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The Subjective Experience of Poverty

Abstract: What significance should the subjective experiences of poor people have in a normative philosophical critique of poverty? In this paper, we take up this question and answer it by looking at two different normative theories: the capability approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and the recognition approach of Axel Honneth. While Sen and Nussbaum are largely quite reluctant toward the role of subjective experiences of poor people, the recognition approach views them as central for its social critique of poverty. We will defend the thesis that a more inclusive view on the role of the subjects of suffering and injustice is needed, that such subjective experiences and the unique first-hand knowledge it produces cannot be substituted by objective criteria, while such criteria are needed to bolster – and in some cases also criticize – the poverty knowledge of poor people.

Keywords: capabilities; poverty; recognition; social critique; subjective.

1 Introduction

The role of subjective experiences is also controversial, debated within poverty research and discussions about adequate measures of poverty and social exclusion. In most official surveys, whether from the European Union or from other national institutions, they are not indicators or necessary conditions of poverty and social exclusion (Atkinson and Marlier 2010). To put it simply: whether one is counted as poor or not is not dependent on whether one views himself as poor. Poverty measures rather focus on objective indicators, most important income, wealth, goods, or capabilities. But there is a growing concern that this might be a major shortcoming and that the multidimensionality of poverty and social exclusion also demands *the inclusion of the view of the poor themselves*

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(Brock 1999; Norton 2001). The rise of the debate about subjective well-being, which obviously cannot be determined objectively without reference to the interior view, and its use for poverty research is also an indicator for this (Kingdon and Knight 2006). Finally, the *role of poor people themselves* in the *conceptualization*, *measurement*, and *evaluation of poverty* is in question. Do they know best or maybe better than the poverty researchers what poverty means or should mean? Neither poverty research nor normative philosophy is situated outside the real world, which is full of relations of power and domination, and it is a fact that some knowledge is privileged and a few have the power to shape the discourse about poverty (Chambers 2007).

These questions also touch upon normative questions in moral, social, and political philosophy, when it comes to the philosophical evaluation of poverty. The discussion is complex, and there is considerable disagreement about many issues such as questions concerning the ethical responsibility for the current situation and ethically demanded solution strategies. However, a widely shared understanding is that worldwide poverty is not only bad for poor people and to a minor extent also for the rich, but somehow *morally wrong and unjust* (Mack et al. 2009). Within this realm of normative discussions, one question that is hardly ever treated explicitly is concerned with the *role of poor people themselves* in ethical theories of poverty and in normative evaluations of their living conditions. The *moral wrongness of poverty* is often only assumed – which is not a false assumption as we want to make clear – and presented as *a fact*, without reference to the poor as authoritative subjects on these matters who should have a say in defining and evaluating this moral wrongness and injustice of their own living conditions. There is some discussion about the poor as *agents of justice*, and it is clear that they are important for the *detection of poverty* and also *to design the right measures to overcome and alleviate poverty* (Deveaux 2013). But it is less clear if the subjective experience of poverty is only of such instrumental value. By subjective experience, we mean two things, that are closely related. First, a subjective experience of poverty can be good or bad, it can be a harmful, joyful, or even emotionally neutral experience. For poverty research, and also for our purpose, the *emotional aspect of subjective experiences* is particularly important. As we will show, it is of normative weight if poverty is experienced as harmful, for example, as shameful or denigrating. It is also important to note that we understand emotions not only as mere feelings, but they always have a certain cognitive aspect – emotions are interpreted feelings situated in a certain context and shaped by the individual who experiences them as well as its environment. Second, subjective experiences refer to *the content of these experiences*, the first-person knowledge of poor people, for example, that a poor person makes the experience that he is looked at in a different way, when he enters the bus or that she is

not allowed to sleep in the train station or that she often experiences violence. Due to reasons of space, we will treat both aspects in one, with a focus on the emotional aspect, and we will only be able to separate them on some rare occasions. We also do not claim that we can solve all the problems regarding alienation and the unreliability of subjective accounts, but rather we want to discuss them for a specific problem and from a specific normative perspective.

In this article, we will discuss two different philosophical approaches to poverty: *the capability approach* of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and *the recognition approach* of Axel Honneth. Whereas the capability approach is an increasingly influential approach to poverty and widely used in poverty research, the recognition approach has not been applied to issues of poverty to this extent (Schweiger 2013a). However, as we have shown elsewhere, both provide different but equally challenging answers to the normative question why poverty is morally wrong (Graf and Schweiger 2013). As a consequence, a reflection on the relationship between the capability and recognition approaches regarding their take on the role *of the subjective experience of poverty* appears to be a promising source of insight for the philosophical debate and for the wider frame of poverty research. As we will show, Sen and Nussbaum are largely quite reluctant toward the role of subjective experiences of poor people, whereas the recognition approach views them as central for its social critique of poverty. The main goal of our article is it then to discuss arguments how the subjective experience of poor people can and should be integrated in a normative critique of poverty.

2 The Recognition Approach to Poverty

The recognition approach claims that injustice is best interpreted and understood as the experience of misrecognition or disrespect (Honneth 1996, 2003). This is based on the assumption that each and every human is in need and therefore also entitled to be recognized, in the forms of love and care, respect and social esteem, because they are the social conditions of becoming an autonomous agent and to realize oneself. Otherwise, they suffer from misrecognition, which is experienced as harmful, distorts the development of positive self-relations and identity, and robs them of opportunities to be themselves as autonomous beings. This model can be applied to poverty, which has then to be criticized insofar as it is disrespectful, humiliating, and denigrating and cuts poor people off from or severely distorts their experience of recognition (Schweiger 2012, 2013a). That makes poor people unfree because they lack the social conditions of becoming autonomous and undistorted themselves.

It is not our goal in this article to further scrutinize the recognition approach and its take on poverty but we rather take it as it is and apply it to the question at hand regarding the role of subjective experiences of poverty. For the recognition approach, such experiences play in fact an important *role* in the moral and political evaluation of poverty. This leads back to the very roots of the recognition approach, which comes from a tradition and further pursues the idea that social philosophy has to reflect the articulated and voiced claims for recognition and respect of social groups and victims of oppression and injustice – in its Marxist traditional versions particularly the workers movement – and take their claims seriously and as a starting point for normative explorations. Therefore, subjective experiences of injustice voiced by social groups such as the labor class, women, or black people stand at the beginning and in the center of concern of the recognition approach. Without this relation to the *actual praxis and reality of the oppressed*, the critique of the recognition approach would be artificial, possible misguided, and its ideas of change and justice without audience. Hence, the recognition approach aims to not only hear the voices of poor people but to give them systematic weight and to further articulate them in its critique.

> To undertake an effective critique of society one must start by taking into account instances of injustice or violations of standards of justice. In contrast to its positive counterpart, the experience of injustice possesses greater normative bite. As such, for Honneth, no experience of injustice must be ignored even if its public expression is fraught with danger and difficulty. This approach to social justice and normativity is typical of the Frankfurt School, which grounds the motivation for social resistance and liberation movements not on grand theories of intellectuals but on people's everyday experience. (Pilapil 2011, p. 81)

On the one hand, the recognition approach claims that what makes poverty morally wrong is in fact what it does to people in terms of misrecognition and disrespect. *The experience of poverty as harmful is its normative core.* People ought not be humiliated but esteemed, they ought not be disrespected but respected, but poverty is humiliating and disrespectful. It makes people vulnerable and victims of various forms of these malpractices and undermines and sometimes even destroys their positive self-relations, their self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, without which one cannot be said to be free and have an undistorted self. Being poor implies not only a living condition of fewer material assets and resources but a condition of less recognition from others, and that affects one's identity. It is a condition of shame and fear, which is articulated by the poor in various ways although often not heard and downplayed (Schweiger 2013b). Although the poor are in no way a homogenous group, and a group that is especially weak and without a lobby, participatory approaches to poverty have not only produced ample evidence about the harm of poverty but also

show how the poor view themselves and their poverty, how they experience it, and that they claim for themselves recognition and respect (Narayan-Parker et al. 2000; Underlid 2005).

On the other hand, the recognition approach claims that we need the diverse and authentic expressions of harm *to fully understand its injustice*. It claims that the victims themselves are able and often needed to point the theorist toward what is wrong, because they know best and also because there are many subtle forms of humiliation and deprivation and many of them go undetected because there is no one who listens or asks. Especially the large-scale measures of poverty are unable to give a comprehensive picture of poverty in this respect because they focus on monetary aspects of poverty and do not include microstudies and qualitative accounts of poverty. The first-person perspective, the suffering subject, is transformed and disappears behind the figures. Instead, from a recognition perspective, there is a need to "think small" about poverty and injustice and to include first-person knowledge as well as *the dimension of subjective well-being* (Hulme 2004).

Now although the experience and articulation of subjective suffering is important to motivate political or social movement and to inform our knowledge about poverty, it is not enough for a normative, moral philosophical social critique. Such a theory that wants to explain and ground its critique needs a more *reliable and objective benchmark* to justify its claims. Christopher Zurn and Nancy Fraser have criticized *the psychologization of social critique* in the recognition approach and stated that objective standards or criteria are needed to answer the challenge of alienation and to dismiss the false claims, for example, of righteously oppressed Neonazis, racists, and sexists (Fraser 2003; Zurn 2003). They are also misrecognized and disrespected but for good reasons. Not every struggle for recognition can be and should be supported, and not every expression of harm and misrecognition is unjust or immoral. Besides the fact that there are vastly individual differences in how people understand, experience, and evaluate certain modes of recognition and misrecognition, some of them are also necessary and inevitable. In some situations, recognition is a competitive good that cannot be shared equally and in others misrecognition for certain actions is the appropriate reaction.

> Thus, for example, a critical theory should be able to dismiss, on principled grounds, claims for expanded recognition put forth by racist hate groups. It should also be able to demonstrate that cultural stereotypes of feminine sexuality may subordinate women through legal definitions of rape – even when these definitions are not generally detected as harmful by women. In other words, a critical theory of recognition must be able to deal with what we might call the problems of the malevolent claimant and of false consciousness. (Zurn 2003, p. 523)

The same problem can be construed for the evaluation of poverty. If the recognition approach wants to give poor people a prominent place in its theory and social critique, do they have a say in what poverty is and why it is wrong all along? Here two interrelated problems arise: on the one hand, it can be argued that some experiences of misrecognition connected to poverty are not morally wrong and problematic. For example, if someone feels misrecognized and poor because she has fewer material resources compared with others but is still well-off. For the recognition approach, mere inequality is not enough to be judged as unjust, and that some people feeling misrecognized because they have less than they think they deserve is not enough to speak of an injustice. Rather it could be perfectly just that they have less because they deserve less, or if someone misinterprets the misrecognition she experiences as being connected to her poverty when in fact it targets a different, not poverty-related trait of her, like being rude and aggressive. On the other hand, a lot of poor people are also happy and feel good despite their situation and do not experience it as being misrecognized and disrespected by others. They *adapt to their situation* and are to some extent alienated from and by their experience of injustice. Does this mean that poverty is not so bad, that it is not morally wrong because it is not experienced and articulated as harmful? We will return to that question, but first we want to take a look at the capability approach on poverty.

3 The Capability Approach to Poverty

The central claim of the capability approach as developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum over the last three decades is that evaluations of societal arrangements, quality-of-life assessments, and judgments about justice or development should primarily focus on *people's capabilities*, that is, on *their real opportunities to lead the lives they have reason to value* (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011; Robeyns 2005). In other words, the capability approach puts a focus rather on what people are *effectively able to do and to be*, instead of what they have or feel. Realized capabilities are called achieved *functionings*, which describe the actual beings and doings of a person. This does not mean that income, happiness, or commodities are not important at all, but resources and goods are considered as means to an end and therefore of instrumental value only, whereas happiness is seen as one significant aspect of human life among others that cannot be taken as the only evaluative category. The centrality of *personal freedom and autonomy*, which is expressed in the set of capabilities a person has, also gives the benchmark to evaluate poverty (Graf and Schweiger 2014). There

is obviously a strong connection between one's material situation and the options and possibilities that are open to one, and economic deprivations often rob people of many basic freedoms. The freedoms to satisfy hunger, to achieve sufficient nutrition, to obtain remedies for treatable illnesses, to be adequately clothed or sheltered, to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities are generally associated with the economic situation of the respective person. However, unfreedoms, and hence poverty, can also be linked to a lack of public facilities, social care, and to the political situation of a country. In a welfare state, e.g., where health care is available to all and a functioning public educational system is in place, income deprivation is a lower burden to meet than in countries where no such systems exist. Thus, a direct focus on substantive freedoms – or capabilities, in Sen's and Nussbaum's usage – in the description of poverty has clear advantages over an income perspective. Ultimately, it is their deprivation that counts, and since there are many variables, besides income, contributing to the expansion – or diminution – of capabilities, a direct focus on capabilities seems to be of advantage.

Based on this conviction that it is necessary and feasible to use objective criteria to evaluate poverty, the capability approach has a more distant and critical relation to subjective experiences and their articulation by victims of poverty when it comes to their moral value and role in determining poverty and social exclusion. Sen and Nussbaum are skeptical of taking people's subjective assessments of their own situation as the defining feature of their well-being. They argue that individual desires, preferences, or psychological happiness are malleable, susceptible to manipulation, adaptive to adverse circumstances, and therefore of limited usefulness for evaluational exercises (Nussbaum 2000; Teschl and Comim 2005). This is the case, it is argued, because the conditions people live in influence their perception of their objective realities, and especially factors such as entrenched deprivation, social exclusion, or predominant power structures within a society can contribute to individuals having a distorted picture of their lives. Particularly in cultural contexts where social norms systematically disadvantage certain groups, even the notion of self-interest can become useless, as Sen demonstrates using the example of women in rural India who have learned to subordinate themselves to other members of their family:

> It has often been observed that if a typical Indian rural woman was asked about her personal "welfare", she would find the question unintelligible and if she was able to reply, she might answer the question in terms of her reading of the welfare of her family. The idea of personal welfare may not be viable in such a context. (Sen 1990, p. 126)

According to capability theorists, this adaptation problem clearly shows that social evaluations must transcend purely subjective measures (as used by utili-

tarians) and go in the "objectivist direction" (Sen 1987, p. 16). Otherwise, the real circumstances of the disadvantaged members of society are systematically misrepresented. As Sen puts it:

> Consider a very deprived person who is poor, exploited, overworked and ill, but who has been made satisfied with his lot by social conditioning (through, say, religion, political propaganda, or cultural pressure). Can we possibly believe that he is doing well just because he is happy and satisfied? Can the living standard of a person be high if the life that he or she leads is full of deprivation? The standard of life cannot be so detached from the nature of the life the person leads. (Sen 1987, pp. 7–8)

Going in the objectivist direction means that the evaluative space of well-being must be expanded beyond any subjective metric and focus on capabilities. By looking at this kind of information to characterize the well-being of a person, one gets the real picture of a person's circumstances and perceived misrepresentations of social realities are avoided. That is to say, the consideration of achieved functionings tells one exactly how a person is living and capabilities are best understood as an objective notion expressing the individuals' general and specific freedoms to live the life he or she has reason to value. In other words, it is assumed that an increase in well-being always involves an increase of important options to choose from.

Despite this objectivization in the definition of well-being, the rejection of first-person evaluations and henceforth the claim to use objective criteria for the evaluation of the moral wrongness of poverty, the individual's perspective is still valued in the capability approach. On the one hand, there is the background assumption in Sen's writings that an expansion of valuable capabilities is connected to a reduction of the formation of adaptive preferences in people's values and desires and he is clear that in his opinion, "[g]reater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and to influence the world, and these matters are central to the process of development" (Sen 1999, p. 18). Therefore, in fair and conducive circumstances, the desires and preferences of persons indicate their "real" interests and they have to be taken seriously. On the other hand, in the non-ideal world we live in, initiatives are often necessary to bring people to engage in reasonable deliberation processes about their circumstances and moral convictions. Especially in the work of Martha Nussbaum, it becomes clear that persons are characterized as active beings who can go through a two-stage process of awareness that challenges the invidious nature of adaptive preferences (Nussbaum 2000, p. 200; Teschl and Comim 2005): first, they have to recognize the problematic conditions they live in, and second, they must conceive of themselves as worthy human beings with fundamental entitlements. Only if these conditions are satisfied is a search for true self-definition

that is not distorted by adaptive preferences possible. As a consequence, capability theorists frequently claim that it is necessary to interfere in social contexts where certain groups are marginalized due to norms, traditions, and power structures. Each individual has the right to be put into a position where the exercise of genuine agency is possible and social arrangements must be organized in a way that that everyone has the real chance to reach this goal.

Still, the capability approach is an *objectivist approach to poverty*. Functionings and capabilities are understood as objective measures that give a clear picture of a person's well-being without referring to her subjective satisfaction. Because of reasons of unreliability of subjective experiences due to the possibility of adaption and alienation and the goal to use an objective measure, which allows to determine the living condition of a person without doubt, the capability approach claims that the value of subjective assessments is limited.

> There is a deeper problem about exclusive reliance on participatory methods, which goes back to Sen's criticisms of the utilitarian approach. People's own assessment of their own condition can overlook their objective condition, and can be biased as a result of limited information and social conditioning (i.e., these methods also suffer from "valuation neglect"). The generally public aspect of assessments may also make it difficult to get honest assessments, and could involve participants in some risk. (Laderchi et al. 2006, p. 40)

4 The Dialectic of Subjective Experiences and Objective Conditions of Freedom

As the analyses in the forgoing indicate, a discussion between the capability and the recognition approach and their different weighting and integration of subjective experiences can be situated within a much larger context. How should poverty be measured? Who are the "experts", poor people, or the scientists? Are there any lessons to be learned from the diverging arguments that the capability and recognition approaches offer, or could they benefit from each other in any way? But before we will give our answer to the question of what role-subjective experiences of poverty should play in the normative evaluation of poverty, we want to return shortly to the recognition approach.

It must be stressed that the recognition approach does not rely only on "the voices of the poor" but also aims at justifying its evaluation and social critique by uncovering the anthropological importance of recognition and the immanent value of positive self-relations, similar to the high value of freedom and autonomy in terms of actual opportunities and realized functionings in the capability

approach. The recognition approach also tries to determine criteria that distinguish justified from unjustified forms of recognition and makes use of the category of positive self-relations and identity in this respect. Their value is considered universally valid and they serve as a foundation for the objective evaluation not only of individual living situations but also of social relations. It is true, the subjective suffering as well as the first-person perspective of the oppressed are necessary tools in the inventory of social critique, they have their role in *the context of discovery* as well as in *the context of justification*, but the ultimate normative work lies on *the idea that personal autonomy and identity is dependent on and intertwined with social relations of recognition*. Only such measures of justice that point into the direction of an expansion of autonomy for all members of society through the experience of material, social, and symbolic recognition and the *protection from structural misrecognition* should be employed (Pilapil 2011). This does not resolve the dialectic of universality and particularity that is inherent in all struggles for social justice, but it gives rise to the idea that a more and more inclusive society is the target against which poverty and other forms of denigration, exclusion, and marginalization have to be measured.

> The development of substantive values must be left open to historical change and to the future of social struggles. Honneth therefore also attempts to justify the context immanent features of recognition by leaving the model open enough to account for the particularity of socio-cultural and historical contexts in which recognitive identity claims are made. Nonetheless, he posits that the content of the three conditions of recognition is thick enough to offer normative criteria for successful identity-formation that extends normative theory beyond the scope of deontological or Kantian approaches that are based on self-determination and moral autonomy alone. (Petherbridge 2011, p. 15)

This means that for the moral evaluation of poverty as well as any other injustice, two questions have to be answered. First, it has to be shown that they are experienced as harmful by the poor, and this experience has to be voiced in some way. We have already discussed how this is important for the determination of the injustice of poverty and its understanding. Second, these experiences have to be interpreted using the normative framework of the recognition approach, and it has to be shown that they violate *the justified recognitive claims* of the poor. It has to be shown that poverty distorts and destroys their opportunities to experience recognition to an unjustifiable extent and that this undermines the goal of a just society to give all its members the opportunities to develop and realize positive self-relations of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem through the experience of recognition from others. Only through this dialectic of subjective experiences and objective goals of justice is it possible to uncover and criticize the injustice of poverty. But it is not possible to entangle these two elements, because the subjective experience would become arbitrary

if taken out of the normative framework, and the normative theory of the recognition about the universal injustice of being robbed of positive self-relations would be without content and contact to reality if separated from the real-world experience of the victims of such injustices.

That more precise understanding of the dialectic of subjective experiences and the social – and objective – conditions of freedom through identity allows a better comparison of the recognition and the capability approach. Both see poverty as morally wrong and unjust, and from both their perspectives, it is obvious that poverty is a structural problem of most of today's societies that can only be appropriately understood if connected to questions of what people are entitled to as a matter of justice and what is the core of a good life. Both the capability and the recognition approach agree that personal freedom and autonomy is of high importance, but they understand the injustice of unfreedom in a different way. The capability approach employs a more or less direct objective approach that focuses on what the poor can really do and be and criticizes their diminished functionings and capabilities. That is what makes them less free. The recognition approach has a less straightforward approach and employs a dialectical methodology, which aims to combine subjective experiences and normative reasoning about the universal value of positive self-relations. Because poor people experience their poverty as being misrecognized, disrespected, and humiliated, they have fewer opportunities to become and be what they want to be. Poverty is for the recognition approach not simply a condition of less freedom and possibilities, but it targets the identity of the poor persons and therefore robs them of the social conditions of their autonomy. Therefore, although the recognition approach is not against using objective criteria – and it seems possible that it could also use the concepts of functionings and capabilities in this regard – it also gives the subjects of poverty and their experiences a different and much higher value.

5 Including Subjective Experiences of Poverty

Based on the background of what we have discussed so far, we will now discuss four roles that we want to assign to subjective experiences of poverty: that they are *indicators of injustices and* enrich *the knowledge base*, that the subjects of poverty have *a right to be heard* and express their experiences, that the negative and harmful experience of poverty constitutes an *injustice in itself*, and finally, that the subjects of poverty are themselves *agents in the deliberative process* that is part of the justificatory process in moral philosophy and theories of justice.

We do not aim that this resolves the differences between the capability and the recognition approach, but we think that they can both profit from each other to some extent and that some common ground can be found in those four roles of subjective experiences of poverty.

First, subjective experiences in regard to poverty are important *indicators* of injustices and enrich the knowledge base about poverty, meaning that they can guide researchers or policy makers to detect objectively measurable forms of deprivation, which are defined and evaluated without taking the subject's views into account. In this sense, subjective experiences are not considered to be directly relevant for assessing or evaluating the poverty condition of a person but have *a heuristic function to identify those situations and circumstances where an injustice is in fact present*. This function can be appreciated whether or not one favors the recognition or capability approach. Even if the injustice of poverty is determined by objective criteria, many injustices are only or more easily detected with the help of the poor and their expressions of their living conditions (Norton 2001). In light of the great variety of ways people can get struck by poverty, this function is of great importance, since it helps to identify disadvantages that, as we know, often get overlooked. Researchers and policy makers usually are not themselves affected by poverty. They have an "outside view", and engaging with the perspectives of those experiencing poverty from a first-person perspective will surely improve their studies and projects in making them more accurate, relevant, and sustainable, even if they do not want to commit to the view that these subjective experiences are part of the injustice of poverty. This line of reasoning is clearly compatible with both the recognition and the capability approach to poverty and it is surely a minimum adequacy criterion any theory of poverty should come up to. Without taking seriously the subjects of poverty in this sense, the respective theories will fail to acknowledge the complexities of social realities.

Second, there is a further reason why subjective experiences should be involved that goes beyond the essentially instrumentalist argument brought forward above. Even if it were unlikely that the poor people's views and experiences would lead to the detection of situations and circumstances where issues of poverty and injustices exist, we want to argue that they have a *right to be heard*. Their moral standing as persons demands that they can articulate their interests, feelings, and points of views on an equal basis with all other members of society, and this fact alone is enough that there is a strong reason to give the subjective experience of poverty and its articulation by the poor an important place in theorizing about it (Lister 2004). This is also a form of respect, which is highly valued by the capability and the recognition approach. Such a right to be heard and taken seriously does not, however, automatically entail the view that it must be granted that the poor people's judgment has to be taken as suffi-

cient to determine the moral status of poverty; neither does it mean that it is only of value if it fulfills the instrumental function we characterized above. Rather, a right to be heard and taken seriously is a minimum standard every account of poverty that is in line with basic democratic values has to entail. We want to use here Harry Brighouse's distinction between *authoritative* and *consultative* views in regard to the question how children should be heard and how their views should be taken into account when it comes to matters that affect them. He argues that children's views are to be seen as consultative because children lack the competencies to make (major) decisions for themselves, while it is not allowed to interfere with choices of adults in the same way, because their autonomy has to be respected (Brighouse 2003; Archard and Skivenes 2009). We do not imply that poor people are to be treated as children or conceptualized as being childish, but rather we think that this distinction can be interpreted in a way that it helps to conceptualize how the views of victims of injustice – whatever injustice it may be – can be integrated in the normative evaluation of this injustice. An authoritative view would imply in this respect that the victim of an injustice can determine this injustice simply because she experiences it in this way and articulates it without the need to rely on outside reasons and justifications. The consultative view then again would imply that the victim of an injustice has a right to be heard and to express her evaluation that she is being wronged and treated unjustly, but this is not enough for the moral evaluation. To put it in different words: the authoritative view means that there is no need for a further objective moral philosophical judgment, whereas the consultative view implies that such is needed.

It is true that sometimes subjective perspectives are biased and distorted, as it was mentioned above in relation to adaptive preferences. Therefore, the argument from the capability approach that it would be wrong to generally assume that a person's self-assessment defines what is in her best interests has clearly merits and the voices of the poor should be judged as consultative rather than authoritative. But we want also stress that such a view must still be respectful to the subjects of poverty with their experiences, feelings, and judgments and not allow that they get treated as mere objects of studies or programs without respecting their agency. Here, the capability perspective clearly can profit from the recognition approach where this insight is well established and taken care of. To be clear, the capability approach is also committed to the fundamental value of respect. However, its emphasis on objectivity in the conceptualization and evaluation of poverty involves some risk that the right to be heard gets overlooked or neglected.

To these two aspects regarding the role of subjective experiences in the evaluation of poverty, we want to add a third one, namely that they add a substan-

tial element to the evaluation of poverty insofar as *the negative and harmful experience of poverty is unjust itself*. We want to make this point clear: from the perspective of the capability approach, a person that is severely sick or without shelter because of being poor is wronged and is entitled to sufficient health care and shelter. That is the core of the injustice of poverty this approach wants to criticize regardless how this persons experiences it and whether or not she views her condition as unjust. But if that person experiences it as unjust and is ashamed and embarrassed about being sick and homeless, then this constitutes an additional injustice. Both the capabilities and the recognition approach claim that it is part of a just society that it enables its members to appear in public without shame and without being stigmatized and humiliated for being poor. And there are increasing efforts to include shame in poverty research. A recent study found that shame is in fact associated with poverty in different contexts and that it is an important part of the poverty experience of many poor people.

> [T]hough socially and culturally nuanced, shame was found to be associated with poverty in each location, variably leading to pretence, withdrawal, self-loathing, "othering", despair, depression, thoughts of suicide and generally to reductions in personal efficacy. While internally felt, poverty-related shame was equally imposed by the attitudes and behaviour of those not in poverty, framed by public discourse and influenced by the objectives and implementation of anti-poverty policy. The evidence appears to confirm the negative consequences of shame, implicates it as a factor in increasing the persistence of poverty and suggests important implications for the framing, design and delivery of anti-poverty policies. (Walker et al. 2013, p. 215)

Our argument is not that it is unjust under all circumstances and in all cases that this person has experiences of shame and embarrassment and feels wronged but that it is morally wrong in the case that these experiences are caused by her poverty. Such a line of argument is compatible also with the recognition approach, which puts normative weight on the experience of poverty right from the beginning. For this approach, all experiences and articulations of misrecognition have to be taken seriously and heard, but they have to be connected to the normative core of the social conditions of becoming and being autonomous and oneself. And those experiences of illegitimate misrecognition that target a person's identity do count as injustices in themselves. Therefore, not all experiences of misrecognition have the same normative weight, but some constitute injustices in their own right because they are forced upon the victims without legitimate reasons. They add insult to injury.

The fourth role of subjective experiences of poverty and their articulation by poor people is that they are part of the *deliberative process* and the public that is so important for both the capability and the recognition approach. Sen

and Nussbaum need such public deliberation to select and justify those func-
tionings and capabilities that are important and serve as the benchmark to
judge injustices. For sure, Nussbaum also makes use of the notion of human
dignity, but it alone is not fit to determine what functionings and capabilities
people are entitled to as a matter of justice (Nussbaum 2011). A similar argu-
ment can be made from perspective of the recognition approach. It has been
said that it views the experience of different forms of recognition as necessary
to develop positive self-relations and to become autonomous. But which forms
of recognition we owe each other as a matter of justice – and which forms of
misrecognition are therefore unjust and morally wrong – cannot be decided on
paper alone but is also to some extent contingent based on the shared values
and the agreed visions of a good society. Honneth writes about the historic and
social contingency of recognition:

> For each of the three recognition spheres is distinguished by normative principles which
> provide their own internal standards of what counts as "just" or "unjust." In my view,
> the only way forward here is the idea [...] that each principle of recognition has a speci-
> fic surplus of validity whose normative significance is expressed by the constant struggle
> over its appropriate application and interpretation. Within each sphere, it is always pos-
> sible to set a moral dialectic of the general and the particular in motion: claims are
> made for a particular perspective (need, life-situation, contribution) that has not yet
> found appropriate consideration by appeal to a general recognition principle (love, law,
> achievement). In order to be up to the task of critique, the theory of justice outlined here
> can wield the recognition principles' surplus validity against the facticity of their social
> interpretation. (Honneth 2003, p. 186)

Poor people are part of the societies they live in, although they are often mar-
ginalized and not integrated well enough. In poverty research, it is common to
determine relevant goods – or functionings and capabilities – based also on
what the population in the target society views as essential (Fahey 2010; Comim
et al. 2008). And if justice is in part also determined by public deliberation and
the self-ruling of a social community, then it is of utmost importance to include
and to hear the experiences of poor people. They are among the weakest mem-
bers of a society, and they are, as we pointed out before, often not heard. In the
process of public deliberation, they should not be given more weight but en-
ough and equal weight, something that is highly endorsed by Nussbaum and
her claim for equal respect for all humans. Otherwise, the danger is great that
what is judged as just and unjust is left in the hands of the powerful:

> It seems sensible to deliberate about which theories we really want to hold onto, which
> intuitions are really the most deeply rooted in our moral sensibility. In the absence of
> such a public deliberation, the most influential views are likely to be those, simply, that
> are held by the most powerful or rhetorically effective people. This way of proceeding,

defective in itself, is especially defective when we consider the interests of the powerless, who rarely get the chance to bring their own ideas about such matters to the table. (Nussbaum 2000, p. 300)

As we have argued, a perspective that is purely subjective is always in danger of being biased or distorted. In addition, they might be random or arbitrary, in fact lacking moral justification. Some individuals being in a situation of hardship do not suffer from their own point of view, and others, e.g., some of those committed to morally objectionable doctrines such as racism or sexism, sometimes think or feel that they are misrecognized and socially excluded. At last, we want to mention one more aspect in the discussion about integrating the experiences of the poor in the moral evaluation of their poverty. We think that many of the difficulties that arise on the individual level can be tackled if experiences are heard on the collective level. For a philosophical critique of poverty, negative subjective experiences surely are relevant if they *systematically appear on a societal or group level*. If in a society there is evidence that in groups affected by poverty shared experiences of misrecognition and stigmatization can be found, this is directly relevant for a substantial critique of poverty and it gives it more weight. Individual suffering because of injustice is at the core of capability and the recognition approach, which are both concerned with the individual as the morally relevant unit (Robeyns 2005; Heins 2012). If suffering happens systematically on an aggregate level and is related to certain social positions, there is a strong reason that some structures and institutions are dysfunctional and in need of improvement. A lack of recognition that is experienced on the societal level with all its side effects is therefore clearly of different weight as are the mere feelings, evaluations, and judgments of one individual. It is a *social pathology* (Zurn 2011). In other words, the weight of the subjective gains more relevance for the critique of poverty if it gets shared and supported by others. It is this element that is typical for the recognition approach's take on poverty that draws, as we have seen, strongly on the idea of different social struggles for recognition. To be clear, stressing the importance of the moral significance of shared and widely held experiences does not undermine the fact that in both the recognition and the capability approach, it is always the individual that is the basic unit of moral concern – and not a group, community, or state. However, the group's experience is usually more reliable, and therefore a better guide when it comes to identifying the subjective dimensions that should be included in a critique of poverty. As it becomes clear from our discussion of the recognition approach, this function of subjective experiences is widely acknowledged in the recognition approach and, as we suggest, should be part of any substantial theory or critique of poverty. Again, the capability perspective can benefit

here from the rich literature on recognition that has already addressed and analyzed the moral harm that is felt and done when groups are socially excluded.

6 Advancing the Critique of Poverty

We have analyzed how the capability and recognition approaches understand and evaluate poverty and how they integrate the subjective experiences in their theories. In particular, we identified four different functions or roles that subjective experiences of poor people play in the two approaches and we suggested that all four of them should have their place in a critique of poverty. It is true that these four aspects have different weights in the two approaches and that therefore there clearly are some tensions to be found. However, there does not seem to exist a categorical difference. Furthermore, despite divergent starting points and theoretical differences, we believe to have shown that both approaches are, at closer analysis, committed to the view that there is a necessity to integrate both subjective and objective dimensions for a comprehensive account of poverty. There is a need for objectivity, despite the fact that it is not clear where to find and how to judge this objectivity. Scientific research is still the best way there is to gather knowledge, although today it is clearer than ever that it is also flawed. Any moral evaluation and critique of poverty is impossible without such knowledge, statistical data, benchmarks, or thresholds. They should not only target material goods but also include social and symbolic forms of recognition as well as measures of subjective well-being. Such dimensions as feeling good, being satisfied and happy, having a positive self-relation, self-esteem, and self-respect should not be used to play down the role of material living conditions and questions of distributive justice but rather complement them. What is envisaged here, and one important area where the capability and the recognition approach can benefit from each other, is something like a well-argued equilibrium of subjective and objective measures of poverty, that should also cover the micro-, the meso-, and the macro-level, from the individual life story to the global scale. Such an equilibrium cannot be set in stone because societies, social and political practices, cultures, and economies are different, changing, and developing. As well as the material living standard and the distribution of goods and services changes, new forms of denigration and exclusion might arise, whereas old forms of exclusion and humiliation can be banned. This has to be taken into account when the task is to develop standards to evaluate poverty, its material hardship, and its stigma.

There are good reasons to take poor people seriously and to value their own perspective. And, in the end, what is philosophical engagement with poverty about if it is not about helping to make the living conditions of the oppressed and poor better. Criticizing injustice and moral wrongness always implies that it should vanish. Therefore, every attempt of a philosophical theory of poverty has to find a balance between distance and closeness, between the opinions of experts and the persons concerned, between objective criteria and subjective experience. There is a dialectical relation. Poverty knowledge, the life of poor people, philosophical critique, and subjective experience are intertwined and they cannot replace each other.

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