
Axel Honneth: *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*. Translated by Joseph Ganahl. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. Pp. 412.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670515000200

Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose? Not for Axel Honneth, whose Hegelian reconstruction sees freedom as the central, even sole, driving force of Western modernity. Other apparently central values are mere modifications of freedom. Nothin' don't mean nothin' if it ain't free.

In his deliberately grand narrative, Honneth follows Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* in developing an account of social justice by means of an analysis of society. The end result is an outline of society in terms of roles and ethical relations through which individuals can achieve freedom and self-realization. The construal is at the same time a description of the constitutive spheres of contemporary society, in terms of its less than fully realized potentials and promises. In Hegelian parlance, the "rational" is in the process of becoming "actual" in modern history, but owing to misdevelopments and social pathologies, there is still ample room for social criticism, in light of the very concept that these institutions (are meant to) embody, namely, social freedom.

Honneth, however, puts Hegelian teleological philosophy of history and metaphysics of reason aside, and sees the mundane notions of shared acceptance concerning the central value, and social reproduction guided by that value, as the mechanisms that keep freedom going. One unintended consequence of that shift is that Honneth's citizens must be "clear-sighted" about this process, while Hegel's construal may appeal to a "cunning of reason" even when the participants have only a partial appreciation, or are "dim-sighted" about what is worth accepting in the society as it is.

Honneth works with a threefold distinction of freedom as negative, reflective, and social, resembling Fred Neuhouser's reading of Hegel. It is hard to overestimate the fruitfulness of that conceptualization. The familiar *negative* freedom to do as one pleases amounts to freedom from external obstacles, whether or not one is a slave to one's passions and whether or not these are in line with the aim of freedom. The *reflexive* freedom of self-determination, self-realization, and authenticity overcomes these faults, but is limited in other ways, which *social* freedom then overcomes: the interpersonal and institutional surroundings must be freedom friendly, so that living in the available roles and taking part in the available practices do not amount to heteronomy or alienation. These surroundings are not mere contexts for action, or potential obstacles, but actualizations or embodiments of freedom, constitutive aspects of what it is to be free. Freedom is not mere individual self-determination, but partly constituted by standing in the right kinds of relations to others and to institutions. When these relations have the structure allowing the subject to be oneself

in the other, they are constitutive of freedom. Honneth's version of social freedom further emphasizes (arguably too strongly) the interdependence of agents' aims: freedom-constitutive relations are ones where the satisfaction of your aims depends on the satisfaction of mine and vice versa, so that we both cooperatively contribute to each others' aims. In any case, social freedom broadly along Honneth's lines seems undeniably a fruitful notion.

Even though the core of freedom is to be realized in social life, it is important that individuals have their private spaces for taking temporary leave from the social world, or for experimenting with new roles and orientations. These are provided by their *legal freedoms* and rights institutionalizing the negative aspect of freedom. It is equally important that individuals have their *moral freedom* to take autonomous critical distance toward their social roles: the social world is to be justifiable to all. Honneth stresses that these institutions of legal and moral freedom are central and well grounded, but their function is to provide protected and approved distance, of a *temporary* nature, from participation in the social world (lifelong only in cases where the available social worlds are wholly unacceptable). Yet there is a constant danger and tendency to mistake these forms of freedom for the whole thing, to forget that the "normal" or desirable state is that of participation in the social world (which should enable freedom for participants). The autonomization of distance can lead to familiar social pathologies of two kinds: first, legal considerations (in the case of legal freedom) can be applied beyond their proper scope, threatening the social bonds with excessive juridification, and moral agent-neutrality (in the case of moral freedom) may make one blind to the moral relevance of particular attachments. Second, they may lead to hollow self-understandings, when one starts to see oneself as nothing but a legal person or moral subject. The most extreme form of moral pathology is that of morally motivated terrorism.

Whereas the point of negative and reflexive freedom is to provide a protected option to "get away," the point of social freedom is to enable participants to be free within the social world. It comes in three variants: personal, economic, and political. The first is embodied in personal relationships, such as friendship, intimate love, and family life. They are Hegel's prime examples of the structure of finding oneself in the other, being oneself through the other—negative and reflexive freedom cannot capture the freedom-constitutive significance of such relations.

By far the most controversial and thought-provoking suggestion in Honneth's book is that the same goes for the market economy. When legitimate, the market is a form of cooperation, where the roles of workers, owners, speculators, moneylenders, and consumers are arranged so that the contribution of each complements the legitimate aims of the others. Mere market mechanisms do not guarantee that, so they must, first, be embedded in ethical understandings via discursive mechanisms providing the

needed socialization and deliberation, and second, they must be legally regulated. These ethical orientations and legal regulations are *intrinsic* aspects of the market economy, claims Honneth (drawing on a reading of Hegel, Durkheim, Parsons, and Polanyi). It is a misunderstanding to think of the market as a normatively disembedded sphere (just think of the ethics of what should not be for sale at all). But it is precisely as a project of a social freedom that the modern market economy is to be understood, and apparently has been understood by the most clear-sighted observers. Of course, Honneth sees the latest twists and turns of the neo-liberal economy as a massive misdevelopment threatening to ruin the achievements of previous generations and grinding the very project of social freedom to a halt.

Honneth's chapter on the market will raise objections from many viewpoints. Not much is said about why economic cooperation should take the form of a market at all. Not much is left of a Hegelian analysis of the market as a jungle of external relations, with a tendency to produce a "rabble," not to mention Marxist worries about the nature of capitalism, which are brought up but not really addressed. Further, it is not clear that the prevailing shared deep ethical understandings concerning the market are in terms of social freedom, as opposed to a more liberal individual freedom, or even a more minimal code of honoring contracts. That many of us are more or less mistaken seems to pose a problem for Honneth's "clear-sighted" view. Perhaps his forthcoming short volume on early socialism's reliance on social freedom will shed different light on the ideal, stressing again ethically motivated social struggles, as in his earlier work.

The third aspect of Honneth's construal discusses public will-formation and its execution via constitutional states. Against instrumentalist views, Honneth sees democratic public life as the central aspect of social freedom. As a kind of reflective cooperation it both constitutes an aspect of social freedom and regulates the other aspects of freedom (legal, moral, personal, economic). Democracy should be responsive to predemocratic forms of freedom and respect at least moral and legal freedoms (as is stressed by the liberal mainstream), but also the personal and economic aspects of social freedom that are realized in personal relationships and the economy. Honneth's Deweyan theory of democracy is familiar from his previous writings: both economic and democratic cooperation are aspects of social life more broadly construed. No doubt, other traditions stressing the agonistic aspects of politics will beg to differ concerning any predemocratic constraints on the democratic process, but many will also find the idea of democratic will-formation as a form of social freedom readily acceptable.

Against the promise of social freedom, in all three spheres massive misdevelopments have taken place. If Honneth is right, we will have a huge practical task in guiding the unfinished project of modernity back onto its tracks. Whether right or not, Honneth has provided us with a central reference point

for future debates on the nature of modernity, freedom, justice, and the social world.

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Giuseppe di Palma: *The Modern State Subverted: Risk and the Deconstruction of Solidarity*. (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2014. Pp. 126.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670515000212

Shelves in shops, libraries, and homes are groaning under the weight of books about neoliberalism. No doubt the global financial crisis (GFC) has proved a fillip to critics of free-market thinking everywhere. If arguments were won on the basis of tonnage, free-market philosophies would have fallen long ago under a weight of words. Academics, newspaper columnists, and leftist activists everywhere grapple with the vexing question of how neoliberalism survived and prospered as capitalism seemingly collapses around it. My answer to this question, admittedly only one voice among many far more astute commentators, is that (perhaps) we have misunderstood this thing we call neoliberalism. Maybe we have misunderstood what its advocates were going on about. And maybe in our misunderstanding we have been left sorely wrong-footed.

Now, this is not where Giuseppe di Palma starts with his argument in *The Modern State Subverted*. Di Palma takes the reader through his own critique of neoliberalism which, as would be expected of a political science professor, starts and ends with the state. He traces his analytical lineages back to Max Weber and to Michel Foucault, whose 1978–79 lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics* provide the grounding for the rest of his arguments. Bringing in Pierre Bourdieu for good measure, di Palma argues that neoliberalism has achieved the “‘creative destruction’ of the politics and collective life of advanced democracies” (2). It is, in this sense, not really an “economic doctrine,” rather it is “a way of governing a country and a way for upright citizens” (3). He spells out this perspective across nine short chapters that cover an array of topics from the rise of the modern state, responsibility and societal risks, attacks on the welfare state, criminalization of populations, the precautionary principle, and challenges to neoliberalism.

I want to highlight several salient arguments throughout the book’s various chapters, and then consider their relevance to ongoing debates about neoliberalism. For most of the book di Palma focuses on the neoliberal transformation of social risk into individual risk, and from class to global risks. In chaps.