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Review Essay: Honneth's Sociological Turn

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Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit: Grundriss einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2011, 628 pp. (incl. index) €35.90 ISBN 9783518585627 (hbk)

Introduction

In *Das Recht der Freiheit (The Right to Freedom)*, his first major monograph since the *The Struggle for Recognition* originally published in 1992, Axel Honneth decisively takes the sociological turn many of his readers have been expecting for some time. Little argument is therefore required to convince social theorists and sociologists of the importance of this book for their own concerns. It is a large work representing an ambitious project which took some five years to bring to fruition, but it is transparent in conception, well-structured, meticulously researched, carefully argued and presented, and as a bonus it is interspersed with some brilliant analyses. The presentation of Hegel's position is one such analysis, but the supreme example, perhaps, is the way in which Honneth puts individual moral freedom in its place between negative individual freedom and social freedom. This instance is all the more striking since its bearing on the overall aim of the project gives it a special even if circumscribed place in the book.

Honneth's intention is to develop a theory of justice in the medium of social analysis directly in opposition to the dominant Kantian version of this theory such as represented by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Whereas the latter theory is characterized by the construction of abstract normative principles independently from social reality which is at best regarded as merely a domain of application, Honneth puts forward an institutional theory that seeks to account for the principles of justice from within social reality itself. This endeavour is very strongly influenced by Hegel's institutional concept of *Sittlichkeit* or concrete ethical life. Extending his Spinoza lectures on Hegel delivered in Amsterdam in 1999 (Honneth 2001), the vision that led Honneth from the outset in writing *Das Recht der Freiheit* was the duplication of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* of 1820 under the drastically changed conditions of the early twenty-first century. It is remarkable that he is strongly supported in this endeavour by leaning on both Durkheim and Parsons, particularly the former. To understand Honneth's project correctly, however, it should be pointed out that his perspective is not purely Hegelian but rather a broader left-Hegelian one. It is for this reason that he distances himself not only from the Kantian theorists, but at the same time also from the neo-Hegelian communitarians. In his endorsement capturing the thrust of the book, Habermas accordingly writes that 'Honneth takes the historical step back from Marx to Hegel in order to reorient the programme "from Hegel to Marx"'.

Although the concept of 'transcendence from within' or 'immanent transcendence'[i] goes unmentioned by name in *Das Recht der Freiheit* unlike some of his earlier writings, it is this core left-Hegelian principle that Honneth follows throughout. According to it, potentialities are developed in concrete everyday life which go beyond it yet incursively and recursively work back upon social life so as to structure, direct, guide and regulate it. This principle requires that rather than fixing exclusively on the potentialities understood as abstract normative principles, it has to be demonstrated how they arise from and go beyond social life yet nevertheless remain effective within it. As regards Honneth's sociological turn, it should be noted that it is exactly the tension between the immanent and the transcendent that sociology is called upon to assuage. More generally, the centrality of the left-Hegelian principle to Honneth's thinking makes the characteristic attitudes he adopts comprehensible. These include not only his long-standing project of the renewal of social philosophy in opposition to political philosophy, but in the book under review also his

pitting of a social theory of justice against the deontological Kantian version as well as against related attempts to support the latter by legal theory, as for example Habermas (1996) does in *Between Facts and Norms*. As far as his strongest competition within the Habermasian tradition is concerned, it is revealing that the title of the book, *The Right to Freedom*, is analogously conceived as an alternative to Rainer Forst's (2007) noted book entitled *Das Recht auf Rechtfertigung* (*The Right to Justification)*. Whereas Forst assumes the inherently limited concept of moral freedom as the most basic, Honneth explicitly embraces the broader concept of social freedom.

1

Turning to the content of the book, Honneth opens with a statement of the general presuppositions of his approach. The first two effectively amount to a statement of the meta-theoretical principle of immanent transcendence, while the remaining two specify the dovetailing reconstructive methodology. According to the first assumption, the reproduction of societies depends on a common orientation toward ethical norms which, as basic ideals and values, from the top lay down what can be imagined as possible and, as institutionalized goals, from the bottom provide guidance to individuals in unfolding their particular life courses. The closely related second assumption insists against the Kantian constructivist grounding of abstract norms on the necessity of an immanent approach which, by no means excluding the transcendent dimension, acknowledges that ideals need to be analysed as actually institutionalized in society. Honneth's third presupposition confirms this requirement to take both the immanent and transcendent dimensions into account in his specification of the methodological procedure of normative reconstruction which demands the adoption of both the sociological and philosophical perspectives. On the one hand, philosophy is required to overcome the short-sighted tendency of mainstream sociology to take social reality as a positively given object by instead independently drawing out its essential features which demand social realization and thus have a shaping effect upon it. On the other, sociology is needed in order to analyse the actual embodiment and articulation of those features in concrete social life. As a form of critical theory, finally, Honneth's approach is built on the presupposition of a type of critique that is enabled by normative reconstruction, namely, 'reconstructive critique'.

Given that his approach has to open with a reconstruction of the essential features of social reality, Honneth begins his analysis with the determination of what he describes as 'the most general values of our contemporary societies'. Of all the ideals of modernity, among which are for instance equality, community, authenticity, social order and self-determination, he singles out the 'constitutive idea' of freedom understood as individual autonomy. As is apparent from the fact that the assumption of freedom underpins every sphere of action, it is the only one fundamentally shaping the institutional order of Western liberal-democratic societies. Consequently, it is virtually impossible to articulate any of the remaining ideals serving as the orientational horizon of individuals or the normative framing of society as a whole other than with reference to the idea of freedom. It is a category or principle encapsulating the highest good which forms the necessary and inescapable element of the contemporary self-understanding, yet it is itself heterogeneous and multidimensional and thus allows a variety of different interpretations and semantic articulations. Indeed, in the light of the bitter conflicts in the course of the discourse of modernity concerning its meaning, Honneth identifies three clearly distinguishable historically effective models of freedom: negative, reflexive and social freedom. His task thus becomes a reconstruction that makes it possible to determine through an eliminative procedure which one of these models actually serves as the normative reference point for our contemporary conception of justice.

2

The first substantive part of the book is devoted to tracing the historical emergence and subsequent articulation of the three modern models of freedom.

The negative model, which is borne by the contract-theoretical tradition from Hobbes via Locke and J S Mill to Robert Nozick (Sartre is also included), proceeds from an atomistic view of human beings who assert themselves individually within a legally secured sphere which forestalls any encroachment on the pursuit of their self-interests and preferences. Whereas the individual's orientations such as wishes and preferences remain unaccounted for in this model, the model of reflexive freedom, as Honneth calls it instead of the traditional positive freedom, includes as its essential component precisely individual intellectual reflection on goals and goal-setting. It has roots going back to Aristotle, but historically it became articulated in two distinct directions – in the tradition from Leibniz via Rousseau to Kant as autonomy or self-determination with reference to universal moral principles implying self-limitation, and in the tradition of Rousseau and Herder (no reference to Nietzsche and Foucault in this context) as authenticity or self-realization implying self-discovery. Subsequently, Kant's transcendental approach was transformed both empirically and communication-theoretically in favour of emphasizing the process of socialization and intersubjectivity respectively, while Herder's concept of authenticity was split into two distinct concerns with identification and narrative unification.

Although broader than negative freedom, neither of the two versions of reflexive freedom incorporates the social or institutional conditions themselves as part of freedom. The need for doing so was indeed suggested by Karl-Otto Apel and Habermas' communication theory, yet their failure to historically concretize discourse as an institution prevented them from taking the step toward a social concept of freedom. According to Honneth, however, it is possible to capture this latter sense by conceiving of particular institutions as media of freedom, but this can be achieved only by backtracking to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. There Hegel criticized both negative and reflexive freedom from the perspective of social freedom – negative freedom for not grasping the goals of action as free, and reflexive freedom for being unable to link the individual self-relation to the institutional domain to which the criterion of freedom applies. Marx adopted and critically employed a similar position in his early writings and throughout his life maintained a social cooperation model of freedom. What all this means for the normative reconstruction to be undertaken in the rest of the book is that the different interpretations of the idea of freedom require that each be embedded in its corresponding institutional complex or sphere of action-cum-knowledge. As the ultimate emphasis is on the institutional complex of social freedom, the overall aim of the reconstruction is the vindication of what Honneth calls *demokratische Sittlichkeit*, concrete ethical life in a democratic key.

3

In the second part of the book Honneth focuses on the possibility of freedom, with the reality of freedom reserved for the third and final part. This division between reality and possibility undoubtedly reflects the fundamental meta-theoretical principle of immanent transcendence. Both negative and reflexive freedom are necessary for the generation of social freedom, but they are dependent on the institutional conditions giving reality to social freedom. Whereas they make freedom possible either by the private pursuit of interests and preferences or by questioning accepted role requirements and social obligations from a particular moral perspective, they are unable by themselves to institutionally embody freedom in social life. These two forms of freedom similarly presuppose a constitutionally inscribed private autonomy based on the system of subjective rights, but since negative freedom on the one hand is exercised in a sphere protected from external interference by legal guarantee and state regulation, while reflexive freedom on the other rests only on a weakly-institutionalized cultural orientation framework, Honneth devotes the second part to an analysis first of legally secured individual freedom and then of individual moral freedom.

(i) Legally secured individual freedom or negative freedom is rooted in the right of the modern individual to withdraw from existing role obligations and social bonds in order to form its own will,

to live up to its own wishes and preferences, and to pursue its own interests in its own self-assertion and self-maintenance. However indispensable this type of freedom is to the modern self-understanding, it nevertheless runs up against its limits to the extent that the realization of individual interests requires a form of social interaction that goes well beyond the law and legal regulation. Indeed, through its privatistic structure the law itself tends to isolate the individual from such socially vital communicative mediation. This incompleteness and potential one-sidedness of negative individual freedom becomes visible in the form of pathogenesis once its exclusive employment, for instance by the excessive articulation of rights claims, hollows out and erodes the existing network of social relations.

(ii) Secondly, individual moral freedom is secured by the attainment of an autonomous I-identity through an abiding orientation toward moral principles which are reflexively held to be justifiable. It gives the individual the culturally established right to distance itself from accepted social obligations and to criticize the latter from a particular moral point of view with a view to re-engaging with social relations once they have improved under such moral pressure. This culturally anchored idea of freedom enjoys legitimacy in developed societies, but it also has inherent limits. The exercise of meta-conventional moral consciousness by criticizing existing social relations cannot be permanently maintained as it is but a momentary phase in the process of individually testing socially accepted conventions. When it is misconstrued as a freedom requiring continuous exercise and personal autonomy in terms of rightness rather than the good is thus one-sidedly pursued, it results in social pathologies.

Honneth presents in fine detail a whole series of graphic examples of social pathologies generated by the over-extension of both legal freedom and moral freedom. They stretch from habitual fixations and deformed personality structures, through moralism, authoritarianism and the juridification of social relations, to morally informed terrorism. Rather than attributing pathologies to individuals, however, Honneth conceives negative developments of this kind as second order disorders in the sense of rationality or reflexivity deficits preventing access to higher-level principles and points of view. Together these pathologies give an indication of the deep-seated tendency under modern conditions to overlook or deny the rootedness of negative and reflexive freedom in social life and its mediating institutions. It is solely by revitalizing this inescapable rootedness that the pathogenic deformations of both can be prevented as well as corrected. The focus of Honneth's final step is thus rendered clear: the reality of social freedom.

4

The third and final part represents the heart of Honneth's project which accounts for the fact that 409 out of 628 pages are devoted to it. It is a historically rich and sociologically acute critical normative reconstruction of how the idea of freedom figures in Western liberal-democratic societies in a manner that gives rise, or could give rise, to a social order that conforms to the criterion of justice. This is done through a meticulous analysis of major societal domains, such as personal relations, the capitalist market economy and democratic will-formation, with a view to showing how the principles of individual freedom within a multidimensional institutional framework play a role in the generation and reproduction of society. Honneth conceives each of the major societal domains or action-cum-knowledge spheres in two complementary ways – following Hegel, as 'concrete ethical' (*sittliche*) institutions in so far as their form based on mutual recognition contains obligations, and, following Parsons, as 'relational' institutions in so far as the activities of the participants reciprocally complement and enlarge each other. This allows him to reinforce the thrust of his core argument to the effect that individual freedom, whether the pursuit of private interests or the reflexive testing of conventional arrangements, can become a socially lived and experienced reality only within institutional complexes of this kind. Honneth accordingly describes these institutions as characterized by complementary role expectations, but being aware that such

expectations are open to different competing interpretations, he acknowledges that beyond them the participants assume a commonly shared norm or what may be conceived as second order expectations. This common reference point forms part of society's basic stock of necessary background knowledge which embraces commonly shared differentiations as well as boundaries separating the different classes of differentiations.

It is from this 'moral grammar', which in accordance with the principle of immanent transcendence presumably encompasses both the common meta-conventional reference point and the differently interpreted conventional role expectations, that the normative reconstruction and reconstructive critique are undertaken. Honneth confirms that the normative reconstruction moves between the levels of empirical facticity and purely normative validity, fixing neither on actual relations nor on ideal principles, but rather focusing on the mediating social practices as forms of the embodiment and realization of intersubjective or social freedom. The critical aim of the reconstruction is both to uncover the deviations from the ideal-typical institutional rules of action that give rise to a variety of adverse developments typical of our time and to contribute toward countering them. As different types of 'anomy' appearing in social institutions, such adverse developments are to be distinguished from 'pathologies' which emerge in the legal and moral areas due to the inherently one-sided thrust of their constitutive principles. In Honneth's view, the constitutive principles of the social spheres are such that they do not admit of inducing pathologies in social relations, but adverse developments deriving from deviations are in evidence. Although pernicious, he nevertheless cautions against their pessimistic over-interpretation.

The reconstruction of the social spheres of personal relations, the market economy and the political public sphere in each case aims at the extrapolation of the framework of mutual recognition and complementary role obligations on the basis of which the participants under contemporary conditions intersubjectively realize the corresponding form of social freedom.

(i) As regards personal relations, first, Honneth offers detailed analyses of friendship, intimate relations and family, in each case tracing the historical changes that led to the respective modern ideals and the consolidation of the embodying social practices.

(a) The ideal of an interest-free, purely private friendship which is ethically based on mutual respect and trust goes back to the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but assumed the form of a fully institutionalized set of practices only after the Second World War when it became generalized across both the sexes and the social classes. Under contemporary conditions of intense individualization, the substance of friendship has become threatened to a certain degree by tendencies toward a privatistic obsession with individual upward mobility and the use of friendship relations for personal gain and instrumental goals. In its late twentieth-century form, however, the ethical core of the institution of friendship has attained a high level of stability that allows both the perception of such tendencies as infringements and the mutual realization of intersubjective freedom.

(b) Secondly, Honneth follows the changes and developments that have led from Shakespeare's time via the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century idea of romantic love to the late twentieth-century de-institutionalization of the nuclear family and the concurrent sexual revolution and social struggles of women and minorities which sealed the autonomization of the intimate or love relationship. The latter has become established as a distinct institution embracing a cultural idea and a social form that enables and legitimizes a personal bond which rests purely on mutual desire for sexual intimacy and an all-encompassing enjoyment of the corporeality of the partner. As the one is the condition of the unimpeded self-realization and elementary self-confidence of the other, the institution of love makes available a sociocultural form of recognition that encourages the reciprocal realization of a unique form of intersubjective or social freedom. Due in particular to new employment conditions

and the concomitant capitalist formation of subjectivity, however, this institution and its form of freedom are today under threat from egocentrism, a calculative disposition and the accompanying conflict potential which are eroding the motivation to enter into a personal bond of pure reciprocal love and its exacting role obligation of remaining attentive to the evolving needs of the other.

(c) In the area of personal relations, Honneth finally considers the family. While acknowledging evidence regarding the pluralisation of the family form, including contemporary single-parent and postmodern patchwork families, he takes the parents-plus-child/children configuration as still being institutionally normal in Western societies. In order to identify the normative core regulating familial relations, he focuses on the shift from the bourgeois paternalistic family model to the currently predominant partnership model. The emergence of the latter presupposes not only the egalitarianization of internal family relations, but due to much longer individual lifespans also their temporal extension. These processes underpin the social and temporal expansion of moral obligations which brought about an unprecedented intensification of relationships based on feelings and the recognition of individual particularity. This accounts for the weakness – i.e., fragility – of the social bond, but also for its strength – i.e., its communicative generation. On the one hand, the socioeconomic conditions advanced by political liberalism encourage the proliferation of exit options, but on the other the consolidation over the past few decades of the triangular relation between the parents and the child/children, where the latter represent the newly introduced third point of view, enables the realization of a unique kind of social freedom. This remarkable but as yet incomplete normative progress, however, is in need of support by a transformation of liberal family and social policy.

(ii) The second major area in which Honneth undertakes a normative reconstruction and reconstructive critique is the capitalist market economy where he focuses on consumption and the labour market. Contrary to the widespread contemporary assumption that the market has become completely functionally autonomous and shorn of all moral implications that by definition would preclude the possibility of a reconstruction which starts from the normative content of the reconstructed object domain, Honneth turns to the tradition of moral economy. Drawing on Hegel, Marx, Durkheim and Polanyi, he insists that, despite the inherently ambivalent modern understanding, the economic process not only presupposes pre-contractual solidarity principles, but also contains normative phenomena such as expectations regarding meaning and legitimacy, role obligations, self-doubt and experiences of injustice. Since economic interests themselves are thus clearly open to social formation and interpretation, a normative reconstruction can link up with the institutional mechanisms through which the ideal of a solidary and socially free market becomes concretized. Through an account in which critical motifs predominate, he accordingly reconstructively assesses both consumption and the labour market in terms of the institutional realization, both normatively progressive and regressive, through discursive interest determination and legal anchorage of the legitimacy securing or regulative principles of the economy.

(a) When capitalism first became institutionalized, the argument for it was that it would efficiently solve the problem of scarcity by encouraging entrepreneurs to provide the necessary goods to satisfy the observable needs of the population at large. The market-mediated sphere of consumption thus emerged as an institution of social freedom in which the different interests – producer, financier, labourer and consumer – stood in a complementary relation of mutual regard and support. This normative claim of what Hegel called 'the system of needs' were soon after shattered, however, when a lack of producer attention to needs in certain areas led to grave gaps in provision, which called forth food riots and goods boycotts, and investment was instead poured into low quality, morally undesirable and luxury goods. While the state acted correctively in observance of the normative principles of the consumption market, consumer associations proliferated which stimulated legislative activity and drove the socialization of consumption still further. In the course

of time, however, adverse consequences where generated by the development of scientific methods of need stimulation and manipulation as well as by the segmentation of consumption through the differentiation of consumer interests. In response, a variety of limitations and regulations concretizing the legitimacy principles of the economic system was indeed brought to bear on the market by both the state and organized consumers. But by the early twenty-first century, a far-reaching transformation decisively marked the massive failure of the capitalist market economy, including such changes as the unprecedented growth of producer power due to globalization, the failure of the state to institutionalize discursive procedures and adequate consumer protection legislation, the decline of cooperatives and consumer organizations, an increase in inequality, the blooming of a capitalist consumer culture and the emergence of a split consumer market in which an overwhelmingly privatistic, luxury-oriented consumer mentality predominates. Honneth regards this as disproving not only the liberal ideology of consumer sovereignty, but also of the social scientific thesis of the current moralization of markets.

(b) As regards the labour market, secondly, Honneth traces a history of some hundred and fifty years right up to the present that is relatively well known in general terms, but he does so in well-seasoned detail – the history of the conflict-laden relation, at times mediated by the state, between capitalist forces and the organizations of the labour movement, both in their varying epochal guises. Not only does he undertake a normative reconstruction that on occasion despairs of finding any normative contact points in a domain dominated by corporations and financial institutions, but he also extends the accompanying reconstructive critique by an explanatory search for the social causes of adverse developments. Of particular concern under current conditions is the cultural predominance of a de-socialized interpretation of the capitalist market as a sphere of purely individual freedom and the concomitant virtually complete disappearance of the collective manifestation and public articulation of the indignation and outrage so characteristic historically of the normatively sensitive opposition to capitalist labour arrangements. As far as the realization of social freedom in the labour market is concerned, the best that could be achieved in the near future would be the reversal of the recent erosion of labour market conditions and the reinstitution of the discursive mechanisms and various rights attained during the social democratic era. In this respect, Honneth pins his hope on the transnational trade union federation and non-governmental organizations.

(iii) In the long final section of the book, Honneth deals with political will-formation occupying the very heart of democratic *Sittlichkeit* which he understands as the embodiment or reality of freedom. Contrary to Hegel who fixed on the state in substantive terms at the expense of intersubjective relations and democracy, he stresses instead deliberatively organized mutual relations through which generally agreed interests and goals are determined. Contrary to Habermas and contemporary democratic theories, he on the other hand rejects the proceduralist view according to which the public sphere represents the completely freestanding domain where the constitutionally based rules regulating personal relations and the market economy are decided. Since a degree of realization of both individual legal and moral freedom for the first time makes uncoerced participation in democratic will-formation possible, Honneth regards the interrelation of the three spheres of personal relations, the market economy and the political public sphere as together constituting democratic *Sittlichkeit*. This implies that the public sphere depends on an iterative process in which it learns from the struggles for social freedom repeatedly undertaken precisely in the other two spheres. In his reconstruction, Honneth builds these relations and tensions into an analysis first of the public sphere as the communicative context of democratic will-formation, then of the development of the constitutional state as a foundational condition of the realization of social freedom, and finally of political culture which he reconstructively arrives at as the key problem in the contemporary period in this field.

(a) In the first leg of the reconstruction, Honneth carefully traces each of the phases in the development of the public sphere. The details relate in particular to the roles of different actors, including the state, capitalism, the labour, feminist and student movements, immigrant communities, the mass media, critics of media power, social and political theorists like Durkheim, Dewey, Arendt and Habermas, internet fora and non-governmental organizations, but account is also taken of parameters such as technology and historical events. From its emergence in the eighteenth century and its establishment and broadening in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, he follows its practical snuffing out during the 1930s-40s, its revival in the immediate post-war years on the basis of constitutional and international law, and the taking on of its current form. A crucial moment in the nineteenth century was the emergence of the nation state which marks the inherent ambivalence of the public sphere, not only consolidating it on the basis of national solidarity but also making possible its nationalist deformation in an anti-Semitic and racist direction. In the wake of the public sphere's concerted limiting by capitalist market forces and its transformation by the technological revolution, it was from the 1960s shaped by two cross-cutting processes each with a tail of adverse consequences – namely, the penetration of the public sphere by economic power and its stratification, on the one hand, and its opening up and often misleading virtualization on the basis of the advancement of media technology, on the other. As regards the contemporary situation, Honneth therefore stresses that the pressing question arising here is whether there is a nascent or, at least, a conceivable instance that could reconcile these processes and mitigate their undesirable consequences sufficiently for the purposes of democratic will-formation.

The point of the reconstruction, however, is the extrapolation of the fundamental conditions of social freedom in the public sphere from two hundred years of social and political struggles and the concomitant demonstration that constitutional guarantees and state protection of individual rights alone by no means suffice for uncoerced and inclusive democratic public will-formation. Honneth identifies six such conditions: beyond legally guaranteed rights, first, a general, inclusive, class-transcendent communicative space is secondly required; to compensate for the shift of the latter to a transnational level, a re-centring is needed that thirdly calls for a highly differentiated, constitutionalized system of mass media capable of providing enlightening information about social problems and the spectrum of their possible interpretation; contrary to democratic theory's fixation on discursivity, democratic will-formation in the fourth place also presupposes the individual willingness to engage in political processes, from voluntary services through gatherings to demonstrations and civil disobedience; to counter individualization, depoliticization and political apathy, next, background knowledge and bonds of solidarity represented by a political culture that obligates the members to feel responsible for each other are necessary, yet such a culture itself presupposes complementary socio-political measures that allow open and free participation in the public sphere, particularly eliminating economically induced social impediments blocking the realization of the social freedom normatively implied by the capitalist market; the final condition of democratic will-formation is a social organ that provides individuals, associations and civil society with the assurance that their publicly formed will can be effectively transformed into social reality. In the penultimate section of the book, Honneth at length gives independent attention to this social organ, the constitutional state.

(b) In the historically rich second leg of his normative reconstruction, Honneth starts from the moment just after the French Revolution when the constitutional state was captured by a strong bureaucracy and the capitalist class and when, parallel to it, Marx and Engels critically targeted the illusion of the state as representing the general interest. From there he follows in detail the historically varying articulation of the tension between the struggle for the constitutional democratic organization of the state and its capitalist instrumentalization right up to the present. Honneth takes this reconstructive starting point as validating the adoption of a deliberative conception of the state

rather than either Rousseau's plebiscitary or liberalism's representative version. Following the line from Durkheim via Dewey to Habermas, he regards the state as a reflexive epistemic organ which is not only rooted in the democratically acted-out will of the people, but is also responsible for intelligently and practically giving effect to that will and thus enabling and realizing the social freedom morally pursued by the citizens. The counterfactual normative idea of the rootedness of the state in democratic self-legislation allows him on the one hand to reject realist theories fixing on the logic of increasing power and violence, while attention to the actual conditions of the citizens' moral engagement and the state activation of an already institutionalized idea prompts him on the other to take theories of democracy and justice to task for their idealistic abstractness. The reconstructive exercise is complicated by the addition to the conflict between democracy and capitalist class selectivity of a second tension, namely, the contradictory relation between democracy and nationalism which became acute during the 1920s-1930s, shifted to the background for a while, once again became virulent from the 1980s onward in the wake of both migration stimulated by decolonization and the fiscal crisis of the state, and on the way was further encouraged by European transnationalization. Indeed, the core of Honneth's critical analysis is the vicious circle of the tension-laden relation of the constitutional state with nationalism, to one side, and with capitalism, to the other. It is these mal-developments that account for the inadequate historical institutionalization of the constitutional state, including its total collapse in Central Europe in the 1930s-40s, and the failure in our own time of the European project. Instead of working toward Europe-wide solidarity and political integration, the majority of states today have aligned themselves with the transnationalization of liberal rights to freedom alone which simultaneously opened a royal road to economic integration and disabled the social re-embedding of the market and the re-rooting of the state in democratic will-formation. Honneth decisively rejects theories of Europeanization in so far as they simply treat transnationalization as running in parallel with the extension of the market. The only exit he sees from what he regards as 'the crisis of the constitutional state' is the bundling of the public power of the unions, social movements and civic associations to put concerted pressure on legislators to domesticate the market. However, there is one major impediment to such an eventuality, namely, the lack of a shared background culture – a point made time and again throughout and pointing to the closing argument of the book.

(c) Honneth's normative reconstruction of the realization of the idea of freedom culminates in the conclusion in a prospective consideration of political culture. While granting that the sphere of public will-formation is a constitutional organ possessing legitimate power and representing the site of reflexive self-thematization, Honneth criticizes the generally accepted contemporary view of this sphere as generating the political-legal regulations necessary for the spheres of personal relations and the market economy in favour of stressing social struggles and changed habits and practices. These he regards as the motor and medium of the historical realization of the already institutionalized ideas of individual legal and moral as well as social freedom. Accordingly, democracy from the perspective of democratic *Sittlichkeit* implies a relation in which the three spheres mutually contribute to each other: social freedom is realized and can help secure personal relations and the market economy only to the degree to which these latter two spheres set free and realize their own particular principles of freedom. The fruitful maintenance of such a tripartite relation is in turn dependent on a learning process in which the spheres appreciate that the historically available principles of freedoms are not only the conditions of their own existence, but also in need of being reiteratively renewed and realized. The consequent fact that the members of society are simultaneously self-conscious democratic citizens, emancipated family members and free market participants means that, when they take part in public will-formation, they are unable simply to abstract from personal relations and the market. Instead, participation requires moral partiality for the freedom that can be actually realized at that historical moment and thus an inalienable sense of direction. But this raises the problem of the bundle of obligatory motives in the form of a shared cultural background that underpins will-formation in the public sphere.

In the wake of globalization, worldwide migration and European transnationalization, the national political culture of the past which focused the attention of all involved on all the relevant spheres and imbued them with a sense of common responsibility has been dissipated without any indication of a functional alternative. In the face of the absence of a broadened framework for the project of Europe and a widespread scepticism about the possibility of democratic European integration, Honneth draws the lesson from the normatively reconstructed historical process that no development, whether normatively progressive or regressive, took place without the involvement of the majority of European countries. Such a tight network of communicative relations binds them together that an event in one country is reflected in others too. On this basis, he pins his hope for the emergence of a new European culture of public will-formation and a transnationally engaged public sphere on historical consciousness and collective memory, particularly a new historical narrative traversing all the stations of the struggle for the realization of the already institutionalized principles of freedom. Honneth closes by expressing the conviction that the Durkheimian-Habermasian idea of 'constitutional patriotism' could indeed play a meaningful role in this narrative, but then only if it is infused with the patriotic potency preserved in the European archive of collective freedom aspirations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, in an impressive tour de force giving social philosophy a sharp sociological edge *Die Recht der Freiheit* offers a critical, normative reconstruction of democratic *Sittlichkeit* that enables Honneth to carefully carve out a clearly defined theoretical position for himself. Generally speaking, it is a left-Hegelian, critical-theoretical position that not only goes in fine detail into the dynamic interdependency among the three institutional spheres of personal relations, the capitalist market economy and public will-formation, but throughout also keeps in mind the dynamizing tension between the actual relations of recognition in these spheres and the counterfactual yet immanently effective ideas, ideals or principles representing their developmental potentialities. More particularly, he explicitly locates himself uniquely among the leading positions of the day – the overly normative theories of justice and democracy, the overly substantive communitarian theories, especially neo-Hegelianism, the normatively blind realist theories, and the uncritical and only partially critical social and political theories of European transnationalism. His inclusion of both actuality and potentiality entails also the adoption of a sophisticated sociological position that goes far beyond the pervasive tendency of mainstream sociology to take its object without reflection as readily available and confined to actuality.

If there is a weakness in Honneth's sociological turn, however, it is to be found in a theoretical reflexivity deficit that is visible at more than one level. First, throughout the book Honneth refers to 'the already institutionalized principles' of freedom that exert counterfactual pressure toward their full institutionalization and thus realization in concrete ethical life. Although advancing an institutional theory, he nowhere reflects on these different dimensions of institutionalization in their own right – what could be called cognitive and normative institutionalization respectively. In fact, Honneth's fixation on the normative dimension prevents him from acknowledging, let alone developing, the cognitive aspect.[ii] On one occasion when he does have the opportunity to conceptualize the yet to be realized already institutionalized principles as representing the cognitive order of society, he is on the one hand constrained by the traditional sociological conception of society's basic stock of necessary background knowledge and on the other reduces the cognitive order in an unaccounted manner directly and without residue to what he calls 'the moral grammar' of society. Here he obviously remains captive to the strong normativism of the Habermasian position he so badly wants to leave behind. Theoretical reflection at this point would not only have allowed him to make a conclusive break, but it would also have made for a less intuitive and hence a sharper analysis throughout. Here is the root of the most central tension, if not contradiction, in *Das Recht*

der Freiheit: although social freedom, like negative and reflexive freedom, is also an already institutionalized counterfactual principle forming part of the cognitive order, it is systematically treated as the social conditions under which the other two forms of freedom are realized.

A second instance of a lack of theoretical reflection concerns the implications of the threefold structure of communication, whether interaction or deliberation. In his analysis of the family, Honneth time and time again stresses that the major advance in the development of this institutional complex of personal relations is the emergence in the late twentieth century of the 'constitutive triangular relationship' between the parents, on the one hand, and the child or children, on the other, which distinguishes the family formed on the partnership model from the traditional modern one based on the patriarchal model. Through the development of family relationships in the medium of communication, the child acquired a role that serves as the vehicle of the third point of view which contextually transformed the relation between the first and second person points of view represented by the parents in a way that can be regarded as having a normatively progressive thrust. Indeed, Honneth describes it as 'the developmental form of intersubjective freedom'. Since he here neglects to reflect on the theoretical implications of this tripartite relationship, however, he completely forgets about the threefold structure of communication and the significance of the third point of view when he shifts to the public sphere as the site of deliberative collective will-formation. References to the public abound, to be sure, yet one never gets confirmation that it is grasped as the bearer of the third point of view nor that the theoretical significance of the role it plays in public communication is understood.[iii] Are the public and the third point of view it represents not also of interest in a consideration of the developmental form of social freedom in the public sphere? Here it should be pointed out that the third point of view, whether borne by the child or the public, is not solely of normative significance but also of cognitive significance since it is the vehicle of the incursive counterfactual impact of the already institutionalized principles of freedom forming part of the cognitive order on the particular mode of their normative institutionalization in concrete ethical life.

It seems as though it will take still more time before the Frankfurt tradition is able to come reflexively to terms with its own cognitive sociological assumptions and implications.

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[i] On the concept of immanent transcendence, see Strydom (2011a).
[ii] For a critical treatment of Honneth from a cognitive sociological perspective, see Strydom (2011b).
[iii] On the public and the third point of view, see Strydom (1999).

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