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Schweiger, G. (ed.): Poverty, Inequality and the Critical Theory of Recognition. New York: Springer, 321 p., ISBN: 978-3-030-45795-2

This book was published as a third volume of the series Philosophy and Poverty and was edited by Gottfried Schweiger. As the name of the book implies, the book examines poverty from the standpoint of critical theory. The book itself is divided into 3 parts. The first part can be described as a historical approach. It critically examines how Fichte and Hegel viewed the concept of poverty. The second part provides insights from the standpoint of critical theory in today's modern global world. The third section offers certain prescriptions about how to alleviate poverty. It is concerned with policies such as basic income, microfinancing etc. This is certainly one way to look at the issue of poverty. The other way could be to examine this issue in a specific national context. However, from my perspective the approach chosen by the editor is very illuminating as well.

In this book review I will highlight and assess some arguments provided by the authors. Due to space constraints I am not going to deal with the entire book, rather I will focus my attention only on a few chapters.

In his introduction, Schweiger argues that global poverty is unjust because poor people lack the ability to enhance their personal autonomy because they lack the three basic forms of recognition: love, rights and social esteem (p. 2). Later Schweiger explains Schmidt and Busch's theory which maintains that love can be understood as recognition of a person as a vulnerable individual, rights can be understood as respect that humans owe one another other based on their humanity, and social esteem can be understood as the idea that one needs to be recognized based on his contribution to a shared goal. In his approach Schweiger draws on Honneth's idea that: "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 in Schweiger p. 5). Schweiger's book constitutes an addition to critical theory by drawing on Honneth's theory of recognition. The book aims to examine issues of poverty within this paradigm.

Schweiger correctly maintains that misrecognition impedes the development of individual freedom because a poor person is simply an object and not a free subject on his own. Schweiger maintains that global poverty is perpetuated by uneven power structures rooted not only in political power in a particular state, but also through international institutions. Schweiger maintains that recognition theory is mainly based on experiences of people from developed countries and does not pay much attention to people from the developing world and their daily economic

struggles nor explores a link between poverty and shame. In this respect, his approach to basing the evaluation of a just world on criteria such as whether current institutional arrangements provide individuals with stability and security is well articulated and defended. Schweiger rightly maintains that there are different effects of poverty in different parts of the world. While poverty in developed countries is exclusionary vis-à-vis the rest of “Western” society, poverty in many parts of the developing world is life-threatening. Schweiger then maintains that poverty reduces one’s ability to act as an autonomous person, reduces a human’s capabilities etc. Schweiger rightly points out that the place and circumstances into which one is born are a very decisive factor as far as one’s later life is concerned. In other words, the playing field is different for everyone from birth. Schweiger recognizes that poor people are often humiliated not because of the wrongdoing of a particular person, but that this humiliation has its institutionalized causes. What is inspiring about Schweiger’s view is that it claims that organizations and states also face recognition challenges among each other. In other words, not all states and organizations are recognized as equal. Schweiger fully spells out the fact that poverty is caused, to a large extent, by right wing libertarianism (Schweiger, p. 12).

In her chapter dealing with Fichte’s concept of poverty as material deprivation, Esther Neuhann presents the illuminating point that poverty carries with itself not only material but also cultural deprivation. An unemployed person does not simply lack income from a job, but also social relations and the status of recognition as someone who is contributing to the advancement of society. Neuhann then poses questions about whether, if this is the case, then should one be entitled to have a job or whether affirmative action and quotas are desirable. Neuhann articulates well the claim that poverty can not be simply reduced to some kinds of recognition because the fact that a poor person is surrounded by people experiencing the same injustice of poverty does not alleviate his own sense of poverty. In her article Neuhann deals with the German philosopher Fichte. According to Fichte, recognition depends on the fulfilment of basic material needs. Neuhann understands these material needs to be food, shelter and personal hygiene. I understand poverty as a lack of opportunities to influence one’s life and to live a good life. Therefore a person is poor if one lacks access to education and medical care. Neuhann says that according to Fichte in order for someone to possess a certain right it is necessary for them to have an empirical self-consciousness as being a person. Neuhann explains that this self-consciousness is being able to act upon a certain thing. Neuhann gives the example of a table. A person is self-conscious if he knows that he can act upon a table, for instance break it, move it and so on. This implies that a self-conscious person is able to actively interact with the world around himself and make certain choices. This would imply that poverty can not be only viewed as a deprivation of material things but also a deprivation of possibilities to act freely. Therefore one could argue that there are actually degrees of poverty. The more a person is able to act as an autonomous agent, the less poor that person actually is. This is however beyond the scope of Neuhann’s article. According to Neuhann, Fichte believes that a self-conscious person realizes his dependency on the external world and that his ability to act is constrained by other free individuals, thus there is an intersubjective relationship among people. The relation of right is a reciprocal relation (p. 44). This does not however deal with the question that some of us are freer to act than others. Thus one can argue that as far as autonomous action is concerned there are degrees of poverty

as I implied above. However, again this is outside the scope of Neuhann's argument. Based on Fichte's writing, Neuhann asks the provocative question of whether poverty must be eradicated in order for the relationship of rights to occur. One could argue that perpetual poverty which one can see in many parts of the world would exclude certain people from claiming or exercising their rights, or at least severely restrict this option.

In his chapter, Bernardo Ferro deals with views on poverty and recognition expressed in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. According to Ferro, for Hegel poverty is not just a material problem but produces social alienation. For Hegel, the problem stems from a liberal capitalist world, where each citizen acts in a certain way in order to promote his own well-being and uses others as means to reach his goals or view them as obstacles in his journey. Liberal capitalist society produces great wealth but also marginalizes workers and poor people who are pressed to accept poorly paid jobs or are discharged as workers. However, these poor people suffer not only from material deprivation but are unable to shape the course of society because their interests in decision-making processes are simply not taken into account. Poor people suffer from psychological traumas such as social exclusion and shame which stem from their poverty. Thus according to Hegel one can not hope that simple redistribution of wealth will solve the problem of poverty. In other words, poor people must be reintegrated into society as equal citizens. For Hegel, an individual can live a fulfilling life only in a state where the interests of individuals and collective interests are truly harmonized and promoted via just and reliable institutions. Hegel's theory can be used as a Framework for constructing a very egalitarian society which can safeguard collective interests and promote individual freedom at the same time. According to Ferro, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* can not be understood simply as a descriptive work relating Hegel's contemporary world, nor as a purely speculative work. According to Ferro, for Hegel freedom must be elevated as its own object and therefore a right. For Hegel, then, the important notion is the intersubjective recognition of freedom as a right as well as a guarantee of certain property rights where people recognize each other as bearers of certain rights and freedoms. In this respect, recognizing freedom as a right, freedom and its safeguards acquire a new social dimension. At this point transgression against freedom objectively allows for retribution because the common standard of right has been breached. However, this can lead to a circle of retributions which does not lead to justice. In order to avoid this, one needs to introduce institutions which are going to be based on objective rights and morality, which is often subjective. Here one can see Hegel's dialectic taking place yet again. For Hegel, the state is the highest expression of freedom because in a properly organized state individuals are still pursuing their own interests, however, they recognize that they can be best served when the interests of others are also taken into account. Therefore they are also concerned with the common good. Hegel claims that philosophy can be not only a speculative endeavor; rather it must be based on particular historical and societal circumstances which, however, we may seek to change. This resembles the basic stance of critical theory which describes an oppressive capitalist regime and contemplates its change. However, as Ferro points out, Hegel's idea of the state as the highest expression and guarantor of freedom does not really solve the problem of poverty, because the state still rests on liberal capitalist market-based structures. Thus one cannot expect that the state will be able to overcome the problems of systemic poverty. What Ferro finds inspiring about Hegel's argument is the

creation of “corporations”. In today’s language we could associate Hegel’s “corporations” with unions which would care for their members and which would allow poor people to become their members, learn necessary skills and therefore gain recognition as full-fledged citizens. One can however pose the question of whether this does not lead to yet another patronizing life in which the dictate of a factory owner is not replaced by the patronizing dictate of a union. Ferro criticizes Hegel’s notion of “corporations” because of its lack of precision and fears that “corporations” can simply reproduce individual selfish motives on a larger scale. Ferro believes that instead of “corporations” one can produce such collective consciousness through civic associations, NGOs and political parties.

In his chapter, Gustavo Pereira claims that besides objectively measured poverty such as for instance a lack of income there exist other types of poverty which are more subjective, but which exclude a person from participating in the decision-making processes of society and from normal life. Pereira calls this civic poverty. Pereira bases his approach on Amartya Sen’s conceptualization of poverty. Pereira illustrates Sen’s approach well when explaining that two people may have the same income but one of them may be chronically ill with just a primary education and a second person may be healthy with a secondary education. According to Pereira, chances to advance in life are significantly different. Pereira finds Sen’s approach to the science of poverty too individualistic. Pereira rightly claims that one can not assess poverty solely on a lack of income, because certain people possess capabilities such as greater skills to get out of poverty, while others who may suffer from long-term unemployment may lose their professional skills as well as suffer from psychological problems such as depression and shame, as noted above. Furthermore, poor people may suffer from a lack of trust in social institutions as well as from a lack of personal responsibility and trust in themselves. From this point of view, which is advocated by Sen and Pereira, one can conclude that poverty is a multilayered process. This process entails in itself objective as well as subjective connotations which makes it very difficult to overcome the problem. Pereira rightly points out that if programs to alleviate poverty will be solely based on income levels, they may not lead to desirable results because they will not take into account the subjective dimensions of poverty mentioned above. Pereira also acknowledges that in certain respects it can be difficult to define what constitutes poverty, because according to Sen a person is not poor when he lives a life worth living. However, the question can be asked of how to determine whether a person has reached that state of life. According to Sen and Pereira, there exist basic capabilities which need to be met in order for a person to pursue a life worth living. These capabilities must stand the scrutiny of deliberation and must be publicly justified. At this point one can ask how public deliberation is going to be conducted and whether such an exercise can actually be objectively undertaken. Moreover, as Pereira implies, the set of basic capabilities and notions of a life worth living can change over time. This further complicates such an exercise. Pereira clearly shows that one needs to understand poverty as a relational process among different members of society. An individual derives his sense of belonging from whether his contribution is appreciated by society and whether his concerns are heard in the public sphere. For a person’s sense of belonging to society, certain significant values are important such as equal rights, fair access to opportunities, fundamental capabilities and dignity, to name a few. If an individual does not believe that these demands are sufficiently met, Pereira claims that this indi-

vidual suffers from civic poverty. Pereira claims that social poverty can be reduced by ensuring that individuals and marginalized groups are able to raise claims, advance arguments as well as participate in social life. Furthermore, besides the influence of power and money relationships, backward cultural practices must be reduced. I am afraid, however, that this concept is perhaps too utopian and cannot be implemented, at least not in the foreseeable future.

In his chapter, Marek Hrubec aims to introduce a theoretical framework with which one can deal with poverty in a context of global order. While Honneth's theory of recognition explains and offers a solution for the suffering of poor people on a national level, in today's globalized world it is necessary to examine the issue of poverty from a transnational and global perspective. This is done by the Czech scholar Marek Hrubec who collaborates with Honneth on developing a further critical theory. According to Hrubec, Honneth does not explicitly focus on interstate relations with regards to the plight of the poor. Therefore, Honneth's position in this aspect can be only indirectly inferred. Honneth views a state's struggle for recognition within a framework of historical and long-term social struggles. For Honneth the state continuously struggles for recognition. The state needs for its recognition not only recognition from other states, but also its territory, population and government as well as more recognition from its citizens. Even the most totalitarian states cannot rely only on the use of force in order to obtain obedience from their citizens. Thus according to Honneth each state strives for continuous legitimation not only by external actors but also by its citizens. According to Hrubec, Honneth's problem is that he underestimates the negative impact of economic global interactions. Since there are certain global entities which do not correspond to national states, Hrubec as well as other authors maintain that a classical international relations paradigm is insufficient when dealing with current global, economic, social and environmental issues.

Although Honneth's theory of recognition cannot adequately address these problems, it can serve as a starting point in order to overcome them. In order to overcome current global problems one needs certain forms of international justice and rights which require certain political responsibility and solidarity and a certain identification as a member of the political community based on mutual recognition. However, Honneth is unable to develop his theory on a transnational or global level. This is the main issue that Hrubec takes with Honneth's theory. Hrubec calls for extraterritorial recognition. He maintains that such recognition can be seen in the promotion of civil and political human rights, where in recent years the international community has demanded that nation states observe at least to a certain extent these rights. Hrubec sees similar potential in social and economic rights. Hrubec maintains that states should regulate transnational activities of multinational corporations. In other words there should be a legal relationship between home states and transnational actors and their activities. Hrubec also claims that it is necessary to overcome the westcentric approach and also incorporate voices from other regions of the world where we can witness the formation of different social movements which attempt to ensure improvements in the of standard of living of the poor.

In conclusion I would like to briefly describe certain chapters from the third part of this book and then offer my short appraisal of it. In his chapter "When Microcredit Doesn't Empower Poor Women: Recognition Theory's Contribution to the Debate Over Adaptive Preferences", David Ingram ponders a situation when many women, although having access to microfinancing for

new projects prefer patriarchal subordination instead. According to Ingram these women suffer from identity crises and conflicting ideas. Gustavo Cunha's chapter, "Universal Basic Income: A Recognition-Based Policy Against Poverty", examines attempts to introduce universal basic income in Brazil and lessons to be learnt from this project. In the final chapter of this book, "Crime and Punishment of the Poor from Recognition Theory Perspective", Javier Cigüela Sola analyzes the relations between criminal law, crime and poverty.

I would like to conclude this book review with the observation that the book *Poverty, Inequality and the Critical Theory of Recognition* provides an illuminating insight into the ways that modern philosophy, social science and critical theory examines the issue of poverty. The strength of this book is in the way that the issue of poverty is examined by various authors, with different standpoints and from different institutions. However, most of the authors are still either from so-called western countries or are affiliated with western institutions. Thus one could argue that more voices from countries where global poverty is present could perhaps add greater authenticity to this book. However, the fact that at least some voices from poor countries are present as well is very refreshing. And it is the richness of the viewpoints expressed for which I can recommend this book to a reader.