jota artikkeli käsittelee, kuitenkin toimii uusliberalistisen ihmiskuvan ja uusliberalismin värittämän sosiaalipolitiikkakäsityksen kehyksessä, ja se voi

vahvistaa nimenomaan uusliberalististen käytäntöjen ja uusliberalistisen hallintastrategian asemaa Suomessa.

MERITOKRATIA

Arkikielessä meritokratialla viitataan yleensä vastuun ja/tai tehtävien jakamiseen henkilöille heidän henkilökohtaisten ansioidensa, meriitinsä, perusteella. Meritokratian periaate on ikivanha: meritokratian idean katsotaan esiintyneen ensimmäisenä Kungfutsella (551–479 eaa.) (Yearley 2002, 247), ja myös sekä Platon (427–347 eaa.) että Aristoteles (384–322 eaa.) kannattivat meritokratiaa (ks. Platon 1999; Aristoteles 2005). Meritokratia on pohjimmiltaan ansionmukaisuuteen vetoava periaate: meritoituneet eli ansiokkaat ansaitsevat asemansa. Pidetään myös oikeudenmukaisena, että tehtävän saa ansioitunut, ja tämä käsitys kestää myös kriittistä tarkastelua: esimerkiksi ansioituneen, asiantuntevan henkilön valitseminen vaatimaan tehtävään on tietenkin oikeudenmukaisempaa kuin epäpätevän tuttavän tai sukulaisen palkkaaminen sukulais- tai kaverisuhteen vuoksi. Ansionmukaisuuden keskeisyys länsimaissa oikeudenmukaisuuskäsityksessä välittyy myös John Stuart Millin etiikan klassikosta *Utilitarismi* (ilmestymisvuosi 1863): ”Kolmanneksi oikeudenmukaisena pidetään yleisesti sitä, että jokainen ihminen saa sen (hyvän tai pahan asian), minkä hän ansaitsee. [...] Tämä on ehkä selvin ja painokkain muoto, jonka oikeudenmukaisuuden idea ihmisten mielisissä saa” (Mill 2000, 69). Ansionmukaisuuden ihanne on siis kuulunut eurooppalaiseen ajattelutapaan jo pitkään, mutta varsinaisesti meritokratia, yhteiskunnallisen aseman perustuminen omaan ansiokkuuteen, alkoi syrjäyttää perimysjärjestelmää vasta 1700-luvulla, ensimmäisenä sotilaallisissa instituutioissa, kuten armeijoissa ja sotakorkeakouluissa. (Sennett 2006, 109–110.)

Suomalaisesta nyky-yhteiskunnasta löytyy merkittävästi meritokraattisia piirteitä:

pyrkimystä palkata soveltuvimmat, löytää lahjakkaimmat, kouluttaa lupaavimmat ja motivoituneimmat sekä todistaa todellinen osaaminen muodollisen pätevyyden suosimisen sijaan. Kaikissa näissä tapauksissa on keskeistä saada selville, kuka esimerkiksi työnhakijoista tai koulutuspaikkaa tavoittelevista ansaitsee omalla aiemmalla toiminnallaan ja osoitetulla motivaatiollaan työ- tai koulutuspaikan. Tätä muotoilua voi kritisoida tarkoitushakuisuudesta: ajatellaanko tilanteissa tosiaan ansaitsemista? Eikö kyse ole esimerkiksi soveltuvuudesta? Ansaitsemistulkinnan puolesta kuitenkin puhuvat tilanteet, joissa huomataan, että joku on saanut työ- tai koulutuspaikan ilman ansioita ja motivaatiota. Näissä tilanteissa on helppoa todeta, ettei kyseinen henkilö ole ansainnut saamaansa. Tilanteissa näyttäytyy soveltumattomuus, mutta kyse on muustakin: on tapahtunut jonkinlainen vääryys. Meritokraattisuus näkyy myös tulospalkkausjärjestelmissä: tulospalkkauksella pyritään palkitsemaan ansioista ja hyvin tehdystä työstä. Myös sosiaalietuuksien maksaminen perustuu todistettuun tarpeeseen ja esimerkiksi työttömyyskorvausta saadakseen täytyy osoittaa hakevansa aktiivisesti töitä. Olennaista on osoittaa ansaitsevansa yhteiskunnan tuki sen sijaan, että vain teeskentelee avun tarvetta ja huijaa sosiaalietuuskijärjestelmää.²

Kuten jo todettu, kun virkoja, opiskelupaikkoja ja niin edelleen täytetään, on toki mielekästä tarkastella, kuka on pätevin tai motivoitunein – rajallista määrää resursseja ei ole taloudellista eikä mielekästäkään jakaa täysin satunnaisesti. Meritokraattinen hakuprosessi on oikeudenmukaisempi tapa jakaa työpaikkoja kuin esimerkiksi sukulaisia suosiva nepotismi tai maksukykyyn perustuva plutokratia, ja sillä vaikutetaan suotuisasti myös tehdyn työn laatuun. Tämän artikkelin tarkoitus onkin avata keskustelua siitä, mikä kaikki voidaan nähdä ansaittuna ja millaisia seurauksia ansionmukaisuuden leviämisellä uusille alueille on.

MERITOKRATIA JA

MAHDOLLISUUKSIEN TASA-ARVO

Meritokratia on tiiviisti kiinnittynyt mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvoon. Meritokratian onnistuminen oikeudenmukaisen yhteiskunnan luomisessa (ainakin näennäisesti) riippuu siitä, kuinka hyvin mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvo toimii kyseisessä yhteiskunnassa. Mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvoa kannatetaan nyky-Suomessa laajasti: esimerkiksi politiikassa meritokratiaa ja mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvoa tavoitellaan keskeisenä oikeudenmukaisen yhteiskunnan elementtinä. Hallituspuolue kokoomus luettelee sen toisena kuudesta keskeisestä arvostaan (Kokoomuspuolueen periaateohjelma). Mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvo nähdään oikeutettuna tapana järjestää tiettyyn asemaan pääsy yhteiskunnassa.

Mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvoa ei kuitenkaan pidetä filosofisesti riittävänä oikeudenmukaisuusperiaatteena, vaan sitä tulee tarkentaa muilla periaatteilla. Sosiaalisen oikeudenmukaisuuden kysymyksiä tutkineelle Brian Barrylle mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvo on ideologia, joka oikeuttaa *status quon* mystifioimalla sen näennäisen oikeudenmukaiseksi kamppailuksi korkeammasta sijasta hierarkiassa (Barry 2005, 40). Yhteiskuntafilosofi John Rawls tuo esiin sekä *Oikeudenmukaisuusteoria* (1988) että *Political liberalism* (1993) -teoksissaan epäilyksensä meritokratiaa ja mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvoa kohtaan ja argumentoi ”reilun” eli sisällökkään, ei ainoastaan muodollisen mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvon puolesta. *Oikeudenmukaisuusteoriasa* Rawls kirjoittaa osuvasti: ”Mahdollisuuksien yhtäläisyys merkitsee yhtäläistä tilaisuutta pyrkiä muodostamaan rakoa huono-osaisimpiin tavoittelemalla henkilökohtaista vaikutusvaltaa ja yhteiskunnallista asemaa” (Rawls 1988, 70). Meritokratiakriitikko Dominique Girardot huomauttaa Rawlsiin viitaten, että meriitin ideologia luo illuusioita oikeudenmukaisuudesta: se muuntaa oikeudenmukaisuuden moraalikysymykseksi (Girardot 2011, 56). Tämä

tarkoittaa tulkintani mukaan sitä, että oikeudenmukaisesta kohtelusta tulee jokaiselle kuuluvan oikeuden sijaan moraalisuuteen ja erinomaiseen käytökseen perustuva ansaittava etu. Tällöin on lupa odottaa oikeudenmukaista kohtelua, mikäli on toiminut oikein. Oikeudenmukaisuuden oleellinen puoli on kuitenkin puolueettomuus: laki on sama kaikille, se kohtelee lainrikkojaakin *oikeudenmukaisesti*. Rawlsille oleellisen distributiivisen oikeudenmukaisuuden ei tule toimia ”retribuutiivisen” oikeudenmukaisuuden tavoin: siinä missä rangaistukset asetetaan sen mukaan, kuinka vakavan rikoksen syytetty on tehnyt, distributiivisen oikeudenmukaisuuden ei pitäisi olla erinomaisuuden palkitsemista. (Rawls 1988, 182.) Meritokraattinen erinomaisuuden palkitseminen ei tästä syystä kelpaa Rawlsille oikeudenmukaisuuden takeeksi esimerkiksi yhteiskunnallisesti järjestetyssä tulonjaossa.

Yhteiskunnalliseen oikeudenmukaisuuteen pyrkiminen keskittymällä mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvoon sisältää muitakin huomattavia ongelmia. Meritokratian ja mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvon ihmiskuvaan ei kuulu ihmisten välinen tasa-arvo: ihmiset nähdään oleellisesti erilaisina kyvyiltään ja siksi he myös ansaitsevat eri asioita. Mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvon toteutumista pidetään usein meritokratian oikeudenmukaisuuden takeena. Kumpikaan, mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvo ja sen myötä toteutuva meritokratia eivät kyseenalaista näkemystä ihmisten välisestä hierarkiasta vaan ainoastaan tavan, jolla hierarkioita rakennetaan: paremmuusjärjestyksen luominen ja jonkun jättäminen sen perusteella ulkopuolelle näyttävät meritokratian viitekehyyksessä aina oikeutettuina. Tämä voi avata ongelmallisen mahdollisuuden oikeuttaa nyt poliittisina ongelmina pidettyjä asioita: esimerkiksi eriarvoistuminen ja toisten ulos sulkeminen erilaisten palveluiden ja jopa oikeuksien piiristä voidaan nähdä oikeutettuna näiden ihmisten ansioiden puutteen vuoksi. Esimerkiksi terveydenhuollon rahoitusongelmien ratkaisuksi esitetään usein niin sanottujen elintapasairauksien hoidon muuttamista omakustanteiseksi. Toisin sanoen sairautensa ”itse

hankkineiden” oikeus terveydenhuoltoon kyseenalaistetaan. Meritokratian kriittinen tutkimus vaikuttaakin tärkeältä lisältä suomalaisen keskusteluun sosiaalietuuksista.

ANSION KÄSITE

Ennen meriitin ideologian käsittelyä tarkastelen Girardot’n käsitystä meriitin käsitteestä. Arkipuheessa ansiolla tai meriitillä viitataan yleensä yksilön (ns. luontaisiin tai hankittuihin) myönteisiin ominaisuuksiin, kuten kykyihin ja muuhun osaamiseen. Tyypiesimerkkejä ansioista ovat esimerkiksi koulutus tai työkokemus. Girardot’lle meriitti tarkoittaa kuitenkin myös jotain hieman muuta.

Girardot käyttää käsitettä kahdella tavalla: yhtäältä meriitti viittaa arkipuheessa käytettyyn individualistiseen ansion käsitteeseen, joka vääristyy meriitin ideologian myötä; käsite siis esiintyy kritiikin kohteena. Vääristyneessä meriittikäsitetyksessä meriitti nähdään vaivannäön hyvittämisenä, palkkiona. Tämä selittyy ranskan kielen erityispiirteinä: meriitti-sana kääntyy joissakin yhteyksissä ’kunniana’; suomeksi sanottaisiin: ”*kunnia* tästä kuuluu hänelle”. Kunnian kuulumiseen jollekulle sisältyy Girardot’n analyysissä palkkio, hyvitys. Meriitti tarkoittaa Girardot’lle kuitenkin selkeästi myös sitä, mitä suomen arkikielessä nimitettäisiin ansioksi. Näitä käsityksiä yhdistää erityisesti individualismi: kunnia kuuluu yksilölle, koulutus on samoin yksilön pääomaa.

Toisaalta Girardot’n mukaan meriitin tulleekin olla eronteon ja arvonnannon kriteeri: meriitti on etuoikeuden vastakohta ja sinänsä demokraattiselle yhteiskunnalle sopiva tapa käsitteellistää arvoa. (Girardot 2011, 38; 205.) Välillä termin *mérite* kääntäminen on kuitenkin monimutkaisempaa. Tarkentaessaan, miten meriitti tulisi ymmärtää, Girardot kirjoittaa esimerkiksi: ”meriitti on ’mittaamattoman’ [*démesure*; yl. käännetään ’ylettömyys’]³ välttämättä arbitraarinen vastaanotto” (Girardot 2011,

188). Meriitti ei tarkoita tässä lauseessa eikä Girardot'n käsityksessä yleisemminkään pelkästään esimerkiksi ansioluetteloon kirjattavia konkreettisia ansioita, vaan mitä tahansa, mikä voi saada aikaan ihailua (*admiration*) muissa ihmisissä, konkreettisempien ansioiden lisäksi myös esimerkiksi yksittäistä suurenmoista tekoa. Tällainen käsitys meriitistä auttaa avaamaan edellä mainitun lauseen merkitystä: meriitti kuvastaa jonkin asian vastaanottoa ja merkitystä yhteiskunnassa ja on siksi aina osin arbitraarinen, aikaan ja paikkaan sidottu, eikä sitä voida määrittää pysyvästi tai ”puhtaan” puolueettomasti, standardisoimalla. Tulkintani mukaan Girardot'lle meriitti on suhdekäsite: asiat eivät niinkään *ole* meriittejä vaan ne pikemminkin *tulkitaan* meriitiksi. Nykyinen tapamme ymmärtää meriitti on kuitenkin vääristynyt, sillä se ei ota näitä asioita huomioon.

Meriitti-termillä on vielä yksi ilmeinen piirre, jota ei ole käsitelty. Sillä on läheinen suhde ansaitsemisen käsitteeseen (*mériter*), mikä näkyy myös suomen termissä ansio. Toinen hyvä käännös ”meriitin ideologialle” olisikin siksi ansaitsemisen, jopa ansionmukaisuuden ideologia. Selvitän syitä tähän seuraavassa kappaleessa.

MERIITIN IDEOLOGIA

Dominique Girardot kirjoittaa teoksessaan *Société du mérite – Idéologie méritocratique et violence néolibérale* (2011), että ansionmukaisuuden periaate on laajentunut liikaa länsimaisissa yhteiskunnissa. Meriitti eli ansio (*mérite*) toimii yhteiskunnallisen eronteon (*distinction*) ja arvonannon kriteerinä, jopa siinä määrin, että se on muodostunut itseäänselvyydeksi. Tämä tarkoittaa sitä, että siihen vedotaan näennäisen ongelmattomasti myös tilanteissa, joihin se ei kuulu. Esimerkiksi, kuten jo edellä on todettu, ansioiden ja ansionmukaisuuden tarkastelu voi vääristää käsityksen oikeudenmukaisuudesta.

Kritiikin kohteena oleva käsitys meriitistä liittyy Girardot'n mukaan tiiviisti muihin pe-

rustavanlaatuisiin arvoihimme: tasa-arvoon, hyötyyn ja järkeen oikeuttamisen kriteerinä. Nämä ilmenevät seuraavilla tavoilla: meriitin yhteiskunnassa on hylätty etuoikeudet ja uskotaan kaikkien ihmisten yhtäläiseen kunnioittamiseen eli *tasa-arvoon*. Kuten Girardot toteaa hieman ironisesti, toisia kunnioitetaan kuitenkin vähän enemmän kuin toisia. Tämän kunnioituksen lisän oikeuttaa näiden ihmisten *hyödyllisyys*. *Järjen* rooli meritokratian oikeutuksessa perustuu yhteiskuntamme pyrkimykseen hylätä aiemmat, irrationaaliset järjestäytymisen periaatteet. Erilaisen kohtelun oikeutus tukeutuu järkeen eikä perinteeseen tai uskoon: voimme esimerkiksi ymmärtää järjellä, miksi hyötyä arvostetaan, kun taas perinteen mukaisesti toimittaessa ei ole mitään ymmärrettävää, periaatteena toimii: ”näin vain on aina toimittu”. (Girardot 2011, 37–38.) Girardot ei halua täysin kiistää esimerkiksi hyödyllisyyden roolia arvonannon kriteerinä. Tämän periaatteen liiallinen systematisointi aiheuttaa kuitenkin ongelmia. (Girardot 2011, 39.)

Ansioihin nojaaminen on kiistämättä poistanut monia yhteiskunnallisia epätasa-arvoisuuksia. Yli-inhimillinen järjestys on hylätty, mutta Girardot'n mukaan on kyseenalaista, riittääkö tämä hylkääminen yksin perustamaan uuden, inhimillisen järjestyksen. Yksi Girardot'n tärkeimpiä tausta-ajattelijoita on politiikan teoreetikko Hannah Arendt. Arendtin mukaan inhimilliset yhteisöt haluavat aina asemoida perustavat periaatteensa totuuden pakottavaan sfääriin eivätkä käsitellä niitä mielipiteinä, joista voi keskustella. Tämä liittyy Arendtin mukaan myös pelkoon demokraattisten instituutioiden aseman rapautumisesta. Demokraattisuus ja muut hyvät aikomukset eivät kuitenkaan välttämättä pelasta tilannetta. Girardot huomauttaa, että inhimilliset periaatteet voivat muuttua yhtä dogmaattiseksi kuin yli-inhimilliset, pyhinä pidetyt käsitykset. Girardot näkeekin, että ansioihin keskittyminen ja ansionmukaisuuden tapa yhdistyä saumattomasti muihin perustavanlaatuisiin arvoihimme vahvistaa niiden dogmaattisuutta. Tämän myö-

tä meriitin käsite muuttuu vähitellen ideologiaksi. (Girardot 38–39.)

Girardot käyttää ideologiasta Hannah Arendtin määritelmää: ideologia tarkoittaa idean logiikkaa, jonka mukaisesti todellisuuden väitetään järjestyvän. Ideologia kuitenkin etäännyttää ajatuksen ja todellisuuden toisistaan, ”repii todellisuuden yhdenmukaistaakseen sen idean kanssa”. Todellisuuden monimutkaisuutta ja ristiriitaisuutta ei haluta käsitellä, vaan käsitys todellisuudesta muuttuu yksinkertaistavaksi ideaksi ja todellisuuden oletetaan toimivan tämän idean logiikalla. Idean kanssa yhteensopimattomat todellisuuden osat muuttuvat yhdistämiskelvottomiksi: niitä ei voida ottaa mukaan käsitykseen todellisuudesta. Girardot kiteyttää: ”Suhteemme todellisuuteen voi muuttua epäkoherentiksi, jotta käsitteellinen järjestelmämme säilyy koherenttina”. (Girardot 39–40.) Erilaisilla puhetavoilla, esimerkiksi puhumalla ansaitsemisesta, osia todellisuudesta voidaan jättää huomiotta ja näin oikeuttaa epäoikeudenmukaisia käytäntöjä.

Girardot’n mukaan tällaisen ideologian avulla tapahtuvan todellisuuden sulkeistamisen kautta Ranskassa voidaan pitää työllisyystilannetta merkityksettömänä ja nähdä ammatillisen onnistumisen johtuvan yksinomaan omista ponnisteluista. Epäonnistuminen taas johtuu liian vähäisestä panostuksesta. Jotta tällaisen päätelmän voi tehdä, tulee osia todellisuudesta pitää merkityksettöminä. Ranskassa vallitsevan käsityksen mukaan voidaan siis myöntää, että onnella on oma osuutensa työllistymisessä, mutta lopulta oleellisempaa on henkilökohtainen pärjääminen. Ansion ideologia ylläpitää samaa myyttiä ”self-made manista” kuin uusliberalismi. Myyttiin liittyy Girardot’n mukaan uskomus, että niin sanotusti omistamme omat ominaisuutemme, että ominaisuuksiemme käyttöönotto ja hyödyntäminen riippuisi vain itsestämme. Tämä uskomus ohjaa kuvittelemaan, että oma kohtalomme riippuu vain itsestämme. (Girardot 2011, 40.)

Girardot’n mukaan omaksumme liiallisesti systematisoituneen ansion käsitteen kautta

logiikan, joka häivyttää todellisuuden osittain näkyvistä. Tässä logiikassa vaikuttaa niin sanottu rationaalinen elementti (*élément rationnel*), toisin sanoen jokaisen yhteiskunnallinen paikka voidaan oikeuttaa rationaalisesti. (Girardot 2011, 41.) Ymmärrän Girardot’n tarkoittavan, että kunkin yhteiskunnallisen aseman nähdään olevan sidoksissa järkeviin perusteisiin, ja kuten Girardot huomauttaa, erityisesti mitattavaan hyötyyn.

Tämä rationaalisuusoletus aiheuttaa Girardot’n näkemyksen mukaan suuria ongelmia. Yhdistettynä hyödyn, tasa-arvon ja rationaalisuuden ihanteisiin ansiosta muodostuu perusta, johon Girardot’n mukaan vedotaan, jotta voidaan ymmärtää kunkin ”paikka”, mukaan lukien oma paikka, yhteisössä ja yhteiskunnassa mahdollisimman yleisellä tasolla. Paikka tarkoittaa Girardot’n mukaan tässä muutakin kuin sosiaalista tilannetta: se viittaa ”kohtaloon”, ihmiselle lankeavaan osaan. Erityisiä sosiaalisia tilanteita ei tarvitse ottaa huomioon: meriitti toimii niin itsestään selvästi yhteiskunnallisen eronteon mittapuuna, että sitä aletaan soveltaa myös toisin päin: ei vain perusteena arvostaa jotakuta vaan sen selittäjänä, miksi jotakuta toista ei arvosteta. Meriittien nähdään toimivan ihmisen tekojen arvon määrittäjänä. Toisin sanoen se, jolla ei ole meriittejä, ei ole tehnyt arvokkaita tekoja. Siksi kohtalokaan ei siis itse asiassa lankea, vaan se tehdään, jopa valitaan. (Girardot 2011, 42–44.)

Ansionmukaisuuden idean logiikka toimii vastaansanomattomalla voimalla. Girardot kirjoittaa meriittien samalla kertaa sekä *selittävän* että *oikeuttavan* vallitsevan asiantilan. Meriittien keräily ja usko omaan mahdollisuuteen vaikuttaa elämänsä kulkuun niiden kautta (usko siihen, että saatu hyvä on ansaittua ja (erityisesti toisia kohdannut) paha on virheellisten valintojen seurausta) toimii suojamuurina elämän ennalta-arvaamattomuutta vastaan (Girardot 2011, 46–47). Unelmana on elämänhallinta ja tragedioilta välttyminen. Girardot’n mukaan meriitti-ideologia on kuitenkin vaarassa johdattaa tilanteeseen, jossa tragediaa ei enää nähdä

olevan olemassa ollenkaan (mt., 44, 48). Oikeuttamisen ja selittämisen samastamista voi selkiyttää esimerkillä. Se voi tarkoittaa asennetta, jossa tapahtuman nähdään johtuvan yksinomaan siitä, ettei syyhyn ei ole puututtu. Esimerkiksi selkäkipujaan valittava ei välttämättä ole harrastanut ennaltaehkäisevää liikuntaa, ja näin kipujen syy, liikunnan puute, myös oikeuttaa kivut – ainakaan kipuilevaa kohtaan ei tarvitse tuntea sympatiaa. Tätä päättelyä voidaan kritisoida syy–seuraus-suhteiden yksinkertaistamisesta, mutta toisaalta tilanne ei muutu sen paremmaksi vaikka syy olisi tosi ja syy–seuraus-suhteet osoitettu pitäviksi. Eihän kukaan kuitenkaan varsinaisesti ansaitse selkäkipuja. Tässä ansaitsemiseen kiinnittyvässä päättelyssä selkävuuista kärsivän moraaliset ominaisuudet nousevat nopeasti tarkasteluun: onko hän laiska, tyhmä vai piittaamaton, kun ei huolehdi itsestään? Vastaavasti tilanne, jossa työnhakija ei saa työpaikkaa, sekä selittyy että tulee oikeutetuksi hänen puuttuvilla ansioillaan. Oikeuttamisen käsitteen kaventuminen selittää myös julmuutta, johon meriitin ideologian mukaisella päättelyllä voidaan ajautua.

Olisi tietenkin epäreilua, jos osaamaton palkattaisiin osaavan sijasta. Tästä ei kuitenkaan ole kysymys. Kyse on meriitin ideologian tarjoamasta oikeutuksesta toisten ulossulkemiselle historiallisesti muotoutuneissa, kontingenteissa tilanteissa. Oikeuttamisen sijaan tilanteet voisi myös politisoida: mahdollisuus selittää tilanne jollakin tavalla ei tarkoita, etteikö tilannetta itseään voisi kyseenalaistaa (Girardot 2011, 196).

Tietystä kyynisyydestään huolimatta Girardot vaikuttaa osuvan analyysillaan varsin todellisiin ilmiöihin. Ansionmukaiseen kohteluun uskomisen on psykologisesti varsin huojentavaa. Mikä tahansa kuohuttava tapahtuma on suhteellisen helppo purkaa muotoon, jossa tapahtunut nähdään aiempien huonompien tai parempien henkilökohtaisten valintojen seurauksena ja niiden kautta ansaittuna. Järkyttävän ihmiskohtalon äärellä on helpompaa kysyä, miksi ihminen ei itse tee mitään parantaakseen tilannettaan kuin myöntää, että kärsivä tarvitsisi

apua. On tuskallista miettiä, pitäisikö itse tehdä jotain auttaakseen tai hyväksyä, ettei voi auttaa. Kyseessä on nimenomaan psykologinen suojaumuuri omia syyllisyyden ja riittämättömyyden tunteita vastaan. Aiemmin huomautin John Stuart Millin käsitteeseen ansionmukaisuuden ihannetta jo 1861 ilmestyneessä *Utilitarismit* teoksessaan itsestäänselvyytenä. Vanhassa kotikaupungissani Porissa voidaan vastaavasti joskus todeta: ”säälä on sairautta!”; toisin sanoen ihmiset ovat itse vastuussa siitä, mitä heille tapahtuu, eikä säälimisessä ole mieltä. Ei siis ihme, että meriitin ideologian tarjoama selitysmalli vetoaa yksinkertaisuudessaan vastaansanomattomasti. Senkaltaiseen ajattelutapaan länsimaalaiset ovat tottuneet jo vuosisatojen ajan. Se, mikä tekee ongelmasta uudella tavalla ajankohtaisen, on Girardot’nkin mainitsema ”rationaalinen elementti”: yhä lisääntyvä pyrkimys selvittää ’totuus’ siitä, mitä kukin ansaitsee esimerkiksi testeillä ja lisääntyvin kilpailuin. Tämä kietoo meritokraattisuuden ihanteen uusliberalistisiin taloudellisen tuloksellisuuden ja tehokkuuden tavoitteisiin: ei kannata investoida ihmiseen⁴, joka ei voi todistettavasti osoittaa pystyvänsä suoriutumaan tehtävästään ja lisäksi osoita merkkejä tehokkuudesta korkealla motivaatiolla. Esimerkiksi armollisuudella, anteeksiannolla (Girardot 2011, 89) tai uuden mahdollisuuden antamisella ei ole tässä päättelyssä sijaa.

Hannah Arendt sekä italialainen filosofi Giorgio Agamben puhuvat inhimilliseen toimintaan oleellisesti kuuluvasta voimasta (Agamben 2001), uuden aloittamisen, tietynlaisen ihmeen tapahtumisen mahdollisuudesta (Arendt 2002). Tällaisen ihmeen tapahtuminen määritetään meritokraattisessa totuudenselvitysprojektissa jo etukäteen mahdottomuudeksi.⁵

MARCEL MAUSSIN LAHJAN KÄSITE

Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) oli ranskalainen antropologi ja sosiologi, jonka kuuluisin teos on *Lahja – Väihdännän muodot ja periaatteet*

arkaaisissa yhteiskunnissa (1923, ilm. suomeksi 1999). Mauss tutkii teoksessaan eri alkuperäiskansojen yhteiskuntien välisiä tai yhteiskunnan alaryhmien välillä vallitsevia sopimusoikeuden ja taloudellisten suoritteiden järjestelmiä. Ranskalainen MAUSS-ryhmä, johon myös Dominique Girardot kuuluu, lähtee ajattelussaan liikkeelle siitä, että länsimaisilla nyky-yhteiskunnilla olisi paljon opittavaa Maussin esittelemien alkuperäiskansojen vaihdantajärjestelmien sisäisestä logiikasta: se lisäisi ihmisten ja ihmisryhmien välistä solidaarisuutta ja yhteiskunnallista oikeudenmukaisuutta (ks. esim. Girardot 2011, 172–173, 215–216). Käyn seuraavaksi läpi, mihin tämä näkemys perustuu tutkimalla Maussin alkuperäisteosta.

Mauss kiinnittää huomiota siihen, että vaihdantajärjestelmät esimerkiksi eri heimojen välillä vaikuttavat perustuvan vapaaehtoiseen ja pyyteettömään lahjojen antamiseen. Itse asiassa ne ovat kuitenkin vastavuoroisten velvoitteiden säilyttämää ja myös taloudelliseen etuun tähtäävää toimintaa. Maussin tutkimat kulttuurit eivät ole vailla markkinoita, kuten aiemmin oli kuviteltu, vaan sen sijaan niiden markkinat toimivat toisenlaisella logiikalla kuin omassa kulttuurissamme. (Mauss 1999, 28.)

Maussin *Lahja*-teoksen esipuheessa antropologi Mary Douglas tuo esiin, että lahjan antamiseen ja vastaanottamiseen liittyy aina valtaasetelma (Douglas 1999, 7). Maussin mukaan lahjan loputon kiertokulku esimerkiksi Pohjois-Amerikan alkuperäiskansojen välillä on aina tarkoittanut lahjan antajaheimon ylemmyyden osoittamista saajaheimoon nähden. Toisaalta lahjan antamisen mahdollistaa toisen heimon halukkuus ottaa lahja vastaan: hyväksymällä lahjan ja siihen sisältyvät konnotaatiot vastaanottajaheimo antaa tunnustusta lahjalle ja sen antaneelle heimolle. Vastaamalla lahjaan vastalahjalla lahjan saanut heimo osoittaa vastaavasti ylemmyyttään. (Mauss 1999.)

Maussin havainnot paljastavat kiinnostavia piirteitä ihmisyyhteisöjen välisestä dynamiikasta. Lahjan antamisen salliminen ja lahjaan vastaamisen salliminen edistävät rauhanomai-

suutta heimojen välillä. Lahjan antajan roolin vaihtelu tarkoittaa tasa-arvon sietämistä, tasa-vertaisuuden tunnustamista ja sen osoittamista. Lahjan vastaanottaminen tarkoittaa toisen tunnustamista – palveluksen palauttaminen vastalahjalla taas on suurenmoinen teko, joka tulee tunnustetuksi kun lahja otetaan vastaan. Lahjojen vastavuoroinen antaminen aikaansaa näin solidaarisuutta antajien välille.

Antropologi David Graeberin mukaan Maussin merkitys kiteytyy erityisesti tämän huomiossa, että antamisesta saatu ilo ja mielihyvä eivät ole ristiriidassa anteliaisuuteen yhdistetyn epäitsekkyyden kanssa. Tämä näennäinen ristiriita on saanut länsimaalaiset historiallisesti (sekä uskonnon että taloustieteen parissa) etsimään perimmäisiä itsekkäitä motiiveja anteliaimmastakin toiminnasta. Suurimmassa osassa maailman kieliä ei ole Maussin mukaan termiä ”*self-interest*” (’oma etu’ tai ’itsekkyyys’) eikä myöskään ristiriitaa ”omien intressien” ja muista huolehtimisen välillä; lahjan antamisen merkitys on juuri siinä, että se edistää näitä molempia. (Graeber 2008.) MAUSS-liikkeen jäsenille Maussin merkitys näkyy juuri mahdollisuudessa kyseenalaistaa uusliberalismiin liitetty ihmiskäsitys. Alain Caillé katsoo tämän ihmiskäsityksen vallinneen myös yhteiskuntatieteissä 1970-luvulta saakka (Caillé 1992, 60).

DOMINIQUE GIRARDOT

JA VÄÄRISTYNEEN

YHTEISKUNTASOPIMUSKÄSITYKSEN

KRITIIKKI

Girardot’n mukaan Marcel Mauss hahmottaa inhimilliset suhteet lahjan kierron ja siihen liittyvien velvollisuuksien kautta: velvollisuus antaa ja vastaanottaa lahja sekä vastata lahjaan. Ansioitumiseen ja ansaitsemiseen keskittyvän puheen keskellä on Girardot’n mukaan tärkeä

erottaa lahjaan *vastaaminen* saadun lahjan *hyvittämisestä* (*rétribution*). Meriitin ideologian viitekehyksessä antaminen tapahtuu sillä ehdolla, että oma vaivannäkö hyvitetään. Epäoikeudenmukaisuus tarkoittaa tästä hyvittämisestä paitsi jäämistä. (Girardot 2011, 76–90; 27; 132–134.) Hyvittämisen ja lahjaan vastaamisen ero näkyy niiden suhteessa lahjan kiertoon. Esimerkiksi länsimaissa ajatellaan, että velan maksu on sanoutumista irti velan myöntäneestä tahosta. Sen sijaan lahjan kiertossa on kyse tietynlaisesta positiivisesta velkakierteestä, jossa lahjojen antaminen ja vastalahjan antaminen yhdistää saajaa ja antajaa. Lahjan kiertoa ei ole tarkoitus lopettaa vaan lahjaan vastaaminen, ”velan maksu” on juuri merkki halusta jatkaa suhdetta antajan ja saajan välillä. Mikäli lahjaan vastaamisen sijaan annetaan hyvitys, se sen sijaan vertautuu pikemminkin velan maksuun, pyrkimykseen päästä eroon siitä, jolle on jotain velkaa. (Girardot 2011, 60.)

Osana keskustelua lahjan roolista nyky-yhteiskunnassa Girardot kritisoi yhteiskuntasopimusajattelun vääristymistä. Ajatus yhteiskuntasopimuksesta on muuttunut Girardot’n näkemyksen mukaan poliittisen todellisuuden arviointikriteeristä (kuten esimerkiksi Thomas Hobbesin tai Rawlsin yhteiskuntasopimus-teorioissa), säännöksi, joka määrittää ihmisten välistä toimintaa. Ajatus yhteiskuntasopimuksesta on redusoitu oletukseksi, että tällainen sopimus todella on olemassa ja voimassa yhteiskunnassa. Oletetaan, että on olemassa rationaliteetti, järkiperäinen järjestävä periaate, jonka kautta yksilöiden tahdot samastuvat kollektiivisen yleistahdon kanssa. (Girardot 2011, 81–82.) Rationaliteetti, jonka mukaisesti yksilöiden ja yhteisön tahdot samastuvat, on Girardot’n mukaan utilitarismi⁶. Tällainen utilitaristinen sopimus muodostetaan, jotta voidaan säännellä rationaalisesti ja tehokkaasti ihmisten välisiä suhteita (Girardot 2011, 84). Yhteiskuntasopimus on nykyhahmotuksessa voimassaoleva vastavuoroinen sitoumus, ja sen muodostavat kaksi suvereenia, yksilö sekä valtio: nämä tekevät sopimuksen hyvin määritel-

lyn intressin mukaisesti ja rationaalisen valinnan tuloksena. (Girardot 2011, 79.)

Tätä ajatusta on syytä selkeyttää. Alkuperäisissä hahmotuksissa yhteiskuntasopimus on luonteeltaan metaforinen, ”järjestävä idea”. Kun yllä kuvatun kaltainen kahden suvereenin välinen markkinasopimuksen malli tuodaan poliittisen alueelle, yhteiskuntasopimus menettää merkityksensä kriittisenä arviointikriteerinä. Markkinasopimuksen pitää olla voimassa, jotta sillä voi olla mitään merkitystä. Myös yhteiskuntasopimuksen merkityksen täytyy muuttua, jotta se voidaan ymmärtää muuttuneessa poliittisessa ympäristössä. (Girardot 2011, 83.) Girardot’n voi tulkita puhuvan yhteiskuntasopimuksen reifioitumisesta: metaforaa aletaan kohdella todellisuutena. Ei-metaforisessa yhteiskuntasopimuksessa on määritetty oikeanlaisen elämän ehdot ja sopimuksen ehtojen rikkominen on rangaistavaa. Girardot’n mukaan on yhä yleisempää ajatella, ettei yhteiskunta ole sääntöjä rikkovalle jäsenelleen mitään velkaa. Yhteiskuntasopimukseen kirjautuminen on järkevää, oikeastaan intressien laskelmointia. Jos ei tee niin eikä toimi sopimuksen ehtojen mukaan, ei voi odottaa yhteiskunnalta apua. (Girardot 2011, 80–81.) Tälle Girardot’n väitteelle löytyy tukea myös muista tutkimuksista. Jorma Sipilä (2011) kirjoittaa Ruth Listeriin viitaten (Lister 2008 Sipilän 2011 mukaan) tällaisen oikeanlaisen käytöksen vaatimisesta: ”oikeuksien saattaminen riippuvaisiksi velvollisuuksien täyttämisestä on äärimmäisen ongelmallista kansalaisuuden ja demokratian kannalta. Tiukasti tulkittuna lähtökohta poistaa sosiaaliset kansalaisoikeudet niiltä, jotka eivät käyttäydy hyväksyttävästi.” (Sipilä 2011, 366.)

Yhteiskuntasopimusajattelun reifioitumisen myötä taloudellinen malli muuttuu myös sosiaalisten suhteiden malliksi. Jos on saamassa yhteiskunnalta enemmän kuin sille pystyy antamaan, altistuu sosiaalisuhteiden markkinoiden ”automaattisille sanktioille”: yhteisö ei kaipaa petkuttajia. (Girardot 2011, 80–81.) Ansioituneiden tulee saada meriitin ideolo-

gian viitekehyksessä eniten ja kyvyttömiä vasta heidän jälkeensä, jos jotain jaettavaa on jäljellä. ”Sekä vasemmalla että oikealla” esiintyy Girardot’n mukaan uskomus, että tähän markkinoiden lain sanelemaan arvojärjestykseen ei pidä sekaantua. Muutoin koko yhteiskunta uhkaa hajota: jos teeskentelemällä kyvyttöntä voisi hyötyä yhteisestä panoksesta ilman omaa vaivannäköä, miksi kukaan laittaisi tikkaa ristiin? (Girardot 2011, 80–81.)

Girardot’n muotoilu sosiaalisten suhteiden markkinoista ja automaattisista sanktioista on poleeminen ja epäselvä. Mahdollisesti sillä tarkoitetaan muilta kansalaisilta tulevaa kritiikkiä, joka ”automatisoituu”, kun meriitin ideologia toimii vallitsevana ideologiana. Sinänsä ajatus, että ”petkuttajaa” ei kaivata, vaikuttaa uskottavalta Suomenkin kontekstissa: esimerkiksi Kelalta huijatuista sosiaalietuuksista uutisoidaan laajasti ja syksyn 2014 niin kutsuttu ”lastenvaunu-gate” on esimerkki huijausepäilyjen nostamasta paheksunnasta.

Ongelmallista vääristyneessä käsityksessä yhteiskuntasopimuksesta ei Girardot’n mukaan niinkään ole se, että sosiaalisten suhteiden kuvitellaan olevan sopimusluonteisia. Suurempi ongelma on, että käsityksen myötä poliittinen suhde siirtyy kohti talouden aluetta. Poliittisella suhteella Girardot tarkoittaa ihmisten välistä suhdetta, joka ei liity liiketoimintaan vaan on neuvottelua siitä, miten elää yhdessä. Markkina-suhteissa taloudellinen vaihto on legitiimiä, koska kaikki ovat yhtä mieltä sen perustavasta ehdottoman vastavuoroisuuden säännöstä. Tämä sääntö ei Girardot’n mukaan voi perustaa poliittista suhdetta. Ihmiset elävät yhteisössä *riippumatta* siitä, toimivatko he ehdottoman vastavuoroisesti ja riippumatta siitä ansaitsevatko he siellä oloaan vai eivät. Tämä tarkoittaa Girardot’n mukaan sitä, että yhdessä elämisessä on väistämättä mukana annettuja elementtejä. Girardot’n analyysi leikittelee ranskan kielen sanoilla ”*fait*” ja ”*donné*”. Molemmat tarkoittavat faktaa, mutta ”*fait*” tarkoittaa tehtyä ja ”*donné*” sen sijaan annettua. Yhteiskunnassa elävä

ei ole valinnut (tehnyt) olosuhteitaan, ne on otettava annettuina. Ei voida kysyä, ansaitseeko hän olla täällä, sillä hän ei voi täällä ololleen mitään. (Girardot 2011, 82.) Osansa kritiikistä saa tässä sanaleikissä myös entisen presidentti Nicolas Sarkozyn vaalislogan: ”*tout se mérite, rien n’est acquis, rien n’est donné*”; kaikki ansaitaan, mitään ei hankita, mitään ei anneta (tai: mikään ei ole annettua). Yhteiskunnassa elämä ei ole vain oman itsen tekemistä; sen sijaan siinä on paljonkin annettua.

Tässä kohdassa on kysyttävä, onko Girardot’n analyysissä aukkoja. Jos esimerkiksi ”yhteiskunnassa olemisen” ymmärretään hyvin konkreettisesti, Girardot’n väite, ettei sitä voi valita, vaikuttaa erikoiselta. Ainakin tietyssä yhteiskunnassa olemisen moni voi valita esimerkiksi muuttamalla toiseen maahan. Tämä aukkoisuus on kuitenkin näennäistä. Pikemminkin Girardot’n analyysi tuo esiin nykyisten käytäntöjen eettisiä ongelmakohtia ja osoittaa, miten itsestään selvydyt voivat johtaa harhaan. Ranskan maahanmuuttolain mukaan maahanmuuttajan taitojen tulisi vastata Ranskan valtion tarpeita eli Ranskassa asuminen on muuttanut Girardot’n tulkinnan mukaan ansaittavaksi (Girardot 78–79). Tämä asettaa Ranskassa jo asuvat ja Ranskaan muuttoa suunnittelevat ihmiset eriarvoiseen asemaan: Ranskaan muuttoa suunnittelevien pitäisi pohtia vuosia ennen muuttoa tapahtuvia elämänvalintojaan Ranskan valtion tarpeiden näkökulmasta. Ranskassa asuvien (varsinkin valkoihoisten ranskalaisten) ei tarvitse ansaita yhteiskunnassa olemistaan: he voivat tehdä valintojaan vapaammin ja luottaa sosiaaliturvajärjestelmän tukevan hankalissa tilanteissa. Näiden ihmisten oikeuksia ei voida yhtä helposti kyseenalaistaa, mutta oikeuksien toteutuminen nähdään taloudellisena ongelmana, joten tulevilta samoja oikeuksia toivovilta maahan tulo pyritään estämään.

Girardot’n kritiikin kautta on mahdollista kiinnittää huomiota nykyisiin käytäntöihin, joiden myötä ihmisten olemisen yhteiskunnassa ja tietyt oikeudet alkavat muuttua ehdollisiksi.

Meriitin ideologian mukaisessa yhteiskunnassa eläminen tulee ansaita kykenemällä elättämään itsensä. Tällainen ehdollisuus luo vaarallisen vaikutelman, että tähän kykenemättömille, ansiottomille, ei ole paikkaa yhteiskunnassa. Tämä oman paikan puute ohjaa kuvittelemaan, että maailmassa on yksinkertaisesti liikaa ihmisiä. (Girardot 2011, 22.) Ylimääräiset ihmiset on ideologian viitekehysessä oikeutettua jättää oman onnensa nojaan.

Girardot'n kritiikki tekee näkyväksi poliittisen ilmapiiirin, jossa monet oikeudet alkavat vaikuttaa ongelmallisilta. Yhteiskuntasopimuksen reifioitumisen myötä yhteiskuntaa paikkana, jossa jatkuvasti neuvotellaan siitä, miten elää yhdessä tai mitä on hyvä elämä, ei voi olla enää olemassa. Näihin kysymyksiin tiedetään jo vastaukset ja mikäli joku ei ole samaa mieltä, hänet voidaan sulkea ulkopuolelle. (Girardot 2011, 80.)

LAHJAN PARADIGMA REIFIOITUNEEN

YHTEISKUNTASOPIMUSMALLIN

HAASTAJANA

Dominique Girardot käsittelee yhteiskuntasopimuksen vaihtoehtona lahjan paradigmatteja perustuvaa yhteiskuntaa. Girardot kirjoittaa teoksessaan myös sosiaalietuuksista ja päätyy puolustamaan perustulomallista sosiaaliturvaa. Selvitän seuraavaksi, mitä ajatus sosiaalietuuksista lahjana tarkoittaisi Girardot'n tarjoamassa meriitin ideologian ja sille vastakkaisen lahjan paradigman viitekehysessä.

Meritokraattiset periaatteet ajautuvat ansaitsemisen ja ansaitsemattomuuden tarkastelusta johtuen ristiriitoihin ehdottomille oikeuksille perustuvien yhteiskunnallisten tukijärjestelmien kanssa.⁷ Tämä kriittisyys verotusta ja yhteiskunnan kustantamia tukia kohtaan näkyy vahvasti myös uusliberalistisesti suuntautuneiden teoreetikoiden asenteissa:

libertaristifilosofi Robert M. Nozick kirjoitti jo 1970-luvulla ansiotuloverotuksen olevan epäoikeudenmukaista työhön pakottamista (Nozick 1974, 169).

Girardot asettuu teoksessaan puolustamaan perustulomallista, kaikille maksettavaa ja vastikkeetonta sosiaaliturvaa. Girardot'n hahmottelemassa mallissa perustulo takaisi kunnollisen toimeentulon kaikille lahjakkuuteen, valintoihin, yritteliäisyyteen ja alkuperään katsomatta. Girardot'lle tällaisen yhteiskunnan järjestäminen auttaisi purkamaan väärää käsitystä, että ihmisen toimeentulon täytyy olla uhattuna, jotta hän suostuu tekemään mitään yhteiskunnan eteen. Tällaisessa yhteiskunnassa lahja olisi etusijalla sopimukseen nähden. (Girardot 2011, 203.)

Toisin kuin edellisestä voisi kuvitella, vastikkeettomuus ei Girardot'lle tarkoita, että sosiaalietuuksia tulisi maksaa odottamatta mitään vastineeksi. Onhan lahjan paradigmassa oleellista lahjan kiertäminen eli saatuun lahjaan tuleva vastata. Mitä oikein tarkoittaa vastikkeettomuus yhdistettynä velvoitteeseen vastata lahjaan? Girardot siteeraa Alain Caillé'ta: ”koska kysymys on, ja sen pitää olla, lahjasta, mitään vastalahjaa ei eksplisiittisesti ja erityisesti voi vaatia, ja valtion ja sen kautta yhteiskunnan on hyväksyttävä tyynesti riski, että mitään ei tule takaisin. Mutta se, ettei voida *vaatia* lahjan palauttamista, ei tarkoita eikä varsinkaan saa tarkoittaa, ettei mitään *odotettaisi*.” (Caillé 2000, 116–117 Girardot'n 2011, 203–204 mukaan; korostus lisätty.) Vaatiminen on siis kiellettyä, mutta vastalahjaa tulee odottaa.

Girardot tarkentaa Caillé'n lailla, että lahjaan vastaaminen ei, kenties vastoin yleisiä odotuksia, tarkoita ryhtymistä yhteiskunnallisesti hyödylliseksi. Lahjaa vastaan ”[y]hteiskunnalla on oikeus odottaa [...] uuden aloittamista⁸ ja osallistumista yhteisön itsensä luomiseen’ [...] ja että kukin saa aikaan ’omissa ja muiden silmissä merkityksellä ladattuja asioita’” (Caillé, mt., Girardot'n 2011, 204 mukaan).

Lahja on avaus toista ihmistä kohden. Jos yhteiskunnan taholta tuleva etuus hahmo-

tetaan lahjaksi, se tarkoittaa myös osallistumismahdollisuuden antamista. Miten tämä sitten eroaa siitä, mikä yleensä ymmärretään sosiaalietuuksien rooliksi? Osallistumisen, jonka etuus mahdollistaa, ei tarvitsisi tarkoittaa valmiiseen prosessiin mukaan tulemistä tai koneiston rattaaksi astumista ja tietyn sopimuksen hyväksymistä, kuten Girardot'n kritisoimassa reifioituneen yhteiskuntasopimuksen mallissa. Sen sijaan se on ”yhteisön luomista”, jota yhteisö itse tekee: kukin osallistuja osallistuu yhteisönsä luomiseen, myös sen sääntöjen rakentamiseen ja kyseenalaistamiseen.

Vaatimisen ja odottamisen välisen erottelun tekeminen on tärkeää johtuen lahjan kierron luonteesta: se on pohjimmiltaan vapaaehtoista. Tästä näyttäisi seuraavan, että ketään ei voitaisi pakottaa antamaan yhteiskunnalle takaisin tai osallistumaan muihin sen prosesseihin kuin perustulon vastaanottamiseen. Nähdäkseni tämä on yhteensopivaa sen ajatuksen kanssa, että kaikkien yhteiskunnan jäsenten tulee voida myös kyseenalaistaa yhteiskunnan säännöt, ei vain noudattaa niitä pakon edessä ja toimeentulon menettämisen uhalla. Mikäli esimerkiksi vaikuttaisi siltä, että Girardot'n hahmottelema perustulomallinen järjestelmä syrjisi joitakuita, sitä olisi syytäkin kritisoida. Tämä pätsi, vaikka kritisoijat edelleen ottaisivat vastaan yhteiskunnan lahjan eli perustulon. Heidän toimeentulonsahan saattaisi riippua siitä, ja poliittiseen toimintaan osallistuminen taas on osin riippuvaista ihmisen mahdollisuudesta ylipäänsä tulla toimeen. Girardot luottaa siihen, että lahjan paradigmalle rakentuvassa yhteiskunnassa jokaiselle kuuluva ja lankeava kunnioitus, osallistumisen toivominen ja siihen kannustaminen riittävät motivoimaan ihmisiä antamaan myös takaisin. Girardot'n mukaan perustulon lisäksi tulisi säätää myös yleiset tulorajat ja siirtää yhteisöistykseen (*mutualiser*) osa tuloista (Girardot 2011, 203). Tämä tarkoittaisi pienempiä tuloeroja ja tasa-arvoistaisi kansalaisia konkreettisella tavalla. Maussin lahjan kierron kuvauksissa lahjan kierto on osallistuvien tahojen tasa-arvoisuus on oleellista: juuri tasa-arvoisuus

näyttäisi lisäävän solidaarisuutta ja halukkuutta osallistua muita tukevaan toimintaan. Osallistumisen todennäköisyys voisi siksin olla suurempi kuin sopimukselle perustuvassa yhteiskunnassa.

Lahja, joka ei sisällä tätä toivetta lahjan saajan osallistumisesta, voi Alain Caillé'n mukaan muodostua saajalleen tuhoisaksi, lääkkeeksi joka onkin myrkyä. Caillé'n tulkinnassa tällainen ”lahja” on aktiivisesti ulossulkeva: se osoittaa ”mittaamatonta halveksuntaa tuen oletettua saajaa kohtaan”; toisin sanoen, Caillé näkee, että lahjan saaja pyritään pitämään lahjan saajan asemassaan. (Girardot 2011, 204.) Nähdäkseni tällainen lahja lakkaa olemasta lahja ja on pikemminkin hyvitys siitä, että ihminen ei voi osallistua (tai hänen ei haluta osallistuvan) Girardot'n ja Caillé'n viitoittamalla tavalla poliittiseen ja yhteisölliseen elämään.

Kriittinen kysymys tähän liittyen kuuluu: miten varmistetaan siitä, että perustulo-lahja ei ole hyvitys eikä kyseessä ole hylkääminen vaan mukaan ottaminen? Perustulon puolustaminen sinällään ei vielä ole lahjan paradigman mukaista. Perustuloa voivat ajaa myös uusliberalismin myönteisesti suhtautuvat: heille perustulo tarkoittaa ”vapaan” yrittäjyyden mahdollistamista ja ihmisten aloitekyvyn (ransk. *initiative*) vapaata virtaamista, siinä missä Girardot'lle se tarkoittaa mahdollisuutta itsetoteutukseen, uuden aloittamiseen (samainen *initiative*) ja politiikkaan osallistumiseen (ks. alaviite 8). Esimerkiksi perustuloon siirtyminen yhdistettynä muusta hyvinvointipolitiikasta luopumiseen siirtäisi perustulon lahjan alueelta hyvityksen puolelle, sillä silloin siihen sisältyisi todennäköisemmin hylkäämisen elementti: pelkkä turvattu toimeentulo ei ratkaise kaikkia ongelmia. Keskinäisen solidaarisuuden korostaminen ja vapaaehtoisuus muodostavat samanaikaisesti sekä kiinnostavan, positiiviselle ihmiskuvalle perustuvan poliittisen avauksen että tuntuvat avaavan tien epäinstitutionaalille naapuriavulle ja lähimmäisistä huolehtimiselle perustuvalla yhteiskunnalla. Tällainen

yhteiskunta yhdistetään yleensä Girardot'n kritisoiimaan uusliberalismiin.

Girardot'n uusliberalismikäsitykseen on tästä ambivalenssista johtuen syytä vielä palata. Girardot kuvailee *La Société du mérite* -teoksessa työelämää paikkana, jossa itsetoteutus ei ole mahdollista. Tämä johtuu Girardot'n mukaan siitä, että työstä annetaan vain hyvitys ja hyvitys voidaan maksaa vain työsuoritteiden mekaanisen mittaamisen keinoin. Henkilökohtaisen panoksen antaminen työhön jää tällaisen mittaamisen ulkopuolelle. (Girardot 2011, 26; 100–101.) On kuitenkin mahdollista kritisoida tätä näkemystä: voi päinvastoin väittää, kuten niin kutsutun uuden työn tutkimuksessa esitetään, että nykyinen työelämä nimenomaan tarvitsee itsensä likoon laittavia, itseään työssään toteuttavia työntekijöitä (ks. esim. Virtanen 2006; Vähämäki 2009). (Tämä ei tietenkään tarkoita sitä, että itsetoteutuksen hinnoittelu ja huomioon ottaminen olisi sen helpompaa.) Girardot'n analyysistä puuttuu talouden luomien reunaehtoju (kuten, miten rahoittaa perustulo?) ja instituutioiden roolin käsittely (kuka huolehtii kansalaisista?). Näkisin, että tämä on pääsyy siihen, että hänen politiikkasuosituksensa avaavat mahdollisuuksia myös väärinkäytöksille.

Toisaalta esimerkiksi kysymykset siitä, kuka haluaisi tehdä rankkoja kolmivuorotöitä terveydenhuollossa, eivät vaikuta Girardot'n perustuloyhteiskunnassa ongelmallisilta: jo nyt ihmiset tekevät tärkeitä ja raskaita töitä melko pienellä palkalla. Girardot'n hahmottelema politiikkakäsitys ja mahdollisesti paremmin yhteiskunnan käytettävissä olevat resurssit (ja päätösvalta niiden käytöstä) mahdollistaisivat parempien työehtojen neuvottelemisen esimerkiksi terveydenhuoltoon.

LOPUKSI

Dominique Girardot'n meriitin ideologian analyysi paljastaa, että uusliberalistiset tuloero-

jen kasvuun tähtäävät ja ihmisiä eriarvoistavat käytännöt saavat oikeutuksensa osaltaan meriitin ideologian kautta. Meriitin ideologia normalisoi pyrkimyksen tuoda uusliberalistisia käytäntöjä työelämään tai sosiaalipolitiikkaan: ne alkavat sen viitekehyksessä vaikuttaa loogisilta ja hyvin perustelluilta.

Meriittien myötä toisille kertyvä hyvä voi syventää yhteiskunnallista eriarvoisuutta. Tämä eriarvoisuus voidaan oikeuttaa meriitin ideologian avulla varsin pitävästi: ideologian mukaan kaikki ihmisen osaksi tullut hyvä nähdään ansaittuna ja vastaavasti saamatta jäänyt hyvä *olisi ollut ansaittavissa*, joten saamatta jääminen on ihmisen oma vika. Myös eriarvoisuus on tämän myötä ansaittua.

Ajatus siitä, että ansioituneempi ihminen ansaitsee enemmän arvostusta ja mahdollisesti enemmän palkkaa ei väistämättä johda vakavia sosiaalisia seurauksia aikaansaavaan eriarvoistumiseen. Meritokraattisten periaatteiden kanssa samanaikaisesti vaikuttavat uusliberalistisia ihanteita heijastelevat käytännöt voivat kuitenkin aiheuttaa sitä: esimerkiksi yksilön valinnanvapautteen vetoavat terveystakuutukset ja yksityinen, nopeammin palveleva terveydenhuolto johtavat siihen, että taloudellinen eriarvoisuus aiheuttaa myös terveydellistä eriarvoistumista. Kysymys on myös siitä, mitä kaikkea rahalla voi (ja on oikeutettua) hankkia. Pitäisi tarkasti miettiä, mitkä asiat ovat oikeuksia (kuten hyvä terveys) ja minkä tulisi olla ansaittua (suurenmoisten tekojen tekemisestä saatava ihailu).

Dominique Girardot'n meriitin ideologian analyysin tärkeintä antia on nähdäkseni mahdollisuus tuoda esiin, miten oikeutetulta vaikuttava epätasa-arvoisuus rapauttaa käsitystä ehdottomista oikeuksista. Meriitin ideologia hävittää erottelun sellaisten asioiden väliltä, joiden tulisi olla saatavilla ilman mitään edellytyksiä ja joiden saavuttaminen vaatii ansioita (Girardot 2011, 54).

Suomalaisessa yhteiskuntafilosofisessa keskustelussa Girardot'n ajattelua tunnetaan toistaiseksi hyvin vähän. Esimerkiksi meriiti-

tin ideologian ja lahjan paradigman vertailu voisi kuitenkin avata myös suomalaista sosiaalietuuskustelua uudella tavalla. Erityisesti tulevaisuudessa olisi tarpeen analysoida kriittisesti niin kutsuttua vastikkeellista sosiaaliturvaa.

VIITTEET

1. Uusliberalismia voi perustellusti väittää ongelmalliseksi käsitteeksi. Se on akateeminen iskulause, mutta jää usein määrittelemättä sitä käyttäviltä kirjoittajilta (ks. esim. Thorsen 2010; Boas & Gans-Morse 2009; Hartwich 2009). Sillä on ideologista painolastia: Taylor C. Boasin ja Jordan Gans-Morsen sisältöanalyysiartikkelin mukaan käsitettä esimerkiksi käytetään useammin markkinakriittisissä kuin markkinoihin positiivisesti suhtautuvissa artikkeleissa (2009, 20 [sivunumeroita ei merkitty, tässä sivunumero viittaa pdf-tiedoston sivuihin]). Lisäksi käsitettä käytetään lähinnä syytöksenä: sekä Boas ja Gans-Morse että Oliver Marc Hartwich ovat tuoneet esiin, että kukaan uusliberalistina pidetty ei halua profiloitua uusliberalistiksi (Boas & Gans-Morse 2009, 4; Hartwich 2009, 4–5). Keskeiset lähteeni kuitenkin käyttävät termiä, joten olen pyrkinyt ratkaisemaan ongelman määrittelemällä termin mahdollisimman selkeästi.
2. Esittelin artikkelin aiempaa versiota Tampereella Sosiaalipolitiikan päivillä v. 2013. Osallistuin ryhmään 4. Poliittiset päättäjät, byrokraatit ja professionaaliset toimijat hyvinvointivaltiossa. Ryhmään osallistuvien sosiaalityön ja -politiikan tutkijoiden keskeinen huomio liittyen esitelmääni oli, että tarveharkintainen järjestelmä käsittelee tietyssä mielessä tarvetta ”meriittinä” ja esimerkiksi sotaveteraaneille maksetut sosiaalietuudet olivatkin juuri palkkio isänmaalle tehdystä palveluksesta.
3. Termi *démesure* viittaa Girardot’n tunnustusteoriaan, jota käsittelem toistaiseksi julkaisemattomassa artikkelissani. Se juontuu käsityksestä, jonka mukaan ihmisten toiminnassa on aina mukana jotakin persoonallista, mittaamatonta ja ylimääräistä, joka pakenee määritteilyä eikä tule koskaan täsmällisesti arvotetuksi.
4. Sosiaalisista investoinneista sosiaalipolitiikassa ks. Sipilä 2011. Sipilän selonteko Britannian lapsiperheiden tukemisesta muistuttaa läheisesti Girardot’n kuvausta meriitin ideologiasta: ”Periaatteena on, että vastuullisten vanhempien perheisiin investoidaan, mutta vastuuttomat eivät kuulu kohteisiin (Spratt 2009). Jos vanhemmat käyvät työssä ja hoitavat lapsensa, he *ansaitsevat* tuen, mutta tyhjästä ei makseta (Lister 2003, 431–432). Tuen vastikkeeksi on osallistuttava työhön, koulutukseen tai harjoitteluun (Dobrowolsky 2002, 65–66).” (Sipilä 2011, 366, korostus lisätty.)
5. Tarkoitukseni on tulevaisuudessa kirjoittaa totuuden, totuudentuotannon ja meriitin ideologian suhteesta. Tässä yhteydessä siihen ei valitettavasti ole mahdollisuutta.
6. Girardot’n utilitarismikritiikki voi vaikuttaa esimerkiksi John Stuart Millin utilitarismiin tutustuneista kohtuuttomalta. Tässä ei ole mahdollisuutta tehdä kattavaa tarkastelua Girardot’n utilitarismikäsitteestä, mutta ylimalkaisuudesta syyttäminen ei ole täysin oikeutettua. Girardot’n kritiikki kohdistuu tiettyyn, yhteiskunnassa vaikuttavaan populaariin ja liiallisesti systematisoituneeseen käsitykseen utilitarismista: utilitarismin tavoite, kaikkien onni on alkanut yhdistyä ajatukseen, että onni tarkoittaa samaa kuin hyöty (Girardot 2011, 62–65). Lisäksi Girardot kritisoi tällaiseen utilitarismiin yhdistyvää, *homo economicuksesta* muistuttavaa ihmiskuvaa, joka olettaa, että ihmiset pyrkivät oman hyötynsä maksimointiin joka tilanteessa. Ks. myös Alain Caillé 1992.
7. Tämä selittää esimerkiksi hyvinvointipalveluiden julkisen rahoittamisen tasaisin väliajoin kohtaamaa kritiikkiä: esimerkiksi YLEN Pirstoutunut Suomi -tutkimuksessa yli 50% vastaajista oli vähintään jonkin verran samaa mieltä siitä, että sosiaalietuet passivoivat tuensaajia (Yle.fi 7.1.2014) ja syksyllä 2013 sosiaali- ja terveysministeri Paula Risikko suositti vastikkeellista työttömyysturvaa (Ilkka.fi 4.8.2013).
8. Kirj. *initiative*: aloitekyky, aloitteellisuus. Girardot’n arendtilaisen ihmiskuvan vuoksi oletan kuitenkin, että parempi käänös on *aloittaminen* ja tarkemmin, jonkin *uuden* aloittaminen. Lisäksi aloitteellisuus-sanalla on suomen kielessä yrittäjyysvetokseen ja individualismiin viittaavia konnotaatioita, joten sen käyttö ei vaikuta tässä perustellulta.

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II

RECOGNITION AND THE IDEOLOGY OF MERIT

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Studies in Social and Political Thought, vol 25, 152–173.

<https://doi.org/10.20919/sspt.25.2015.32>

Published by University of Sussex

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8. Recognition and the Ideology of Merit¹

by Heidi Elmgren

1 Introduction

In this paper I will examine French philosopher Dominique Girardot's² theory of the *ideology of merit* and its effect on recognition. Girardot takes the well-known Honnethian conceptualization of recognition as her starting point but her work opens a path toward other directions: understanding the reasons for lack of recognition in society, and how the nature of recognition as a freely issued gift is at stake. Girardot's theory of recognition also enables the possibility of recognizing something completely new that transforms norms rather than simply conforming to pre-existing standards. This is made possible by the influence of Hannah Arendt's theoretical framework of human activity on Girardot's conception of recognition.

I will first take a look at Girardot's theory of the ideology of merit and then go on to examine briefly how Girardot's conception of recognition differs from that of Axel Honneth. After this I will give an account of the relation between the ideology of merit and Girardot's conception of recognition. In the second part of the paper I will outline how the ideology of merit creates, according to Girardot, a new kind of social pathology. I wish to argue that the pathology in question is a pathology of recognition. In Hannah Arendt's terminology, the ideology of merit seeks to force all human activity to fit the category of *labor* and consequently denies the category of *action*, the most human and political category of activity. For Girardot, the single most disturbing consequence of our misled conception of merit is the search for objectified recognition. This means that the essence of recognition is forgotten and replaced by a distorted, standardized and meaningless version of it. The standardization of recognition by identifying it with objectified merit creates a pathology of recognition: attaining recognition in the public sphere becomes very difficult.

2 Recognition Meets the Ideology of Merit

2.1 *The Arendtian Background: Action, Plurality, and Judgment*

To understand Girardot's theory of recognition one must first take notice of

Girardot's conceptual and theoretical background in Hannah Arendt's theory of human activity. Arendt divides human activity into three categories: labor, work and action. Labor refers to the production of things 'needed for the life process itself' (Arendt 1998, 96). Philosopher Sara Heinämaa lists nutrition, clothing, and cleaning as examples of labor activities. Labor's products are not meant to serve any other ends than the continuation of the process of life and laboring itself (Heinämaa, forthcoming). *Work* creates the human world through the production of relatively durable and permanent things such as buildings, furniture, clothes, and pieces of music. The products of work do not spoil and disappear from the world as, for instance, food does if it is not consumed relatively quickly (Arendt 1998, 138). The category of action is the most 'human' of the types of activities. In comparison to labor and work, action does not produce anything concrete. 'Action and speech,' as Arendt puts it (1998, 95), 'together constitute the fabric of human relationships and affairs.' Speech and action do not bring forth things as such, but through them human beings show who they are. Through action their 'unique distinctness' (Arendt 1998, 176) manifests itself.

Heinämaa also points out, following Arendt that non-laboring activities—that is, activities categorized as action and work—can be 'encompassed' as laboring. This happens when these activities are subordinated to the needs and necessities of biological life (Heinämaa, forthcoming). This is a crucial point for Girardot as well. According to Girardot, the ideology of merit tries to force all of human life to fit the category of labor and at the same time operates to deny the category of action. The ideology claims that the meaning of action could be reduced to what can be measured. So, when critiquing merit measuring procedures, Girardot is critiquing the attempt to measure what Arendt calls action (Girardot 2011, 119–129).

Two other important Arendtian concepts in Girardot's theory are *plurality* and *natality*. Human life, according to both Arendt and Girardot, is manifested in a plurality of unique beings. Human beings are not identical but unique, and yet they are equal. If they were not equal they could not understand each other at all. But were they identical there would be no need for speech: simple signs and gestures would be enough to help human beings understand each other's identical needs (Arendt 1998, 175-176). Plurality stems from another condition of human life, that of natality: the 'second birth' that a child undergoes as she or he learns to speak. Natality is for Arendt the introduction of something unforeseen among human beings. As the child enters the speech community she or he becomes capable of action, which Arendt characterizes as 'the capacity of beginning something

anew' (Arendt 1998, 9). Natality, plurality and action are all closely woven together: natality serves as the basis for plurality and through action human beings distinguish themselves rather than merely remaining distinct. It is our uniqueness, rooted in natality, that makes beginning something new and unforeseen possible: in short, makes action possible.

Finally, a few words on *judgment*. Judgment for Arendt is a faculty of the mind: it is the 'ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly' (Arendt 1971, cited in Benhabib 1988, 30). For Arendt, judgments 'are not arrived at by either deduction or induction' (Arendt 1992, 4), for judgment deals with particulars, not universals. Judgment is then not a logical operation - which of course does not mean irrational. Arendt's untimely death meant she could never fully systematize her thoughts on judgment. In Girardot's treatment judgment is taken to be the human capacity to assess complex situations without resorting to mechanistic, pseudo-objective measuring or calculation. For this kind of mechanistic assessment, which is the target of her critique, she has reserved the term 'evaluation' (See e.g. Girardot 2011, 117).

2.2 Merit and the Ideology of Merit

The term 'merit' refers to skills, abilities and personal traits that are valued in a certain community of value. In everyday life merits are understood as positive criteria that determine who will be, for instance, hired or allowed access to a certain education. Merit stands out as the opposite of privilege, and as such it is a fitting concept of value for a democratic society. Merit represents the refusal of injustices and the ideal that all human beings are born equal (Girardot 2011, 38).

In her book *La Société du mérite - Idéologie méritocratique & violence néolibérale* (2011) Girardot analyses the contemporary understanding of merit and what she sees as problematic about it. According to Girardot, merit is the criterion of distinction that democratic societies need and should apply. But despite its links to the idea of justice, Girardot argues, the criterion's application scope has expanded wildly, and merit is now seen as a pertinent criterion even in situations and places into which it should never have entered (Girardot 2011, 45).

Many scholars have written about the so-called 'myth of meritocracy' or 'meritocracy myth' (see e.g. Jenkins 2013, MacNamee 2009). These synonymous concepts refer to a rather widely shared (false) belief that our systems of hiring, education and so on already fulfil the meritocratic ideals. By contrast, it seems that meritocratic and supposedly fair procedures (used

in hiring, for instance) produce biased outcomes: for instance that the ones being hired are more likely young men than older women. However, the myth of meritocracy leads us to think that those who claim that the procedures are biased simply are not willing to accept the personal failures of those rejected or excluded. Due to this myth, many forms of discrimination such as outright sexism, racism and ageism are taken to be matters of history; the meritocratic procedures are supposed to prove that younger and/or white men are better than, for instance, older black women at mentally or physically demanding tasks and professions. I argue that for Dominique Girardot, the myth of meritocracy is part of the functioning of what she calls the ideology of merit. Her overall theory shows that our current understandings of merit and meritocracy are more deeply problematic than the 'myth of meritocracy' conceptualization allows to be examined.

Girardot argues that the concept of merit has become a self-evident part of our conceptual framework. It is starting to dictate how we conceptualize the social-cultural world and relations (Girardot 2011, 37). In Girardot's account, merit is gradually turning into an explanatory tool that supposedly explains why some people are doing well and some are sick, poor, and/or stupid. So rather than functioning solely as a criterion for measuring and evaluating in social situations, merit is used in an ever-increasing number of cases to explain and justify the current state of affairs. Merit is the way to explain why some people are successful in acquiring resources, opportunities and services: they have acquired merits. But merit is also used to explain the opposite phenomenon: those still struggling for resources and opportunities are said not to have enough merits (Girardot 2011, 42-44).

For Girardot, merit can stand as the criterion for distinction and legitimize someone's social standing. However, our current conception of merit supposes that merit determines the value of people's actions in any situation; that people's relations to each other and to themselves should be structured by merit. Factors that might affect a person's abilities are evoked only to further explain the lack of merit of the person in question: sickness, loneliness and failure are all coded as indicators of a lack of merit (Girardot 2011, 42). Due to the concept's expansion from its sphere of pertinence, Girardot argues, our conception of merit has turned ideological.

Girardot's account of ideology follows that of Hannah Arendt. For Arendt, ideology is 'quite literally what its name indicates: the logic of an idea,' where 'the "idea" of an ideology ... has become an instrument of explanation' (Girardot 2011, 39; Arendt 1986, 469). Girardot claims that merit is assuming the role of an all-encompassing ideology in our conceptual

system (Girardot, 2011 39–40).

Any ideology tends to eliminate competing views of the world and any positions that conflict with its dogma to maintain itself as the main explanatory tool. Since logic, as Arendt puts it, is 'the process of deduction from a premise' (Arendt 1986, 469) the only things that can be allowed to exist, to be considered as 'real', are the things that can be deduced from the premise. What cannot be deduced from the idea cannot be. Thus, following Girardot, ideology 'tears reality' to make it fit its own idea of the world. Our conception of merit has distorted our conception of reality and replaces the complexity of life with the simplicity of an idea (Girardot 2011, 39). The conception of merit has become *totalizing*: all the complexities and unforeseeable consequences of actions that make up life are cast aside and replaced by simplistic reasoning, a totalizing logic of an idea. Merit has become an instrument of explanation and what it seeks to explain is social inequality and individual success and failure. The ideology of merit turns any situation into a question of someone's individual responsibility and (lack of) merit.³ In this way the ideology of merit seemingly justifies situations that we might otherwise analyse and criticize as social wrongs.

The ideology of merit seeks to explain and justify why, for instance, a sick person should be the only one responsible for their hospital bills: it can be seen that they had something to do with the origin of illness (did they exercise enough? Did they have the influenza vaccination? and so on) and so it is inferred, according to the logic of the idea, that no one else owes this person care or help, financial or otherwise: they in a way deserve their illness for there were precautions they could have taken to avoid it but chose not to.⁴ The ideology of merit links the problems of a wrong scope of consideration and biased consideration. It does not seem reasonable to ask whether someone 'deserves' to be sick or not: even if the person did bring the illness upon themselves, they did not 'deserve' it, they merely caused it. However, the ideology of merit with its all-encompassing force brings this question of desert to the situation. His situation may be worsened if he happens to be a member of an underappreciated class of people in the area where he seeks healthcare. He may be thought to deserve the illness even more than a member of the dominant class. The ideology of merit claims that merit is the best criterion with which to evaluate what each person deserves. It is capable of bringing this question of desert, of being merited, into all situations where something is being shared. This means that the problems related to bias that used to be somewhat limited can now be found in new and even more problematic situations. The ideological concept of merit makes the biases appear natural and unavoidable: additional proof of the lesser abilities, lack of innate talent and tendency to make poor life choices

of marginalized groups.

2.3 Girardot, Arendt and Honneth

German philosopher Axel Honneth distinguishes three forms of recognition: emotional support (in primary relationships that feature love and friendship), cognitive respect (in legal relations; cognitive respect is shown by guaranteeing legal rights) and social esteem (recognition of personal traits and abilities by the community of value; Honneth 1995, 92–130). It is this third type of recognition in which merits may be invoked: we may esteem a person for their merits; that is, grant esteem to persons who are able to do things that require skill and training such as speak several foreign languages fluently, type very quickly, take good care of children, write inspiring poems, and so on.

Girardot refers to Honneth as a starting point for the questions concerning recognition (Girardot 2011, 32 fn. 1, 140) and points out that the ideology of merit causes ‘in Honnethian terms’ a social pathology (ibid, 143). However, Girardot makes a distinction between two kinds of recognition instead of three: respect (which is for everyone because of their uniqueness) and admiration (recognition for remarkable deeds and people; Girardot 2011, 188). Most frequently, Girardot simply writes ‘recognition’ and the reader must infer from the context whether this refers to respect or admiration or both. The aim of Girardot’s discussion on recognition is to take notice of the sentiments of injustice which increase despite the efforts to guarantee fairness of treatment by measuring merit as exactly as possible (Girardot 2011, 28): to point out a qualitative difference between standardized recognition and a more authentic type of recognition, a distinction to which I will turn in section 3.2. Honneth does not seem to make this kind of distinction: standardized forms of recognition such as being evaluated on a scale of 1-5, being awarded a diploma, or receiving a carefully made positive critique of one’s exhibition would be examples of social esteem for Honneth, but for Girardot the two first forms of recognition, being standardized, are not examples of admiration. Although her references include Honneth’s work, Girardot’s theory of recognition is Arendtian in its basic concepts. This paper is concerned with Girardot’s own theory and its interesting implications. The Honnethian threefold division and Girardot’s twofold division of recognition help shed light on different questions. Honneth’s theory is here used for comparison with Girardot’s theory.⁵

The difference between Girardot’s and Honneth’s theories is noticeable in Girardot’s usage of the term ‘singularity’ (*singularité*). The idea of singularity is related to Girardot’s Arendtian understanding of human

beings and the human condition of natality, the possibility of something totally new in the world with each new human being that enters the speech community (Arendt 1998, 8–9). Girardot's term *singularity* refers to this, to each person's uniqueness.⁶ It is this singularity which is overlooked when recognition becomes standardized. How could each and everyone's singularity, their uniqueness, be appreciated in concrete situations in the sphere of social esteem? Do we not need some common criteria in order for us to be able to appreciate anything at all? The problem is linked to differences in Honneth and Girardot's theoretical background.

Girardot's critique is targeted at the practice and demand of measuring *human action*. This restricts the scope of examination for her part to the domain of action that she calls the domain of 'initiatives, of beginning' (Girardot 2011, 171), i.e. the birth of something new that is not yet recognized as important or significant. Although she does not say this explicitly, this seems to be linked more to the category of admiration than to that of respect. Girardot sees the ideology of merit as a threat to Arendtian plurality and natality, the multi-voicedness of human co-existence and the introduction of something unexpectedly new among human beings. In the context of Arendt's work it is then fitting - and to be precise, necessary - to conceive of a form of recognition that combines both the singular and general: an action is always deeply personal and issues from an unprecedented source that springs from the human condition of natality (Arendt 1998, 179), but this uniqueness and singularity can only appear within human communality, in the public sphere. As for the commonness needed for the appreciation of merit (needed even when appreciating something unique such as the singularity of each person), Girardot would reject the rigid standards and pseudo-objectivity (further described in section 3.2) and resort to the Arendtian concept of judgment: the criteria would be negotiated through reflective judgment, taking the particular case as the starting point.

This paper cannot attempt a full comparison between Honneth and Girardot's work, but it seems evident that the two emphasize different aspects of recognizing remarkable deeds and people. In his later work, Honneth conceptualized the third sphere of recognition slightly differently: he writes of 'the "achievement principle" as a selective embodiment of social esteem' (Fraser & Honneth 2003, 147). The achievement principle concerns acts whose merit lies in their contribution to the society. Honneth is aware of the problems related to the achievement principle and refers to it as a 'double-edged source of legitimacy' (Fraser & Honneth 2003, 147). His analysis recalls in some respects Girardot's critique of the ideology of merit (Fraser & Honneth 2003, 148–149). Nonetheless, the problems that Honneth and Girardot discuss are not the same. For Honneth a problem caused by

the achievement principle is for instance the non-recognition of housewives' work. This is linked to bias and the implicit values of the society. Girardot's problematic is linked to the denial of the category of action by the ideology of merit. Girardot is interested in the personal input in a remarkable action that goes unrecognized because it cannot be measured or does not fall into standardized categories. The possibility of recognizing admirable actions also becomes threatened: the denial of action takes meaning away from such ideas as doing something for 'love of the world' (to paraphrase Hannah Arendt; see Young-Bruehl 2006, 79). Instead people are taken to act solely to be rewarded for it.

A final remark on the differences between Honneth and Girardot: for Girardot a pathological situation is one in which critical reflection ends and decisions are instead made based on standardized and unchangeable measurement. In such a situation, Girardot claims, actual recognition cannot be given. If recognition is not given even though from some point of view it ought to be given, this as such does not necessarily create a pathology of recognition but is something that follows from the nature of recognition as a freely issued gift; that recognition between people cannot be forced or demanded as a due. It seems to me that such a situation where recognition is not given though it ought to be given can also be pathological. Girardot's stance on the issue remains unclear. It seems to me she would agree that such a situation can be, at the least, tragic and wrong. However, in *La Société du mérite* Girardot focuses on cases where the core of the problem is not the lack of recognition between people, but an ideology and procedures that distort our concept of recognition; and this problematic creates situations where no recognition can be given between people. In the next sections I will demonstrate why Girardot takes this stance.

3 Merit and Pathologies of Recognition

3.1 Merit and Recognition

In Girardot's account, in contemporary society there is something wrong in the relations between merit and recognition (especially recognition of remarkable actions, that is, admiration in Girardot's terms).⁷ The problem is that measuring merit is often understood as the main instrument of granting recognition. I interpret Girardot to be referring to a wide variety of things when she speaks of measuring: for instance, measuring an individual's input in a collective enterprise; measuring the results or the efficiency of her work; or measuring her abilities or her more abstract 'potential' through testing. In Girardot's interpretation measuring aims at measuring people's utility. A

personal input that would express the personality and life experience of the measured person doesn't count, because how it reflects in the work cannot be counted (Girardot 2011, 106–107). Through a mechanical measuring process, a person can only get their due, possibly a fair share, but not recognition.⁸ In my interpretation this difficulty in attaining recognition seems to create a pathology of recognition.

3.2 Merit as Objectified Recognition

Girardot conceptualizes human life in terms of conflict, recognition and co-existence. Human beings become who they are in conflictual relationships with other human beings who can either grant them and their actions recognition or deny it. This means recognition is simultaneously something we need and something we might not get. This intrinsic feature of recognition is addressed by the ideology of merit in a problematic way. According to Girardot merit is now seen as objective or 'objectified' recognition.⁹ This expression refers to many things, the first being that the procedures of granting merit aim at being as objective as possible. This is in itself a good goal but it is realized in a problematic way. Maintaining that recognition has to be measured in this pseudo-objective fashion has several harmful consequences for our understanding of recognition.

Recognition has to be assessed objectively to ensure it is legitimate (Girardot 2011, 133), or, in other words, recognition needs to be earned, merited. This is self-evident. However, when trying to realize this goal, the conception of objectivity can become distorted. According to Girardot it seems that we want to be recognized through a supposedly fully objective procedure. She writes that with this kind of procedure we are 'posited (*posés*) as a thing in itself, independently of all social rapport, of all rapport to our peers' (Girardot 2011, 141). My interpretation is that this is done to ensure that a person is not judged for the bad deeds of their predecessors or for the person's relations to any other people. The wish seems to be that a person could be evaluated without any reference to others (Girardot 2011, *ibid.*). However, also the beneficial effects of certain kinds of family backgrounds are left out of the picture, and such effects can give some persons considerable advantage.¹⁰ According to Girardot, ultimately the ideal of objectivity turns into a fantastical idea of valuing a person independently of all value judgments (Girardot 2011, *ibid.*). This is impossible. To clarify this claim Girardot uses wages as a counter-example for the idea of 'self-determining' value: wages do not reflect an intrinsic value but a certain state of representations of value and of social forces at the present moment¹¹ (Girardot 2011, 136). Correspondingly people and their skills are always

appreciated in a certain environment and community of value. These values cannot be accepted as indelible without any scrutiny or possibility of reassessment even though this is what the search for objective recognition aims to do. Also, such a strict procedure cannot recognize new kinds of merits.

The sort of objectivity that is sought after in measuring procedures seems quite curious. Why would people want to be evaluated in this way? The answer to this, according to Girardot, lies in human insecurities and the precariousness of recognition. The ideology of merit works as a psychological bulwark against feelings of injustice. Once human beings dedicate themselves to something, the rejection by others feels devastating (Girardot 2011, 46–47).

This idea of ‘objective’ recognition is linked, according to Girardot, to a conception of justice as the reward or remuneration (*récompense*) of one’s efforts. If rewarding efforts is considered justice, Girardot points out, it is then crucial that the measuring of efforts is done as exactly and precisely as possible (Girardot 2011, 27, 130). It is not hard to understand why conceptualizing recognition in this way, via merit, is so appealing. That someone should be esteemed for no real reason seems unjust. In that situation they do not deserve the esteem they are given. This is why it is often thought that some proof needs to be provided to justify the esteem. This happens nowadays preferably in the form of standardisable merit: by having qualifications and by being evaluated objectively.

3.3 Problems Relating to Objectified Recognition

There are several problems related to the new, supposedly objective conception of merit and the idea that recognition could be captured best by this conceptualization. I will go through them in the next two subsections. The first problem lies in 1) the attempt to evaluate efforts in a mechanical way, most often simply by quantitative means. For instance, bibliometrics such as journal rankings are thought to be objective as they enable non-experts to evaluate the quality of expert work without any substantial knowledge of the issue (Rini 2013, 130). A very bad article may be mentioned in several other articles for its low quality - yet this means the article gets many references, which is considered a merit by simplifying quantitative measuring. As a consequence the bad article will be interpreted to be meritorious by non-expert evaluators who only consider the numbers.

Interestingly enough, Adriana Rini points out that bad bibliometrics are even capable of reinforcing existing biases instead of enhancing the objectivity of evaluation: Rini has studied the effect of such quantitative

measurement procedures in hiring at philosophy departments in New Zealand universities. According to her findings the supposedly objective procedures have led to the exclusion of women from philosophy departments and professional philosophy (Rini 2013, 130-131).

Objectification of the concept of merit also seems to have another, rather concrete meaning. The second problem is that 2) what counts as merit is in constant danger of becoming an 'object', that is, reified. With standardization of the processes of granting merit only certain, already established forms of excellence can be recognized as merits.

Referring to one of the central concepts of Arendt's political theory, Girardot writes that human life is manifested in a *plurality* of human beings (Girardot 2011, 133, 145). What a person says or does will always be interpreted by the plurality of other people and this means the meaning of an action is never fully settled (Girardot 2011, 131-132, 145). This plurality and this nature of action (in Arendt's sense) cause human co-existence to be emotionally risky. Human beings act in the world and by their actions they become and manifest who they are (Girardot 2011, 106; 171-173). However, they might not be properly understood or accepted by others: the meaning of an action can never be conclusively decided, because it can always be interpreted and reinterpreted by the open-ended plurality of human beings. The ideology of merit then tries to offer both psychological comfort and a procedural, standardized guarantee of fair treatment. It grants, if not automatic recognition, then at least an automatic remuneration for one's efforts, one that cannot be denied. This creates the third problem relating to the new way of conceptualizing merit and the search for objective recognition: 3) a confusion of recognition and remuneration. The concept of recognition moves away from being something like a gift, freely issued and symbolic. Instead, it becomes something that one *expects* to receive, something that is *due* to one. Richard Münch has made a point reminiscent of Girardot's recognition/remuneration distinction, calling it 'the intermeshing of payment and respect in the capitalist economic sphere' (Fraser & Honneth 2003, 141). Actual recognition given by others is far less assured. The remuneration does not feel quite the same as actual recognition, for it not only changes the hoped-for recognition into a concrete remuneration but also changes what is done: a singular action is turned into a standardized performance. The ideology of merit offers a substitute for recognition that is not as scary and precarious; the psychic bulwark mentioned earlier in this section. Unfortunately, the human need for actual recognition, for the recognition of both the action and the subject's singularity rather than mere automatic remuneration, does not vanish with this move.

The fourth problem is that 4) the supposedly objective recognition that is due to anyone who has followed procedure accordingly makes acting (in Arendt's sense) in the world seem superfluous - incomprehensible and unnecessary. It seems to me that action will always take place: people still do charity work, act in theatres and write poems without external incentives such as money. However, action cannot be met according to its actual nature and be publicly appreciated as meaningful and important human activity. This is why hobbies are increasingly formulated as activities that enhance individuals' ability to recover from work and relieve stress instead of as action, activities that are done with and for other people and in order to make manifest to others who we are. In a similar vein, the discourse on art's ability to improve well-being is turning art into an instrument of governmental health policy and ties it to measurable utility. What is lost in the process is the ability to understand, conceptualize and grant recognition to other dimensions of art that are much more intrinsic to it than utility.¹²

3.4 Measuring: Subject Limited to Factuality

The testing and measurement of efforts and merits is done to improve the fairness of merit-based divisions of possibilities or wealth. For Girardot this is problematic not simply because of the consequent denial of action. This brings us to the fifth problem relating to attempts to measure merit in a pseudo-objective manner: 5) in testing and measuring, the subject is limited to a *factual* description of themselves. Measuring merit means 'hijacking,' as Girardot puts it, 'the aspiration for recognition' and bringing it to 'a domain where it does not belong: the domain of the facts' (Girardot 2011, 130-132). What Girardot means by this is a manoeuvre in which human beings are taken to be fully definable by and reducible to factual information. In this subsection I will first address some questions relating to this claim. Then I will tie them to the problem of limiting the subject to a factual description of themselves.

Firstly, one might ask, isn't recognition almost always tied to facts? Recognition as praise given to a skill or personal trait etc. can be tied to facts, for instance, to what has been done. The point is, it cannot be tied to facts *once and for all*, for our interpretations of such facts are susceptible to change: historical changes, changes to what is valued, etc. Someone can for instance kill whales excellently. Still, for many people, the excellence of the act is not considered praiseworthy but instead the excellent whale killer is thought to be cruel. Then again, for some, whose daily survival might depend on whale meat, the excellence is clear. Similarly, a work of art can be overlooked by contemporary audiences and experts but recognized as remarkable after

decades or even centuries. This has been seen possibly most famously in the case of Vincent van Gogh; also in the scientific world new ways of thinking are not always easily accepted as the slow transition to Einstein's relativist worldview shows. Also, people can change, for instance, by learning new skills or adopting new moral principles or life goals which make them treat other people with more respect. This kind of personal change can affect our judgment of them. According to Girardot, the allegedly objective measurement serves to get rid of the essential plurality and open-endedness of human judgment and the inevitable 'multi-voicedness' of human (co)existence (Girardot 2011, 132). The aim is to define in fully 'objective', exact and most often quantitative means phenomena that cannot, by their nature, be pinned down conclusively (ibid.).

This, then, raises a second point: Girardot does not deny the need to assess¹³ recognition but points out that it needs to be done with respect to what recognition itself is: recognition does not rise from 'quantifiable measurement,' but instead is 'symbolic' (Girardot 2011, 133). This is why the result of assessing recognition 'is not a number to be counted, but a symbol that indicates greatness' (ibid). Girardot refers constantly to Arendt's account of judgment, and opposes judgment with evaluation. So, recognition ought to be assessed or judged but not evaluated. I cannot elaborate on Girardot's distinction here but my interpretation of how evaluation and judgment relate to the topic at hand is that legitimating recognition cannot be a strict mechanical procedure (evaluation) but a negotiation among human beings on what they value and why (judgment; see also Girardot 2011, 143). The differentiation between action and labor is clear here. Action is something that can be recognized. However, evaluation sets action aside and uses instead the quantifiable and standardisable merits as the basis for 'recognition'. Recognition becomes the aforementioned mechanical procedure and reduces action to a mere performance. Evaluation brings labor to the core of recognition and distorts it: labor as the center of recognition means that only the efficiency of activity can be recognized (Girardot 2011, 113). This, then, is not actual recognition. According to Girardot, 'measuring evaluates *what* is done,' whereas recognition concerns *who acts*, the singularity of the person that is manifested in action (Girardot 2011, 132). The power of action to change values and significations and create new ones is dismissed or neglected when evaluation attempts to grasp it. It is not able to identify genuine newness and originality even though what it attempts to reward can be something unique and unforeseen.¹⁴

Counting merits is not a 'symbol that indicates greatness' and, as a consequence, the given recognition is made banal in the process. It would seem that anyone with similar achievements and merits could be granted

the same recognition, which turns remarkable achievement conceptually into a standardized performance that is linked to measurable and quantifiable utility. Action is reconceptualised as a subfield of labor: it is linked to the process of life and survival and its efficiency at maintaining life and maintaining its own existence becomes its key feature even though this is not what action is about. The point of, for instance, art is not survival, it is the creation of meaning, and in particular of new meanings - however, as we try to justify the public funding of art it seems that this apparent 'uselessness' of art seems to prove that as it is not necessary (which is obviously true, but it does not mean art is *insignificant*), that it is something extra which one should only be allowed to enjoy if one can afford it.

With these remarks, we can return to the original problem presented at the beginning of this subsection: how measuring merit limits the subject to a *factual* description of themselves. Measuring merit is, according to Girardot, mentally and socially disastrous (Girardot 2011, 130). Measuring is thought to bring forth objective knowledge of the measured people or activities. Via merit, recognition is assimilated into the facticity of measurement. This creates a confusion of recognition and mistaken objectivity: by claiming to separate recognition from all subjective contexts, measuring procedures paralyse human beings to their current state. Claiming to have found objective facts about the measured people can actually mean causing damage to them. This is because facts about human beings are not like facts about things. Human existence and activity cannot be defined by or reduced to objective measures, because they are fundamentally invested with meaning and always producing new meaning. There is always something that escapes attempts at controlling and defining (Girardot 130-131).

Quantitative measuring of unmeasurable things is only a part of the problem. Girardot is referring to concrete testing situations that aim to evaluate for instance the suitability of a person for a job. The method of the evaluation, whether it is an IQ-test, quantitative measuring or an interview is not important. The problem lies in the attempt to pin down for instance personality traits as definitive, whereas in reality, as Girardot puts it, we are not owners of our traits and abilities but merely their depositories (Girardot 2011, 139). Even our merits, such as abilities, are susceptible to change. In the working world the problem can manifest itself as an inability to accept the possibility of change; possibly the employers' reluctance to hire young women could be interpreted as such: a pregnancy and consequent motherhood are seen as negative changes in the employee that merely cause expenses for the employer. In hiring, on the other hand, 'potential ability' is becoming the most sought after trait in an applicant. Richard Sennett has

plunged into the difficulties in defining, let alone locating, such potential ability and concludes that testing and making conclusions about someone's potential is a 'damaging measure of talent' (Sennett 2006). It seems there is also a grave difficulty in accepting the *possibility* of a *positive* change, learning and development in an employee. This is something that might take time - and might not happen at all in the end. Due to this uncertainty of the outcome, believing in an employee's potential ability becomes a risk the employers do not wish to take. In light of this, the 'potential ability' sought after in job interviews is starting to look rather curious: it is something that, in order to be perceived as potential, needs to present itself as already *actual*.

Based on Girardot's account, I argue that the damage done to the evaluated in meritocratic assessments can be conceptualized as the stereotype threat phenomenon. Once it is indicated that often girls do not do as well as boys in math tests, girls taking such a test will more likely underachieve. Numerous studies have shown that human beings' ability to succeed can easily be shaken when the testers remind them, even in indirect and implicit ways, of the negative stereotypes associated with the categories under which they are classified (for instance stereotypes relating to gender, ethnicity, and age: see e.g. Spencer, Steele & Quinn 1999; Stone *et al* 1999). If the stereotype threat is not taken into consideration in testing situations, the new results will more likely be interpreted as giving further evidence of the lesser abilities of the persons belonging to a group that is already generally seen to be less able. Facts concerning human beings as individuals are not objective in the sense that they could be measured at any moment in any conditions and circumstances. The measuring as such is a social relation with social conditions.¹⁵ Thus the measurement results do not reflect any unchanging objective identities of the tested persons. Identifying a person with their measured performances or results risks reifying (objectifying) them (Girardot 2011, 132). The demand to grant opportunities on the basis of measured merits reduces persons to their performances and potentialities to actualities¹⁶ (Girardot 2011, 130–131).

With human facts there is always a possibility of a global revaluation of all standards. This openness in human action can manifest itself as artistic and scientific innovations, learning, and personal transformation. This fundamental openness can be illuminated by the simple example of junior sports: young athletes' current success is often taken to indicate future success in sports in general. This has been shown to be a false supposition: the differences in maturation make predicting future success very difficult (Pearson, Naughton & Torode 2006). The problem in merit-measuring procedures is that the fundamental openness and uniqueness of human action is not, and cannot be, taken into consideration.

4 Conclusion

The ideology of merit seeks to secure everyone's bit of recognition by standardizing and objectifying it. According to Girardot, the reason for this is obvious. Human beings need and yearn for recognition, for they are and cannot be otherwise but 'within' the conflictual relations of recognition.

However, this move brings several problems along with it. Firstly, as quantifiable methods may be simpler to use than a complex examination of the subject matter, objective knowledge (of merits, of efforts) is thought to be attained most conveniently by simplifying quantitative methods. This means unmeasurable things are being measured and what cannot be measured doesn't seem to exist at all. Secondly the conception of merit constantly faces the threat of becoming reified: standard procedures can only recognize certain types of merit. Thirdly, this automatic process that only recognizes certain merits offers a fixed remuneration for it. This remuneration is not the same as authentic recognition of the singularity of the action or the person. People might demand something of the kind but once such a process of automated 'recognition' is set, the recognition-become-remuneration becomes inflated and loses its meaning as a way to recognize something remarkable. Fourth: action in Hannah Arendt's sense, that is, activities that are done simply because we live among other people, becomes incomprehensible and seems unnecessary: it cannot be met in the public sphere as it is, but instead its public funding faces difficulties. Action's existence needs to be justified by external beneficial effects. The existence of these effects can be hard to verify. This also threatens critical action: for instance the creation of theatrical pieces that do not 'benefit' the spectators but make them feel inadequate, guilty or express their wishes to overthrow the government become hard to justify. The fifth problem is that by testing and verifying one's merits, people are condemned to their current state and their possibilities are limited to actualities.

These five problematic aspects in the attempt to objectively measure merit with standardized criteria make for a pathology of recognition: it becomes impossible to attain actual recognition within these conditions. This is because actual recognition means having to deal with the fact that recognition might not be given: it is freely issued and may arrive centuries too late. What is offered instead is a standardized remuneration for certain merits and constant evaluation that can only further standardize our conception of human action; the possibility of change and genuine newness start to appear impossible.

The nature of actual recognition as freely issued and spontaneous is a problem in our society, for very often the appreciation of certain work is

used to justify the salary of the people doing that work. Or, a lack of merits (for instance a lack of abilities that are *recognized* as useful in our society) is used to justify the exclusion of some persons from working life and all the benefits that follow. For the unemployed in some countries this means starving. Recognition of certain kinds of work as valuable and others as not is always tied to values and as such is subject to historical change. This is why I argue that one's livelihood should not be dependent upon the recognition of one's input in the society. Recognition should stay on another level than these questions for it is not possible to measure the worth of someone's actions objectively - even if it were, it still bears no implication for the worth of the person and their rights to a decent life. In practice this would mean a basic income that is paid to everyone regardless of ability to earn (merit) a living. Girardot also argues for such a model of social security (Girardot 2011, 203).

Finally, Girardot's twofold division of recognition and the inclusion of singularity in both of these categories offer an interesting addition to Honneth's theory of recognition. The manifestation of one's *singularity* through action in the public sphere is, I think, at the core of the need for recognition: to be recognized as who one is, through being distinct from everyone else in one's singularity and, simultaneously, to be considered admirable; this seems to be central to the power and meaning of recognition for human beings and their lives.

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Endnotes

¹ I would like to thank the following people for their useful comments: Sara Heinämaa, Hans Arentshorst, Joonas Pennanen, Arto Laitinen, Arvi Särkelä and Onni Hirvonen.

² Dominique Girardot is a contemporary French researcher and teacher of

philosophy. She is a member of the French group of intellectuals M.A.U.S.S. “Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales” founded by philosopher Alain Caillé. She has published one book and several articles in French on meritocracy but is still relatively little known outside of France. Her book *La Société du mérite – Idéologie méritocratique et violence néolibérale* was published in 2011. For more information on M.A.U.S.S., its connection to Marcel Mauss and its other leading ideas see Graeber 2008.

³ In Girardot’s theory, the ideology of merit is closely linked to other influential ideologies of our times. For instance, the emphasis on personal responsibility present also within the ideology of merit is linked to the neoliberal agent, *homo oeconomicus*, the “self-made man”.

⁴ It should be noted that the English verbs “to merit” and “to deserve” both translate into French as “mériter”.

⁵ I would like to thank Joonas Pennanen for an illuminative conversation on this section which clarified for me the differences between Honneth’s and Girardot’s thought and made it possible for me to articulate them more clearly.

⁶ It was suggested that I translate ‘singularity’ as ‘particularity,’ as the meaning of ‘singularity’ in this context is reminiscent of it. However, I have decided not to change the translation, as using the term ‘singularity’ in contexts that could suggest the use of the term ‘particularity’ seems to have become more common. This can be seen in the work of Pierre Rosanvallon (2013), but a more pertinent example in this case is Giorgio Agamben, who, while writing on Hannah Arendt, uses this term (1998). Also, in *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights* (2006) Peg Birmingham has chosen to use this term. In light of these remarks I find it best to translate ‘singularité’ with ‘singularity’.

Singularity is a concept used by Jacques Derrida in a way that would not at first glance seem relevant here. Girardot does not refer to Derrida’s work when writing of singularity, but Simon Wortham’s analysis of Derrida’s concept of singularity reminds one of Girardot’s use of the term. Wortham lists Derrida’s many uses of the term and concludes: ‘the singular, then, is that which remains irreducible to any established concept, code, system or generality. Always more and less than an example, its particularity cannot ever be fully apprehended by way of “universal” categories or criteria.’ I argue that Girardot speaks of the singularity in each person in a similar vein.

⁷ It is worth pointing out that the ideology of merit affects also another Honnethian form of recognition. Ideology of merit is often present in political slogans, such as in 2006 former French president Nicolas Sarkozy's 'tout se mérite, rien n'est acquis, rien n'est donné' ('everything is earned, nothing is certain (or, nothing can be taken for granted), nothing is given'). In addition to the detrimental effects on esteem, the ideology of merit has, according to Girardot, also the potential of corrupting our conception of *rights*. Rights are usually thought to be unconditional, something given to everyone unexceptionally, but the ideology of merit with the above mentioned rhetoric can bring them to the sphere of things that have to be deserved (See e.g. Girardot 2011, 203).

⁸ Girardot argues that recognition cannot be demanded as "a due", for being able to attain recognition or give recognition to others demands renouncing any position of power. The others have to be faced as equals who can either grant one their recognition or not. This risk has to be taken to be able to gain actual recognition that is not forced or standardized or pretended. Girardot, seemingly paradoxically, does write that recognition *is due to us*. Yet it cannot be *demande*d as a due. Within Girardot's view of human life as co-existence and so on this seems reasonable, but still the claim that one should not demand recognition seems problematic. The ones who are in a position to *give* recognition are often in a position of power and the struggle for recognition, demanding recognition as a due, is an attempt to claim equality with the oppressor. This is something Girardot seems to be promoting when speaking of renouncing positions of power. Possibly Girardot's position could be defended by pointing out that a situation in which someone who is higher in the hierarchy gives recognition to someone lower in the hierarchy is not, according to Girardot, genuine recognition. Yet this whole way of conceptualizing the issue can be criticized for bringing the very real problem of non-recognition further away from reality.

⁹ I've translated the term in most cases as "objectified recognition" or "objective recognition" depending on the context since Girardot writes mostly about "*objectivisation*" and "objectivity". Alternative translation would be "commensuration" or "commensurable recognition", as an anonymous referee suggested, but the objectivized recognition is criticized in so many cases that this would not cover all of them.

¹⁰ For instance, the effect of social class on children's lives has been studied extensively by Annette Lareau in her book *Unequal Childhoods: class, race and family life* (2003).

¹¹ For instance in public discussion in Finland it is sometimes pointed out that women just 'happen' to work more often in fields where wages are lower. In reality the fact that the field is dominated by women is directly connected to the lower wages in that field due to gender devaluation (see e.g. Murphy & Oesch 2015).

¹² See e.g. Eleonora Belfiore's work on instrumentalism in cultural policy.

¹³ What Girardot writes is literally: 'la reconnaissance, pour être perçue comme légitime, doit être *mesurée*.' (emphasis added) I think here the more correct translation could be "assessed" rather than "measured" because the English word doesn't seem to have the same alternative meanings as the French one.

¹⁴ Onni Hirvonen pointed out that a struggle for recognition might at the same time be a struggle to make certain acts count as a merit. This is true. What is criticized here is a procedure that leaves no room for this kind of re-assessment of what counts as merit, that is, where there is no room for human judgment.

¹⁵ For this illuminative formulation I owe thanks to Professor Sara Heinämaa.

¹⁶ Again I thank Professor Sara Heinämaa for this turn of phrase.



III

MERIT, COMPETITION, DISTINCTION

by

Heidi Elmgren, 2018

Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History
and Feminist Theory, vol. 21, 71–89.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/R.21.1.5>

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Merit, Competition, Distinction¹

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Abstract

The article presents a critique of competition by introducing a concept called *distinction*. Competition is thought to work as a guarantee of the fairness of meritocratic procedures (merit-based recruiting in the job market or e.g. entrance examinations). However, fairness created by competition is, even at its best, only relative. This critique is then used a part of a larger critique of the role of merit in society.

Keywords: Merits, interests, distinction

1 Introduction

In this article I present a critique of competition with the help of a concept I call *distinction*.² This critique of competition is then used as a part of a larger critique of the role of merit in society, and in particular in hiring procedures in academia. Competition is thought to work as a guarantee of the fairness of meritocratic procedures, such as merit-based recruiting in the job market or the merit-based distribution of opportunities (e.g. entrance examinations for educational institutions). Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that fairness created by competition is, even at its best, only relative. Competition is used as the guarantee of the fairness of the meritocratic procedures, but it seems that the justification it aims to provide is also only relative. It appears that in order to rid ourselves of some of the problems related to competition, we ought to give up our current dominant concept of merit and the emphasis we place on it.

I develop my argument with the help of two differentiations made by Dominique Girardot in her book *La Société du mérite: Idéologie méritocratique et violence néolibérale* (2011). She distinguishes between *conflict* and *competition* as well as between *hierarchy* and *distinction*. In section two of the paper I examine these four concepts and study their interaction. This is done in order to illuminate the importance and potential of one of the concepts, distinction, to the task at hand, namely, critiquing competition. In the third section, I explain the link between merit and competition and then proceed to look at the problems created by competition in the academic world. Combining my prior analysis with Marilyn Friedman's ideas about pluralism, I introduce distinction³ as a new criterion that could be used to challenge meritocratic and hierarchical competition as the main means of assessing and legitimizing recognition of merit. A procedure that could recognize distinction could help amend some of the problems created by competition. In the fourth section of the article, I examine how the concept of distinction resonates with Hannah Arendt's concepts of *miracles* and *action*, the latter of which is the human activity that is capable of starting something completely new. I compare the concept of miracle with Immanuel Kant's concept of genius. However, recognition of merit (which could include recognizing distinction, although at the moment it is most often not included) is linked to more general inclusion in society (having a job, access to training, participating in politics etc.). Due to this, in the fifth section I study how recognizing distinction can still strengthen unfairness and the exclusion of difference. Such a negative outcome is particularly probable if the subjective and intuitive sides intrinsic to distinction are not kept in check, such as when the objectivity of the procedure that can recognize distinction is not taken into consideration.

According to my interpretation, the problematic linked to competition, merit and exclusion is deep and solving it requires more than finding out what kind of procedure would produce the fairest outcomes. The problems related to merit are linked to social conditions in contemporary societies, and they cannot be mended by simply honing procedures that measure merit. My aim is to elucidate how the attempts to only fix procedures leave the conditions in which procedures are followed unquestioned. The focus of this article is twofold: it creates a critique of competition and consequently of merit-based exclusion by way of criticizing problematic procedures. Subsequently, I wish to explore a critique on a deeper level: to criticize the attempt to amend problems relating to merit-based exclusion simply by amending procedures. Our willingness to exclude someone based on any standard (no matter how well chosen) might always create more problems and unfairness than it claims to solve. In the absence of a better solution, aiming at creating procedures that could recognize distinction rather than aiming at establishing hierarchies might be better than doing nothing, but it should not lead us to think the problem has been solved.

2 Concepts

In *La société du mérite*, Dominique Girardot discusses two differentiations: between conflict and competition and between a hierarchy and a distinction. I will take a look at these four concepts and examine how they interact.

Conflict

Conflict is central to recognition.⁴ Being in conflict means being in conflict with the definitions given to us by others and our own aspirations to be something we are not (yet are still recognized to be). Girardot writes that it is relationships with others that give a foundation for our identity. Thus, the recognition by others becomes extremely important for us (Girardot, 2011: 144–146). Conflict arises from the risk of not being seen by others as we wish to be seen.

According to Girardot, conflict enables a rivalry between subjects that is fruitful and not simply violent, a rivalry that is based on the (Arendtian) plurality of human subjects, the uniqueness of each human being from another and the inevitable multiplicity of viewpoints that follows. In this kind of rivalry the participants are equal and they are not aiming at showing that the other is wrong or less worthy than they themselves are. It seems Girardot is here following Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's agonistic view of politics as she writes: “[this multiplicity of viewpoints] founds a political solidarity ... that is not ... manifested in the consensus but on the contrary in the confrontation of opinions that is never settled” (Girardot, 2011: 179). Later she continues on the topic of democracy, rivalry and equality: “Democracy is the affirmation of equality ...: it inscribes human beings to a rivalry by the [Maussian] gift rather than to the universal competition for the ‘rare’ goods” (Girardot, 2011: 202–203). The conflict and rivalry work within the paradigm of “the gift” Marcel Mauss described in his classic *The Gift*. The rivalry and the paradigm of the gift are intimately connected: the gift is always also a kind of show of excellence that the receiver can recognize but also refrain from recognizing. Giving reciprocally allows both to show greatness by giving, and act as worthy judges and appreciators of gifts that they receive (Mauss, 1999: 119–120). It can be interpreted that in societies based on the gift economy, it is the equality of participating peoples that enables the sublimation of certain aggressiveness in gift giving (Mauss, 1999: 134–135).

Competition

For Girardot, competition is the opposite of conflict. Competition is both individualizing and depersonalizing: although everyone competes as an individual, the competition makes the competitors impersonal. This is because in

competition, the subjects are reduced to their qualities. They become the bearers (i.e. the supposed owners) of their qualities. These qualities are more or less rewarded (Girardot, 2011: 138–147.) As Girardot states, “To keep one’s place in the competition, it is important to develop characteristics that are analogic, comparable and measurable to those of others. ... Generalized competition banalizes and fragilizes identities, [the subjects] ought to keep to measurable conformities” (2011: 148). Competition, Girardot further suggests, demands competitors to become comparable. It thus encourages conformity rather than differing from pre-set standards.

According to Girardot (2011: 147), competition brings about a hierarchy instead of distinguishing. One might think, as Girardot notes, that neoliberal generalization of competition would help to produce social conditions that are the most favourable for the attainment of recognition. With competition becoming omnipresent, would not this enable people to reveal themselves more frequently, and thus be a positive thing? It is an often-repeated belief that the best will always prevail and competitions are situations where excellence can be manifested. According to Girardot, this is not the case. The structure of competition prevents recognizing all there is to be recognized. This is because exclusion is competition’s founding principle. Competition works within a framework of scarce goods to which there is limited access. There simply are not enough positions for everyone to reveal themselves. (Girardot, 2011: 146; Girardot, 2016, private email.) The ideology of merit works as a justificatory tool that assures that efforts will be rewarded although, for instance, (politically created) economical scarcity will most certainly preclude that.

As opposed to competition, the conflict in the search for recognition circulates around reflexivity and makes people notice how alone and hollow they are without others. People need other people, and they need them also for the recognition they can give (Girardot, 2011: 146.) However, unlike conflict, competition turns others into enemies, as Girardot (2011: 143) puts it, because one person’s success in competition always means a failure for everyone else competing. Competition prevents the opening towards others and to what is different from oneself. Competition prevents people from truly encountering each other, and this is linked to the way competition builds hierarchies (Girardot, 2011: 147).⁵

Hierarchy

The conflictual nature of recognition demands that people recognize the other as an equal, as someone who can recognize them or withdraw their recognition from them. *Hierarchy* means the explicit denial of equality. Hierarchy is nowadays often justified by (supposedly) objective competition. Hierarchy separates people from each other, diminishes mutual recognition and justifies

treating others as less worthy.⁶ Competition and the hierarchy it creates are ways to evade recognizing equality. If there is a ranking from better to worse, there is no need to claim equality. There is no equality, because some are better than others.

Hierarchical relations thus seem harmful for recognition. I next develop Girardot's claim that hierarchy effaces distinction. What is distinction and why is the disappearance of distinction problematic?

Distinction

In her critique of competition, Girardot writes that competition does not distinguish, but instead creates hierarchies; in other words, it does not create distinctions (Girardot, 2011: 147). Therefore, the distinction that competition does not create must be something that does not necessarily lift one above others (to create a hierarchy). Yet distinction still has to be somehow remarkable because it is brought about in a conflict, where there is room for mutual recognition and fruitful rivalry. This means that distinction can be recognized, that it can be something we admire. Girardot also points out that competition demands comparability, and for this reason, competitions create conformity rather than singularity (Girardot, 2011: 147–148). Instead of this, distinction can be something relatively incomparable: it could reflect singularity. Based on these distinctive features set by Girardot, non-comparability, remarkability and non-hierarchy, the term distinction could capture something that is excellent and original, combined with differing from the norm and pre-set standards. This means recognizing that it is a question of reflection, not of calculation or deduction – of judgment, to use Hannah Arendt's term (Arendt, 1992: 3–5).

To avoid measuring that kills the possibility of recognition, we should aim at creating procedures that have the potential of recognizing distinction. However, recognition, even of distinction, is never absolute. The emphasis should therefore be on aiming at creating such procedures and, through those, striving for outcomes that allow for a certain newness and unpredictability. The non-hierarchic nature of distinction has interesting implications. It seems to follow that in a hierarchy, attaining recognition is much harder than in an equal setting. In a hierarchy, one can receive recognition only from one's superiors and the recognition one receives is not attainable by anyone else. Equality enables conflict, which can result in fruitful rivalry where all participants can simultaneously aim at becoming better in their fields but not be directly threatened by others' success. A procedure that recognizes distinction does not require the selection of one single winner and the exclusion of all the rest. Rather, it could recognize several, equal "winners". The resulting procedure that could recognize distinction thus has a certain utopian aspect about it.

3 Examining the Academic Context: Distinction, Pluralism, Gender

Merit and Competition

In this section I use the academic world as an example to explicate the role of merit in competition and how competition and merit create problematic situations. The problems relating to competition in academia are widely known and criticized by many scholars. For instance, Carson, Bartneck, and Voges (2013) analyze how competitions are inefficient ways of distributing funding, and Hawkins, Manzi, and Ojeda (2014) elucidate the negative effects of competitive academic culture on the wellbeing and mental health of researchers. I want to contribute to these findings with a philosophical analysis of the limitations of competition and problems relating to merit-based exclusion.

One way to amend the situation is to demand more carefully devised competitions. However, a wider critique still might be needed. As Carson et al. and Hawkins et al. note, criticizing so-called bad competition is not enough. It might be necessary to question the principle of competition altogether.

First, we should identify some problems relating to competition:

1) Bad judging and bias: unfair choices by selection committees caused by implicit or explicit bias. This can be tackled by setting the composition of the committee in such a way as to prevent anyone's personal opinions from dominating the selection. (See the notes on Longino in the next subsection.)

2) Problematic criteria: even when the committee is well selected and personal biases can be ruled out, the criteria can still cause biased outcomes and favour certain forms of excellence over others, such as only taking into consideration the quantity and not the quality of written works, overlooking teaching as an academic merit and so on. This can be tackled by being conscious of the various outcomes and consequences different criteria have.

Above I presented the first problem as having been solved, but the second one persists. Equally, the situation may be vice versa: the criteria may be well chosen but the personal biases of selection committees can still cause biased outcomes.

3) Competition forces sameness: usually, in order to take part in a competition, one needs to meet the criteria of the competition. Taking part in competitions demands competitors to be similar and this rules out diversity in several, interwoven ways. In complex social situations, setting overly narrow criteria may have problematic consequences. Women and men tend to choose different specialties in philosophy and, as Katrina Hutchinson (2013: 123) points out, journals publishing papers only relating to certain specialties end up excluding more women than men.

On another level from these is a fourth problem, which I tackle in the fifth section of the paper:

4) The material and political conditions in which competitions are organized. There is a scarcity of jobs yet finding employment is necessary in order to maintain a sufficient standard of living.

It is curious that competition has become such a crucial part of academic work. Most would agree that competition is parasitic to the actual goal of universities: attaining knowledge. To use Mika La Vaque-Manty's term, unlike in sports, competition is not "a constitutive norm" of the academic world (La Vaque-Manty, 2009). In my view, the omnipresence of competition in academia is linked to the value placed on merit. The principle of merit is taken to work as a guarantee of fairness and of the good quality of scientific work. Merit works as an assurance to ensure that no one receives something they are not entitled to. Proof of merit is demanded to achieve the ideal of academia as a meritocracy: that the ones who are recognized (by having won the competition) are the most meritorious, experienced, and prominent researchers in their field. Yet numerous studies show that this is not the whole story. Embarking on an academic career has a lot to do with luck, connections, family background, race, age, sex, nationality and other aspects.⁷ To be precise, I am not claiming that people working in academia are without merits, but it is clear they are there partially by chance, not just by merit.

What is merit, then? For the purposes of this article, merit is anything that is viewed as a merit in a given situation. However, we cannot define it in a completely relativistic way. It is clear that in many situations we want merits to be clearly defined. For example, we require that surgeons have careful training and maybe even official qualifications. When it is a matter of life and death, this use of merit seems indisputable. However, in other contexts, for example in the artistic setting, matters are less clear. When no one's life is at imminent risk, the standards, methods and reasons for acting are varied and their evaluation is not a self-evident task. For instance, giving Bob Dylan the Nobel Prize in literature in 2016 was seen as a choice that was somehow outside the box. It was an opening towards a different kind of excellence (songwriting) than the one that is usually considered worth the prize (writing novels). Especially in the specific context of art almost anything can be a merit, especially in the context of distinctions: something new that escapes pre-set standards and qualifications yet is still appreciated.

The conditions for something to be seen as a merit are that it needs to be possible to (a) *give reasons* that (b) *some of the others can understand* and (c) *accept* for considering it to be a merit. This means that the merit needs to match certain criteria. But in order to maintain the possibility for something new to emerge, the reasons given for considering something a merit may be new criteria in that situation, because a distinct performance can make it possible to question the earlier norms.

Distinction and Competition in Academic Work

Let us consider one particular example of the problematic between distinction and competition in academic work. Often, one cannot, in a reasonable sense, decide which of two excellent job applications for a position in philosophy is better, as they are written by two different persons with different specialties, conceptual and methodological starting points, tasks and goals. The candidates are simply too different. They do not settle into a hierarchy but both stand as excellent and distinct from each other. Sara Heinämaa has pointed out that, to be precise, neither is aiming only at conforming to well-established academic or theoretical norms but, in so far as they operate creatively, they also establish their own norms.⁸ These two different persons and their ways of practicing philosophy are nevertheless compared when deciding who should be hired for a position in a given philosophy department. There is relatively little space for recognizing the distinction of both the applicants.

Of course, it is not simply due to the mechanisms of competition that both of the applicants cannot be recognized equally: most often only one person can be hired for a given position.⁹ However, one problematic outcome of the mechanisms of competition seems to be that of the philosophers who are actually hired, an overwhelming majority are white males (see e.g. Rini, 2013). Girardot's observation that competition creates similarity seems to gain a particular meaning in this context. If the majority of applicants are white males, then it seems that the similarity of candidates (i.e. the similarity of people who enter a career in philosophy) has been established already before the competition takes place. Alternatively, if there were a nearly equal amount of male and female candidates,¹⁰ the gender gap that nevertheless prevails in philosophy departments seems to suggest that not only specialties but other characteristics of the competitors are assessed and interpreted as merits and demerits. I will continue with this topic in the next section.

If competitions are as problematic as these reflections indicate, how can we replace them and with what? At the least, it seems it would be good if the procedure that is used in an assessment of any kind could recognize distinction, but what would this mean? Following from the definition of distinction sketched out in section 2, I would like to argue that something that is distinct can question the norms that govern assessment. Let us imagine a running contest where one competitor has decided not to compete in running fast, but in running gracefully. Let us further imagine that they succeed in such a way that the judges feel compelled to negotiate whether the competitor should be given an honourable mention (fittingly by its other name, a distinction). Recognizing distinction demands recognizing what is personal and original in the act, recognizing its singularity. Grace, as such, cannot be measured like speed, but it is a matter of judgment. However, the recognition of such a singular act cannot be forced or demanded as a due. The incomparable competitor deliberately

takes the risk of being disqualified or simply overlooked. The conflict and striving for recognition that Girardot claims is lost in competition is reclaimed in this kind of setting where there is room (or where someone makes room for) the unpredictable. The recognition that the graceful runner possibly, only possibly, attains, is therefore all the more precious.

This example is obviously not very realistic – someone might even call it amusing. It has been pointed out to me that a better example would be Oscar Pistorius, the athlete with artificial limbs who competed in London in the 2012 Summer Olympics. However, unlike the graceful runner, Pistorius *was*, remarkably, becoming comparable with the other athletes who did not share his handicap. He was trying to be faster than the others, simply with different means – artificial legs instead of biological ones. The graceful runner seems to be taking a different kind of chance: they are defying the rules and hoping to be recognized. Their action could be read as being almost a critique of serious, single-minded running. Pistorius' accomplishment is without question extraordinary, but it is not distinction in the sense used here.

Now we can return to our example of two different job applicants at a philosophy department. In an assessment that respects distinctions, there is no single winner above all but several, equal “winners”. In an article concerning the exclusion of women and minority groups as well as marginal topics and approaches in philosophy, Marilyn Friedman has suggested pluralizing meritocratic standards of evaluation as a solution for the exclusion problem (Friedman, 2013). Pluralizing the standards could help bring about distinctions rather than hierarchies. Plural standards demand a wider expertise and, in practice, the pluralization would most likely best be achieved by having more people doing the assessment. The objectivity of science would benefit from this: objectivity can more likely be achieved by a community where different people's biases cancel each other out, so to speak, rather than by individuals (Jukola, 2015.) The problem here is that no matter how objective or sensitive to distinction the hiring process is, the material conditions where hiring decisions are made do not usually allow for hiring more than one person. Pluralizing the selection committee and the standards is, in practice, a difficult task with surprising obstacles (see Ahmed, 2016), and it might be even more difficult to increase (to pluralize literally) the amount of people the committee can hire. There simply are not enough positions for everyone. The several, equal “winners” cannot all be hired.

To summarize, here are the differences between Pistorius, the graceful runner and philosophers with different specialties. Pistorius is not changing (at least the goals) of his chosen game, instead, he has shown that different kinds of people can compete in it too. The graceful runner is doing something quite revolutionary, at least for a while. The runner might be starting a new game (maybe parkour or even a combination of ballet and running), which could

later become a strict and non-reflective sport obsessed with its own rules, thus falling back on the competition logic.

Philosophers with different specialties are not, in a way, competing in the same game at all even though the competition actually brings them to compete against each other. The problem is that some specialties seem to be more esteemed than others. There seem to be hierarchies within philosophy affecting which specialties and what kinds of questions are deemed more deeply philosophical than others (Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013). This inequality of specialties is manifested, for instance, in the Finnish JUFO classification of academic journals. The most esteemed journal of feminist philosophy, *Hypatia*, is graded 2 out of 3 (Pölönen & Roth, 2015). This means that for someone specialized in feminist philosophy it is virtually impossible to publish in the highest category. Among other things, this affects hiring feminist philosophers for positions in philosophy departments.¹¹

This means that to argue that specialties cannot be compared because they are too different is not enough. They may well be incomparable, but it does not change the fact that some specialties are more valued than others and therefore they are more likely to be favoured.

The problem of inequality here is linked to power positions: who ranks scientific journals? Who makes the decision to hire yet another white male candidate with a “highly similar CV”? This is the level where the change should happen. Or could it be that the problem is wider? Does it start with our difficulty to imagine institutions without hierarchies? It is not often problematized that only a few people are allowed to decide for so many. Hierarchy demands that there are always fewer people on the upper levels, meaning there are simply not enough positions for everyone who are qualified.

In their critical article about academic competitiveness, Carson, Bartneck and Voges ask:

What prevents us from opening our eyes to the absurdity of the academic situation? Why are we so convinced that our proposal will be accepted? Why do we believe that we will achieve a tenured process and that our paper will be accepted by *Nature*? Coming back to Alice’s question “Who won the race?” we conclude that currently we are all losing. (Carson et al., 2013: 189)

In the Caucus Race in *Alice in Wonderland*, which the authors are referring to, the contestants do actually get warm and dry despite not finding out who finally won the race. In that sense everyone wins. In academic competitions, however, these kinds of beneficiary side effects are less evident. The alternative Carson et al. propose for distributing funding is a lottery. This would require no energy from the applicants, so they could focus on their actual scientific work. The authors have are now creating computer simulations that test the ef-

iciency of funding in the long run compared to the current system (Carson et al., 2013). The fairness of such a lottery procedure could be argued to be questionable. However, in addition to being very inefficient, the current system is often heavily based on the role of references of the application and therefore might not be as fair as we wished anyway. A system that awards funding for the first year simply by lottery and which demands a progress report on the project for subsequent years would save significant time for researchers who stand to possibly gain nothing, yet the quality of scientific work would not be as compromised as in a system that requires no reporting at all.

4 Distinction, Newness, and Miracles

It seems clear there is a subversive element in distinction. Distinct action questions and rewrites the norms that govern assessment: it asks to be recognized on its own terms because it is creating something new in the world, something that Hannah Arendt calls a miracle. This possibility of a miracle does not need to be extremely rare. For Arendt, the concept of the miracle can be abstracted from the religious framework and refer to any new, unlikely event. The existence of our planet and human beings are examples of miracles for her.

[W]henver something new occurs, it bursts into the context of predictable processes as something unexpected, unpredictable, and ultimately causally inexplicable – just like a miracle. In other words, every new beginning is by nature a miracle when seen and experienced from the standpoint of the processes it necessarily interrupts. (Arendt, 2005: 111–112)

To recognize miracles, we need to use our faculty of judgment, which “has ... to do with man’s ability to make distinctions” (Arendt, 2005: 102).

For Immanuel Kant, it is only the few geniuses who can truly use their ability to change the course of history and make miracles. For others, it remains to follow the lead of such geniuses (Boehm, 2013: 171). Instead, for Arendt, the human condition of natality, the “birth of new men and the new beginning” is “the miracle that saves the world” (Arendt, 1958: 247). Everyone is capable of beginning, of starting something new. She identifies the creation of man with the creation of freedom (Arendt, 1958: 177). She continues: “This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and all origins ... The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable” (Arendt, 1958: 178). It is not some rare genius who is able to do this, but man, any human being. Also, for Arendt, the ability to judge, to make distinctions even when confronting something new to which earlier standards do not apply, is

“quite familiar” and “can be seen in everyday life whenever, in some unfamiliar situation, we say that this or that person judged the situation rightly or wrongly” (Arendt, 2005: 102).

There is a stark difference between Kant’s and Arendt’s ideas on miracles and genius. It seems that for Arendt, actions are great, even genius, whereas for Kant, it is the people behind those great actions that are geniuses. What I find interesting is that the Kantian idea of a rare genius is still very much present in contemporary society. For instance, Sally Haslanger has recounted her negative experience of being told by one of her teachers that he had “never seen a first rate woman philosopher and never expected to because women were incapable of having seminal ideas” (Haslanger, 2008). In this teacher’s view, some people (usually men) “have it” and some simply do not. This is a common way of understanding genius or talent: it is thought to be something bestowed only upon a few people. The idea of rare geniuses has consequences on our conception of merit, recognition and who is recognized. If we expect miracles only from a few people, then what most people are doing has to be interpreted as mediocre.

Expecting miracles only from a few can be backed up by claiming that only a few people actually do something exceptional. Often there is talk of potential and attempts to locate it, either with tests or intuitively so that it could be guaranteed that no resources are wasted on those who lack potential. The problem with *potential* is that it is truly potential; in order to become visible and real, it needs to have a chance to actualize. Potential is not something that leaves marks and indications to be picked up by some method. It is, to a great extent, a question of belief. To give potential the space (and time!) to actualize means always taking the risk that the actualization will not take place. But failing to give potential a chance makes it extremely probable it will not develop. The fact that, against all odds, some people manage to succeed even with virtually no resources does not mean others who are equally unprivileged just ‘don’t have it’, that they are lacking something. It means they are less lucky and that the society in which they live is simply unfair.

The recognition of distinction is not simple. To recognize the emergence of something new, we need *wonder*, as described by Luce Irigaray and interpreted by Sara Heinämaa (2016). Irigaray is referring to René Descartes’ passion of wonder. Wonder is a passion that “doesn’t involve any value-judgment” of its object (Descartes, 2010: §53, §70–73). However, as Heinämaa notes, for Descartes, wonder is always a “spontaneous reaction” whereas for Irigaray wonder is an ethical principle, a task that ought to be carried out in order to act ethically. Heinämaa argues that Irigaray’s concept of wonder is equally influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s description of the phenomenological method. According to Heinämaa, for Irigaray, wonder means “refraining from measuring the other by our own cognitive and emotional standards” (Heinä-

maa, 2016). This “suspension of evaluation” (ibid.) allows us to open towards what is new. I wish to argue that wonder can become a way by which to learn to appreciate something new, by opening towards it.

Instead of opening towards what we cannot instantly define and understand, it is easy to settle, with Kant, to deem something as “lacking spirit” (Kant, 1914: §49). For Irigaray, wonder is “not something that happens to us” (Heinämaa, 2016) like it is for Descartes – and possibly also for Kant, given his idea of wonder as “a shock of the mind” that “provokes a doubt as to whether we have rightly seen or rightly judged” (Kant, 1914: §62). Instead, wonder is for Irigaray a “particular passivity that requires activity”; it is something “we have to struggle for” (Heinämaa, 2016). Heinämaa argues that “wonder depends on the other” but that it is “my task to maintain this opening”. I would like to take this notion a little further. In order for us to be ethical subjects, which is the aim of Irigaray’s project, could wonder sometimes be something that we need to try and evoke despite the immediate lack of it, despite the apparent “lack of spirit” in for example, a musical performance? With a closer examination, it may be revealed that “spirit” is not simply the attribute of a person or a cultural product, but also dependent on the people who assess whether or not something has it. The whole situation where the “spirit” ought to express itself takes part in the creation of the spiritedness of, for instance, a musical performance. If this is true, we need to ask: to whom do we allow the benefit of suspending our first impressions – that is, the benefit of wonder – before deeming them this way or that? Who is allowed to distinguish themselves? Who is given the time to develop their potential to actuality? Who is deemed crazy, a mediocrity or a genius? The idea of distinction faces deep problems that are linked to cultural power positions and implicit values, especially in a culture where this “Kantian” conception of genius as someone who prevails against all odds reigns. I will concentrate on this problematic in the next section.

5 The Problem with Distinction: Intuition and the Idea of Genius

So far I have criticized non-pluralistic competition for the way it produces conformity and builds hierarchies which prevent mutual recognition. However, what I call distinction could face different kinds of problems and cause a similar situation where only people with “highly similar CVs and forms of excellence” (Jenkins, 2013: 99) are hired: namely white (young) men.

There is an objection to my arguments about the need to recognize distinction. If to recognize distinction means to let go of at least some of the pre-set standards of assessment and give way to wonder and by wonder to admira-

tion, it seems this kind of reaction is more likely to be provoked and tolerated if the person behind them is our stereotypical genius: a straight, white male. One might argue that this danger is particularly present in philosophy. Katrina Hutchinson (2013) has written about the difficulty women have in building and embodying authority in philosophy. Authority is a relational attribute: others must agree that you have authority in order for you to have it. As Haslanger's example of "seminal ideas" suggests, it is often thought that there is something about, for instance, philosophy, that cannot be learned but which already needs to be there. This type of thinking is problematic and can be and has been criticized. Also, as Jennifer Saul (2013: 43–44) suggests, the difficulty people have in recognizing their own implicit biases which affect their assessment is possibly stronger within the philosopher population. People who think they are objective are more likely to be less so (Uhlman & Cohen, 2007), and because the main virtue of philosophers is often thought to be objectivity, this seems to create a dangerous combination where implicit bias reigns.

So what can be done if people's own feelings about their own objectivity are mostly erroneous, and if even when people have a realistic conception of their level of objectivity, it means that they know they are unobjective? How are we to reach objective outcomes at all? Helen Longino's studies on objectivity show that it is, indeed, difficult for a single human being to attain objectivity. However, the problem is not as desperate as one might think based on this conclusion. Objectivity can instead be present in a community, given that the community is diverse enough (see e.g. Husu and Rolin, 2005; Jukola, 2015). This takes us back to the crucial role of pluralism. Achieving diversity requires a wide base of expertise in decision-making bodies. In an article concerning the position of women in philosophy (Elmgren, 2016), I suggested one way to enhance the situation and women's participation in philosophy would be to tackle the inequality of different subfields in philosophy. First, hiring different kinds of people from various subfields of philosophy and then making them members in the committees that decide who will be hired next could make it more likely that non-male, non-white, non-analytical philosophers are also hired.

6 Conclusions: To the Root of the Problems

It might seem that the problems are neatly solved. If we could just create better hiring procedures and gather a larger crowd of people to assess the applicants for positions in academia, the outcome of those procedures would be fairer and more objective. But this is not enough.

There are a number of problems on several levels here. Some of them can be tackled by making sure that procedures are not biased and standards are not so strict that they hamper anything new from emerging. However, some of the problems remain unsolved and, what is worse, they are responsible for maintaining an even deeper problem than the ones of lower orders, namely: if improving the procedure actually enables the meritocratic system of exclusion to continue, is it, then, actually harmful?

On the first level:

1) Biased competition: not everyone has the same chance at obtaining the positions, access to education and so on that they would deserve based on their merits.

On the second level:

2) The nature of competition: it creates conformity rather than enables distinction.

3) The idea that there is a scarcity of human talent in the world that is only bestowed upon a few and those few can be identified in some manner, be it competition, testing, or intuition.

4) Even if distinction is recognized in some way, the recognition of distinction is likely to be unequal because it is affected by power positions, cultural and social valuations, and discrimination.

On a societal level:

5) The role of competition in society: we use competition in the job market to justify exclusion from professions that require expert skill, but these practices also have much wider consequences. Because general inclusion in society is conditioned by the person's taking part in working life, the scope of exclusion becomes wider. Generalized competition can exclude an individual from more wide-ranging possibilities to enhance the quality of one's life as well as from wellbeing and health.

No matter how fair the competition is, if we require everyone to take part in it and create a situation where all who might have the qualifications still cannot find a job, there remains serious unfairness in the situation as a whole. If we do not have enough jobs in society, then seeing employment as a prerequisite for social inclusion and participating in society is simply unfair, no matter how well it can be shown that all who have jobs are among the best in their respective fields. The situation is unfair, no matter how much the hired ones deserved their jobs.

We may solve problems 1–4 by improving meritocratic procedures that are used in for instance hiring. Insofar as we are not able to change society as a whole, it might be more important to enhance the fairness of our existing procedures and thereby enable more people (as well as different kinds of people) to manage in competition. But if this allows us to close our eyes from the deeper social unfairness, it becomes a dubious task. If I endorsed this position, whose

cause would my article and its conceptual analysis further? The cause of those who are already privileged, who have qualifications but are left unrecognized due to first and second level problems or of those who are outside the entire competition framework? Yet whose cause is more urgent? The answer seems obvious.

My more radical solution (instead of merely improving procedures) would be to dissociate education level from the level of one's salary, control the levels of salary with income caps and introduce a substantial basic income. Basic income would eliminate the need for every individual to have a job because their survival would not depend on having one. If monetary compensation was not seen as the main means of showing appreciation for someone's job, it would also help end the discussion on whether, for instance, a job requires so much merit that a salary of an astronomical scale is necessary to match the given effort. We cannot completely abolish the need to assess the quality of people's work in some manner (because many jobs do require expert skill). Despite this, the suggested changes would amend the inclusion of people who, for whatever reason, are not in the job market, and keep income differences on a more sustainable level. This would be beneficial to all as income level equality has been shown to enhance the wellbeing of the whole population (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009: 302–303).

If we continue to imagine that we can simply modify meritocratic procedures to their maximum capacity and decide for certain and for good that someone deserves a given position, we are likely to continue the unfair exclusion of people who have not received the same opportunities in life as have those we consider to have merits.

Endnotes

- 1 I would like to thank Martina Reuter for her insightful comments during the process of writing this article.
- 2 This article is a part of my dissertation on the problematic created by meritocracy in contemporary society. In this article I concentrate on questions of merit, recognition and procedures that aim at finding out who (e.g. among applicants for a given job) is most meritorious. What merits are, exactly, is not the key question of this article; merits may be whatever are the characteristics or qualifications that are viewed as merits in a given situation. I elaborate on this definition in section 3.
- 3 This should not be confused with Pierre Bourdieu's concept.
- 4 The concept of recognition used in this paper is that of Dominique Girardot, which is influenced by Axel Honneth's thought. The difference is that in Honneth's system recognition is divided into three forms: emotional support, cognitive respect and social esteem. Girardot mostly speaks simply of recognition but also makes a division between *respect*, which is for everyone due to their unique-

ness, and *admiration*, which refers to recognition of remarkable deeds and people. (On the differences between Honneth and Girardot, see Elmgren 2015). This article mostly concerns admiration, in Girardot's terms: the recognition of remarkable things and the possibility of recognizing something that breaks from earlier standards of assessment.

- 5 It has been pointed out to me that for instance in an election the juxtaposition between competition and conflict is misguided; lack of competition in an election would be telling of a one-party system rather than an indicator of a good process. The juxtaposition is not meant to be absolute but to refer to particular evaluating practices. A democratic election is not the type of competition that is described here: at least in principle, it does not force the competitors to become identical but instead, an election can be won in more than one way, leaving room for distinction (see below). Of course people do compete for votes in an election but the competition itself can be "played" and won in several ways (although, in practice, money seems to play a central role). Democracy is not (at least necessarily) meritocracy and therefore the problems of merit do not directly apply to it.
- 6 I would like to thank Martina Reuter for pointing me towards this conclusion.
- 7 On how racism affects embarking on an academic career, see Altbach & Lomotey (1991) and Walker (2003); on the effect of social class, see Soria & Stebleton (2013); on the interplay between race and social class, see Hardaway & McLoyd (2009); on the interplay between race and class on women, see Gutierrez y Muhs et al. (2012); on sex discrimination in British academia, see Knights and Richards (2003); on women's worse career prospects in academia, see Danell & Hjerm (2013).
- 8 Heinämaa, private email 2015.
- 9 Getting the job is obviously not the only way to become recognized. However, being recognized, for instance, formally (in the form of a certificate or a more general "thumbs up" from the assessment board) while not getting the job is still a rejection and leaves the other equally qualified candidate in a precarious situation.
- 10 It is also a well-known fact that there is a serious lack of diversity in philosophy departments. In this paper I have concentrated on the case of women because this problem is the most well documented (see e.g. Beebee & Saul 2011; Hutchinson & Jenkins 2013), but the situation seems to be even worse for people of colour and people who do not conform to traditional gender norms. On the situation of Black students in philosophy, see Fernandes Botts et al. 2014.
- 11 The impact is not necessarily direct, because the creators of the JUFO classification system explicitly emphasize it should not be used to evaluate individual researchers. However, the classification is used in measuring the productivity of departments and thus researchers with so-called better JUFO scores may be more likely to be hired or tenured etc.

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IV

MERIT-BASED EXCLUSION IN FINNISH MUSIC SCHOOLS

by

Heidi Elmgren 2019

International Journal of Music Education vol. 37, 425-439.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761419843990>

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Merit-based exclusion in Finnish music schools

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International Journal of
Music Education

2019, Vol. 37(3) 425–439

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DOI: 10.1177/0255761419843990

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Abstract

In this article I analyse merit-based exclusion in Finnish music schools for children and young people. I base my study on my earlier research on meritocracy and written data collected online from current and former music school students in the autumn and winter of 2015–2016. I am able to show there are implicit and explicit merit-based hierarchies in the music school. Hierarchies and exclusion are shown to be connected to the institution's meritocratic features. As the hierarchies are merit-based, it is hard to question them. The hierarchies justify excluding students from certain practices such as performances. These practices are in fact learning opportunities, as has been established by earlier research. In addition to this, the hierarchies also influence students' views of their potential and this, combined with limited learning opportunities, hinders their development. The hierarchies thus produce self-fulfilling prophecies of the students' advancement. This is how the meritocratic system can in fact produce the failure it pretends only to reflect.

Keywords

Exclusion, hierarchies, meritocracy, music education, talent

Introduction

The article analyses merit-based exclusion in Finnish music schools for children and young people. I base my study on my earlier research on meritocracy (Elmgren, 2015, 2018) and written data collected online from current and former music school students in the autumn and winter of 2015–2016. I analyse the data from the point of view of theory-driven qualitative content analysis (Alasuutari, 2012), using my previously built framework on meritocracy as the theoretical foundation. I ask whether there are implicit or explicit hierarchies in the music school, and what they are based on, and study the students' experiences of hierarchies and the exclusion they cause. I aim to show that the hierarchies and exclusion are connected to the institution's meritocratic features. "Meritocracy" usually refers to a form of government. In this article, I use the term in its adjectival

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form as a descriptive concept that refers to practices and mindsets aimed at distributing recognition, other social goods and/or resources based on individuals' merits.

The Finnish music school system

By *music school*, I refer to partly state-funded Finnish institutions of musical education for children and the young (approximately 6–18 year olds) that offer music studies as an extracurricular activity and form part of the Basic Education in the Arts. There are 96 music schools in Finland (Suomen Musiikkioppilaitosten Liitto, 2017). In total, 4.6% of 7–19 year olds take part in music education (in some parts of Finland, the participation rate is as high as 7.9%) (Van Norden, 2002).¹ The Association of Finnish Music Schools is part of the European Music School Union (Riediger, Eicker, & Koops, 2010).

The music schools follow the national core curriculum for the Basic Education in the Arts,² which is a curriculum framework formulated by the Finnish National Agency for Education (Alt, Enakimio, Meriluoto, & Rodionoff, 2017). Music schools have a strong standing in Finnish arts education and several laws regulate their status. The first law concerning music schools is from 1968 (*Valtionavustuslaki*; see Kangas & Halonen, 2015, pp. 199–200). The Basic Education in the Arts includes different fields of the arts and is, by law, target-oriented, advancing from one level to another and organized primarily for children and the young. In addition, it gives the student the ready ability to express themselves and apply for professional training in one's respective field (Law concerning Basic Education in the Arts, 1998/633.)

In music schools, students advance through course examinations to complete diplomas for their studies. Education is carried out as instrument lessons (most often one-to-one tuition) and other related studies. The schools create the curricula themselves within the national framework. Most of the music schools concentrate on Western classical music, with some also teaching a so-called pop/jazz curriculum as well as the classical one. In many music schools, students are chosen based on an entrance examination. The acceptance rate is approximately 50% (Kangas & Halonen, 2015, p. 203).

Finnish music schools are now going through a curriculum change, and many of the problematic issues pointed out here have been addressed in the new curriculum framework (Opetushallitus, 2017a, 2017b). This study provides further knowledge for policymakers and music school teachers on the exclusive practices that students have faced, but also ways to create more inclusion, a joy of music and feelings of belonging.

Research on music schools in Finland and elsewhere

Music students are most often researched in music education studies. The foci of these studies have been, for example, students' learning practices. For instance, Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks (2017) consider the differences in learning practices between British and Chinese university-level music students. Dalagna (2016) has studied the effects of mentoring on desired artistic outcomes in music performance. Burnard's research (2012, 2013) concentrates on developing creativity in music education whereas Chaffin, Imreh, Lemieux, and Chen (2003) study piano practice as expert problem solving. Another prevalent way of studying music students is through questions relating to playing ergonomics (see, e.g., Bruno, Lorusso, & L'Abbate, 2008; Martín López & Farías Martínez, 2013). The music institutions and their atmospheres and practices have hardly been studied at all. Closer to my approach are Rosie Perkins (2013a, 2013b) who has studied the effects of hierarchies in music education, and Alison Davies (2004), with an emphasis on the presumed meritocracy of

music education. Henry Kingsbury (1988) has analysed in particular the role of talent in music education in a conservatory in the United States. The works of Perkins, Davies, and Kingsbury are all ethnographic case studies at single institutions (see also Nettl, 1995 and Froehlich, 2002), and as such, rather narrow in scope.

It has been difficult to find comparable studies related to pre-college music education, because the differences between national education systems are notable. Music education institutions are not routinely studied internationally either (Perkins, 2013a). In the Finnish context the only somewhat comparable study is by Tuovila (2003), where the author examines 7–13-year-old music school students ($n = 66$) and their views of studying in four music schools in Helsinki, as well as the musical practices in those institutions.

On meritocracy

Literally, meritocracy means the “rule of the merited” and refers to a form of government. It is a neologism coined by Michael Young (1958) in his book *The rise of meritocracy*. The principle, however, is much older; the idea of a society organized based on merit first appeared in Confucius’ thought (Van Norden, 2002, p. 247) and it can be argued that Plato (*Republic*, D. Lee trans. 1987) and Aristotle (*Politics*, E. Barker trans. 1998) also supported meritocracy. Nowadays, meritocracy manifests itself in meritocratic procedures, such as meritocratic selection in hiring or the general principle that people in higher positions ought to be there due to merit rather than because of money, influence or family connections.

With good reason, merit-based procedures of exclusion can be considered fair. The principle of merit is seen as a refusal of injustices (e.g., nepotism), and it reflects the ideal that all human beings are born equal (Girardot, 2011, p. 38). It justifies excluding those who do not fit certain criteria in a certain situation (i.e., who are not meritorious enough). For instance, it is clearly justifiable to exclude non-qualified surgeons from the operating room. From this commonplace understanding, however, things become more complex. Once meritocracy is introduced in a given situation, it makes exclusion available and justified. Exclusion is still a choice that concerns values, not a necessity. It may harm the excluded ones, and the risk of exclusion also affects those who are included.

An example of meritocratic exclusion in music schools is the entrance examination: only people with certain merits (qualifications, propensities, abilities, characteristics, etc.) are accepted. Those who are excluded do not get the chance to learn the things the institution offers to those who pass the exam. The exclusion follows from an assessment of their potential. The excluded person is thought to not have what it takes to complete the education. However, this is not a fact but an assessment and a prediction. As an evaluator, Henry Kingsbury (1988) elegantly described this: “I was ... asked not just for musical evaluation but for divination” (p. 64).

Meritocratic procedures and ethos relate to hierarchy (Rhodes & Bloom, 2012). In principle, meritocratic procedures treat everyone as equals and individuals rather than as representatives of their families, for example. However, in meritocratic selections, the underlying thought is that everyone is *not* equal because the attempt is to select some over others. The goal of the procedure is to find out the differences between people that will (supposedly) determine who to justifiably hire for a given position or accept in a given institution. The hierarchy this creates is accepted as a given. Because the hierarchy is based on a meritocratic procedure, it is considered fair and unproblematic. Even if it is not—that is, if the people chosen by such a procedure prove to be unworthy of their position—it does not mean that the ideal of meritocracy and the hierarchy it is thought to be capable of justifying are questioned.

Rhodes and Bloom (2012) have argued that there is a cultural fantasy of hierarchies: “Crucially, it is ... this constant disappointment [with inept people in power positions], which ironically organizes and reproduces us as subjects of desire to this cultural fantasy of hierarchy” (p. 163). The same can be said of meritocracy, which Rhodes and Bloom list as one of the most important modern liberal and capitalist ideals. The apparent lack of merit in candidates chosen by a supposedly meritocratic procedure does not raise the question of whether power should be allocated according to merit; it only proves that the *process* is biased. The ideals of justified hierarchy and meritocracy both only gain strength from failure. It is precisely because of injustice that it seems more important to try harder to realize *true* meritocracy. Meritocracy is considered inherently fair. However, the exclusion it justifies can still be problematic.

Meritocracy in the context of music schools

In music schools, the meritocratic element is most visibly present in the form of the entrance examination. Also, those who succeed best in the course examinations get the best grades (Kangas & Halonen, 2015). In addition to this, there is a tendency to divide the students into those with exceptional talent, the mediocre ones, and even those whose studies the institution wishes to cut short due to their poor results (Kangas & Halonen, 2015, p. 204).

A meritocratic order is interpreted to be working if there is no clear conflict between the merits of the accepted and excluded: if those left outside are not, for instance, great musicians. If the results of the students shunned by the institution are bad and those who it appreciates are good, it is often interpreted as a logical consequence of the students’ individual abilities, which the institution simply brings out. I wish to challenge this interpretation. It can be argued that the system of division and branding partly creates the differences in skills and reinforces original differences; in other words, it risks creating self-fulfilling prophecies.

Alison Davies (2004) has analysed the (supposed) meritocracy of one conservatory. She points out that middle-class students question the meritocracy less often than more mature students and students with a working-class background. They think that social factors also play a part in who is viewed as “talented” in the conservatory. In accordance with this, my mostly middle-class respondents hardly question the justification of merit-based procedures, even when they see they do not benefit from them.

In this article, I argue that there are hierarchizing, merit-based practices in music schools. The hierarchies manifest themselves, for example, in practices that exclude some students and include others. Although the hierarchies may be tacit, the students are aware of them and of their own standing in them. They interpret their standing in the hierarchy as a reliable assessment of their merits: their skills, level of talent, and/or potential. Due to being merit-based, hierarchies are considered justified, and hence the system of merit-based hierarchies is capable of producing self-fulfilling prophecies of the students’ development.

Research questions, data and methods

In a meritocratic framework such as an institution, inclusion and exclusion usually work through implicit or explicit hierarchies. Therefore, the research questions are:

1. What kinds of hierarchies, if any, are there in music schools?
2. What are the hierarchies based on?
3. How do the possible hierarchies affect the students’ experiences of music school and possibilities of learning?

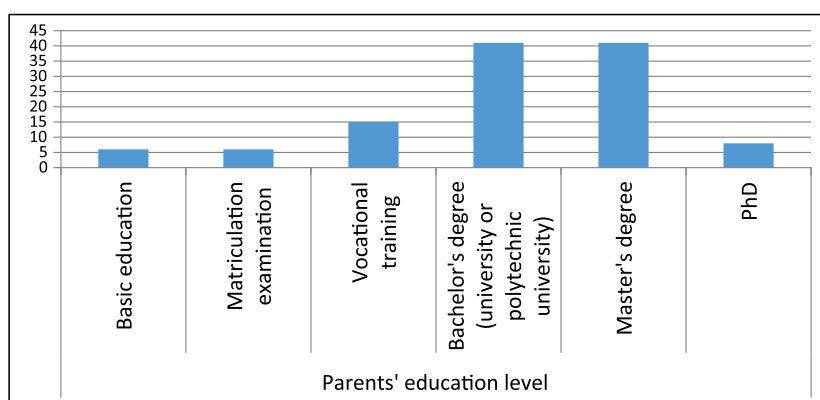


Figure 1. Parents' education.

The data

The survey data for the research project were collected during the late autumn of 2015 and winter of 2016. They were gathered online through a call for contributions on a Jyväskylä University webpage, which was distributed mostly via Facebook and some mailing lists. The survey consisted of an introductory text, a short survey concerning background information and a space in which the respondents could recount their experiences. The scope of the inquiry was limited to the last 20 years, namely, to people who had studied in music schools during the years 1995–2015. There were 117 usable answers.³

Sixty-nine per cent of the respondents were aged between 21 and 30 years. Only 12.8% of the respondents were men, so making conclusive comparisons between genders is not possible. Most of the participants (78.6%) evaluated the income level of their family as middle, 18.8% evaluated it as low and 2.6% as high. Based on the families' income levels and the respondents' and their parents' education levels (Figure 1), it seems that respondents mostly came from middle-class or upper-class families.

Method

The method of analysis was theory-driven qualitative content analysis (Alasuutari, 2012). As the theoretic foundation of the study, I have used my own framework of meritocracy, formed during my doctoral studies. The framework is based on the work of Dominique Girardot (2011), a French critic of meritocracy.

The creation of hierarchies is crucial to meritocratic practices (Elmgren, 2015, 2018; Girardot, 2011). Therefore, depictions of hierarchies were chosen as one theme of the analysis. In the content analysis, I coded the data according to specific traits and depictions of situations where the respondents felt excluded. In this article, I concentrate on the respondents' conceptions of "talent" as a category that they invoke to explain and justify the division of the students into hierarchies, where those higher in the hierarchy are more included in the practices of the school than those lower down.

Exclusion does not come across as a simple matter in the data. Most responses recounted several, even conflicting, experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Someone who was well recognized and included by their instrument teacher could feel like an outcast during music theory lessons or in orchestra practice, or vice versa. Positive and negative feelings also seem to alternate during the years of studying in music school, due to, for example, the teacher changing or varying practices, such as voluntary activities becoming compulsory.

Studying experiences is not a self-evident task. The concept *experience* is not “innocent”; it is already an interpretation by the person verbalizing their experience and by the researcher analysing it (Säilävaara, 2016; Saresma, 2010). I searched for depictions of different situations and practices that were related to inclusion and exclusion and classified them according to patterns that I was able to extract from them. Following Saresma (2010), my analysis aims at elucidating how the experiences of exclusion form, and what sorts of situations and practices are described in relation to exclusion. The longest and most reflective answers mostly came from people who had already ended their music studies some years ago. The temporal distance may have enabled them to gain more perspective on their years in music school, but it also means that questions of memory come into play. Also, some experiences may appear more meaningful after the studies have been completed.

Limitations of the study

As the information and invitation to participate were distributed online, anyone fitting the description of “studied in a Finnish music school between the years 1995–2015” was invited to take part. The survey was mostly distributed through Facebook, which means that most of the respondents were active Facebook users. The lack of male participation (less than 13%) in the survey follows partly from the fact that fewer boys (approximately 1/3) than girls go to music school (Van Norden, 2002). The majority of respondents represented the middle or upper classes. To study the role of gender or social class in music school, another set of data collection is needed.

Excluding practices and mindsets

In the subsection “Hierarchies”, below, I track and classify the depictions of hierarchizing practices that the respondents have shared. In the subsection “Talent as a condition for inclusion”, I analyse how being considered *talented* can be invoked to work as a self-evident way to create a “natural” hierarchy among the students. I trace how being positioned and/or positioning oneself in the hierarchy affects the students’ views of themselves as musicians, their motivation, and sometimes even career choices.

Hierarchies

It would be easy to think of meritocratic exclusion simply in terms of who is accepted into the music school and who is not, on the clear basis of the exclusion of the entrance examination. Meritocratic exclusion, however, can continue after that through explicit and implicit hierarchy-building. Those included are higher in the hierarchy than those who feel excluded. Exclusion from higher places in the hierarchy is an ongoing, tacit process. Even without explicit exclusion, the process may lead a student to exclude themselves—with the result that they end their studies in the music school or conclude that becoming a professional musician is impossible for them.

Due to the connection between meritocracy and hierarchy (see the subsection “On meritocracy” in the Introduction), I wanted to study how the concept of hierarchy resonated with the respondents. I mentioned it in the call for contributions, and 14.2% respondents wrote about it. In this section I have concentrated on studying whether the respondents had experienced hierarchies in music school and how the hierarchies were justified. According to Perkins (2013a), the hierarchies of the institution and each student’s position in them play an important part in “what and how” students learn. The chances of learning are thus very different for students who are higher and

lower in the hierarchies. My findings provide further confirmation of Perkins' results and demonstrate how differences in opportunities are already developing at early stages of music education.

According to the respondents, the hierarchies were based on differences in the perceived skills of the students. Due to this, I argue that hierarchies are meritocratic. The analysis shows that there are implicit and explicit hierarchies in music schools. The respondents were often aware of their own standing in them. The division into those who are included and those who are excluded was not necessarily (or even often) officially or explicitly made. Yet the perception of who was included and who was not was often, if not always, shared. The students higher in the hierarchies seem to gain confidence from their position, but for those who are lower, the opposite is true: both their confidence and motivation drop.

The hierarchies organize what Alison Davies (2004) calls the *learning processes* of the music school. In concordance with Davies' findings, also in Finnish music schools, those who are left out of concerts or advanced orchestras are excluded from learning processes, meaning that they do not have access to all the educational opportunities the institution offers to those who are included.

Hierarchies can be divided into four subclasses: (1) hierarchies among students of the same teacher (favouritism); (2) hierarchies among students who play the same instrument; (3) hierarchies on the level of the whole music school; and (4) hierarchies among teachers.

Twenty-seven-year-old Hanna explains the system of hierarchy between the students of their teacher:

There was a clear hierarchy among the ... pupils: ... one ... [who] was to become a professional musician, the teacher's favourite; ... we, the good players ... [who] competed for our place in the ranking; ... the unmotivated ones, who quit the hobby quickly; and the new beginners.

The respondent feels that the hierarchy stemmed from the "teacher's attitude" towards the students. Katja (aged 30) writes that her teacher had a favourite, a girl who was "evidently talented", whom the teacher would put "on a pedestal". Three other respondents describe themselves as "mediocre". This may tell of a comparison between the students, but it also reflects their views of their level of talent or skills on a broader level.

The depictions of hierarchy are often static, like the ones above. Once established, the respondents seem to expect certain kinds of results of themselves based on their place in the hierarchy. Hierarchy thus seems to hinder the respondents' conception of their potential and prevents them from setting more ambitious goals.

Competition among the same teacher's students may widen to cover all the students of the same instrument. Lotta describes: "I played in the best string orchestra of the music school", which indicates that not all string players were accepted as members of that group. Leeni mentions that "the most demanding orchestras" had not included her when she was younger. The hierarchies of this level can also be created by the practice of allocating the students who are on a certain level in their studies to certain teachers. Consequently, students make interpretations of their own place in the music school based on these divisions.

Hierarchies can be created not only in student/teacher relations but also by subtle, institution-level messages, such as the performance order of the players in student concerts. Several respondents from different music schools mention this, so the practice seems quite ingrained. The respondents interpret it as building a hierarchy between the students based on their current level of competence. Maiju describes: "The magical performance order appeared on the wall and from that one can conclude the level of one's competence".

In Tuovila's dissertation (2003), a nine-year-old girl told that she was the best in her group, because "the one who plays last in a concert is the best of all". She herself performed last, after a

“high-school student” (p. 172). The meaning of the performance order was already clear to this young student. Tuovila gives this as an example of the importance of peers and sees it as a possibility for creating healthy self-esteem.

Based on my analysis, the interpretations of these hierarchizing practices and their effects on students’ self-esteem are more complex. In the data, finding oneself lower in the hierarchy is often experienced as discouraging. Milja describes her pride as, concert by concert, her place moved further towards the end in the order of performance: “the most skilled one got the honour of being the last”. However, as her training motivation flagged, she had to witness younger students “climb” past her in the order of performance. Her perception of her progress thus followed the order of performance. Milja reports starting to feel very nervous before performances and wonders whether it was due to her becoming a teenager, or the fact that much younger students started playing the same pieces as her. It seems arguable that her withering motivation and the competitive atmosphere of the institution created a situation where she did not have space to enjoy the performances in the way she had before. There is an expectation from the institution of maintaining a certain level and of steady advancement and these overrule other meanings of the hobby.

Leeni, who saw herself as recognized in the music school, offered an explanation for always assembling the concert programme so that the less difficult pieces are performed first and the more advanced later: “Of course it might have reflected the level of advancement but it was also a practical thing”. According to her, the players at the beginning of the concert were younger and more nervous about their upcoming performance. This “practical thing” also fits well with an attempt to build a dramatic arc for the concert, as Leeni puts it: “The concert also always ended with a grand last number that was usually performed by the most advanced pupil”. These seemingly self-evident practices may have unforeseeable outcomes for individual students.

The most advanced students from the whole music school may also be asked to take part in joint activities, even outside the institution. For instance, Maria, a 19-year-old student, writes how the top-students “with exceptional abilities, whose families ... had long roots in music ... quickly formed an ‘inside group/elite’ in the music school”. The members of this group were always asked to perform at big concerts.

Leeni (aged 24) describes her positive experiences of having been able to “bustle around [for instance, being asked to play on many occasions] as the best [player of that instrument] in the music school”. Leeni wonders whether those lower in the hierarchy were actually aware of the “certain kind of ranking order” that prevailed in her music school. To her, it seemed that those “lower in the ranking” were less interested in music and did not spend as much time at the music school as those higher in the ranking.

Now that I think about it, it might have been because of the ranking ... I remember thinking that those less integrated in the music school world probably didn’t know who was ... “good” and who was “bad”.
(Leeni)

The recollection of Maria (aged 19) points to the opposite:

No one would say these things out loud, but I know it [the division of students in groups that were treated very differently] caused problems, not just for me but for many others.

In four cases from four different music schools, a respondent refers to a ranking order of teachers that manifested itself in the way that the students were divided among different teachers. Within the scope of this study, it is not possible to know whether such rankings really existed and whether

the teachers were aware of them or not. Nevertheless, some students interpreted the system of giving the “best” students to certain teachers as signifying a ranking order among the faculty.

In some cases, the students interpreted having a certain teacher as a sign of their own place in the hierarchy. Inka writes: “There were a few ‘elite teachers’ in the music school – my teacher was not one of them but in practice this person was just right for me”. Interestingly, two other respondents from the same music school had similar experiences and interpretations: Maiju had “concluded that the teachers had been ranked by their skills and then we the students were divided to different teachers, according to our skills”. This interpretation affected her view of herself as a musician: “As I was never accepted as the student of that teacher whose students did so well in concerts ... I concluded I am not good at playing the [instrument]”. Suvi, from the same music school, describes: “Certain teachers in the music school were profiled as more recognized than others and being their student was a merit”. In another music school, Mikael tells that “everyone silently knew” that the “best students” were allocated to a certain teacher.

Talent as a condition for inclusion

Talent refers to special aptitude (as in artistic or athletic talent) that is often thought to be innate or “natural”, as in the Cambridge English Dictionary’s definition: “a natural ability to be good at something, especially without being taught” (“Talent”, 2018). The music school students who advance most quickly are often considered talented and, the other way around, those advancing less quickly are thought to lack talent. I wanted to study how respondents relate to the concept of talent. Therefore, it was asked in the call for contributions whether the respondents had felt that their “motivation, application and talent were recognized” in the music school.

The concept of talent as an innate merit that cannot be learned or changed (as seen in the definition above) may pose a threat of “limiting a subject to factuality”, as Dominique Girardot calls it (Girardot, 2011, pp. 130–132; see also Elmgren, 2015). *Subject* here refers to any person; *being limited to factuality* means that the subject is considered only based on what they are able to do and produce now. The subject becomes limited to the “factual” evidence of their abilities, such as test results, performance in an audition, and the way they sing or perform at this moment.

The limiting of a subject to their factuality resonated with some of the of the respondents’ texts. One respondent reports thinking that not being able to “get cadenzas” meant she was not fit to become a professional musician. She takes factual inability or difficulty in one part of the musical practice as a sign of permanent failure and the impossibility of reaching a meaningful goal; this single factual obstacle affects her view of her whole potential, in the sense of potential abilities and potential futures. Not doing well in music theory led two respondents to get negative feedback from their theory teacher regarding their abilities in music in general. The teachers have taken the particular difficulties that their students are facing as signs of general inability. In this mind frame, current problems are understood as more general indicators of the student’s musical abilities and potential instead of concrete issues that can be solved by practice.

Most of the respondents who talk about talent write about it in relation to advancing and learning quickly, or playing well. Similarly, those who feel they lack talent simply write about “not being good enough” and therefore not having a chance of becoming a professional. Or, like one respondent, they state as a fact that “there were a lot more talented students among the ones a couple of years older than me”.

In the data, the conclusions drawn by those who talk about talent are similar. The thought of oneself as talented may be an important psychological resource for some students (5.8%): Katja protests what she sees as unfair judgment, appealing to actually being talented, “Goddammit!” For Suvi, for instance, being considered as a part of the most talented “caste” of students was a “major

motivational factor". On the other hand, 8.3% mention thinking of themselves as not talented enough, as average or mediocre players, or having a low consideration of their level of musicality. This does not have to be a problem. Reetta tells that "being average was enough for me", as her main ambitions were elsewhere, in sports: "In music I was average and ... the point was to get joy out of doing it". However, for most who write about their perceived lack of talent, being considered average or "not amazingly good" caused problems and made it more difficult to see reaching certain goals as possible. It is notable, however, that even for those for whom the lack of talent is not a problem or who note that a lack of practice also has something to do with their level of success, it still seems that having more talent would be a reason to practice or invest more in music.

The feeling of inadequacy can persist through years of training and advancing to the professional level. Katja (aged 32) has a professional degree in her instrument, but as a child she was rejected by the entrance examination board and finally started music school when she was 16. Despite her diploma and years of training, she ends her text with a sceptical reflection of her abilities:

On the other hand, despite my plans I did not end up as a professional musician, so maybe the selection board of music school was, in the end, right then, 25 years ago.

The ending can be read as a sign of a sort of talent-related determinism: if someone is meant to "make it", it is clear from the beginning; no amount of training will change it. Not becoming a professional musician is explained in rather a meritocratic way: Katja seems to suppose that those now working as musicians were somehow better than her from the start. Only seeing personal effort and talent as explicating factors for any situation is typical of meritocratic logic: other explanations can be excluded, such as the realities of working life, the significance of connections, economic situations and so on (Girardot, 2011). Completely against this deterministic and meritocratic logic, right before her pessimistic conclusion, Katja tells that during her music school years, she noticed "with some *schadenfreude*" that she was suddenly treated as a "gold student" in the same institution that had originally rejected her. Katja seems to have made an impression on the music school staff: "I think someone in a higher position commented [on rejecting her earlier] in an embarrassed tone". This indicates it had become clear that the rejection had been a mistake. It is curious that in spite of all the recognition and personal success, Katja ends her text by wondering whether that rejection might have been justified. It seems that the beliefs and myths relating to what musical talent is are stronger than any evidence presented to the contrary.

Another respondent, now working as a professional musician, 28-year-old Mikael, also reports still suffering due to harmful attitudes related to musical talent. Only now, with new experiences in improvised music, has he started to see himself as musically talented: "During my music studies I developed a conception of myself as very unmusical". He sees the teachers' attitudes as crucial in the development of this self-conception. His first music theory teacher hinted for several years that "not everyone's abilities will be enough in the long run". The teacher seems to have thought that these abilities are not something that are learned but are innate. Kangas and Halonen (2015, p. 204) point out that sometimes teachers may try to end the studies of slowly advancing students by encouraging them to stop. Mikael experienced something like this due to his lack of practising during the first years at music school: "also my own instrument teacher ... suggested several times I should change [instrument] or maybe start Boy Scouts instead...". When his practice motivation got better, the teacher also changed his or her attitude and became more encouraging. However, the earlier negative experiences were not effaced by this new attitude and encouragement. Mikael writes: "Insinuations like this still have an effect on me as I work as a professional musician, wrecking my self-esteem from time to time". Mikael's and Katja's examples show that success in

studies does not necessarily mean feeling included or guarantee freedom from harmful thought models.

The relationship between talent and motivation seems an interesting one. Many respondents reported not being or not having been motivated to practice. On the other hand, positive comments about music school teachers often described the teacher actively motivating the student. It thus seems that some teachers may take the lack of motivation as a given, whereas others try to affect the student's motivation. In the case where the teacher does not try to motivate the student, the lack of motivation to practise and consequently not developing musically may lead into a situation where the teacher, parents and/or the student interpret not advancing as a further proof of lack of talent, such as in the case of Mikael.

Being considered talented often means having privileges and special attention from the teachers. However, in a few cases, the respondents frame talent as an external force that someone else, rather than the student, sees as compelling. Talent becomes something that needs to be actualized: it becomes the reason to pressure the student to study too much (by the parents and/or instrument teacher). Niina (aged 24) describes it thus: "Being talented, advancing became more of an obligation". Three respondents write about being considered good and talented musicians, but not enjoying music anymore. At worst, the student considered talented may be expected to dedicate their life to music simply because they are talented. Talent becomes a reason to instrumentalize the students.

Discussion: Meritocracy as production of failure

Meritocratic exclusion works by granting opportunities to those who are perceived as worthy of them, that is, who *merit* them. In the context of an educating institution, it means exclusion from certain learning practices, as Alison Davies has formulated, which is also visible in my data. In the music schools, this is framed as rewarding the best students for their advancement.

My analysis shows that there are implicit and explicit hierarchies in music schools in Finland. This shows that hierarchies can start to develop at the earliest stages of music education. Furthermore, the dynamics related to hierarchies and meritocracy observed in the higher levels of music education (Davies, 2004; Perkins, 2013a) also manifest in education for children and the young. The hierarchies are created by subtle institutional messages, such as performance order in concerts, by including only certain students in performances, by creating orchestras based on the players' level of skill and through the teachers' words and attitudes. In some cases, teachers tried to avoid fuelling competition among students, but the structural practices and persistent and pervasive mindsets still enabled the students to create comparisons amongst themselves.

The hierarchies are based on perceived merits, that is, the skills and abilities of the students. However, based on my analysis, it can be argued that the hierarchizing practices and thought models accompanying them accentuate the original differences. They encourage and motivate those deemed more "talented" than their peers and discourage the rest.

Based on the way the respondents write about talent, I would argue that talent becomes a tool for meritocratic logic, which helps justify exclusion. Talent is a fact-like quality, not something one can develop, as it is considered innate and natural. Concentrating on talent may become an instrument of limiting a subject to one's factuality. If one is considered factually to possess talent (e.g., being told they have "potential" or "talent", which means this "factuality" may be very vague and non-tangible), it works as a psychic bulwark⁴ that may protect its possessor from some of the harm inflicted in a meritocratic environment. Inversely, if one is considered factually not talented, it becomes a permanent feature of the person. Based on my data, the students may believe that their place in the hierarchy is a fact about themselves. The talent framework seems to provide no tools

to tackle one's difficulties but instead demands one to accept them as an unavoidable fate (see also Esslin-Peard & Shorrocks, 2017).

Exclusion from concerts, longer lessons and special attention is justified by meritocratic logic, according to which the best ought to be rewarded and given the most possibilities and rewards for their advancement. In practice, it means excluding some students from learning opportunities. This is how meritocracy can in fact produce the failure it pretends only to reflect. The practices at a music school may well be meritocratic and reflect true differences in the skills of the students. It may be that those highest in the hierarchies are the best players as well. This can, however, be achieved by not allowing all students to acquire all the necessary abilities. As mentioned, the respondents often complimented their teachers for motivating them. This means these teachers did not take motivation as a given and it may have allowed more students to be able to find their personal motivations to practice and develop their skills. This is yet another example of how differences in skills may be the result of the music school practices rather than reflecting innate differences of the students, such as talent.

In the light of these remarks, meritocratic processes start to seem dubious. The question is, therefore, not how to improve the working of the meritocratic processes, but how to enable everyone to have access to all the learning processes at a given educational institution.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Anita Kangas, Marja-Leena Juntunen, Alain Caillé, Emmanuel Renault, Jenny Säilävaara, Tiina Sihto and Armi Mustosmäki for their insightful comments and encouragement during the writing of this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding


This publication has been undertaken as part of the ArtsEqual research initiative, financed by the Academy of Finland's Strategic Research Council of the Academy of Finland from its Equality in Society program (project number 293199).

Notes

This article is part of my compilation dissertation that concerns principles of meritocracy and meritocratic practices from a philosophical point of view. This fourth and concluding article is an empirical application of theoretical work I have prepared in my other articles.

1. The basic education of arts in music is also provided outside music schools (e.g., in community colleges), but music schools are the focus of this study.
2. One should be aware that the basic education (the "regular" school system) and Basic Education in the Arts (of which music schools are a part) are two distinct systems. Music is taught in Finnish schools for all pupils as part of the curriculum, alongside mathematics, Finnish, foreign languages, etc. The music school system that is the topic of this article is distinct from these regular schools. To put it simply: everyone goes to regular school, and in addition, some go to music school in the afternoons to receive further music education.
3. One respondent had not studied during 1995–2015, one did not indicate the time of study and considering their age had most likely not studied during that time. They were thus disqualified. One did not leave any background information, so their (short) answer was not considered.
4. On "ideology of merit" as a psychic bulwark against life's precariousness, see Girardot (2011).

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Appendix: Call for contributions (translation from Finnish)

Beta blockers before student concerts or the key to finding your own field?

Have you studied in a Finnish music school during the years 1995–2015? I’m collecting research data on Finnish youth and young adults’ experiences of music school for my dissertation in which I study meritocracy.

In meritocratic practices, such as aptitude tests, competitions and hierarchies that are based on these, the crucial thing is the possibility to exclude some (not showing merits) and include some (with merits). One gets into music school through an entrance examination. This means that for those who get in, the first possible exclusion has been passed. Some students end up as professional musicians and some quit their studies during their teenage years and refuse to touch their

instrument for years, if ever. What happens during the time in music school? Puberty alone cannot be the explanatory factor, as it does not deter all beginning musicians.

I examine inclusion and exclusion that take place in the music school. I'm looking for accounts of both nice and unpleasant experiences in music school. Which factors played a part with what happened to you and your music hobby? Which practices in music school and ways of studying music motivated you to continue the hobby? Did some practices or ways of studying affect the practising motivation negatively? What kind of conception did you develop of yourself as a musician during your studies?

In music schools, students may be encouraged to advance in their music studies in many different ways. The most advanced students may be rewarded with, for instance, encouragement grants, possibilities to perform, longer lessons and master classes given by special teachers... Were these kinds or other types of encouragement used in your music school? How did you experience these practices, and did you get to be involved in them or were you left outside?

Was there competition or (explicit or implicit) comparison among the students in your music school? What was the teachers' part in creating the atmosphere in the music school? Were they aware of possible competition? Did you feel that your motivation, application and talent were recognized and that you could advance in your music studies in the way you wished?

Write freely about your experiences. The writing may be a short description of a single situation or an incident linked to music studies, or it can be a wider text, charting your life, music as a hobby and music studies. I am asking all the writers to also fill out the preliminary information form, which seeks background information that is important for the study. If you wish, you may also leave your contact information in the preliminary information form. Among those writers who leave their contact information, there will be a lottery of 15 movie tickets as a prize for writing.