The winter meeting took place at the University of Turku in Finland, 10-12 February 2012. We had different themes for our discussion.

The first theme was about “Recognition, freedom, dignity and social battles for justice in intercultural democratic society”. This theme consisted in the analysis of the concept of recognition in relation to the recent discussions on societal ethics, politics and justice. The workshop examined recognition and identity struggles that have emerged around the world as a result of post-secular society. We discussed this both in the theoretical perspective, such as philosophical, sociological and political views, and in the empirical perspective as well. The workshop looked at the cultural and social consequences of globalization and it dealt with proposals for world justice as a response to this. We focused on different battles of recognition and considered how recognition can be institutionalized under the condition of democracy.

In particular we discussed the latest work of Axel Honneth about freedom, recognition, institution and justice: Das Recht der Frieheit (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2011). Honneth has changed his focus from recognition to the problem of how freedom can be institutionalized in a modern bourgeois capitalist society. This could also be called the problem of how a societal ethics could be constituted.

The model for Honneth is Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Hegel has, as it is well known, tried, as a critique of Kant, to conceptualize the institutionalization of freedom in modern society. It was interesting to bring Hegel’s discussion into play, not least his Wirkungsgeschichte or significant influence on later philosophical, political and sociological discussions of Sittlichkeit or Ethical Life, and its forms of institution in modern society.

The second theme of the meeting was “Environmental Ethics: Climate change and justice in the context of globalization of capitalism”. This part of the workshop dealt with

environmental dilemmas due to the global environmental crisis. We debated climate change issues in the perspective of proposals for a new economy and we asserted how we should consider the climate change issue in relation to topics of identity struggles and poverty in developing countries.

The third theme of the meeting was the “Foundations of ethics”. Here we continued our ongoing discussions concerning possible foundations of ethical theory. Since the group started in 2010, it has been focusing on discourse ethics and ethics and closeness. The theme for the meeting in Turku involved discussions of consequentialism and utilitarianism as an ethical theory, but also broader themes about bioethics and environmental ethics were elaborated.

Finally, we had some papers that addressed the open theme of ethics in relation the general purpose of the study group.

As an overall theme, we investigate ethical and social values in a cosmopolitan world society. We examine the paradoxes, dilemmas and tensions appeared in recent debates about ethical, political and social values in contemporary societies. We can observe that ethical problems have been increasingly a central problem in public debates in Nordic societies and in the international community. Both political decisions and daily practices in public institutions and private business organizations are increasingly faced with ethical problems and issues. Moreover, there are more and more problems and practices where ethical issues are central themes and where ethical reflection is a central theme. This tendency has been very present in: the relation between democracy and administration; the obligations of business corporations in relation to profit maximization and economic efficiency; public and private management and governance; health issues; the relation to the environment and the use of natural resources; the social obligations and responsibilities towards global poverty, democracy and environmental problems. Every discussion over the prioritization of the social use of resources has, today, to be oriented towards different ethical dilemmas, problems and paradoxes of different kinds with very far reaching implications for the life of people in society and nature.

Indeed, we had a very fruitful meeting in Turku and we would indeed like to thank warmly Professor Juha Räikkä from the Philosophy department at Turku University who supervised the local organization. Moreover, we would also like to thank the participants in this symposium for their interesting contributions to the general discussions of our study group.