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Stephen W. Sawyer

William J. Novak

University of Michigan Law School, wnovak@umich.edu

James T. Sparrow

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**SOCIAL FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND THE POLITICAL:
Three Reflections on Axel Honneth's *Idea of Socialism***

Stephen W. SAWYER, William J. NOVAK, and James T. SPARROW

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HONNETH, DEWEY, AND THE DEPTHS OF DEMOCRACY
BY WILLIAM J. NOVAK

One of the most surprising and satisfying aspects of Axel Honneth's timely new book *The Idea of Socialism* is its recovery of the continued vitality of John Dewey's pragmatic democratic philosophy. While many critics and theorists of the modern condition ignore Dewey's contributions (or treat them as something akin to Americana—quaint relics of a bygone, “metaphysical-club” era), Honneth understands Dewey's historic achievement as well as his ongoing political relevance. Indeed, as early as 1998, Honneth identified Dewey as key to moving the tradition of radical democracy beyond conventional liberal, republican, or proceduralist narratives. “In his endeavor to justify principles of an expanded democracy,” Honneth noted, Dewey (in contrast to republicanism and democratic proceduralism) took his orientation “not from the model of communicative consultation but from the model of social cooperation.” Here, in Dewey's robust understanding of “the social” and the interactive, experimental character of all reality, lies the early kernel of the bold claim Honneth advances in this book that Dewey's

ideas might represent “the best chance for socialism” to reestablish its own relevance in the 21st century.

Honneth’s rediscovery of Dewey is reminiscent of Jurgen Habermas’s own epiphany when he first met Richard Rorty at a Heidegger conference in 1974 San Diego. Rorty was performing what Habermas called “a strange concert,” trying to harmonize “the dissonant voices of three world-famous soloists”: Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and their most unlikely comrade John Dewey – “the radical democrat and most political of the pragmatists.” Did Dewey really belong in such company? Habermas wrote that he initially found the association “so obscene” that he lost his temper. Ultimately, however, this was to be the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Dewey (along with Emerson, Whitman, and James) was central to Rorty’s long philosophical crusade for the “priority of democracy over philosophy” and the “priority of technology over theory.” And Habermas gradually embraced a grander conception of Dewey’s pragmatism as the “radical democratic branch of Young Hegelianism” and “the third productive reply to Hegel, after Marx and Kierkegaard.” Indeed, Habermas even suggested that pragmatism—via the quintessential American philosopher of praxis—could provide something of a much needed antidote to the historic “weaknesses of Marxism with respect to democratic theory.”

In *The Idea of Socialism*, Honneth basically picks up where Habermas left off. Here, Dewey becomes a central figure in Honneth’s attempt to wean socialism from a narrow 19th-century obsession with predominantly economic and industrial forms of domination and unfreedom. Honneth’s critique of early socialism in this regard is unsparing: “Not only did early socialists restrict the community of solidarity entirely to the economy, ... [but] for reasons that are hard to understand, [they] simply ignored the entire sphere of political deliberation.” Honneth’s critique here is very much part and parcel of his larger positive project to construct a more expansive idea of “social freedom” beyond the confines of earlier critical traditions. Here too Dewey becomes an important, if unlikely, comrade. Three elements of Dewey’s thought are particularly significant to Honneth: 1) his historical experimentalism—his pragmatic, experimental stance towards historical processes of transformation that challenged the totalizing and necessitarian features of other social theories; 2) his rich concept of the social—his claim that “associational or communal

behavior constitutes a basic feature of all things”; and 3) Dewey’s similarly thick rendering of the complex socio-historical processes of democratic will-formation. As Habermas anticipated, Dewey’s radical democratic theory operates for Honneth precisely to compensate for socialism’s historic weaknesses with respect to the more democratic and political aspects of social freedom.

Now, as James Kloppenberg and Robert Westbrook have shown in extraordinary detail, the depths of Dewey’s pragmatic democratic theory are surely worthy of such a recovery. Indeed, I would suggest that even Honneth’s current rehabilitation only begins the process of excavating the true depths of Dewey’s radical democratic commitments. For within and beyond Honneth’s recovery of admittedly key features of Dewey’s philosophy lay three distinct levels of mutually-reinforcing processes of democratization that could be usefully deployed in any attempted re-animation of socialism and social freedom today. I would call those three levels or layers of Deweyan democracy: 1) critical democracy; 2) substantive democracy; and 3) social democracy.

Critical Democracy. The first level at which Dewey’s philosophy embraces the democratic is at the intellectual level of critique. For one of the first tasks of any democracy must be the vigilant and persistent critique of remarkably resilient and subversive forms of anti-democratic thinking. Honneth’s earliest work on Dewey draws attention to Dewey’s first writings where this first level of critical democracy was most transparent. As Morton White suggested some time ago, pragmatism was part of a larger “revolt against formalism” that fueled the original growth of a more empirical and critical American social science. Anti-formalism and critical realism crossed boundaries from literature and law to metaphysics and social ethics, taking direct aim at anti-democratic legal-economic formalisms. As Honneth notes, Dewey’s first essay on the democratic theory was “The Ethics of Democracy.” Notably, this 1888 piece had a villain. For it takes the form of a review of Sir Henry Maine *Popular Government*. At the time, Maine was the reigning expositor of a long-standing English aristocratic critique of democracy. Maine’s contempt for the masses burned brightly, holding that “the gradual establishment of the masses in power is of the blackest omen for all legislation founded on scientific opinion.” Taking explicit aim at the lyrical American notions of Walt Whitman and George Bancroft that

democracy was “the tendency of the ages ... which no human policy could hold back, Maine recommended “a healthful douche of cold water.” He tellingly associated democratic aspiration directly with “socialist fantasy” and “communistic schemes.” Dewey’s 1888 review wasted little time skewering Maine’s rather empty and formalist caricature of democracy in the aristocratic English constitutional tradition. Dewey deemed Maine’s idea of democracy to be “based upon a view of history which denies to it all meaning; . . . his forebodings for its future rest upon an irrelevant basis; and that the supposed destructiveness is due to the occasional necessity of doing away with the evils engendered of aristocracy; and that the legislative infertility attributed to it goes rather to show that in every state except the democratic, the masses of the people are more opposed to change and progress than the few.” Dewey concluded, “The charge lies against the form of government which breeds such a mass, not against democracy.”

Dewey would go on in this short piece to anticipate much of his future democratic theory. But here it is the first level critique of the critiques of democracy—the realist and anti-formalist critique of anti-democracy—that is most telling. In his more mature *Liberalism and Social Action*, Dewey would similarly skewer classical liberalism for its undemocratic metamorphosis. Dewey famously decried the fact that late 19th-century classical liberalism had lost sight of its emancipatory origins and grown a) too static (failing to account for dramatic changes in socio-economic context); b) too negative (emphasizing a formal, legalistic liberty from the state instead of a substantive, positive commitment to human freedom); c) too economistic (defining freedom in almost exclusively monetary terms and ignoring the importance of cultural expression: science, art, intellect, aesthetics, romance); and d) too individualistic (failing to recognize human beings as fundamentally changing and growing, associative, social, and relational creatures). In America’s so-called first Gilded Age – also known as the “Lochner Era” – Dewey contended, American liberalism was fast transmogrifying into a reactionary form of laissez-faire apologetics. This is a classic example of critical democracy in intellectual action.

Substantive Democracy. Already in his first essays, however, Dewey also began moving systematically from realist and anti-formalist critique towards a more positive, pragmatic, and political program of

what I would call substantive democracy. Substantive democracy and not mere procedural or mechanical democracy. Dewey's contemporary W.E.B. Dubois understood something of the essence of the distinction when he talked about "abolition democracy," noting that "the failure of democracy lies in the fact that it has not been tried in precisely those activities of life where it is most important." Dewey himself was as critical of the limits of 19th century "democratic" politics as Honneth is of 19th century socialism. "The problem of democracy was seen to be not solved, hardly more than externally touched," Dewey argued, "by the establishment of universal suffrage and representative government." The mistake common to almost all conventional treatments of democracy was to see it primarily as a matter of "the form of government" – a matter of mere arithmetic concerning governance by the one, the few, or the many. "To define democracy simply as the rule of the many, as sovereignty chopped up into mincemeat," Dewey held, was the product of "abstract and purely mechanical" formalism. It fundamentally erred in mistaking narrow democratic means for democracy as opposed to larger substantive ends. While most commentators, like Maine, focused on democracy as a simple matter of constitutional structure, representational arithmetic, and electoral instrumentalities, substantive democracy required that voting and officeholding as democratic tools also secure greater democratic objectives. Dewey was forceful and unambiguous on this very point: "Universal suffrage, recurring elections, ... and the other factors of the democratic government are means . . . for realizing democracy. . . . They are not a final end and a final value." Substantive democracy implied "something more"—something beyond the "quantitative or numerical" characteristics of "a special political form," beyond "a method of conducting government," beyond "something that took place mainly at Washington and Albany." To hold otherwise—"to erect means into the end which they serve"—was to defend an empty formalism, what Dewey provocatively dubbed democratic "idolatry."

What then was that "something more"—the larger substantive elements and ends to be served by democratic mechanisms, procedures, and tools? Something of a hint is contained in the actual substantive and pragmatic policies—ends, outputs—endorsed by Dewey and American progressive reformers, as Honneth puts it, "in the experimental search for the most comprehensive answer to a

socially problematic situation.” In a crucial point elided by almost all conventional democratic theorists, the essence of substantive democracy inhered precisely in the open-ended range of pragmatic, problem-solving policies that advanced larger democratic ends and goals. Dewey and Tuft’s extraordinary text *Ethics* culminated, as it had to, in very specific experimental policy proposals like Henry Seager’s positive “Programme of Social Legislation.” For the heart of substantive democracy implicated the whole spectrum of complex and elaborate policies of public provision – for the maintenance and advancement of public welfare, public health, public safety, and public utility. This is where public problems were solved and technologies of government and law were deployed. Herein was Rorty’s priority of democracy over philosophy and technology over theory. Most important for substantive democracy were those provisions aimed at the equalization of public citizens and the eradication of unequal barriers to communication, interaction, and possibility. Here substantive democracy placed special emphasis on those areas of legal-economic public policymaking that involved the distribution and redistribution of public resources: public goods, public services, public benefits, and even public property.

Social Democracy. Now, of course, Dewey fully recognized that the projects of critical democracy and substantive democracy could be pursued via means that were not inherently democratic. Elite intellectual critique and administrative expertise, for example, could be marshaled quite effectively for democratic ends at the first two levels of democratization. But as Dewey and Honneth fully suggest, a truly radical democracy requires a third level of development and a further socialization. This is what Dewey referred to with deceptive simplicity as democracy as “a way of life. The “political and governmental phase of democracy,” was but a vehicle for “realizing ends that lie in the wide domain of human relationships and the development of human personality”—“a way of life, social and individual.” The “key-note of democracy as a way of life,” was the broader substantive and equal due regard for the welfare of each and every member of the community in the active, ongoing creation of the conditions of collective life together. That was what Dewey meant when he held that “the problem of democracy” necessarily involved the problem of “social organization” as “all those who are affected by social institutions must have a share in producing and

managing them.” Obviously, this rendering of a new democracy was self-consciously anti-aristocratic and egalitarian in all its manifestations. “The aristocratic ideal” of “the elect few,” Dewey asserted, left “the many outside the pale with no real share in the commonwealth.” Where aristocracy worked a basic “blasphemy against personality,” the new “democratic movement” included every human “personality” according to the “ideal of equality” in which “democracy lives and moves.” Social democracy entailed a broad ethic of inclusion, nondiscrimination, and the removal of all barriers to social interaction. As Dewey concluded, “Democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith . . . in the potentialities of human nature as that nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth.” “Intolerance, abuse, calling of names . . . because of differences of race, color, wealth, or degree of culture” were nothing short of “treason to the democratic way of life”

Tall order this new critical and substantive vision of social democracy. No wonder Honneth can harness it effectively in his larger effort to re-envision socialism and broaden social freedom in the contemporary era. This is a most welcome intervention, especially given the much-commented-upon democratic deficit in recent economic and political trends. We seem to live again in what Hannah Arendt called “dark times” – periods in which the “public realm” has become so “obscured,” so “dubious,” and so “despised,” that people ask no more of politics or democracy than that it serve personal, private, individual, and ultimately petty interests. In just such times, I concur with Honneth that a return to John Dewey offers up a new way of thinking about the potentialities of a new democracy – simultaneously radical, political, and social.

THE POLITICAL LIMITS OF AXEL HONNETH'S *IDEA OF SOCIALISM*
BY STEPHEN W. SAWYER

Axel Honneth's *Idea of Socialism* is an important clarion call for an urgent rethinking of the possibilities of a socialism for the twenty-first century. At the heart of Honneth's not-so-modest proposal is the attempt to renew socialism by moving it beyond its traditional emphasis on economic domination narrowly construed. Nineteenth-century socialists, he argues, rested their idea of "social freedom" too much on overcoming the singular economic domination of capitalist markets and the industrial economy, and in consequence, bequeathed us an unnecessarily circumscribed vision of freedom largely responsible for the impasse of socialism today.

Drawing directly on his magnum opus *Freedom's Right*, Honneth argues that a proper renewal of socialism requires an abandonment of this rather blinkered view of "socialism's founding fathers" in the 1830s and 1840s, as well as a return to and reconsideration of Hegel's more expansive theory of social freedom. Honneth draws particular attention to Hegel's claim in his *Philosophy of Right* that a proper and more thorough-going freedom can only be achieved through the coordination of intersubjectivity (love, friendship, the family, etc.), civil society (including the market economy), and the state. By building on this more capacious Hegelian notion of freedom, socialists must "interpret liberal rights to freedom not as a restriction but as a necessary condition for economic social freedoms." More importantly, in the sphere of public authority or the state, Honneth emphasizes "the process of democratic will-formation" as central "to the principle of social freedom." Integrating a respect for "basic" individual rights, intersubjective freedom, and democratic will-formation, he argues, might just provide the necessary "path to renewal" for contemporary socialism.

Beyond Hegel, Honneth's enlarged vision of social freedom also draws on John Dewey's pragmatic conception of public knowledge and social intelligence, Jurgen Habermas's conceptions of communication and the public sphere, and Emile Durkheim's notion of a functionally arranged and integrated society. These ideas come together in resonant passages such as the following:

The solution Dewey proposed counts today as everyday pragmatic knowledge and can be understood as a continuation of the already

mentioned notion that the stage of the social, unused potentials for social renewal can only be discovered through a process of communication which is as unrestricted as possible. If we take this idea further and determine which authority within a functionally arranged society should take over the task of integrative steering, it will become obvious that the appropriate institution is that of the “public sphere” in which all participants take part as freely as possible.

With this broadened genealogy of social freedom, Honneth provides a new theoretical foundation for a renewed socialism just as contemporary democratic politics seem to be calling for it. But it is precisely here, on the question of democratic politics and “the political” that those interested in bringing the demos back into our understanding of social justice may have the most questions. Importantly, Honneth’s *Idea of Socialism* radically expands and relativizes the social (beyond the mere field of market and civil society) so as to include democratic will-formation. At the same time, however, by bringing the demos back in through the social, it would seem he turns his back on the political.

In short, Honneth grounds his liberal democratic renewal of socialism squarely in the social, *not* the political. Democracy, democratic politics, and democratic will-formation participate in the process of creating social freedom as social forms. His specific reading of Dewey in combination to the sociology of Durkheim and Habermas’s social theory push him on more than one occasion to suggest that social freedom will be achieved as society becomes an “organic structure” or is “functionally arranged.” Honneth writes for example that “the democratic public sphere [...] must take over the role of supervising the functioning of the entire organic structure and of making the requisite adjustments.” In other words, the expansion of social freedom beyond the economic to the realm of democratic will-formation requires, as Honneth argues, greater “functional differentiation,” “organic structure,” the integration of the complexity of modes of social action and “adjustments.” One might reasonably ask then: can an organic, functionally arranged democratic society be achieved without a conception of the political?

As our democratic politics become more polarized, such stark depoliticization may prove difficult. Of course, the ambition in raising

this issue is not to read against the grain of Honneth's interpretation. His account is convincing on many levels: the return to socialism's origins as well as the attempt to ground a rereading of socialism in the ideals of the French Revolution, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and John Dewey (the thinker that Habermas declared the great representative of the democratic wing of left-hegelianism). But are there other ways of reading some of these same sources that would build on Honneth's insights while also allowing for a democratic politics and opening up toward the political?

One such resource may reside in Hegel's own account of the relationship between civil society (and the market) and the state. This passage is important for gaining perspective on Honneth's work of recovery because it is precisely by reconceiving and reinvigorating the connection between civil society or the market and the democratic will-formation of the state that Honneth sees so much potential for reinvigorating socialism through a pragmatic democracy. The challenge however is that in his account, the relationship between these spheres is guided by a principle of "functional differentiation." That is, he does not seem to see the relationship between these spheres as a potential site of conflict, debate or tension. In fact, he explicitly refuses to give any credence to the contingent forces that once did and might once again produce new and vibrant forms of social legislation. While Honneth certainly recognizes that debate and conflict will take place within the sphere of democratic will-formation, he does not seem to suggest or recognize that the political will also seep into the actual articulation between the different spheres of social freedom themselves, for example in determining the very relationship between civil society and the state.

Hegel, on the other hand, takes great pains to discuss the articulation between these two spheres, raising the essential question of power and the necessity for a constant negotiation in the relationship between individual activity and the ideals of a collective state. The transition from civil society to the state in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* comes in a section entitled "the police and corporations." It is in this section that he explains how the infinite variety of particular interests within civil society come to serve the general interest of the state. Five key elements shape this relationship. First, Hegel explains that in the form of civil society characteristic of ethical life, the "business of one is carried out on behalf of all" (§235).

That is, by pursuing one's individual interest, one is also necessarily also contributing to the betterment of society as a whole. Second, he insists that in order to ensure this process of contributing to an organic whole through one's individual actions, exchange and procurement require oversight. That is, since particular interests may in some cases not serve the universal idea of the state, but only the private interest of the individual, oversight by regulatory bodies to ensure their contribution to the state is necessary. Third, if such oversight is not practiced, then purely private self-interest within civil society will not be corrected and will contribute to inequality. Oversight by regulatory powers must therefore reduce such inequalities because, according to Hegel, such impoverishment is necessarily arbitrary and contingent within an ethical life. Fourth, it is therefore regulatory police that guarantees the "universal" inherent in particular interests because it prevents the contingencies of particular actions (like impoverishing others) from taking hold. And finally, fifth, in this process of ensuring the universal qualities of particular activities, "no objective boundaries can be drawn" (§234).

So in order to create an organic whole in which individual activities in the market or elsewhere are carried out by the individual for her own sake and on behalf of all, regulatory oversight is necessary. This regulatory oversight provides the connecting tissue between civil society and the will-formation that takes place at the level of the state. Moreover, these regulations cannot be clearly defined in advance and may even be boundless. They depend on "customs, constitutions, prevailing conditions, emergencies." This does however raise a more fundamental problem for Hegel (and for us): if this regulatory oversight has no clear limits (legal or otherwise), what are the mechanisms that prevent this regulatory police from becoming arbitrary? If no boundaries can be set, then how and when is the use of such "unfixed" power to be defined and limited?

Hegel provides two sets of responses to this question, a local and a state response. The first comes in his discussion of corporations where he claims that professional associations and cities must attempt to regulate themselves and remain subject to oversight by police. That is, in this case oversight must remain local in nature. Since the oversight provided by associations and police is local, the risk that it will overstep and the dangers of arbitrariness are minimized. How then might regulation be managed at the level of the state? Here,

Hegel expressly moves beyond the realm of the democratic to give power of oversight to the few—but essential—bureaucrats at the head of state and a constitutional monarch who guarantees the state's unity. These bureaucrats and the monarch, he argues, will not be limited, but there is no danger of arbitrary power because they will identify entirely with the universal ethical ideal of the state and therefore by definition cannot use their power arbitrarily in their own private interest.

Of course, as Marx pointed out in his critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state, such an approach has obvious limitations. A recognition of these limitations ultimately bring us back to Honneth and the political limits of a Hegelian account of social freedom. Indeed, much like Hegel also evacuated the democratic political from the essential task of monitoring, overseeing, and even "adjusting" the relationship between civil society or the market and the will-formation that takes place within the state.

Paradoxically, it was precisely this limitation that occupied many of the theorists that Honneth suggests were interested in overcoming domination solely within the economic sphere. When Honneth writes that "early socialists ascribe no independent role to political democracy," he oddly misses the fact that many thinkers who were contributing to the founding of socialism did discuss democracy and recognized it as fundamental. Moreover, they did not cordon it off into a distinct sphere of social action. Marx, Louis Blanc, Ledru Rollin and many others' discussions of democracy during this period in fact contributed to politicizing the relationship between the state and society. One needs look no further than Marx's critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state, or Louis Blanc's "*L'État dans une démocratie*" to find contributions to an immanent principle which could guarantee a properly political relationship between civil society and the state—as opposed to Hegel's relatively weak structural guarantees which hinge on either localism or an unrealistic definition of the constitutional monarch and the bureaucrat. As Marx wrote: "Monarchy cannot, while democracy can, be understood in terms of itself. In democracy none of the moments obtains a significance other than what befits it. Each is really only a moment of the whole *Demos*." These early socialists therefore used democracy precisely to describe their ambition to achieve socialist ideals in a non-arbitrary way. For all of these thinkers, as Honneth points out, socialism

provided a sophisticated conception of a free egalitarian society. But democracy provided another essential contribution to this socialist innovation: it was at once the political form of free will-formation which was grounded in such equality (as Honneth highlights), as well as the non-despotic means of realizing such freedom by regulating the relationship between civil society and the state. As Louis Blanc argued in *The State in Democracy*:

If Jacques oppresses Pierre, will the 34 million individuals that make up French society all run to protect Pierre, to protect liberty? It would be foolish to assume so. How then does a society intervene? Through those whom they have chosen to represent them toward this end. But these representatives of society, these servants of all the people, who are they? The State. So the State is none other than society itself, acting as society, in order to prevent oppression and maintain liberty.

In Blanc's account, democracy was therefore expressly not considered specific to only one social sphere, such as the market. In other words, the action of democracy was not set aside by such early socialists. It was in fact the very means by which the relationship between society and the state was overseen. Since the regulation between these spheres could not be functionally or organically established or pre-determined—Blanc clearly states it would be a mistake to think so—it must be regulated. But it cannot be regulated by distant bureaucrats or a constitutional monarch who Hegel had placed outside the political. In Blanc's argument, the regulation itself must be democratic, that is political, to the extent that it is managed by representatives who are none other than agents of society acting upon itself as society. And it is from this perspective that the calls for universal suffrage by the *démoc-socs*, or democratic socialists, of the 1840s must be understood. Not so much as a "basic right" or an attempt to integrate a liberal conception of will-formation, but rather as a necessary means for preventing regulatory administrative power from becoming driven by arbitrary or despotic experts. Democracy, for these early socialists, was the means of preserving the socialist ideal by politically saturating the very relationship between the state and society.

So far from ignoring and setting aside the democratic, these early democratic socialists were searching for ways of increasing popular participation through social movements and the vote. In so doing, they politicized the very nature of the state-society relationship, ensuring that even the relationship between the fundamental spheres

of social action, which Honneth so rightly places at the center of our quest for freedom, were political.

WIDENING THE GYRE
BY JAMES T. SPARROW

Axel Honneth's *Idea of Socialism* seeks a new grounding for solidarity that is firmer than the industrial-age assumptions that shaped socialist thinking at its origins in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Honneth aims to recover those social and political energies that somehow managed to explode the dead husk of the Ancien Régime at the end of the eighteenth century, yet merely sputter on today when confronted by the recrudescence of a latter-day mercantile despotism. The key to doing so, he argues, is freeing ourselves from the conceptual shackles of modern capitalism's industrial birth-pangs.

We are living at a moment in history when the destabilizing eruptions of the two industrial revolutions have long since been assimilated by "traditions" capable of yoking them (if never quite subordinating them) to equal self-government under law. They buffet the world still—those atomizing blasts unleashed by steam and commodification, and the synthetic fusions wrought by chemicals and cartelization—but we know how to deal with them, even if we currently lack the political will to do so. For this reason, Honneth is right to look beyond the conceptual horizons of the industrial age. What is needed is a New Democratic imagination capable of making the invisible new sources of power legible, and subjecting them to democratic problem-solving.

At the heart of this book, as in the last section of Honneth's previous work, *Freedom's Right*, lies the concept of *social freedom*: a collective condition predicating the fullest possible recognition and agency of individuals on their actions to enable each other's independence (15). Honneth identifies the conjoint pursuit of social freedom as the proper object of an egalitarian politics that can thrive in our times, unconstrained by the original conditions of the industrial era.

The defining feature of Honneth's social freedom, and the reason for his reliance on Pragmatic ethics, is a refusal of the economic determinism that ultimately hobbled the early socialists' conceptions

of revolution and solidarity, their two main antidotes to market society. (Chapter II) When defined exclusively within the economic sphere, socialism proved insufficient to grapple with the variegated domains of the modern world. Honneth follows Luhmann in defining these domains according to a “functional differentiation” into discrete domains, each with its own logic and normative system. (77-79; 129n2) Three kinds of free association in particular attract Honneth’s sustained attention: those exercised in market exchange, civil association, and constitutional democracy (58-59; 88-89; *Freedom’s Right*, §6.1, 6.2, 6.3).

To escape the monistic cage of historical necessity in which Marx, Proudhon, and the rest imprisoned themselves, Honneth substitutes a Neo-Pragmatist “historical experimentalism,” adapted from Hegel by way of Dewey. (Chapter III, esp. 60-64) In socialism’s benighted days, “historical necessity” dictated the eventual triumph of class consciousness among the proletariat, which was destined to dissolve capitalist enterprise, private relations, and bourgeois politics into a revolutionary whole. Now, according to Honneth, the future belongs to all citizens of the public sphere, who must experiment conjointly to solve problems “for each other,” (19) thereby placing their freedom on an objective foundation (23), removing barriers to ever-wider communication among all members of society (60), and harnessing the energies of “holistic individuals” (24) to the collective genius of democracy to knit together all spheres of society without subsuming them into a monolithic economic “base.” This conceptual move expands the idea of solidarity for a world in which industry is no longer the dominant economic sector, wage earners are not necessarily the most decisive (or even the most abundant) agents of historical change, and the ideal of planning has fallen before more distributed modes of coordinated action.

This vision of communicative solidarity, flexible and capacious enough to hold liberty and equality together in productive tension, is bracing and generative. It opens a new way to account for and respond to various sources of exploitation—notably the gendered and sexed kinds, although race, empire, and cultural hegemony could just as easily fit—without reducing them to some *a priori* scheme determined by economic imperatives or psychological needs. It allows social citizens to summon all the energies unleashed by the market mechanism, by “free association” in civil society, and by political

competition under constitutional government (88-89), while adding a reflexive principle of mutual recognition intended to counteract the fissiparous and centrifugal defections authorized by liberalism (94).

Most importantly, Honneth's vision of solidarity refuses to accept early socialism's subordination of liberty to equality and solidarity—the source of its most tragic compromises from the very beginning. Gone is the insistence that civil liberties are rationales for bourgeois domination under the sign of private property; rights are “perfectly compatible” with social freedom, requiring as they do the “same pattern of mutual supplementa-tion.” (82) This is a strategy, Honneth claims, that “overcomes liberalism from within” by replacing an economically administered society with the “free interplay” of a democratic way of life. (105-7) It is well-suited to counteracting the perils of our contemporary society, in which computation, networked communication, and financialization have worked in concert to liquify the relationships on which older ideas of solidarity drew to reorganize power in a more democratic fashion.

To re-conceive solidarity as free association Honneth relies on a Pragmatist ethics, which opens his analysis up to new conclusions about how much liberty an egalitarian politics can sustain. Just as the Pragmatists believed the old myths of sovereignty and property could be discarded for new ones with greater modern “cash value” (to paraphrase James' *Meaning of Truth*), Honneth believes liberty and equality can be redefined to contain each other simultaneously (105), thereby escaping the categorical opposition on which liberal political philosophy is founded and through which neoliberals have made socialism seem antiquated, dangerous, or inconceivable. And certainly the Pragmatists were not wrong, if their extraordinary social and institutional accomplishments at all scales—municipal, regional, national, or international—were any indication. (See the reviews by William Novak and Stephen Sawyer in this exchange.) This is why Honneth insists the way forward depends on an institutionalism operating through a “plurality of functionally specific actors” and roles (95) motivated by resolutely heterogeneous subjectivities. (97-8) He understands this is necessary for the “holistic individual” to “participate equally at every central point in the mediation between the individual and society,” thereby guaranteeing that freedom does not undermine the “superordinate entity of society.” (92-93)

As Honneth's exploration of social freedom makes clear, our notions of a positive democratic power are woefully under-developed. (This was also true of the idea of positive liberty in the nineteenth century as it strained against liberalism's negative.) Too often democratic theory adopts a liberal conception of power as the great evil whose containment, counter-balancing, or extirpation defines the very purpose of "liberal democracy." Clearly this will not do for a politics predicated on solidaristic work to build a public sphere. The need for a more developed conception of democratic power reveals itself with particular clarity toward the end of *The Idea of Socialism*, where Honneth concludes with a defense of the "democratic way of life" as the guarantor of social freedom. The ecological influence of this life world is distinguished by its capability to "overcome social dependency and exclusion"—indeed, to counteract all forms of domination and coercion in all spheres of modern society. (106-7) A "modern society cannot be genuinely *social*," he argues earlier, "as long as the spheres of personal relationships and democratic politics have not been freed of coercion and influence." (89-90)

The problem of how to unleash and safeguard democratic power in the world still needs to be worked out, one experiment after the other. Liberal theory is probably not equal to the task of doing so, as democratic power requires more than solving collective action problems to maximize preferences or solve security dilemmas. This is the challenge of democratic sovereignty: it is constitutive of the very public itself. The persons who convene, sustain, and defend the public—against enemies internal and external—are the sovereigns. In sharp contrast to Schmitt's sovereign, only they can prevent emergency from devolving into exception while unleashing a political will as boundless as the problems it takes on. They are the ones who define the public welfare and decide how to direct the public purpose. Unfortunately, they may also elect to divide or misdirect the latter in order to traduce, privatize, or seize hold of the former, as Honneth is well aware. (101; *Freedom's Right*, 278-9) Widening the gyre of conjoint interest and action may unleash the social power of modern society, but it will not necessarily bring contingent, open-ended democratic solutions—and could invite solutions of a more final variety.

In addition to this constitutive, inward-facing conundrum of how to constitute a sustainable public, the problem of democratic sovereignty also has an outward-facing aspect. This has to do with the

scope and boundaries of egalitarian politics. Honneth's sovereign, the citizens constituting the democratic public sphere, can theoretically extend as far, geographically and socially, as the problems they choose to solve together. Ultimately he wants a public produced by experiments unbounded by the exclusions of the nation. But to get there he thinks it inadvisable to leap to a post-national cosmopolitanism that would abandon robust regulations (like social welfare or gay marriage) that nonetheless still institutionalize the collective work of democratic politics. (99-100)

Although Honneth argues that socialist experimentation "needs to be transnationalized" to operate on an equal footing with capitalism, he recognizes that there is still much work to be done to "clarify its relationship to the nation-state"—perhaps by articulating and reinforcing "international interdependence." (94, 99) Yet he does not look to the European Union for salvation, since its coordinating matrix is a common market whose institutions were built almost exclusively on liberal principles. (*Freedom's Right*, 333-334) The only kind of public authority he finds credible beyond the nation-state would appear to be an international coordinating bodies modeled on NGOs like Amnesty International (99-100, 102). In this regard it would be interesting to know what he thinks of the historian Sam Moyn's critique of human rights and humanitarian internationalism as a *Last Utopia* that is *Not Enough* to secure social citizenship.

This brings us to the final conundrum of democratic power; the challenge of robust yet open-ended membership. Honneth makes the social citizen both his ideal political subject and his democratic sovereign: "the citizens assembled in the democratic public sphere are the only ones who can be convinced to tear down existing limitations and blockages cautiously in order to enable free cooperation in all major social spheres." (97) Yet citizenship is a much older model for belonging and obligation than the economic interdependence and functional differentiation on which socialist solidarity is supposed to be based (77-79; *Freedom's Right*, 3-4). If we are moving into a world run by the one percent and defined by automation, artificial intelligence, and financialized detachment from broader social reproduction, it is unclear that the "organic analogy" Honneth wishes to deploy (91-92) will guarantee that citizens of any polity will recognize those outside the city walls, or even subject themselves to the "superordinate" priority of the social, no matter how it is defined.

What Yeats observed almost exactly a century ago holds even truer today: “the centre will not hold.”

A solidarity sufficiently capacious to balance equality and freedom in a dynamic society requires a clearer understanding of the nature of democratic power as much as it does a suppler restatement of liberty. Honneth’s new book makes major strides toward the latter goal, and sets the stage for pursuing the former. Our understanding of social citizenship is immeasurably enriched as a consequence—and just in time for the next widening of the gyre.

ABSTRACT

Axel Honneth’s *Idea of Socialism* is an important clarion call for an urgent rethinking of the possibilities of a socialism for the twenty-first century. One of the most surprising and satisfying aspects of Axel Honneth’s timely new book is its recovery of the continued vitality of John Dewey’s pragmatic democratic philosophy. These reflections on Honneth’s use of John Dewey for democratizing social freedom, take stock of and explore the political limits of Honneth’s social reconstruction.