7 Freedom and a Just Society—Three Hegelian Variations

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Hegel's legacy has been the object of numerous reactualizations and reappropriations, each new thinker reading it from the point of view of their take of the social and political concerns and philosophical needs of their time. Perhaps more often than with any other major philosopher, the exact relationship of appropriation and interpretation of Hegel has often been less than fully clear. Given Hegel's unique manner of conceptualization and writing, what exactly his view is on a particular issue formulated in contemporary terms has often been remarkably difficult to say. There is no doubt that freedom is a core concept of his mature social and political thought, but what exactly is his concept of freedom? What about justice? Does Hegel have a theory of justice, and if so, what are its basic contours?

Rather than trying to answer these questions directly, I will first critically examine two variations of the freedom-justice connection each of which draws on a fundamental principle or principles in Hegel and thus thematize different aspects of his thought, though neither of them are exactly Hegel's in detail. The first of the Hegelian accounts is by Axel Honneth whose work thematizes for the reader the question of the relationship of a theory of good life to a theory of justice, in that there is move from the first to the second in it that requires clarification. We find such clarification in Rainer Forst's response to and critique of Honneth and in his emphasis of "justification" as the core issue of justice. The confrontation of Honneth's and Forst's accounts also exemplifies a central question around Hegel's social and political thought, namely that of relativism or historicism versus universalism, with Honneth's thinking seemingly oscillating between these options and Forst taking a more straightforwardly universalist (and formalist) line. Contrary to views which emphasize the historicist aspects of Hegel's thought, if not simply construe him as an a priori historicist, I argue that Forst's is in fact the more Hegelian of the two accounts in its commitment to the capacity of human thought and discourse—in principle—to transcend any given horizon of thought or normative order. And yet, Honneth's insistence on the embeddedness

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of discourses of justification in the given system of norms and normative roles in which individuals find themselves resembles Hegel's own political realism and thematizes the need to reconcile both aspects of his thought: *both* the human capacity in principle for context-transcending reflection on the justness of the social order *and* the limitations in practice of individuals and groups for transcending the embeddedness and particularity of their perspectives. This brings us the concept of freedom which I will argue forms the fundamental principle of Hegel's own mature social and political thought: that of "concrete freedom."

A third account discussed will be my reconstruction of this concept and its implications to the problems raised in the critical examination of Honneth's and Forst's accounts. I will argue that the actual concept of freedom on which Hegel operates is more capacious than Honneth's and that it can do justice both to the actual, historically and socially given limitations, and to the capacity in principle of human thought to transcend them. I will end by returning to the question of the relationship of a theory of the good life to that of justice—this time in Hegel himself—and point to a reason stemming from the ontology of objective spirit to consider his account of a good society as the actualization of concrete freedom also as an account of justice.

Freedom as the Ultimate Good Provided by a Just Society

Axel Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition*, published in German in 1992 and in English in 1995 (Honneth 1995), is perhaps the most influential recent account to reactualize elements of Hegel's social and political thought. The first thing to note about the book with regard to our theme is that Honneth does not originally frame the book as presenting a theory of justice, or of a just society, but rather a "critical social theory" (Honneth 1995, 2) or a "social theory with normative content" (1). Instead of "social theory," Honneth could have equally well described his work as a work in critical "social philosophy," a branch of philosophy whose heritage Honneth subsequently locates in Continental European thought, starting with Rousseau's, Hegel's, and Marx's ideas of better or worse forms and tendencies of social life, the worse end shading into "social pathology" (Honneth 2007). What Honneth explicitly contrasts this branch of philosophy with is Anglophone political philosophy starting with Hobbes and Locke, which is the natural home also for the modern discourse of justice.

Notably however, a theory of justice is the framing in terms of which the English translator of *Struggle for Recognition* Joel Anderson introduces the book in his (possibly quite influential) translator's introduction (Honneth 1995, x–xxi), and it is the framing in terms of which Honneth's work is often framed in Anglophone discussion. But more importantly, it

is a framing that Honneth himself subsequently increasingly adopts for his theorizing, apparently due to a growing influence of Anglo-American political philosophy on his thinking. What, then, is the difference between framing the project of *The Struggle of Recognition* in terms of critical social philosophy and in terms of a theory of justice? A core idea of the book on the critical social philosophy framing is that a good society or a good form of human co-existence is one that to a reasonable extent provides individuals opportunities to the experience of being "recognized" by relevant others. The experience of recognition, in the three forms of love, respect, and esteem, supports the individuals' positive self-conceptions, which have similarly three dimensions corresponding to the forms of recognition. These positive self-conceptions—basic trust, self-respect, and self-esteem—are crucially important for the individuals' capacity for agency or self-realization and thus *freedom* in this sense (Honneth 1995, 92–130). In short: a good society provides its members reasonable chances to develop psychological resources for a free life.

Unlike in the original formulations in *The Struggle of Recognition*, where "justice" or "injustice" is barely mentioned,[1] in the early 2000s, Honneth starts describing experiences of lack or denial of recognition as "experience[s] of social injustice" (Honneth 2004, 352). This new framing arises together with the theme of *norms or principles*. Whereas in the old framing Honneth focused on the benefits of recognition for agential capacities of recognition, the psychological damages of its lack or denial, and the motivational underpinnings of emancipatory action, he now focuses more in particular on expectations of recognition "*held to be legitimate*" (352). What, then, makes a particular expectation legitimate? This is done according to the new framing by "norms" or "principles of recognition," an idea that becomes particularly prominent in Honneth's debate with Nancy Fraser in their co-authored book *Redistribution of Recognition?* (Fraser and Honneth 2003). More exactly, in *Redistribution or Recognition?* Honneth thinks of the three dimensions of recognition familiar from *The Struggle for Recognition* in terms of corresponding three "principles": that of "love" in intimate relationships, the "equality principle" in legal relations, and the "achievement principle" which applies to social hierarchy or distribution of material goods. On the new framing, undue withholding of recognition from individuals is not only something harmful but a failure to satisfy a relevant principle or norm of recognition and thus an *injustice*.

As for the *ultimate* legitimacy of recognition claims or expectations as matters of justice, Honneth's account seems hesitant between two views. On the one hand, the historically particular principles—Honneth has primarily the recent institutional history of Western Europe in mind—can be understood as the normative rock bottom without any further justification or legitimation other than that they have become generally accepted

and institutionalized or at best justified or legitimated by a more general principle whose general acceptance is specific to European modernity: that of freedom. Or else, one can refer to a foundation that transcends the historically given. Honneth opts for the latter strategy in a few places in *Redistribution or Recognition?* where he describes the need for recognition as a "quasi-transcendental interest of the human race" or the "form" of expectations for recognition as "an anthropological constant" underlying their historically changing "contents" (174) or, when he suggests that struggles for recognition point at "unmet demands of humanity at large," a reference point "beyond all given forms of social organization" (244). On this view, whatever is historically or culturally specific to the three recognition principles, they somehow rely for their ultimate legitimacy on universal human "interests," "expectations," or "demands." Combining the dots here, whatever more concrete specification legitimate recognition expectations may take in European modernity (or anywhere else), recognition in general is still something that humans need in the way argued for in *The Struggle for Recognition*: for developing psychological resources for freedom in the sense of self-realization. Honneth presents a further consideration for thinking that the institutionalization of the three principles of recognition, though they are on his view specific to modern societies, nevertheless represents normative progress. He says that they enable individuals "a higher degree of individuality," allowing them "to learn more about their own personality through the different patterns of recognition." They also allow for a greater inclusion of individuals with different personalities or characteristics as full members of society (Honneth 2004, 360). The institutionalization of the three forms of recognition in modern society as normative expectations in other words supports a greater range of possibilities for freedom as self-realization.

And yet, Honneth does not seem to think that freedom in this sense is a universal human aspiration but rather sees it as a specifically modern ideal. But if this is so, then the normative rock bottom for recognition claims as claims of justice appear, after all, historically specific or contingent. This is the direction that Honneth's theory takes on in the later book *Freedom's Right*, in which freedom is explicitly the central concept, with recognition receding somewhat in the background. Whereas in *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth focused on the psychological conditions of freedom as self-realization, in *Freedom's Right* his focus is on their objective social conditions. The book puts forward an ambitious three-componential theory of freedom, comprising of "negative freedom" in the sense of absence of hindrances to realizing one's aims and desires (with Hobbes, Sartre, or Nozick as some of the philosophical proponents of the idea), of "reflexive freedom" as the capacity to autonomous setting of aims (with Kant as the prime representative) or to finding out and following aims that are

authentically one's own (the romantic version of reflexive freedom), and, finally, of "social freedom" in the sense of one's ends or goals being supported by social reality and thus having a chance of actually being realized in it (Hegel's idea according to Honneth) (Honneth 2014, 1–11). Honneth now explicitly presents his theory as a "theory of justice," though as one with a heavy investment in social philosophy in the form of a "normative reconstruction" of the legitimizing ideal of modern society and its concrete institutionalization in its basic structures. There is, on Honneth's construal, ultimately one overarching ideal providing a modern democratic society legitimacy in the eyes of its members and thus grounding claims of justice and injustice for them: that of individual freedom (1–2). What Honneth conceives of as different forms of freedom— negative, reflexive, and social—form the essential components of what is actually required for an individual to be free in a concrete meaningful sense. On this conception a just society is—in the eyes of its members—one in which each of these requirements of individual freedom is supported by the various institutionalized spheres of social life.

Whereas in *The Struggle for Recognition* the question of whether freedom in the psychological sense of capacity for agency or self-realization should be thought of as a universal human aspiration or something specific to Western modernity remains open (see Zurn 2002), and whereas Honneth's thinking in *Redistribution or Recognition?* seems undecided between these options, in *Freedom's Right* Honneth apparently solves the problem by arguing that freedom is *de facto* the central value against which members of modern societies judge the legitimacy of the social order and thus one that they have accepted as the key criterion. Whether or not social institutions support the freedom of individuals is hence the criterion on which they are judged as just or unjust by their members. That said, Honneth's "normative reconstruction" of what is required for freedom to be actual involves a rather ambitious revision or rearticulation of simpler theoretical and everyday ideas. Ultimately, it requires not only negative freedom as a sufficient space free of external hindrances to realizing one's aims and to experimenting with different lifestyles and not only the reflexive freedom to autonomous moral reflection or search of authenticity in the setting of aims but also social freedom in the sense of the concrete reality of social relations and structures being congruent with or supportive of one's ends so that they can be actualized. As for the last-mentioned requirement of individual freedom, Honneth's "normative reconstruction" presents the modern forms of personal relationships as promising to support freedom in this concrete social sense by—according to their legitimating principle—promising mutual care and support for the realization of one's aims for their participants. Honneth then presents the market economy as harboring the legitimating principle of freedom in the cooperative or social sense

of support for the actualization of the respective aims of its participants.[2] Finally, he reconstructs the modern democratic society and state according to its legitimizing principle or promise as a deliberative enterprise where decisions are deliberated and made cooperatively, the actualization of any one actor's aims being thus dependent on the realization of those of many others—ideally of most if not all members of society.

Both versions of Honneth's theory of justice—the earlier recognition-focused one (on the justice framing) and the latter one focused on freedom—are clearly *Hegelian* in that they draw on and reactualize an important idea that is Hegel's: recognition is undoubtedly a fundamental concept in Hegel's social and political thought; also, Hegel clearly subscribes to a concept of freedom that is more substantial, demanding, and "social" than the negative or reflexive concepts. Neither one of these theories pretend to be *Hegel's* theory of justice however, differing in methodology and details in multiple ways from anything Hegel wrote. A particularly salient difference concerns Honneth's normative reconstruction of democratic institutions as a sphere of social freedom and Hegel's suppression of democratic will formation.[3] But there are other respects in which Honneth's account differs from Hegel's and in terms of which, I shall argue, Hegel's account is superior. These will be taken up in the second and third section.

Justice and Freedom as Participation in Justification

One of the questions that Honneth's move from the original framing of his theory to a justice framing has thematized is this: how does one actually get *from* saying that someone needs something, or that humans generally need something, *to* saying that their having it is a claim of justice, or that their not having it or being deprived of it is an injustice?[4] This question takes us to the second approach to a theory of justice, one represented by Rainer Forst whose own inspiration is more Kantian, but which, as I will argue, is in a certain respect more Hegelian than Honneth's: namely in its commitment to the capacity of the human mind—in principle—to transcend limitations it has set for itself.

In an article commenting explicitly on Honneth, Forst argues that whereas "recognitional accounts provide an indispensable *sensorium* for experiences of social suffering generally and of injustice more narrowly […] when it comes to the question of the criteria of the *justification of justice* claims, a procedural-deontological, discourse-theoretical account is necessary" (Forst 2011, 307). Two things are notable here. Firstly, Forst connects the idea of justice to *justification*. Secondly, he refers to the Habermasian idea of *discourses* of justification or more broadly concrete social processes of asking for and providing justification for claims and critically reflecting on the validity of the offered justifications. On his account, it

is crucial to distinguish conceptually between "*fundamental* (or *minimal*) and *maximal justice*." "Fundamental justice" requires the establishment of a "basic structure of justification" where all members of a society or social whole have a say on the institutions they live under, this requiring that they have a sufficient "status and power" to do so. "Maximal justice" then refers to a "*fully justified basic structure* […] that grants those rights, life chances, and goods that citizens of a just society could not reciprocally deny each other," or in other words a system agreed upon by those participating in processes of deliberation on what goods are such that deprivation of them counts as an injustice (309–10). To refer back to Honneth, is it, for example, a requirement of justice that a society provides individuals reasonable opportunities to receive love or care in families or other close relationships or that social hierarchies or distribution of wealth mirror the value of contributions to the common good or social cooperation? These are undoubtedly good things, but that alone does not make them matters of justice. What would lend claims for them legitimacy as claims of justice according to Forst is that they can be accepted as such by those participating in processes of deliberation and thus "justified" by and for them. The first and primary question of justice is hence now who has a "status and power" to participate in such processes. For Forst *this* is the normative rock bottom: everyone affected has a fundamental or "basic right to justification" as a rational being or person (Forst 1999). It is *the* foundational justice claim the denial of which is impossible: there are no good reasons you could offer for depriving me of the right to be offered justifications and participate in deliberation on institutional arrangements that affect me. Not respecting that right of mine, Forst argues, means not respecting me as a rational being or person with "dignity" (Forst 2011, 309).

The question that became thematic in considering Honneth's account—what provides the transition from alleged needs to claims of justice—is hence answered by Forst thus: some appropriate justificatory process in which particular claims are collectively accepted as legitimate and hence as something that can be expected to be met as a matter of justice. Is this something Honneth could accept as a complement to his view? Could he accept that the "principles" or norms that make something a claim of justice are something whose ultimate legitimacy rests on processes of justification a la Forst, at least on potential ones in which they *could* be justified for the concerned individuals?

Honneth resists the possibility. In a response to Forst he mounts what sounds like a familiar Hegelian critique of Kant and Kantian accounts: Forst's basic idea of the "right to justification" suffers from, and ultimately fails due to its "abstractness." In positing the idea of a "free and unrestricted discourse among all members of society" Forst does not take seriously enough the "historicity of contexts of justification" (Honneth 2011,

415). What Honneth has in mind more exactly is historically developed "social norms and corresponding roles" against and from within which individuals always judge the justifiability of particular social arrangements.

Strikingly, Honneth seems to posit the historically developed "norms" or "principles" themselves beyond critique or challenge, presenting them as something that critique or challenge always appeals to. In the introduction to *Freedom's Right*, he criticizes Kantian (and Lockean) theories of justice for stipulating "that the normative principles according to which we judge the moral legitimacy of social orders may not stem from within existing institutional structures" (Honneth 2014, 1). Is he thus actually implying that they should stem from them and that the existing institutional structures or the given norms, principles, and values of a culture or society are the ultimate reference point for claims of justice? Not quite. He is equally critical of historicist accounts that present the given principles, norms, or institutions of a culture or community as the normative rock bottom without asking whether they themselves are "rational or justified" (2). But what then makes them rational or justified on Honneth's account? In short, this is the promise of individual freedom as self-realization. This, however, as I pointed out, is on Honneth's more recent construal in *Freedom's Right*, a specifically modern ideal or value (1)—not (to borrow Honneth in the earlier book *Redistribution or Recognition?*) a normative reference point "beyond all given forms of social organization" (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 244).

The difference as well as possible connections between Honneth and Forst can be seen here in two interesting ways. Firstly, though the central role that Forst gives to the idea of justification might at first sight seem to introduce a drastic difference between his account and that of Honneth's, as we have seen justification is actually central for Honneth as well. The difference is rather in how the two thinkers frame justification: whereas Forst thinks of it in terms of concrete discursive processes of deliberation, Honneth thinks of it in terms of more inchoate acceptance. For Honneth, there is one overarching modern ideal or aspiration: that of individual freedom as self-realization. What makes a modern society just in the eyes of its members is that it enables or supports individual self-realization. In other words, social structures are justified for individuals—and thus freely accepted by them—if they can experience them as living up to this legitimizing or justifying promise. One difficult question here concerns the relationship between the philosopher Honneth's highly sophisticated construal of freedom and its requirements, on the one hand, and everyday understandings of freedom by the people in question, on the other. Does their understanding of freedom correspond to anything like Honneth's conception of it? And do they have any clear conception of the relationship of the basic structures of their society to their freedom? These are empirical

questions, but realistically "legitimization" on the Honnethian version must remain mostly in the form of inchoate, inexplicit, less than perfectly articulated thoughts, experiences or feelings about the social order and its relation to one's life chances. Here philosophical articulation or "reconstruction" may have a socially emancipatory role however: providing vocabularies or conceptual means for individuals to clarify the relevant ideas, realities, and their connections. To the extent that this can be connected to Forstian discourses of asking for, providing, challenging, and agreeing on justifications, perhaps the two thinkers are not very far from each other on this score after all.

The other way of seeing a difference and possible connections between the two accounts concerns their respective conceptualizations of freedom. In contrast to Honneth's highly elaborate construal of the psychological and social preconditions of individual freedom as self-realization, the fundamental concept of freedom in Forst's model is the broadly Kantian concept of freedom as autonomy, thought along Habermasian lines as participation in collective "law-giving" or the determination of the basic principles of justice and their application in discursive practices or processes of "justification." There certainly is a place for that in Honneth's *Freedom's Right* in its account of deliberative democracy (Honneth 2014, 253–335). At first sight one might think of this as only one aspect of what is required for a society to enable free individual lives according to Honneth. Yet, if one considers deliberative democracy as the discursive site where questions of the justness of social institutions and arrangements in Honneth's sense—as requirements of individual freedom—can be explicitly thematized and debated, there is again a clear point of proximity between Honneth and Forst.

A remaining question is, however, how far Honneth would want to maintain, against Forst, that individuals will participate in democratic deliberation always from the point of view of given "social norms and corresponding roles," unable to transcend them to an unrestricted discourse a la Forst or Habermas. If such ability, disability, or degrees thereof are regarded as empirical matters, Forst should not have any difficulty with agreeing that the transcendence is often difficult to achieve and that the "unrestrictness" of justificatory discourses in this sense is hence an ideal by no means easily realized. On the other hand, if Honneth is making the a priori or transcendental claim that it is logically or metaphysically impossible for individuals to question the given particular social norms or normative principles,[5] then in this respect Forst who would resist such claims is more Hegelian than Honneth. Let me explain.

There is a certain fundamental vision that unites the influential strand of recent neo-Hegelian thought represented by the Americans Robert Brandom, Robert Pippin, and Terry Pinkard. For all of these thinkers, reasons, norms,

and justification are fundamental to what Hegel calls "spirit." With different emphases and not insignificant differences between their individual programs, they all see spirit in deontological terms, as a realm in which humans transcend the dictates of nature, instituting a space where action and thought are guided by reasons and self-governed norms whose power over them relies on justification rather than instinct or brute force. Collectively, speaking humans are thus on this picture autonomous, self-legislating, and self-governing beings. Thought together with an ontological view of the being of social norms and a fundamental idea from Hegel concerning limitations that the human mind sets for itself, deontological neo-Hegelianism puts in doubt any a priori or transcendental claims about the limitedness of horizons of justification.

It is a basic social ontological fact that the existence of norms and normative principles as social realities, or as "objective spirit," depends on their acceptance by the individuals whose life activities are governed by them (see Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2011). The theoretical reference to such acceptance or "vertical recognition" alone would be however vulnerable to a simple objection: an individual is not bound by norms at all if the existence of the norms is wholly dependent on the individual's acceptance of them. The neo-Hegelian solution, in a nutshell, is to refer to "horizontal recognition"[6] between individuals in the sense of taking the respective others as having normative authority over the social norms in question. In short: the authority of norms over us is the authority of the others we recognize as (co-)authorities. Given these arguable facts about the ontology of norms, any idea of social norms as having a transcendental function strictly speaking in setting the horizon within which the justifiability of something else can only be asked by individuals is a non-starter. Social norms exist and have power over individuals only insofar as the individuals accept or recognize them vertically and recognize each other as authorities over them. Such vertical and horizontal recognitions are for the most part by no means deliberate or explicitly conscious acts, nor is there any guarantee that they are not ideologically colored or corrupted, or otherwise less than fully rational. Yet the idea that norms and corresponding roles posit a transcendental horizon strictly speaking for individuals living according to them is simply not viable.

All of this is but a concretization of Hegel's dialectic of the limit appropriated by Gadamer (1989, 338) and others: limitations that the human mind sets for itself are ones it has—in principle—already transcended. How difficult such transcendence is in practice is a context-dependent empirical question, and this holds also for Forstian justificatory discourses, or Honnethian deliberative democracy. Though Hegel himself was skeptical about the actual viability of collective discourse or deliberation for his time and place, the principle is nevertheless true to a fundamental tenet of

his thought: the capacity, in principle, of humans to question or withdraw their acceptance or recognition from, and to change what they limit or govern themselves by—here the norms of their social life. The distribution of actual status and capacity to do so—to return to Forst—is obviously a fundamental question. Though collectively speaking humans are free in the sense of self-governing beings, everyone actually having equal share of this freedom is a different matter. Forstian unlimited justificatory discourses in which all potentially affected have the right to participate are a way of addressing this issue in terms of *status*, yet they face a crucial limitation: the unequal distribution of the actual *reflective capacities* of individuals and groups participating.

Hegel's Concept of "Concrete Freedom" and Justice

It is all well and good to insist on the fundamental demand for justification as requirement of respect for persons, as Forst does, and his argument that no reason can be offered which could deprive someone of that right is profound. And yet, it does not address the empirical question of, not the recognized status, but the actual individual capacity to participate in unlimited reflection. The same goes for Hegel's idea of the capacity of the human mind—in principle—to transcend any self-posited limitations: for individuals and groups, the actual capacity comes in degrees and is issue-dependent. Hegel was of course perfectly well-aware of this fact, and his reading of the actual capacities of his fellow Germans or Prussians undoubtedly affected his view of the viability of genuine democracy as the ideal political order for his time and place. Though Honneth might not want to frame matters this way, his resistance to the unlimitedness of Forstian discourses has a certain analogy with this "realism" of Hegel's: though the philosopher (Honneth, like Hegel) is capable of reconstructing the rationality or justness of the social whole from a transcending perspective, ordinary citizens judge it from their limited perspectives or particular "contexts of justification" (Forst 2011, 415).[7]

But how then to reconcile the demand for justification of the institutions or norms of social life on the one hand with realism about people's actual capacities for context-transcending rational practices of reflection, deliberation, or justification on the other? Here Honneth's account has both some initial promise and certain fundamental problems. The promise is the intuitiveness of the notion of individual freedom or the everydayness of the experience of it, which would seem to provide a pre-theoretical, everyday measure of the acceptability or justness of social institutions, one which can function without requiring highly educated reflective or reasoning capacities. However, the problem which I have already hinted at is that everyday understandings of what is required for individual freedom

may differ drastically from Honneth's theoretically elaborate and erudite reconstruction of it. Indeed, part of why the reconstruction is needed is precisely because individual freedom is mostly thought of in inadequate ways. The hope is that the theoretical reconstruction will gradually seep into everyday understandings.

But there is another problem: Honneth's conception of freedom is, on the other hand, in a certain respect problematically limited and in a way which sheds further doubt on its actual application to social reality as a measure in light of which social institutions or norms appear justified to individuals. Namely, everything that Honneth says about freedom is eventually oriented towards one idea: that of individual freedom as self-realization. This is precisely the purpose of the psychological resources that experienced recognition according to *The Struggle for Recognition* supports. And it is what the abstract, reflective, and social dimensions of freedom and their institutionalization according to *Freedom's Right* support or are conditions of realization for. At the center of this conception is the individual who needs to be adequately free from hindrances to realize her aims (negative freedom), who needs to have adequate capacity and opportunity for moral reflection and experimentation of aims that she can recognize as her own (reflective freedom), and who needs objective support for realizing the aims she recognizes as her own (social freedom). Honneth's is ultimately a reductive picture of the sole value to which all other values are reducible for modern individuals: self-realization.[8]

Do modern individuals, in fact, judge the justness of a social order or social institutions *solely* in light of such a concept? How about, say, happiness or well-being? Honneth's claim for the primacy of individual freedom as realization of one's aims can reasonably only be an empirical claim about the relative priority of values in a typically modern Western value horizon and as such its veracity is a question for empirical social research. On a reasonable assumption this is something that varies significantly between individuals and social groups in any modern society—and not only since such societies, according to a view Honneth approves of, embody a plurality of views of the good life.

What would Hegel say? Freedom is after all undoubtedly the central normative or evaluative principle of his social and political thought. Is his account hence vulnerable to the same critique as Honneth's? I will argue that it is not and that the reason for this is that the concept of freedom Hegel operates with is in decisive respects different from that of Honneth. On the whole, I want to suggest that Hegel's concept is more promising as a framework for understanding what makes the given social order acceptable or justified for individuals than the models discussed above. What is the concept of freedom I am talking about? It is what Hegel in the Introduction to the whole of his *Philosophy of Spirit* presents as the "essence

of spirit": "concrete freedom" (LPS, 66–7; EPM, §382). Concrete freedom contrasts with "abstract freedom" as freedom in the sense of abstraction from determinations. Since everything finite is on Hegel's account constitutively determined by things other than it, the concept of abstract freedom can have only a limited range of applications as it cannot apply in relations to constitutive determinants. I can only be free from something that determines me contingently, not from something that determines me essentially or constitutively.[9] "Essence," in an Aristotelian manner, is here is an immanent ideal which something can live up to more or less. Yet, Hegel does not suggest that its realization is a natural tendency independent of human action and choice: it is a *"Bestimmung"* in the dual sense of a given determination and of a vocation, something that "the human" should "make of himself" (LPS, 60). This formulation is open enough to allow for different degrees of conscious human foresight and planning, depending on the issue, level of analysis, and the humans in question.

What, more exactly, does he mean then by "concrete freedom"? It is not "abstract" freedom from determination, but freedom, in the sense of, to use Hegel's familiar metaphor, finding oneself in it, or being conscious of oneself in it. Its logical structure is that of "absolute negation" or "double negation" (SL, 531) or to use another familiar formula of Hegel's, the "unity of identity and difference" (SL, 358). The fundamental issue here is constitutive relations to something other than oneself. Freedom in such relations means firstly acceptance of its otherness (difference or a first negation) and secondly overcoming its alienness (identity or a second negation). Combining the dots here, concrete freedom as the "essence" of "spirit" applies to all the constitutive relations of human persons to otherness as the immanent ideal of these relations.[10] Hegel's state, in the overarching ethical sense as including all the spheres of social life, is a system of concrete freedom or in other words the ideal organization of society enabling maximization of concrete freedom in all of the constitutive relations of human life: with regard to one's own given determinations (self-relations with regard to one's physical and other needs, particularities of character, talent, and capacities), with regard to other human beings (horizontal relations), and with regard to the state or the society as a whole and its various institutions (vertical relations).[11]

There are two immediate advantages in Hegel's conceptualization of freedom compared to the models discussed above. Firstly, it is formulated at a level of abstraction that can accommodate different levels of the capacity for context-transcending rational reflection and discourse and different modes of acceptance or vertical recognition of social institutions. Thinking in terms of opposite ends of a spectrum, *both* approval based on an ideally rational context-transcending reflective process or "unlimited reflection" *and* non-reflective satisfaction with them and one's life in them can count as forms of "consciousness of oneself" in them and thus as concrete freedom. Furthermore, and importantly, there is no radical gulf between the

reflective and the unreflective modes since concrete freedom is *the* criterion on which all relations constitutive of spirit or the human life-form are to be rationally evaluated, and the realization of the concept is nothing else than human beings being conscious of themselves in core elements of their world, whether reflectively or unreflectively. For the philosophically educated, the society which they can evaluate from a purely rational perspective as realizing its essence or concept is a world where they (given sufficient personal luck and effort) can also concretely experience it being realized in their relations with the fundamental determining "others" of their existence: their needs and capacities, the other people of their lives (family members, other members of civil society, their compatriots), and the social institutions and structures at large, all of these forming an interlocking, reasonably harmonious whole. The philosophically uneducated can have the same lived experiences, and becoming philosophically educated (think of a member of the "substantial estate" going to university and becoming an educated member of the "universal estate") merely means learning the conceptual means for reflecting the rationality of the whole, which is to say evaluating it in light of the concept of concrete freedom.[12] In the ideal case he is able to conclude that it lives up to its concept and thus that the social whole is the "actuality of concrete freedom" (PR, §260), i.e., realization of the immanent ideal of spirit or the human life-form.

The other advantage of Hegel's conceptualization of freedom is that it is capable of encompassing a range of values without reducing them to one as Honneth's conceptualization does. Importantly in this regard, Hegel's "concrete freedom," unlike Honneth's self-realization, is not merely freedom of *doing* but also of *being*. Consider Hegel's parade example of concrete freedom—friendship and love. Hegel writes (as cited by and translated in Honneth 2014, 44) in the Addition to §7 of his *Philosophy of Right*[13]:

> Here [in friendship and love], we are not one-sidedly within ourselves, but willingly limit ourselves with reference to an other, even while knowing ourselves in this limitation as ourselves. In this determinacy, the human being should not feel determined; on the contrary, he attains his self-awareness only by regarding the other as other.
>
> (PR, 32)

Now compare this to Honneth's construal of social freedom, including in friendship and love, here formulated in terms of "mutual recognition":

> […] "mutual recognition" merely refers to the reciprocal experience of seeing ourselves confirmed in the desires and aims of the other, because the other's existence represents a condition for fulfilling our own desires and aims. […] both subjects recognize the need to supplement their respective aims, thus seeing their own aims in the other […]
>
> (Honneth 2014, 44–5)

Honneth's construal here and elsewhere in *Freedom's Right* is focused on realizing "aims" and thus on action,[14] in general that of self-realization, whereas Hegel's is not. This is not to say that action is irrelevant for Hegel, far from it: §7 of the *Philosophy of Right* is part of Hegel's description of freedom of the will in the concrete sense of freedom. Yet, Hegel's focus on the will at the beginning of the *Philosophy of Right* should not be read as meaning that action is the only dimension of life in which concrete freedom as the concept or immanent ideal of spiritual, i.e., human life applies. He is clearly not suggesting, in contrast to Honneth's construal, that friendship and love realize freedom solely in the sense of supporting my capacity to realize aims that I have. Concrete freedom is a broader ideal according to which I am free when I can accept the fact that I am determined by otherness and when I can "willingly" limit myself or allow myself to be limited or determined by it since it is something in which I can be conscious of myself. Crucially, the world of objective spirit—the social or human world—is brought about by human will, and concrete freedom is not merely the immanent ideal of willing, but also of what it creates: ideally a world of concretely free being, i.e., human life. Though willing is an essential component of such being, being is not reducible to willing.

We can apply this basic idea to the three constitutive relations mentioned earlier: horizontal relations with other persons, vertical relations with social institutions, and self-relations. In horizontal or intersubjective relations my being concretely free has a *subjective* and an *objective* aspect analogous with the subjective and objective focus of Honneth's earlier and more recent work. In the *subjective* sense I am concretely free when relevant others affirm me by their attitudes of recognition towards me, whether in the sense central for the above-mentioned neo-Hegelians of respecting me as a co-authority on the norms of co-existence,[15] in the sense of recognizing me as a legal person (PR, §36), in the sense of caring about my happiness or well-being (especially in the family) in the sense of appreciating me as a competent contributor with "honour" (PR, §253), or in some other sense—with the different social spheres embodying different combinations of the different forms of recognition (see Williams 1997, 133–282). Though part of this is its supporting or enabling the realization of aims I have, relationships of recognition are not merely instruments for action but themselves, ideally, free ways of *being with* other persons. The *objective* aspect here is that the individual and collective ways of life of the others relevant for my life are compatible with or supportive of my ways of life and the other way around. This involves not only the compatibility of "aims" a la Honneth, and thus willing in a narrow sense, but everything that gives an individual human life its particular characteristics. The mutual complementarity of friends obviously consists of much more than their aims in life, and the same goes for all interpersonal or intergroup

relations. Though the civil society is the realm of economic action and realization of interlocking individual aims, Hegel's state as a whole is an ethical unity in which individuals can be "conscious of themselves" in their compatriots not merely as enablers or complements of the realization of their individuals aims but also, and more broadly, existing, by and large, harmoniously with them in all essential aspects of life. The mix of the exact modes of finding oneself in the relevant others differs from one social sphere or kind of social relation to the other (relations within the family, within the different areas of civil society, or within the political state), but they are all specifications of the ideal of concrete freedom. It should be clear that freedom in this sense is not a value separate from other values such as happiness or well-being but rather accommodates them.

Concrete freedom in vertical relations with the formal institutions and norms as well as with the informal norms of social life means then nothing else than freely (meaning here not under coercion) accepting or vertically recognizing them as good or just, where the mode of acceptance or recognition ranges from the most reflective and distanced philosophical thought and discourse to unreflective feelings of being at home in the society (see PR, §§132, 268). Crucially, the criterion on which philosophical thought or unlimited reflection—whether individual or collective—judges the goodness or justness of the social institutions and structures of social life is none other than that on which it is also unreflectively experienced as good or just: that of them facilitating concrete freedom in all the essential relations of life, including horizontal relations and self-relations.

Finally, concrete freedom in self-relations as finding or being with oneself in one's individual determinations—particularities of character, talent, capacities, and needs—is integrated with the two previous axes of relations. It is these determinations being developed in socialization into a system which is *both* genuinely one's own, not forced or externally imposed but fitting to me as in individual, *and* in sufficient harmony with the social relations and social whole more broadly in which one lives, given the particular roles one inhabits in them. Only when I am also concretely free in my self-relations, can I actually experience the social world as realizing concrete freedom in my individual case.[16]

Much of the above is compatible with Honneth's and Forst's accounts of social justice and aspects of it can be further elaborated or developed on in terms of insights by the two thinkers, even if Hegel himself might not have agreed with the further developments, especially in the important issue of democracy and concrete democratic processes and discourses of justification. Yet, Hegel's is a broader and more systematical sweep on everything that makes individual and social life good according to its concept. But how about the question I posed at the beginning with regard to Honneth: what, if anything, makes all of the above not merely a matter of a good

society but a matter of justice? There is one general perspective which provides an interesting answer: as I said, the realization of or "actuality" of the concept or immanent norm of human life according to Hegel is not a natural process but something that "the human" should "make of himself" (LPS, 60) and that (s)he thus bears responsibility for. However obscured individual or collective agency in bringing about a free society may be in Hegel's mature treatment, and despite the fact that focusing on action alone in reconstructing Hegel's conception of freedom is one-sided, it is striking that the *Philosophy of Right* begins (in PR, §§5–7) with a treatment of the will. Ultimately, the world of objective spirit is a human creation, a creation of willing in a broad collective and historical sense, and thus the realization of its immanent ideal—concrete freedom—is a human responsibility. Though not a duty in a narrow moral sense, it is a duty of justice.

Notes

1 For the few uses of the term "injustice" (*Unrecht*) in the book, none in a theoretically emphatic sense, see Honneth (1995, 131, 138, 154).
2 For critique, see Jütten (2015) and Ikäheimo (2022, 188–95).
3 This is something Honneth criticizes Hegel for in Honneth 2010, a reconstruction of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which includes many of the ideas applied to contemporary social reality in *Freedom's Right*.
4 Interestingly, Honneth's (2023, 14) himself ask this question concerning Miranda Fricker's work: how does one get from a discourse of epistemic virtues to claims of epistemic justice and injustice?
5 See the revealing formulations on taking social and institutional norms as given in Honneth (2020, 4–5).
6 I borrow the language of "vertical" and "horizontal" recognition from Siep (2014).
7 See Yeomans (2015) on Hegel's take on the social situation and respective forms of accountability of the different estates.
8 See Halbig's (2018) analysis of the ways in which Honneth reduces all other values to that of freedom.
9 For a more extended discussion of this theme in Hegel, see Gleeson and Ikäheimo (2019), and Ikäheimo (2022, Chapter 3).
10 See *idem*.
11 For a more detailed working out of these dimensions, see Gleeson (2020).
12 This is crucial for avoiding the common impression that the philosophical justification of Hegel's state is something obscure hidden somewhere in the *Science of Logic*, the precise nature and connection to the argumentation of the Philosophy of Objective Spirit, or of *Philosophy of Right*, is a topic only for a very small minority of specialists.
13 The *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* is cited according to Nisbet's translation.
14 Two examples: "we cannot experience ourselves as free as long as the preconditions for the implementation of our autonomous aims cannot be found in external reality." (Honneth 2014, 47); "to be reconciled with reality, the

subject must seek to realize aims that presuppose other subjects who pursue complementary aims" (*Ibid*. 48).

15 PR, §217A: "My will is a rational will; it has validity, and this validity should be recognized by others."

16 Reconstructing the details of this dimension of concrete freedom would require drawing at length on the Subjective Spirit section of the *Encyclopaedia* [EPM], a task for which there is no space here.

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