

# *Recognition and Social Exclusion: A Recognition-Theoretical Exploration of Poverty in Europe*

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ABSTRACT. Thus far, the recognition approach as described in the works of Axel Honneth has not systematically engaged with the problem of poverty. To fill this gap, the present contribution will focus on poverty conceived as social exclusion in the context of the European Union and probe its moral significance. It will show that this form of social exclusion is morally harmful and wrong from the perspective of the recognition approach. To justify this finding, social exclusion has to fulfil three conditions: (i) it has to be experienced as harmful by the socially excluded, (ii) it has to meet certain objective criteria, and (iii) it has to violate normative claims embedded within society.

KEYWORDS. Recognition, social exclusion, poverty, disrespect

## I. INTRODUCTION

Conceiving poverty in terms of social exclusion has become a political and scientific commonplace (Byrne 2005; Layte, Maître and Whelan 2010; Pierson 2010). Different concepts of social exclusion have been criticized for being too broad and vague as well as lauded for providing a multidimensional account of poverty that shifts away from a mere monetary conception (Hills, Le Grand and Piachaud 2002). Yet there is no common definition of social exclusion and it seems as though there never will be. One recent study identified seventeen different definitions of social exclusion in the literature, and this focussed exclusively on the English-speaking world (Morgan *et al.* 2007). Social exclusion is more of an umbrella term that has to be operationalized and defined more narrowly for its application, but it can also be utilized in very different contexts and disciplines, thus allowing for interdisciplinary approaches.

Social exclusion and poverty are thick concepts in the eyes of Bernard Williams, which means that they combine descriptive and normative components (Williams 1985). They not only describe social processes and phenomena, but also evaluate them. The question of whether something is good or bad is answered by simply naming it poverty or social exclusion. This appears to be intuitively true in most cases – the hungry child, the homeless person or the working poor single mother – but it does not explain what exactly is wrong with social exclusion or how to judge when social exclusion is justified. Prominent examples that come to mind are imprisonment or eremitism, where the first is social exclusion as a form of rightful punishment and the latter is social exclusion as a freely chosen way of living. Such issues obviously require clarification as they concern the concept of social exclusion and ultimately also affect political welfare policies, whether we restrict benefits to those who are blameless for their situation or not.

This article does not aim at presenting just another definition of social exclusion, rather it explores one distinctive concept of social exclusion from the viewpoint of one distinctive concept of social philosophy: the recognition approach. In similar fashion to the capabilities approach, the recognition approach as we use it here is not a fully elaborated theory, but is based on the works of Axel Honneth and its discussion and further development by other scholars during the last twenty years (Fraser and Honneth 2003; Honneth 1996a; Thompson 2006; van den Brink and Owen 2007). Honneth himself has not adopted a definitive stance on poverty or social exclusion, but it seems natural to deploy his theory on such issues as it claims to be critically concerned with social problems and processes (Schweiger 2012). Despite some recent works, the literature on recognition and social exclusion and poverty is still limited, especially when compared to other social topics such as work or gender. Developing such a recognition approach to social exclusion, however, is not an exegetical analysis of Honneth's work, nor do we claim to do justice to Honneth's or anybody else's theory of recognition. The recognition approach presented here is

more or less connected with some of Honneth's work, but it will go its own way when it seems appropriate, as other such approaches have done in the past. In fact, Honneth himself has changed various features of his theory over the years.

In the following pages we will develop and examine the thesis that social exclusion is morally harmful and wrong. One could ask if this is really necessary. Are there any doubts that social exclusion is morally wrong? Consider the empirical knowledge about incarcerated criminals. Their welfare status is also very low – they are poor and socially excluded by nearly all measures applied in the European Union –, they have certain health problems, they die younger and their imprisonment also has negative effects on their families, children and communities (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999; Spaulding *et al.* 2011). Should we open the prison gates because of these negative effects of being incarcerated? Most people would say 'No', arguing that at least some of these negative effects of imprisonment are part of the punishment. So perhaps the negative effects of social exclusion and poverty are also justified consequences. Do the socially excluded get what they deserve? I think these are serious questions that have to be addressed.

In the next section, a political concept of social exclusion in the context of the European Union will be briefly presented. I will then demonstrate that social exclusion is a particular form of the denial of social esteem as a major inter-subjective condition of social belonging and the ability to pursue a good life. Honneth usually connects the denial of rights with exclusion, but this rests on a different understanding of exclusion than the one used here. To justify this thesis, three major components of the recognition approach as an immanent normative theory will be explored in relation to social exclusion: (i) subjective experience, (ii) objective criteria, and (iii) socially embedded normative claims. The article thus aims to provide one possible explanation why social exclusion in the accepted sense is morally wrong. This should not be interpreted as an exclusive explanation, nor does it rule out others

deriving from different normative angles, such as those of Brian Barry or Amartya Sen (Barry 2002; Sen 2000). It is the case, rather, that the recognition approach can contribute to – as well as learn from – the other philosophical approaches to poverty and its evaluation (Graf and Schweiger 2013).

## II. POVERTY AS SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Poverty comes in many different shapes and forms: absolute and relative, chronic and transitory, rural and urban, youth and elderly, voluntary and involuntary. Being poor can mean not having things, not being able to do things, not being this or that. Understanding poverty as social exclusion is one way to grasp its multidimensionality and to highlight one feature that is pivotal in modern societies: belonging. A broad and useful definition of social exclusion was presented by Tania Burchardt, Julien Le Grand and David Piachaud from the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion.

An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society, (b) he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society, and (c) he or she would like to so participate, but is prevented from doing so by factors beyond his or her control (1999, 230).

The focal point of this conception relates to the terms ‘normal’ and ‘involuntary’. Social exclusion is defined in relation to standard or normal activities within a certain society, and is involuntary. This raises at least two crucial questions: What are normal activities and how can they be defined? What are the main factors that prevent such participation or activity? To flesh out this concept, indicators of social exclusion are needed that allow us to determine who is actually socially excluded and who is not. There is heated debate over these indicators in terms of whether they should be resources, capabilities, subjective expressions or

other things. For example, Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud (2002) define normal activity in four dimensions: (i) consumption, (ii) production, (iii) political engagement, and (iv) social interaction, and set four corresponding indicators: (i) equivalized household net income under half mean income, (ii) not employed or self-employed, in education or training, looking after family, (iii) non-voter, not a member of community organizations, and (iv) lack of someone who can offer personal support.

Yet there are multiple alternative sets of indicators that are used to measure social exclusion. As it is not our objective here to engage in these debates, we will draw on a political concept and set of indicators of social exclusion. This clearly demarcates the boundary between definition and measurement of social exclusion and corresponding political programmes of poverty alleviation. The indicators discussed here, therefore, are not only of academic interest, but also have significant practical policy impact. The Commission of the European Union defines three basic indicators of social exclusion: monetary poverty, material deprivation, and unemployment. These indicators are described within the Fifth Target of the Europe 2020 strategy, which aims at lowering the number of people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union from 114 million (2008) to 94 million (2020).

The fifth Target concerns the promotion of social inclusion, or the combating of poverty and social exclusion, defined on the basis of three indicators: the number of people considered ‘at-risk-of-poverty’ according to the EU definition (i.e. the poverty risk threshold is set at 60% of the national household equivalised median income), the number of materially deprived persons (EU definition but stricter) and the number of people aged 0–59 living in ‘jobless’ households (defined, for the purpose of the EU target, as households where none of the members aged 18–59 are working or where members aged 18–59 have, on average, very limited work attachment) (Atkinson and Marlier 2010a, 30).

People are materially deprived within the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy if they experience at least four out of nine deprivations (European Commission 2011; Fusco, Guio and Marlier 2010): people cannot afford to (i) pay their rent or utility bills, (ii) keep their home adequately warm, (iii) face unexpected expenses, (iv) eat meat, fish, or a protein equivalent every second day, (v) enjoy a week's holiday away from home once a year, (vi) have a car, (vii) have a washing machine, (viii) have a colour TV or (ix) have a telephone. The three indicators of at-risk-of-poverty, material deprivation, and living in jobless households do not involve any subjective expressions, such as whether people actually feel poor or socially excluded. They also do not include indicators such as education, health, housing, social contacts or political participation, which are all of considerable importance and are also reflected within the research and reporting of the European Union (Atkinson and Marlier 2010b). To stay within the argument, however, this contribution will only reflect the EU's set of indicators used within the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy and analyse their significance.

As noted above, the European Union estimated around 114 million people were living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the year 2008 (European Commission 2011). The indicators do not fully overlap, and hence there are people at risk of poverty who are not materially deprived or living in a household with zero or very low work intensity, as well as people who are affected by all three. The overall population of people living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion is composed of about 80 million people at risk of poverty, 40 million people suffering severe material deprivation, and 34 million people living in a household with zero or very low work intensity. Numerically, therefore, the biggest challenge within the European Union is relative income poverty, whereas the poverty risk threshold is set at 60% of the national household equivalised median income. These figures show the society-wide extent of the problem of social exclusion (see Table 1).

At risk of poverty	48.7
At risk of poverty and materially deprived	12.1
At risk of poverty and living in a low work intensity household	12.8
At risk of poverty, materially deprived, and living in a low work intensity household	6.7
Materially deprived	18.8
Materially deprived and living in a low work intensity household	2.3
Living in a low work intensity household	12.5
Total	113.9

Table 1: People in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union in 2008 (in millions; European Commission 2011, 17)

### III. THE RECOGNITION APPROACH

After this short summary of one influential concept of social exclusion, the present section will explore its moral significance. Is social exclusion in this sense morally wrong and, if so, why? More specifically: can the recognition approach explain why social exclusion in this sense is morally wrong and why? The short answer is that social exclusion is morally harmful and wrong because it is experienced as harmful, it is connected with various forms of disrespect especially denigration, and it violates major normative claims that are embedded in society. Social exclusion is wrong because it distorts or hinders self-realization. The long answer, on the other hand, has to start by explaining what the recognition approach is all about. Drawing chiefly on Honneth's work, the recognition approach can be reconstructed along five key lines (Deranty 2009; Honneth 1996a; Honneth 2007a; Petherbridge 2011).

(i) It aims to reveal these three basic forms of recognition – love (personal relationship), rights (cognitive respect) and solidarity (social esteem) – that are the inter-subjective conditions required to develop and sustain self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.

(ii) These different forms of mutual recognition are equally important and, as they are the inter-subjective conditions for the constitution of subjectivity and identity, they also enable individual self-realization, which is the core of what Honneth calls “formal conception of ethical life” (1996a, 171-179). Self-realization, which relies on different forms of recognition, can be seen as the final goal of Honneth’s theory, and struggles for recognition are ultimately struggles for self-realization (Kompridis 2004; Zurn 2000).

Taken together, the three forms of recognition – love, rights, and esteem – constitute the social conditions under which human subjects can develop a positive attitude towards themselves. For it is only due to the cumulative acquisition of basic self-confidence, of self-respect, and of self-esteem – provided, one after another, by the experience of those three forms of recognition – that a person can come to see himself or herself, unconditionally, as both an autonomous and an individuated being and to identify with his or her goals and desires (Honneth 1996a, 169).

(iii) Honneth distinguishes three main forms of disrespect analogous to the three forms of recognition (1996, 131-139): (iii.1) physical abuse, torture, and rape, which destroy the basic self-confidence of the victim; (iii.2) the denial of equal rights and discrimination; (iii.3) and denigration and insult, which threaten the individual’s honour and dignity. The possibilities for self-realization are not sufficient if someone suffers from disrespect.

(iv) Social conflicts are then likely to arise, which can be understood as ‘struggles for recognition’, as different groups (e.g. women, ethnic or religious minorities, workers) claim and fight for recognition for themselves. Such claims carry critique and anticipate social change. This finally leads to social progress and the gradual expansion of rights to different groups, which abolish previous forms of discrimination and exclusion.

(v) A critical social philosophy has three main tasks: (v.1) to distinguish justified from unjustified claims of recognition; (v.2) to reflect on social developments and relations in terms of whether they sufficiently ensure and foster recognition or if they are oppressive and disrespectful; (v.3) to develop therapeutic measures to change things and act alongside those who are suffering; all three are important parts of what can be called the diagnosis of social pathologies (Haber 2007; Honneth 1996b; Zurn 2011).

It is imperative for social philosophy to find a determination and discussion of those developmental processes of society that can be conceived as processes of decline, distortions, or even as ‘social pathologies’ (Honneth 1996b, 370).

These five ideas form the core of the recognition approach as an immanent normative theory, which was labelled by Antti Kauppinen (2002) as a form of internal reconstructive critique. Although not often explicit, the concepts of immanent (and transcendent) and internal (and external) do not overlap, but have distinct meanings and functions in Honneth’s critical theory. Such a theory is immanent because it aims to uncover the hidden normative claims within criticized social relations and it is internal because it does not want to employ a god’s-eye-view on them, but is rather situated within. The recognition approach’s social critique rests on the interaction of three conditions of moral harm:

(i) Subjective experience: the denial or distortion of recognition is experienced as subjectively harmful and is articulated in various ways, individually or collectively. Suffering is one major starting-point and a concern of the recognition approach, emphasizing its willingness to stay as close as possible to actual social conflicts and movements (Deranty 2010). Therefore, subjective experiences, feelings and emotions, voiced by such groups and social movements as the working class, women or black people, form the initial major area of concern for the recognition approach. Without this relation critique, the recognition approach would be artificial and lack an audience.

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, 81).

(ii) Objective criteria: as many critics have pointed out, critical social philosophy cannot rest upon subjective experiences alone, it also has to identify some sort of objective criteria to distinguish justified from unjustified forms of recognition or disrespect (Fraser 2003; Pilapil 2011; Zurn 2003). This is a difficult task and has to shoulder much of the normative work within the recognition approach. Here, we want to focus on those criteria that derive from the three forms of recognition as they are connected with the normative benchmark of the recognition approach, namely “undistorted self-realization” (Honneth 1996b). This means that the opportunities to engage in personal relationships, equal protection by civil and social rights, and the experience of social esteem and belonging are objective criteria for evaluating an individual life and social relations. On the one hand these criteria are context-sensitive – social esteem in one society can have a different meaning from that in another – but on the other hand they are universal as they are oriented towards undistorted self-realization. Also, these criteria have value in themselves, which means that disrespect is morally wrong even if it does not ultimately distort or hinder self-realization (Honneth 2002).

(iii) Socially embedded normative claims: these are claims of recognition that address implicit or explicit normative promises within society. They serve as a reference point for claims of recognition as they are also objects of struggles for recognition. For example, the achievement principle in

capitalist society implicitly promises that everyone who is talented and hardworking should be able to make a good living and struggles for recognition can address this principle either because it is not fulfilled or because it is flawed in itself and hinders the self-realization of some.

I always introduce the conflicts and struggles of capitalist social formations with reference to those principles of mutual recognition that are considered legitimate by the members of society themselves. What motivates individuals or social groups to call the prevailing social order into question and to engage in practical resistance is the moral conviction that, with respect to their own situations or particularities, the recognition principles considered legitimate are incorrectly or inadequately applied (Honneth 2003, 157).

The question now is whether these three conditions are equally important and equally necessary. To put it another way, can we only speak of moral harm and wrongness if all three of them are met? The answer I want to give is twofold: (i) a state or process or action is certainly morally harmful and wrong if it meets all three conditions, but can also be morally harmful and wrong if it meets just one or two of them. This is important because there are certain cases in which something is morally wrong even though the people who suffer do not acknowledge its wrongness or do not experience it in this way. This is the problem of false conscience, which is not new to the recognition approach but has still not been fully resolved. It is a different thing to distinguish false from justified claims of recognition than it is to explore the role of personal and subjective experience in general; (ii) the recognition approach cannot dismiss subjective feelings, but should also not overestimate their value. Social exclusion is also morally wrong for those who are socially excluded but do not feel so or have developed coping strategies that cloud their feelings. It is this problem that Amartya Sen discusses under the term of adaptive preferences (Teschl and Comim 2005). People who are poor or socially excluded tend to adapt their wishes to their circumstances, content themselves with the little they have and may not even feel that

something is wrong or unfair. It is not possible to speak of undistorted self-realization under such conditions and the role of objective criteria is essential in such cases.

#### IV. SOCIAL EXCLUSION AS MORAL HARM

Given this background, one general recognition-based statement about social exclusion could read that social exclusion is morally harmful and wrong if it is (i) subjectively experienced as harmful, (ii) if it is connected with forms of disrespect or distorts the possibilities of self-realization and (iii) if it contradicts valuable implicit or explicit normative claims that are embedded in society. This is a very general assessment, which clearly has to be put in more concrete terms. Beyond the basic physiological and psychological needs all humans share, further operationalisation and differentiation have to include empirical knowledge about the target society. In this sense a recognition-based perspective on social exclusion combines absolute and relative elements (Schweiger 2013). The general forms of recognition – personal relationships, cognitive respect and social esteem – are universal, but their concrete formation and embodiment in each society are relative. It is important to stress that recognition can come in different shapes – recognition-based sociological studies explicitly show this. It is not only about identity politics, but also includes material and social forms such as income, housing or political participation. The recent works of Stephan Voswinkel are a particular source of evidence on this empirical and material side of recognition (2012a; 2012b). Although the recognition approach has a strong connection with social psychology, this should not and does not impair its ability to deal with material claims and questions of redistribution. Crucial topics of poverty and social exclusion such as income, living wage, material deprivation, housing, education, health or unemployment are not outside its remit, but can be reconstructed rather as materializations of recognition, mostly of social esteem, which are embedded in social, economic and political institutions.

We now have, on the one hand, a political concept of social exclusion and, on the other, a very general description of when a condition, phenomenon or process is morally wrong. How can these two concepts be brought together, or the latter be employed in the former, to evaluate their moral significance? Let us try to answer this question with reference to the three conditions of moral harm.

*Social Exclusion and the Subjective Experience of Harm*

Is social exclusion connected with actual feelings or experiences of harm that are expressed by those affected? As noted above, subjective feelings are not part of the EU's concept or measurement of social exclusion, so an answer to this question has to be sought elsewhere. There is significant evidence that social exclusion lowers subjective well-being in various ways: one feels isolated or left out of society, has mental health or emotional problems or feels ill, is not satisfied with certain domains of life or is simply unhappy and frustrated. A recent study by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions is cited here, but there are other extensive quantitative and qualitative studies that support this point (Ahn, García and Jimeno 2004; Layte, Maître and Whelan 2010).

For the individual, the single indicator with the biggest impact on life satisfaction is deprivation: the inability to afford basic lifestyle goods and services. Ill health is the second factor that results in a large reduction in life satisfaction across all country groups. Unemployment and income (especially in the CC3 [Candidate Countries]), as well as low education (particularly in the NMS12 [New Member States]) and family structure also play a very important role (Watson, Pichler and Wallace 2010, 2).

As regards the recognition approach there is one indicator of subjective well-being that the European Union considers of special importance, the sense of fulfilment in life, as this is obviously close to the normative benchmark of undistorted self-realization. Here again the three indicators of social

exclusion – low income, material deprivation and unemployment – are the main factors, together with poor health. Interestingly, not having a partner is also a strong factor, especially for single parents (Layte, Maître and Whelan 2010). This is at least another hint that recognition in the form of love or personal relationships is of real importance. Also unemployment – which is one of the indicators of social exclusion – is known to negatively affect subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Wanberg 2012).

*Social Exclusion and the Lack of Social Esteem*

Now let us turn to the question of objective criteria. One might argue that the three indicators of social exclusion – monetary poverty, material deprivation and unemployment – are materializations of disrespect, especially denigration or the denial of social esteem. The recognition approach differentiates three major sets of criteria: personal relationships, rights, and social esteem. The corresponding forms of disrespect are physical abuse, denial of rights, and denigration. Social exclusion is not necessarily or directly connected with disrespect in such forms as physical abuse or the denial of rights, but, as empirical studies impressively demonstrate, it affects personal relationships and makes it more difficult to engage in political participation or to make use of civil and social rights. The most interesting form of disrespect for social exclusion, however, is denigration. The scope and aims of denigration itself are not fully explored within the recognition approach and it is palpably open to a whole range of interpretations. For Honneth, social esteem has something to do with how someone chooses to live.

Thus, the kind of recognition that this type of disrespect deprives a person of is the social approval of a form of self-realization that he or she had to discover, despite all hindrances, with the encouragement of group solidarity. Of course, one can only relate these kinds of cultural degradation to oneself as an individual person once the institutionally anchored patterns of social esteem have been historically individuated,

that is, once these patterns refer evaluatively to individual abilities instead of collective traits (Honneth 1996a, 134)

This is closer to the issue of identity politics and the case of social groups that share something like a mutual conscience and feel like a homogeneous group, in some ways at least. This is not the case for people who are socially excluded, even if it is true that some groups are more often affected than others, e.g. immigrants or single parents. There is, at least in this understanding, no common way of living for the socially excluded.

Yet the recognition approach has more to say about denigration. Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch has further analysed the concept of social esteem on the assumption – which he takes from Honneth – that social esteem is essentially based on skills and talents and one's contribution to social goals. He then distinguishes two main forms (Schmidt am Busch 2010): (i) social esteem in terms of having work and (ii) social esteem as the level of earned income for market activities. Schmidt am Busch cites Honneth's reference to unemployment in this regard, whose assessment of unemployment can be underpinned by many other sources (Wanberg 2012).

A mere glance at studies of the psychological effects of unemployment makes it clear that the experience of labor must be assigned a central position in the model emerging here. The acquisition of that form or recognition that I have called social esteem continues to be bound up with the opportunity to pursue an economically rewarding and thus socially regulated occupation (Honneth 2007b, 75).

Here is not the place to fully appreciate the details of Schmidt am Busch's elaborate study and further distinctions between different forms of social esteem, but the general direction is clear. The paradigm of the 'working society', the achievement principle and the importance of the labour market are decisive for Honneth's version of the recognition approach (Petersen and Willig 2004; Smith and Deranty 2012). This is a clear shift from the issues of identity politics to the material basis in modern societies on which different ways of living and cultural practices rest.

What does this mean for social exclusion? I want to distinguish two main forms of denigration that can serve as objective criteria to evaluate social exclusion: lack of employment and lack of sufficient income. Both are derived directly if social esteem is bound up with work and the level of one's income. In contrast to rights, however, which are granted to everyone just because they are human and deserve equal cognitive respect, social esteem has both an inclusive and an exclusive effect. Social esteem is not distributed equally among all members of society, but according to their skills, talents and efforts. Otherwise social esteem would lose its value and finally become useless. Therefore, an authority that determines the social esteem of different skills, talents and efforts or activities or achievements is needed. Social esteem is institutionalized. As Schmidt am Busch clearly demonstrates, Honneth believes that the market is well suited to distributing social esteem in its main forms of employment and level of income.

Neither in RR [Honneth 2003] nor in any other writing does Honneth develop a conception of determining the social usefulness of different kinds of work and the level of commensurate income by means of anything other than markets. Moreover, nowhere does he suggest that such a conception is to be developed within the framework of Critical Theory (Schmidt am Busch 2010, 268).

To do this, however, markets have to be contained by social welfare systems and must not be ideologically distorted. In more practical terms, everybody is granted at least a basic and sufficient maintenance even if they are unable to find work or are unwilling to work. Such activities that are necessary for the reproduction of society, such as giving birth, and caring for children, the sick or the elderly, have to be recognized as work and therefore should generate adequate income.

In RR Honneth [Honneth 2003] thus specifies a sufficient condition for determining whether an activity is work (in the social sense). The argument is this: if an activity is necessary for the reproduction of society, then it is work. The sociopolitical interest that underlies this argument consists in revealing certain activities that are not market

governed as work. Honneth's second case (2) refers to activities that are already recognized as work, and which can take place in the private or the public sector. Here he argues: if the level of income – and thus of social esteem – is determined or influenced by factors irrelevant to the work carried out (for example the gender of the worker), then the achievement principle is being applied in a distorted manner at best (Schmidt am Busch 2010, 273-274).

This offers a more detailed understanding of the two forms of denigration: if people lack employment even if they have useful talents, skills, and show some effort, or if they are unemployed even if they engage in socially reproductive activities, it is denigrating. It is denigrating if people do not earn enough to have a decent life if they are engaged in care work, unpaid work or if they do not work at all, which occurs only very rarely. In such cases some basic social rights are needed to alleviate such market outcomes and provide for a decent living. Is social exclusion connected with any of these forms of denigration? The short answer is 'Yes'. Social exclusion is characterized here by three indicators – monetary poverty, material deprivation, and unemployment – and all three are denigrating in the above sense. The vast majority of those who are socially excluded are either unemployed or they lack sufficient income despite the fact that they have useful talents, skills, show an effort and are willing to work. These are the objective criteria needed to judge social exclusion as morally harmful and wrong from the position of the recognition approach.

(i) First, it seems highly unlikely that all those unemployed are unemployed because they lack the necessary skills or talents or show no willingness or effort. This is simply not the case, as all available data about the motivation of the unemployed demonstrate (Gallie and Paugam 2000). Some are unemployed because they do not have time to work because of other duties to their families and some are unemployed because they have special needs or cannot work forty hours but only twenty (Leach *et al.* 2010). It is justifiable to say, therefore, that they are disrespected in that their skills and talents are ignored.

(ii) Second, monetary poverty means that some people have much less money than the majority of the population. It is again not the case that these people lack money because they have no useful skills or talents or because they are lazy. Some are poor because they engage in such necessary reproductive activities as caring for their children or other relatives. Some are poor because they are unemployed although they could and want to work. Some are poor although they work every day (Hanzl-Weiß and Vidovic 2010). Some are either too young to work or too old (European Commission 2008; Zaidi *et al.* 2006). It is thus safe to say that monetary poverty is also a form of denigration. It significantly limits the possibilities of pursuing one's own goals in life without being justified.

(iii) Third, material deprivation is at least indirectly connected with monetary poverty. People do not have enough resources to engage in basic activities that are seen as necessary for a decent living. Material deprivation means that people are not only limited in terms of their self-realization in pursuing their own goals in life, but that they are not even able to engage in such activities or have such things that are perceived as basic in their respective societies and on which individual self-realization normally relies. If a person or a family cannot afford to pay their rent or keep their home adequately warm, discourse about self-realization becomes artificial and ridiculous. Material deprivation cannot be reduced to income poverty, but it is closely related to it and it also more often affects those who have special needs or duties of care. Such people are not willing or able to be fully productive, flexible and market-oriented workers. Both monetary poverty and material deprivation show that the social containment of the market has failed.

### *Social Exclusion and the Violation of Embedded Normative Claims*

The third condition for social exclusion to be morally wrong is that it violates embedded normative claims. This condition overlaps to some extent

with the objective criteria discussed above. At least two such normative claims are violated by social exclusion: the achievement principle, which argues that everybody should be able to make a decent living if they are willing to do so, and the idea of dignity.

(i) The achievement principle is of great importance for the recognition approach as it is not only seen as a major formative principle of modern society, but also has normative significance. It carries and determines social esteem.

Once we become cognizant of the many superimpositions and distortions inherent in the capitalist achievement principle, it is hard to see any normative principle of mutual recognition in it at all. Nevertheless, putting the new idea into social practice indeed did away with the estate-based form of social esteem, and at least normatively sustains the demand that the contributions of all members of society be esteemed according to their achievements (Honneth 2003, 147).

This principle is violated by social exclusion because the majority of socially excluded people simply do not get what they deserve: a job, a living wage, recognition for their caring. The achievement principle does not work for them and rather makes them feel that they are responsible for their situation. From the perspective of the achievement principle, social exclusion is often seen as a personal failure, but it is rather a violation of this principle. This is clearly true for the working poor and for those who get no chance to work. Social exclusion is a vicious circle and many do not become poor but are born poor. In reality, the achievement principle is in fact a Matthew principle: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (Wade 2004).

(ii) Modern societies rest on the idea that everyone has an inviolable dignity. Whereas the achievement principle is more of an implicit normative claim, the idea of human dignity is explicitly stated in various documents such as the Human Rights Charter of the United Nations, the European Social Charter and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the

European Union, and should serve as a guideline for politics and law. Therefore, this principle can serve as a point of reference in struggles for recognition and can be claimed before the courts. Is social exclusion a violation of human dignity? There is no clear answer to this question as there is no clear concept of human dignity, but at least one argument can be adduced in support of this assertion. Social exclusion means being cut off from major resources of recognition as it is connected with various forms of disrespect. This means that, at least according to the recognition approach, the inter-subjective conditions of basic self-relations such as self-confidence or self-esteem are constrained or even do not exist. This is a violation of the idea of human dignity. Christian Neuhäuser and Julia Müller (2011) have brought forward a familiar argument based on Avishai Margalit's theory of a 'decent society'.

A decent society does not tolerate that its members are humiliated. Relative poverty is humiliating because relatively poor people are seen as second-class citizens and have reason to see themselves in their self-respect violated. It does not matter why they are poor; it only matters that they have a right to be seen and treated as equal citizens. Their human dignity is fragile and can be violated, but they can never fully lose their human dignity and the rights that come with it. A decent society, therefore, has to end relative poverty no matter why it exists (Neuhäuser und Müller 2011, 170-171).

## V. CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In the present contribution I have tried to show that social exclusion is morally wrong and harmful from the perspective of the recognition approach as it fulfils all of its three conditions of moral harm. It is subjectively experienced as harmful, it is connected with disrespect – especially denigration – and it violates at least two major normative principles – the achievement principle and the idea of human dignity – that are embedded within the societies of the European Union. I want now to highlight four conclusions and thoughts for further research.

The first point is that the recognition approach seems to be suitable for assessing and evaluating such important processes as social exclusion and that it allows us to gain further insights into what makes them so problematic. As a critical theory, this is exactly what the recognition approach aspires to do. It ties social exclusion to the paradigm of a ‘working society’ and explains its wrongness from there. This also implies the necessity of social and political programmes to help the socially excluded and to alleviate their condition.

The second point I want to make is that the weighting of the three aforementioned conditions – subjective feelings, objective criteria, and embedded normative claims – is still highly unclear. This makes things difficult, especially for concepts like social exclusion treated here or for anyone probing them. The problem is closely connected with the achievement principle and market-tied social esteem. It is one of the main points of reference for the recognition approach but, as many have stated before, it is deeply divided and ambiguous (Voswinkel 2012a). Social esteem is both a tool for integration and exclusion. The recognition approach can neither dismiss it if it wants to stay within the paradigm of working society nor can it neglect the ideological distortion and moral harm that it induces. To tie social esteem to the market also implies a social-democratic criticism of what can be called neo-liberal excesses, but not capitalism as such.

From the sociopolitical perspective, the aim of contemporary Critical Theory is not the critique of capitalism as such, but rather of neoliberal capitalism. As I have pointed out, Honneth is fundamentally of the opinion that neoliberal, but not social-democratic, orders are problematic from the standpoint of recognition theory. Because regulated markets are components of the latter, it would be surprising if Honneth believed that markets in general were unsuited to determining the social usefulness of work (Schmidt am Busch 2010, 268).

Social exclusion, on the one hand, constitutes such an error within the system and can be successfully criticized for failing to meet the moderate

social democratic promises of the welfare state. On the other hand, it seems as if social exclusion is also a symptom of a much bigger problem and it is highly questionable if it is possible to come to grips with it under the condition of a capitalistic and market-based economy and society at all. The flaws of market-based social esteem and the achievement principle go far beyond the two alleviating conditions of a welfare state and the recognition of reproductive work that Honneth demands. Unemployment, the working poor, the intensification of work or changes to performance-oriented pay are all connected with a market-oriented achievement principle. It is necessary, therefore, to flesh out the moral core of the (labour) market and to mark the distinction more clearly between distorted and undistorted or morally good and bad market interactions. This is one major topic in Honneth's recent book *Das Recht der Freiheit* (2011). Despite this, the problem of what Stephan Voswinkel calls the shift from appreciation to admiration as an internal shift in the meaning of social esteem needs much more critical attention (Voswinkel 2012a).

Third, I see a mismatch between the diagnostic and the therapeutic strength of the recognition approach. Although the recognition approach is well-suited to diagnosing major problems within society and expanding our knowledge about them, it falls somewhat short when it comes to problem solving (see also Zurn 2011). Regarding the problem of social exclusion, it is still unclear which solutions – and like every complex problem it demands a coordinated package of solutions rather than a single solution – are adequate or, to stay within the realm of normative philosophy, which solutions ought to be pursued. Is it a right to work or rather a basic income? The recognition approach, which seems to prefer a right to work in this context, has to provide substantial and well-argued answers to these questions and remain close to those groups and movements that are concerned with such transformation processes.

A fourth element is the question of health, and especially mental health, which is a major area of concern when it comes to poverty,

inequality, and social exclusion, together with the transformation of work and employment since the 1990s. Current research discusses this under the heading of social determinants of health and it is also the subject of ongoing philosophical debate, especially about the worldwide scope of justice (Anand, Peter and Sen 2004; Marmot and Wilkinson 2003). Health is not at the centre of the recognition approach, and although it is clear that health is an important pillar of a good life and a basic condition for self-realization, it is unclear where it should sit within its framework. Is health or access to health care a form of recognition? Is health something that benefits from recognition or is it a prerequisite of recognition? These questions, especially in the context of poverty and social exclusion, still have to be tackled.

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