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Perspectives on freedom

Normative and political views on the preconditions of a free democratic society

Perspectieven op vrijheid

Normatieve en politieke zienswijzen betreffende de voorwaarden voor een vrije democratische samenleving

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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Hans Arentshorst

geboren op 14 december 1982 te Noordwijk

Promotoren: Prof. dr. H.H.A. van den Brink

Prof. dr. M. Yrjönsuuri

Prof. dr. A. Laitinen

Co-promotor: Dr. J.H. Anderson

The degree is awarded as part of a Joint Doctorate with the University of Jyväskylä.

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To me, human societies, like persons, become something worthwhile only through their use of liberty. I have always said that it is more difficult to stabilize and to maintain liberty in our new democratic societies than in certain aristocratic societies of the past. But I shall never dare to think it impossible. And I pray to God lest He inspire me with the idea that one might as well despair of trying.

Tocqueville[1]

[1] Quoted in White 1973: 222.

Introduction: The problem of freedom today

In 1975 John Pocock famously coined the term ‘Machiavellian moment’, which refers to the moment when people start to realize that their political order is not a reflection of an eternal order or part of a divine eschatological story but that it is *mortal* and surrounded by a dangerous sea of historical contingency (Fortuna), which can only be kept at bay with the help of creative political action (virtù).[2] Recently, Luuk van Middelaar has argued that the European Union had such a ‘Machiavellian moment’ in the period following the economic crisis of 2008: after decades in which the story of the EU had been told as an eschatological narrative, Fortuna now started to knock at its door with a series of crises – the euro-crisis, the Ukraine-crisis, the refugee-crisis, and the Atlantic crisis (Trump and Brexit) – which confronted people with the mortality of the EU and the need for political *virtù* in order to stay alive.[3]

This traumatic experience seems to be closely connected to the renewed struggles that we can witness today about the meaning and realization of the ideal of *freedom*. After decades of wide-spread belief in the benefits of globalization, marketization, open borders, and de-regulation, we are now facing a countermovement consisting of various forms of populism and nationalism that promise to restore borders, security, and identity. As Brexit and the recent elections in America (Trump vs. Clinton) and France (Macron vs. Le Pen) have indicated, the most important dividing line in western democracies seems to be no longer between the classical ‘left’ and ‘right’ and is instead between ‘open’ and ‘closed’.

These two movements of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ seem to be informed by two different ideals of freedom: globalization and marketization are often accompanied by an ideal of individual freedom that stresses private property rights, personal responsibility, and entrepreneurship within free markets, which reduces the preconditions of individual freedom to the market and the rule of law.[4] Populism and nationalism, on the other hand, seem to be informed by the ideal of restoring popular sovereignty and collective autonomy, and it usually tries to realize this by restoring the

[2] Pocock 1975: viii.
[3] Van Middelaar 2017: 30.
[4] This ideal has often been characterized by leftist thinkers as ‘neoliberalism’. As David Harvey for example puts it: “My view is that [neoliberalism] refers to a class project that coalesced in the crisis of the 1970s. Masked by a lot of rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility and the virtues of privatization, the free market and free trade, it legitimized draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power.” 2010: 10. However, the term ‘neoliberalism’ has become more and more discredited for being too vague, see for example Honneth 2016.

unity of 'the people' in a negative and exclusive way; namely by identifying the people's enemies, for example elites or immigrants.[5]

One could thus argue that both the 'open' and 'closed' movements in today's societies are often informed by problematic interpretations of the genuine emancipating ideals of individual and collective autonomy: globalization and marketization often contribute to an 'atomistic' picture of society in which self-sufficient individuals compete in free markets. This picture often neglects the social, political, and cultural preconditions of individual freedom, which can lead to feelings of social dissolution, powerlessness, and identity-crisis. Populists and nationalists try to fill this void by promising to restore collective autonomy, community, and identity, but in doing this they de-legitimize pluralism and threaten the freedom of minorities.

If we follow this simplistic sketch of the problem of freedom today, then we seem to be faced once again with the problematic pendulum swing between the extremes of 'atomism' and 'homogeneous unity' that keeps returning in modern societies in different guises. This raises the question of whether the pendulum can also be stopped somewhere in the middle in order to realize the ideals of individual autonomy and popular sovereignty – or, in other words, the ideals of liberalism and democracy – in a more balanced and less one-sided way.

In this dissertation I would like to contribute to a better understanding of this problem by turning to the insights of contemporary political philosophy. One way of picturing the contemporary landscape of political philosophy is to see it as divided between three camps – a moral camp, a social-ethical camp, and a political-historical camp – each focusing on a different type of problem. In the moral camp, philosophers focus on problems related to *legitimacy* and *justice*. Finding inspiration in natural law philosophy and Kant, these philosophers – such as today's procedural liberals or human rights theorists – are concerned with constructing legitimate moral principles and theories of justice. The central concern in the social-ethical camp is to identify the *social preconditions of individual self-realization*, which is often done through a 'via negativa', namely by identifying 'social pathologies' that prevent individuals from realizing themselves. In this group we find for example 'communitarians' or critical social theorists, who take their cue from thinkers like Aristotle, Hegel, Marx, Durkheim, or Dewey and who try to identify the social pathologies of today, such as alienation, reification, anomie, fragmentation, or atomism. Finally,

[5] As Jan-Werner Müller argues: "Populisten machen sich einige der Versprechen der modernen Demokratie – vor allem die Vorstellungen kollektiver Autonomie – zunutze, ohne diese Versprechen jemals einlösen zu können." 2016: 28.

there is the political-historical camp, which is concerned with the *preconditions of doing politics* or, differently put, with the *autonomy of politics*. They explore this also through a 'via negativa' by focusing on those historical situations in which politics is subordinated to morality, ethics, the social, teleology, ideology, or natural law theory, which leads to a minimization, or worse, the 'ending of politics'. Not surprisingly, we find here all the famous critics of totalitarianism, since this is perhaps the ultimate historical example of the 'ending of politics'. The inspiration in the political-historical camp is drawn from a miscellaneous crew, including Machiavelli, Tocqueville, Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, Claude Lefort, and Reinhart Koselleck, who all take, not morality or ethics, but *history* as their main guide.

In each of these camps we can find different accounts of freedom, and – since the problem of freedom today seems to revolve around the problems of atomism and homogeneous unity – it is especially the relation between the social-ethical camp and the political-historical camp that could be interesting; we can find all the famous critics of atomism in the social-ethical camp and all the famous critics of (totalitarian) homogeneous unity in the political-historical camp. If we want to find a middle way between atomism and homogeneous unity, then a confrontation between these two camps can perhaps be a fruitful starting point.

Interestingly, however, this confrontation has been largely absent in the philosophical debate. In recent political philosophy it has been especially the relationship between the moral camp and the social-ethical camp that has been extensively studied, for example in the debates between defenders of negative and positive freedom, between liberals and communitarians, or between Kantians and Hegelians. My aim in this dissertation will be to shift the perspective and try to set up a dialogue between the social-ethical and political-historical camp because I think that a constructive confrontation between the critics of atomism and the critics of homogeneous unity can help to raise the level of debate when it comes to the problem of freedom today.[6]

In this introduction I want to explore why there has been hardly any constructive dialogue between the social-ethical camp and the political-historical camp. At first sight, there seems to be an obvious reason, namely the fact that most socialists operate in the social-ethical camp and most (classical/conservative) liberals in the political-historical camp, and these two political orientations do not have a good track record when it comes to having constructive dialogues. However, besides

[6] The moral camp will thus not be discussed, which does not mean that I think that the moral camp has nothing to contribute to an understanding of the problem of freedom today, but merely that it falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

this obvious political reason, there are philosophical and methodological differences between the social-ethical and political-historical camp, which can help to explain the lack of dialogue between them.

I want to explore these differences by focusing, first, on the fact that the two camps are informed by a different approach to freedom that I characterize as *normative* and *political* (§1). Then, I will look at their different understanding of critique and the different methodological commitments involved – the social-ethical camp being concerned with *identifying social pathologies* (§2) and the political-historical camp trying to *add new perspectives* that can open up new possibilities for thinking and acting (§3). After exploring these differences, I will turn to the work of Pierre Rosanvallon and Axel Honneth and explain why their work is particularly suitable to set up a dialogue between the political-historical and social-ethical camp (§4). And finally, I will give a general overview of how I will proceed in the dissertation (§5).

1. Normative and political approaches to freedom

When discussing the ideal of freedom, it is common among philosophers to start by saying that freedom is one of the most ambiguous and contested concepts in political philosophy. Hegel wrote for example that, “No idea is so generally recognized as indefinite, ambiguous, and open to the greatest misconceptions (to which it therefore actually falls victim) as the idea of liberty.”[7] More recently, Isaiah Berlin wrote that there are “more than two hundred senses of this protean word [freedom] recorded in the history of ideas.”[8] And Hannah Arendt argued that, “To raise the question, what is freedom? seems to be a hopeless enterprise.”[9] But after these tentative remarks, most philosophers still continue to present their own account of freedom. Without pretending to give an exhaustive account of the different conceptions and approaches to freedom, I would like to focus here on a general distinction between ‘normative’ approaches to freedom (which we can find in the moral camp and the social-ethical camp) and ‘political’ approaches to freedom (which we can find in the political-historical camp).

One of the central inspirations of the normative approaches to freedom is still Isaiah Berlin’s article ‘Two concepts of liberty’, which distinguishes between ‘negative’ and ‘positive’

[7] Hegel, Enzyklopedie III, §482.
[8] Berlin 1969: 121.
[9] Arendt 1961: 143.

liberty.[10] As Berlin explains, whereas negative liberty is about "the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others",[11] positive liberty is about self-mastery, that is, "to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes."[12] Writing in 1958 at the height of the Cold War, Berlin argues that although negative and positive liberty – or 'freedom from' and 'freedom to' – may appear similar, they "have led in the end to the great clash of ideologies that dominates our world."[13] Berlin then continues by discussing the pros and cons of the two concepts of liberty: he rejects positive liberty because it is often accompanied by the problematic idea that there is a 'true' self, which can easily lead to a political power coercing people in realizing this 'true' self and thus 'forcing them to be free', and he defends negative liberty because it is compatible with value pluralism, which for Berlin is one of the central issues that modern societies have to deal with.

Leaving aside here an evaluation of Berlin's ideas, one can say that his article has become the usual starting point for normative discussions of freedom, which has led to a large amount of philosophical literature that has tried to further develop the conceptual analysis of negative and positive freedom.[14] Furthermore, Berlin's dual account of liberty would return in the debates between the 'liberals' and 'communitarians' in the wake of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls also analyzed the concept of freedom in order to determine "the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all",[15] but as 'communitarian' critics such as Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre, or Charles Taylor argued, this was based on an ill-conceived conception of the human person. What resulted was a discussion that largely overlapped with Berlin's distinction between negative and positive liberty, revolving around the opposition between the 'primacy of the right' versus 'the primacy of the good'.[16]

These debates stimulated revisions of Berlin's original distinction. This was done either by introducing new distinctions, such as Taylor's distinction between an 'opportunity' and an

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[10] The irony is that Berlin himself operated in the political-historical camp.
[11] Berlin 1969: 122.
[12] Berlin 1969: 131.
[13] Berlin 1969: 131.
[14] For an overview of the discussions following Berlin's conceptualization of freedom, see for example Skinner 1984. For a recent anthology see, e.g., Schink 2017.
[15] Rawls 1999: 220.
[16] For a discussion on the underlying assumptions in the liberal-communitarian debate, see for example Taylor 1995.

‘exercise’ concept of freedom,[17] or by introducing a *third* conception of freedom, such as Phillip Pettit’s and Quentin Skinner’s republican notion of ‘freedom as non-domination’ or Axel Honneth’s Hegelian notion of ‘social freedom’.[18]

In this way, there emerged what one could call a family of ‘normative’ approaches to freedom. This included thinkers from both the moral and social-ethical camp and reached from highly abstract conceptual analyses to detailed empirical analyses of society. Despite this wide variety, one could say that this family shares at least two characteristics: 1) it takes a *normative conception of the individual* (concerning its reason, dignity, autonomy, or self-realization) as the starting point for thinking about the social and political order, and 2) this then usually results in a *model of democracy* or a *theory of a just society*. The guiding idea of the ‘normative’ approaches to freedom thus seems to be that a normative theory of the individual and of individual freedom can serve as the foundation for determining what a justified model of democracy is or how we can realize a just society.[19]

If we now turn to the ‘political’ approaches to freedom that can be found in the political-historical camp, we are confronted with reflections on the preconditions of freedom that do not start from normative theories about the individual but that rather start from historical analyses of specific political realities in order to gain insight into the preconditions of doing politics, since for these thinkers the ‘ending of politics’ is the ultimate threat to freedom. One could say that whereas the ‘normative’ approaches start from a normative theory of individual, which then provides a normative position from which to determine the social order, the ‘political’ approaches understand freedom as a *counter-concept to order*.[20]

We find such an understanding for example in the following: in Hannah Arendt’s equation of freedom with spontaneity and beginning something new;[21] in Max Weber’s understanding of freedom as a counterforce to the stagnation caused by bureaucracy;[22] in Raymond Aron’s

[17] Taylor 1985b.
[18] Honneth 2017.
[19] Two examples are as follow: Philip Pettit says that, “If we take the goal of the state to be the promotion of freedom as non-domination – if we re-appropriate the republican ideal – then we can begin to see the outlines of a commanding political philosophy. Freedom as non-domination has attractive institutional implications, and, so far as that is possible in advance of more detailed empirical work, the book tries to outline the main lessons.” 1997: ix. Axel Honneth proposes “von nun an mit der normativen Leitidee der ‘sozialen Freiheit’ die Emanzipationsbestrebungen in allen Teilsystemen der gegenwärtigen Gesellschaft politisch repräsentieren zu wollen.” 2015: 154.
[20] Cf. Palonen 1999: 523.
[21] Arendt 1961: 166-167; 1993: 49. Arendt also speaks of this understanding of freedom as ‘natality’, which she equates with political action 1958: 9.
[22] Cf. Palonen 1999.

rehabilitation of ‘formal’ freedom in opposition to ‘real’ freedom;[23] in Claude Lefort’s idea that the central precondition of freedom is the acknowledgement of the indeterminacy of the social order;[24] and in Reinhart Koselleck’s argument that historical contingency should be understood as an important dimension of human freedom.[25] This understanding of freedom as a ‘counter-concept to order’ can also be found in the generational idea of emancipation whereby each new generation becomes, in Kant’s terms, ‘mündig’,[26] and it is also central in electoral politics where the voters have the possibility to break with continuity and start something new.

Today, these political approaches to freedom are continued on the one hand by ‘agonistic theorists’ such as William Connolly, James Tully, Chantal Mouffe, and Bonnie Honig, who have tried to incorporate the insights of the political-historical camp – especially concerning the nature of pluralism and conflict – into their own ‘agonistic’ theories and models of democracy. They have thus not challenged the development of abstract normative theories of democracy and freedom as such, but they have merely developed alternative theories and models that resist idealized pictures of harmony and incorporate the idea that struggle, disagreement, and permanent contestation are essential to democratic politics.[27]

These agonistic theorists can be differentiated from a second group of thinkers, including people like Frank Ankersmit, Kari Palonen, and Pierre Rosanvallon, who often explicitly distance themselves from normative political philosophy and the development of abstract models and theories[28] and who stick instead to *historical* investigations of representative democracy. In doing this, these thinkers also have important things to say about freedom, albeit not formulated in a

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[23] Aron 2014.
[24] Lefort 1986. Cf. Poltier 1993.
[25] Palonen summarizes Koselleck’s position as follows: “Koselleck’s point is that philosophers of history and the natural law theorists have a common ideal, which is oriented toward an elimination, or at least a minimization, of time, history and politics. They understand freedom as a realization of a plan, of a law, or a future ideal state. All contingencies – pluralisms, conflicts, unforeseen consequences, historical accidents, etc. – appear suspicious to them, instead of being treated as dimensions of human freedom in history.” 2002: 99.
[26] As Koselleck describes this ideal: “Mit jeder nachwachsenden Generation, korrespondierend den absterbenden Generationen, entsteht die Möglichkeit, sich aus bislang vorgegebenen Bindungen zu befreien.” 2006: 198.
[27] See for example Bonnie Honig’s comparison of ‘virtue’ political theorists (Kant, Rawls, Sandel) and ‘*virtù*’ political theorists (Nietzsche, Arendt): “The theories that displace conflict, identify politics with administration and treat juridical settlement as the task of politics and political theory I call virtue theories of politics. The theories that see politics as a disruptive practice that resist the consolidations and closures of administrative and juridical settlement for the sake of the perpetuity of political contest I call *virtu* theories of politics.” 1993: 2. See also William Connolly’s comparison of political theories that gravitate either toward an ‘ontology of concord’ or an ‘ontology of discordance.’ 1987: 10-11.
[28] See Ankersmit 1996: 1-20; Palonen 2002.

normative theory. It is this latter group of more historically oriented thinkers (as opposed to the 'agonistic' thinkers) that will be central in my further discussions of the political-historical camp.

If we now compare the different approaches to freedom in the social-ethical and political-historical camp – either 'normative' or 'political' – then it is not surprising that they lead to very different accounts of what the realization of freedom requires. For those in the political-historical camp, notions such as *contingency*, *indeterminacy*, or *social division* are often considered to be important preconditions of freedom, whereas for those in the social-ethical camp these are often perceived to be exactly the things that have to be *overcome* in order to realize freedom. This difference is closely related to the different pathology that is central in both camps, either atomism (social-ethical camp) or totalitarian homogeneous unity (political-historical camp). For those in the social-ethical camp, it is the excessive focus on formal subjective rights that is one of the main causes of atomism, and they usually want to overcome this by appealing to a more 'real', intersubjective freedom, which is often accompanied by an 'organic', complementary conception of society; for those in the political-historical camp, however, it is exactly the abolishment of formal rights and the appeal to social organicism that has characterized totalitarian societies, and therefore we see here the opposite tendency of a rehabilitation of formal rights and a firm rejection of any appeal to organicism.[29]

These opposite ideas about the preconditions of freedom provide a first possible explanation why there has been no constructive dialogue between the critics of atomism in the social-ethical camp and the critics of homogeneous unity in the political-historical camp. I now want to take a closer look at the specific understanding of *critique* in both camps, which will reveal different methodological commitments that provide a second possible explanation why a constructive dialogue between the two camps has been largely absent.

2. The social-ethical camp: Identifying social pathologies

What connects those in the social-ethical and political-historical camp is the rejection of the abstract moral constructivism that, in their view, can often be found in the moral camp:[30] one could say that both want to connect political philosophy with the concrete study of history and society

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[29] Cf. Berlin: "The perils of using organic metaphors to justify the coercion of some men by others in order to raise them to a 'higher' level of freedom have often been pointed out." 1969: 132.

[30] I will not discuss the question of whether this critique of the moral camp is legitimate or not, which falls outside the scope of this dissertation. My focus will be on the relation between the social-ethical and political-historical camp.

and, in this way, to *situate* the abstract political philosophy in the moral camp. However, they understand this in a different way. In the following I want to look at two accounts – namely Axel Honneth's defense of social philosophy (representing the social-ethical camp) and Frank Ankersmit's defense of aesthetic political philosophy (representing the political-historical camp) – which can provide a general introduction both to the different ways in which the attempt to 'situate' political philosophy is understood in the social-ethical and political-historical camp and to the different methodological commitments involved.

Starting with the social-ethical camp, I want to turn to Axel Honneth's article 'Pathologies of the social: The past and present of social philosophy', in which he tries to rehabilitate the tradition of social philosophy (which is similar to what I have called the 'social-ethical camp'). He contrasts the tradition of social philosophy with two other traditions in philosophy, namely the Aristotelian tradition and the tradition of modern political philosophy. As Honneth explains, all three traditions are concerned with analyzing political societies, but they all have different aims. For Aristotle and his followers, the basic question was "how a community could guarantee a life for its members that is both good and just."[31] Here the analysis of political society is connected to a substantive ethics based on metaphysical presuppositions in which the natural aims and goals of human self-realization are articulated.

Honneth says that in modern political philosophy, starting with Hobbes, the central question has become a different one, namely "how a community could be capable of establishing a kind of order to which all could generally consent."[32] Confronted with the English Civil War and the permanent rivalry between different religious doctrines, the idea that a stable social order can be established on the basis of a shared notion of the good was for Hobbes no longer a realistic option. Honneth says that this led to the modern separation of *ethics* and *morality*: because one cannot say anything general about the conditions of the good life anymore, political philosophers started to turn exclusively to problems concerning procedural justice. The connection between the good and the just, which for Aristotle still had been natural, was now cut into two parts: the question about the good life was to be answered by every individual alone, and the problem of how to realize a just social order was taken up by political philosophers, who used the story of the social contract

[31] Honneth 2007a: 33.
[32] Honneth 2007a: 33.

to provide a justification for a modern political society that every rational individual, independent of his idea of the good life, could consent with.

Social philosophy, as Honneth explains it, can be seen as a reaction to this bracketing of the discussion of the good life in modern political philosophy; or, in the metaphor I have used so far, it can be seen as an attempt to set up a social-ethical camp alongside the moral camp.[33] As Honneth says, although we are confronted in modernity with ethical pluralism, social philosophers still think that something can be said about the way a society realizes, or fails to realize, the good life. But instead of simply taking up the Aristotelian thread and start talking again about the natural aims and goals of human beings, modern social philosophers take a *via negativa*: they try to identify *social pathologies* that restrict individuals from living a 'full' life, leading to experiences of meaninglessness, alienation, anomie, etc. Social philosophy, in Honneth's definition, is "primarily concerned with determining and discussing processes of social development that can be viewed as misdevelopments, disorders or 'social pathologies".[34] The main contribution of social philosophy for Honneth is that it provides an instance of ethical reflexion (*Reflexionsinstanz*) that can identify forms of suffering in society that fall outside the scope of the moral camp, which is mainly concerned with procedural injustices.

However, as Honneth shows, this project of social philosophy runs into all kinds of methodological problems. The main problem, he argues, is that in order to say something about social pathologies in modern society, one needs a conception of 'healthy' human self-realization to contrast it with. But whereas Aristotle could still articulate a conception of natural goals and aims of humans based on metaphysical presuppositions, under modern conditions of ethical pluralism one has to find a different strategy to discuss human self-realization and the good life. Against relativists who argue that what is considered as 'healthy' or as 'pathological' is relative to a culture's self-understanding, and can therefore only be descriptively analyzed, the claim of social philosophy, Honneth says, is that it is still possible in modernity to develop *context-transcending*

[33] Actually, the relation between the moral and social-ethical camp can be understood in at least two ways: either as a *division of labor*, whereby the moral and social-ethical camp simply give an analysis of different problems in political society – either related to procedural justice (moral camp) or to individual self-realization (social-ethical camp) – that in the end can be complementary (which seems to be Honneth's view in his article 'Pathologies of the Social'), or, alternatively, the social-ethical camp can understand its relation to the moral camp as one of *superiority*, whereby the 'situated' approach in the social-ethical camp should replace the 'abstract' approach in the moral camp (which seems to be Honneth's position in *Freedom's Right*, where he presents his philosophy as a Hegelian theory of justice).

[34] Honneth 2007a: 4.

norms with which one can critically diagnose societies by distinguishing 'healthy' from 'pathological' social developments and institutional arrangements.

These context-transcending norms are developed not through *moral construction*, but through *immanent reconstruction*, that is, on the basis of a concrete analysis of socially induced forms of suffering in existing societies. Or, put differently, the context-transcending norms should not be understood as a strong metaphysical position, but they are developed in a post-metaphysical framework based on, for example, 'quasi-transcendental', 'formal-anthropological', or 'social-ontological' arguments. In his article, Honneth reconstructs the tradition of social philosophy in order to show the increasing methodological difficulties that have emerged when trying to articulate such context-transcending norms.

Honneth begins his reconstruction by discussing what he considers to be the 'founding father' of social philosophy, namely Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although Rousseau can be lumped together with Hobbes and Locke as a social contract-theorist, the difference according to Honneth is that Rousseau not only analyzed modern political society with regard to its moral legitimacy, but he also identified social pathologies in existing society and the limitations they imposed on the goal of individual self-realization.

In his *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau gave a critical diagnosis of modern society by contrasting his ideal of the 'healthy' individual in the state of nature, who is autonomous and has an undisturbed self-relation, with the 'pathological', other-dependent individuals in modern society. But, as Honneth argues, what makes Rousseau's diagnosis problematic is that the justification of his ideal of individual self-realization is very underdeveloped and unclear. He combines, on the one hand, a *historical narrative* about the development from the state of nature to modern society, and on the other hand, *a-historical anthropological claims* about human nature (for example, that we have a natural capability for compassion), which are both difficult to disentangle and not justified in a satisfying way.

According to Honneth, this methodological confusion remains the same in the work of subsequent social philosophers, such as Hegel and Marx, who also combined, in a complicated way, speculative *historical-philosophical* arguments with claims about *human nature* to identify social pathologies and to articulate an ideal of healthy human self-realization. In Hegel's case, the pathology of bifurcation (*Entzweiung*) can be overcome in a communally lived *Sittlichkeit*, whereas in Marx's case the pathology of alienation can be overcome by the self-objectification of

individuals in their work.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the work of Nietzsche and the emergence of the discipline of sociology were important turning points in social philosophy because they heightened the level of methodological reflection. The work of Nietzsche was important because he was the first to present his ideal of individual self-realization – the life-affirming, value-positing 'Übermensch' that could overcome the pathology of nihilism – as being reserved only for a small group. Nietzsche thus defended an ethical *particularism* – whereby an ideal of human self-realization is only suitable for a particular group – which was foreign to earlier social philosophers, and it retrospectively questioned the supposed objectivity and universality of the ideals of Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx. In this way, Nietzsche prepared the way for the nowadays common suspicion that every ideal of human self-realization is just one particular worldview, or just one perspective on the good life, among others.

The emergence of sociology signified another important development because the social pathologies that were diagnosed by people like Durkheim (anomie), Weber (disenchantment/stahlhartes Gehäuse), or Simmel (Tragödie der Kultur) were no longer speculative but were largely based on empirical data. An example is Durkheim's study on suicide, which showed, on the basis of statistics, that the amount of suicides is higher when societies are either too strictly or too loosely regulated. This raised the bar for subsequent social philosophers to back up their critical diagnoses of society with empirical evidence.

In the twentieth century social philosophers continued to critically diagnose society, Honneth says, but they now moved in two opposite directions with respect to the normative criteria that they used: some based their critical diagnosis exclusively on *historical-philosophical* arguments (Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer), while others based their diagnosis exclusively on criteria found in *human nature*, for example by developing a philosophical anthropology (Gehlen, Plessner) or by using psychoanalysis (Freud, Fromm, Marcuse).

A next stage was reached with Michel Foucault, who was influential in discrediting *any* attempt to criticize society with normative criteria based either on teleology or on human nature. His work tried instead to analyze how modern subjects are constituted, and what role knowledge and power play in this constitution, without making substantial normative claims about human self-

realization.[35] As Honneth says, Foucault's arguments were very influential: "The circle of philosophers who defend the thesis that every context-transcending norm – and especially every reference to human nature – merely conceals a power-related construction now reaches from Richard Rorty to Judith Butler."[36] Whereas social philosophers – from Rousseau up to the twentieth century – had always based their critical diagnosis of social pathologies on an ideal of individual self-realization that was justified (implicitly or explicitly) by historical-philosophical and/or anthropological claims, there now emerged a methodological crisis: how can one still develop context-transcending norms when every reference to teleology or human nature is dismissed?

Honneth still discerns three ways in which contemporary social philosophy has tried to justify ethical claims about individual self-realization in the face of these methodological problems. The first is to *proceduralize ethics* as we can find it in the work of Habermas. What is considered as 'normal' or 'pathological' is now understood as being completely dependent on the democratic will-formation of a society in which every individual can participate in order to reach a consensus about which social developments are 'healthy' and which are 'pathological'. A second option is to articulate a *weak, formal anthropology* in which basic claims about human nature and human self-realization are made that are 'thin' enough to be compatible with ethical pluralism but 'thick' enough to function as context-transcending criteria to determine normal and pathological developments in society. Honneth gives the examples of Charles Taylor's formal anthropology and the capability theory of Martha Nussbaum. Thirdly, there is the possibility of a *historically relativized justification of ethics*; here a historical reconstruction retrieves the main ethical ideals guiding a certain historical epoch and then shows how certain social developments are pathological insofar as they obstruct the realization of these ideals. Again, Taylor's work (such as *Sources of the Self*) is given as an example here.

At the end of the article Honneth argues that the survival of social philosophy as a context-transcending instance of ethical reflection is dependent "on the success with which the claim of a weak, formal anthropology can be justified in the future",[37] which reveals Honneth's preference

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[35] However, one of the returning criticisms against Foucault is that his books *do* contain normative criteria for self-realization, but he simply does not explicate them. See Taylor's 'Foucault on freedom and truth' in 1985b and 1989: 487ff; and Honneth 1986b: Chapters 4-6. Only in his later work, where Foucault talks about the 'care of the self', does he seem to become more explicit about his normative ideal of individual self-realization.
[36] Honneth 2007a: 40.
[37] Honneth 2007a: 42.

for the second option given above.[38] With the help of Honneth's 'tour-de-force' through the tradition of social philosophy we have gained a first glimpse of how the social-ethical camp understands its attempt to 'situate' political philosophy and of the methodological commitments and problems involved.[39] If we now turn to the political-historical camp we find a different understanding of situating political philosophy and different methodological commitments.

3. The political-historical camp: Adding new perspectives

In order to get a first impression of how the political-historical camp understands its attempt to 'situate' political philosophy, we can take a look at Pierre Manent's characterization of Raymond Aron, which can perhaps be applied to all thinkers in the political-historical camp: "Without having recourse to a state of nature, a best regime, or an idea of reason, Aron accepts – in the language of playing cards – the hand that history has dealt him, and it is within the present conditions of political life that he installs his observation post."[40] This quote reveals two differences with Honneth's account of the commitments in the social-ethical camp.

First of all, whereas Honneth described the social-ethical camp as having its observation post in society, providing an 'instance of ethical reflection' that tries to identify social pathologies, one could say that those in the political-historical camp place their observation posts in the actual conditions of political life. Again, we see here the difference between a focus on either a normative conception of the individual or on the preconditions of doing politics. Secondly, whereas Honneth argued that the fate of social philosophy is dependent on being able to develop context-transcending norms, one could say that those in the political-historical camp explicitly reject the search for a normative foundation or privileged position from which to analyze political society (such as a "state of nature, a best regime, or an idea of reason"). This raises the question about what guides the critical analyses of those working in the political-historical camp.

[38] Although, as many commentators have pointed out, Honneth seems to have moved from a more anthropological approach in his book *The Struggle for Recognition* to a more historical and sociological approach in his recent book *Freedom's Right*.

[39] However, in this dissertation we will also encounter other understandings of critique in the social-ethical camp, which are accompanied by different methodological commitments.

[40] "En verité, sans le préalable de l'état de nature, d'un meilleur régime, ou d'une idée de la raison, Aron accepte, pour employer le language des cartes, la 'main' que l'histoire lui donne, et c'est au milieu des conditions effectives et présentes de la vie politique qu'il installe son poste d'observation." Manent 2013: 20.

If one takes a brief look at the thinkers in the political-historical camp, it is quickly revealed that they all share a certain *perspectivist* approach to political philosophy. For example, in the letter addressed to Lorenzo dé Medici at the beginning of *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes:

> Nor I hope will it be considered presumptuous for a man of low and humble status to dare discuss and lay down the law about how princes should rule; because, just as men who are sketching the landscape put themselves down in the plain to study the nature of the mountains and highlands, and to study the low-lying land they put themselves high on the mountains, so, to comprehend fully the nature of the people, one must be a prince, and to comprehend fully the nature of princes one must be an ordinary citizen.[41]

This perspectivist metaphor seems to imply that for Machiavelli there exists no neutral objective viewpoint when trying to understand political reality, but there are only different perspectives.[42] Similarly, in the work of Max Weber one can find the distinction between 'monocratic' science (i.e., the search for the one true theory that will end all discussion) and 'ideal-typical' science (which presents itself as a preliminary, one-sided perspective on reality).[43] Then there is Hannah Arendt's claim that the political thinking of philosophers and theologians has often been disappointing because they start from thinking about *Man* (in the singular), whereas politics for Arendt concerns the fact of the plurality of *men* (in the plural).[44] Finally, Reinhart Koselleck's work can be understood as a critique of all notions of history in the singular, which he opposes to a 'history in the plural'.[45]

One could thus argue that the thinkers in the political-historical camp all resist, in their own way, the idea of a privileged position or foundation when trying to understand political and historical reality, and instead they promote a perspectivist approach. In order to get a better understanding of the underlying methodological commitments of this perspectivism, and how these

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[41] Machiavelli 1999: 4.

[42] Cf. Ankersmit 2002: 190-192.

[43] Palonen 2010: 122-124. As Weber argues: "Alle Erkenntnis der Kulturwirklichkeit ist […] stets eine Erkenntnis unter spezifisch besonderen Gesichtspunkten." Quoted in Palonen 1998: 10.

[44] Arendt 1993: 9. (Arendt speaks of "*den* Menschen" vs. "*die* Menschen").

[45] See Olsen 2012. "[T]his call for a plurality of perspectives is a discursive feature that distinguishes [Koselleck's] reflections on historical writing from the reflections made by many other German historians between the 1960s and the 1980s. It was […] a discursive feature with which Koselleck reacted against and positioned himself outside the more scientific, unambiguous, and uniform social-historical discourses in the discipline." Olsen 2012: 239.

commitments differ from those in the social-ethical camp, I want to turn to the work of Frank Ankersmit, who has provided an analysis of the difference between what he calls ‘foundationalist’ political philosophy (which includes the moral and social-ethical camp) and ‘aesthetic’ political philosophy (which is identical to the political-historical camp and its perspectivist approach).[46]

Ankersmit’s starting point is the idea that modern political philosophy, starting with Hobbes, has been predominantly ‘foundationalist’. This means that the point of departure for political philosophers is a conception of what they consider to be the origin, basis, or foundation of the political order – for example self-preservation, freedom, reason, or history – and from there they then try to deduce the requirements of the good, just, or free political order. Ankersmit thinks that this foundationalism is still central in contemporary political philosophy, for example in the debate between liberalism and communitarianism, which both consider the *individual citizen* as the ‘foundation’ of the political order, although they understand this differently.

As Ankersmit says, liberalism “discovers the foundation of the political order in what the rational individual will conceive as the just political and social order”,[47] whereas for communitarians, “Aristotelian or Hegelian conceptions of what it is to be a citizen function as the foundation of the political order.”[48] Ankersmit argues that even though we may prefer the ‘situated’ account of the individual by the communitarians over the ahistorical and asociological account of the individual in liberalism, in the end both “are foundationalists because of their belief that without foundational principles political philosophy is impossible.”[49]

One could extend Ankersmit’s argument by saying that also critical social theories, despite having a ‘situated’ or ‘immanent’ approach that is informed by the empirical social sciences, often revolve around one central principle – be it ‘Verständigung’ (Habermas), recognition (Honneth), justification (Forst), or resonance (Rosa) – which points to a normative conception of the individual’s reason, dignity, or self-realization.[50] One could thus say that those in the social-ethical camp (such as communitarians or critical social theorists) reject the abstract account of the individual in the moral camp and want to start from a ‘situated’ understanding of the individual,

[46] See Ankersmit 1996, 2002. My earlier claim that there has been no constructive dialogue between the political-historical and social-ethical camp does not mean that there has been no reflection *at all* on the relation between the two.
[47] Ankersmit 1996: 7.
[48] Ankersmit 2002: 165.
[49] Ankersmit 2002: 165.
[50] Jean-Phillipe Deranty speaks for example of the “crucial element in any critical theory project […], namely, the ‘foundational’ principle or norm that is to underpin such a project.” 2016: 56.

but for Ankersmit this means that they remain foundationalist in the sense that they believe that one needs a normative conception of the (situated) individual when analyzing the social and political order.

So what is wrong with taking a normative conception of the individual as the starting point for thinking about the social and political order? Ankersmit makes two central claims against contemporary 'foundationalist' approaches: 1) that they miss the paradoxical insight that it is not the focus on the individual that is the best way to secure freedom, but it is the recognition of the *autonomy of politics*; and 2) foundationalist political philosophy problematically ignores the *brokenness of the political order*.

Concerning the first point: like many others in the political-historical camp, Ankersmit takes the historical reality of totalitarian societies in the twentieth century as the starting point for thinking about the preconditions of freedom. In totalitarian societies, freedom was eliminated because a totalitarian power completely dominated society and politicized all social relations based on an ideology. Seen from this perspective, one of the central preconditions of freedom is to secure the individual against political power, and according to Ankersmit this aspect is often neglected in political philosophies that start from a normative conception of the individual citizen.

In today's traditions of liberalism or communitarianism, Ankersmit says that there is usually no clear distinction made between the pre-political and the political order. Ankersmit argues that, "In none of these traditions […] will we, ideally, transgress an invincible barrier guaranteeing the individual's sanctity in moving from the individual to the state or vice versa."[51] In other words, Ankersmit fears that when the individual is considered to be the ultimate foundation of the social and political order, then there is no effective barrier against the complete politicization of all human relationships. There will be in principle nothing outside the reach of what is collectively willed by individuals, which, he says, is exactly the Jacobin conviction that lies at the root of all forms of totalitarianism.

For Ankersmit, the paradox is that in order to secure freedom and provide an effective protection against totalitarianism, it is better not to start from a normative conception of the individual and from there try to determine what the just, good, or free order should be, but instead it is better to recognize the *autonomy of the political domain*. He says that, "Paradoxically, it is not individualism but a certain collectivism, a qualified recognition of the autonomy of the collectivity

[51] Ankersmit 1996: 7.

in its relationship to the individual that will prove to be the best friend and ally of the sphere of individual freedom."[52] Ankersmit's reasoning is that when one starts with a concession to collectivism, which challenges the attempt to reduce the collectivity to the individual, then this will create, in turn, a space where the individual possesses *its* autonomy with regard to the collectivity.[53]

This is the reason why Ankersmit says that the strongest checks on the totalitarian seduction in the twentieth century have not been the normative, foundationalist theories of political philosophy, but instead the best check has been provided by the simple fact that most politicians in Western democracies had the good sense to recognize that the domain of politics has a certain autonomy with regard to our collective will and to the will of the statesman. These politicians recognized "that there exists in political reality an element of sheer inertia, an immense and immovable weight that even the collective can never succeed in overcoming",[54] and instead of trying to attack it with all means available, these politicians were ready to "creatively adapt [their] goals to the given of this dimension of inertia."[55] For Ankersmit, it is this practical recognition that we can never completely dominate and control the sphere of politics, that we can never completely transform it to our wishes, and that it will always be a domain lying beyond what is collectively willed and desired, that has proven to be the best safeguard of individual freedom.[56]

One can clearly recognize the influence of Machiavelli in Ankersmit's reasoning. Machiavelli also argued that in order to secure freedom, one is not so much helped by the insights of morality or ethics, but one is dependent on *virtù*, that is, on responsible political action which recognizes that the political domain can never be dominated since *Fortuna* can never be dominated and which tries to creatively and prudently respond, adapt, and act in the face of *Fortuna's* fickle ways.

Ankersmit's second claim against foundationalist political philosophy is that it misrecognizes the *brokenness of the political order*, which is also inspired by Machiavelli. In order

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[52] Ankersmit 1996: 8.
[53] Ankersmit 1996: 8.
[54] Ankersmit 1996: 9.
[55] Ankersmit 1996: 9.
[56] Besides politicians in Western democracies, Ankersmit gives the example of Gorbachev by saying that, "Gorbachev's wisdom in recognizing that it would make no sense to try to weather the storms that he had unwittingly unleashed by attempting to remove, again, its causes. Gorbachev had the *decency* not to start eliminating his opponents in the traditional Soviet style because he had the *wisdom* to see that an outright confrontation with the new realities of Russian society would be disastrous both for himself and his people. And both in the case of the statesmen in Western democracies and in that of Gorbachev these twin virtues of decency and wisdom originated in an awareness of the *autonomy* or recalcitrance of the domain of politics with regard to the will of the individual or of individual statesmen." 1996: 10.

to explain what Machiavelli meant by this, Ankersmit turns to the essay 'The originality of Machiavelli' by Isaiah Berlin, who argued – against the 'vulgar' interpretation that Machiavelli simply dismissed ethics and morality in favor of an immoral power politics – that Machiavelli was aiming at something different; namely to point to the problems that arise when there are two incompatible moralities at work. As Berlin writes:

> One is the morality of the pagan world: its values are courage, vigour, fortitude in adversity, public achievement, order, discipline, happiness, strength, justice and above all the assertion of one's proper claims and the power needed to secure their satisfaction [...] Against this moral universe stands in the first and foremost place Christian morality.[57]

For Berlin – who was always eager to promote early modern thinkers who recognized the conflicts resulting from modern ethical pluralism – Machiavelli was thus one of the first thinkers who recognized that the reality in which we have to act contains two conflicting moralities, in this case the pagan and Christian morality, which both have their own validity, and that there is not a third ethical language by which to settle this conflict. In other words, there is no foundation or privileged position from which one can solve the conflict, but there are only different *perspectives*.

The result is a *broken* political reality consisting of incommensurable ideals, an idea that is common in the political-historical camp: think of Weber's 'war of the gods', Berlin's notion of the 'Ionian fallacy' (i.e., the fallacy of assuming that the goods in society are commensurable), or Tocqueville's analysis of democracy that starts from the incommensurability of freedom and equality. Based on the lessons of history, most thinkers in the political-historical camp are convinced that the ideals that we want to realize in modern democracies are not commensurable – or, in Ankersmit's words, that "the pantheon of our most lofty political ideals is divided against itself"[58] – and that neglecting this historical insight can have destructive consequences.

However, this affirmation of incommensurability in the political-historical camp does not mean that they elevate conflict and struggle as the new essence or 'foundation' of the political order, as has for example been done by Carl Schmitt and some of today's agonistic theorists. As Ankersmit emphasizes, the brokenness of political reality will merely make conflict a necessary

[57] Quoted in Ankersmit 2002: 167.
[58] Ankersmit 2002: 168.

aspect, not the *foundation*, of modern politics.[59] Indeed, for Ankersmit it has been the brilliance of modern democracy to have found a way to constructively deal with this incommensurability of ideals – namely by transforming *abstract political ideals* into *persons with political opinions*.

Whereas it is hard to reconcile incommensurable ideals on the 'deep' level of abstract theoretical claims, one can *do business with opinions* at the 'surface'. In a democratic society you can make compromises whereby a person can be prepared to surrender his opinion about a certain ideal to a political opponent, but on the condition that the other may, under certain circumstances, display the same generosity to you. As Ankersmit says: "[W]hat initially divided you may then unite you: for this display of generosity by both of you will then sow the seeds of trust and of mutual confidence in the relationship between the two of you."[60] In this way, by transforming abstract political ideals into persons with political opinions, democratic politics makes possible compromises and the striving for a *juste-milieu* politics with which most parties can more or less live, and this is the reason, Ankersmit thinks, why democracy has been more successful in assuring civil peace than any other political system.[61]

Ankersmit's aim is thus not to celebrate eternal conflict and disagreement, but he argues that it is more prudent to stay at the *surface* of political life and try to deal with incommensurabilities and find workable compromises there, instead of searching for *deep* foundations (for example a normative account of the individual) that can determine how to realize a social and political order in which these incommensurabilities are overcome. As Ankersmit says about approaches searching for deep foundations: "[Their] discourse of normativity creates around itself a reassuringly rationalist and monological pseudo reality without all the unexpected, unpleasant, and painful paradoxes in which the brokenness of political reality presents itself to

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[59] As Ankersmit says, "this is the difference between believing that conflict is the foundation of marriage (Schmitt) or believing that it merely is an inevitable *part* of it (Machiavelli)." 2002: 170.
[60] Ankersmit 2002: 176.
[61] See Ankersmit's critique of Rawls on this point: "What Rawls, in his recent work, refers to as 'constructivism' leaves no room at all for how we can reach consensus and compromise in politics without thereby forsaking the political principles that are at stake in our dealings with our political opponents. But this is what democracy is all about: in democracy we often reach agreement *without* having been convinced of the validity of the views of our opponents. Whoever ignores this fact has lost sight of one of the most interesting and important features of public argument in democracy […] Democracy requires us 'to do business' with even our most sincere and deeply felt political principles. This is not a weakness; it is the paramount strength of democracy. Rawls does not take sufficiently into account the differences between debate in the academic world (which seems to be the model he is unable to cast aside) and in politics, where the conditions for reaching consensus and compromise have a very different background." Ankersmit 1996: 391n34.

us."[62] For Ankersmit this is not only problematic because foundationalist philosophy in this way has to pay the price of becoming inapplicable and irrelevant, but, again, he expresses his worries that it does not effectively guard itself against the totalitarian seduction. As Ankersmit says, the fact that twentieth century intellectuals so often served the cause of totalitarianism is closely connected to their belief in the commensurability of ideals, namely that the realization of one particular ideal – for example the realization of equality in a communist society – would automatically entail the realization of other ideals such as freedom or justice.[63]

Ankersmit's critique of foundationalist political philosophy raises the question about what the role of the political philosopher could be if we follow his advice and start from the recognition of the autonomy of politics and the brokenness of political reality. In answering this question, Ankersmit takes, once again, Machiavelli as his inspiration. Machiavelli asked a similar question, namely how to do politics after one has realized that any normative foundation for the political order, in the end, will turn out to be quicksand, and his answer was that we should instead turn, not to morality or ethics, but to *history*. As Ankersmit says, it was Machiavelli who discovered one of the central insights that history can teach us about politics; namely that there is "*representationalism* inherent in all human (inter)action and, especially, in politics. The representations that we have of each other – and not some fixed and reassuringly intersubjective reality lying behind or beyond these representations – will at all times determine what we shall see as the appropriate thing to do in politics."[64]

Ankersmit translates this Machiavellian insight into the idea that politics – just like history and art – is characterized by an *aestheticism* whereby all we have are representations (i.e., of each other, of the past, or of that which the art-work depicts) without having recourse to a foundation or privileged position from which we can objectively determine if these representations are correct or not. What Ankersmit is striving for is therefore an *aesthetic* political philosophy, which is neither about finding "perky moral certainties nor found in statistics or theories about the behavior of politicians and the electorate"[65] but is about providing new, original *perspectives* that can provide insights into the functioning or dysfunctioning of the existing political machinery.

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[62] Ankersmit 2002: 171.
[63] Ankersmit is of course not saying that foundationalist political philosophy *is* totalitarian, but merely that they share certain characteristics, such as reducing the complexity of political reality to a few principles or the belief in the commensurability of ideals.
[64] Ankersmit 2002: 166.
[65] Ankersmit 1996: 15.

In other words, political insights for Ankersmit cannot be found in the realm of facts or values but in the aesthetic realm of representations and perspectives. Meaningful political philosophy for Ankersmit is similar to significant art, in the sense that it provides useful insights not by moving away from the world we know – through abstraction or theoretical refinement – but by articulating new and original ways of looking at what is already familiar to us. According to this view, insights are provided by a new "*representation* of (political) reality rather than in the attempt to structure reality *itself* by means of either a (socio-scientific) conceptual web or by moral laws."[66] And, as Ankersmit says, it has been the discipline of history that has been exemplary in providing these kinds of insights.[67]

Besides the work of Machiavelli, Ankersmit considers the work of Tocqueville as a clear example of such an 'aesthetic' or 'perspectivist' approach. Tocqueville was not searching for normative foundations, but with the help of the insights of history he articulated new perspectives and representations of political reality that were fruitful for understanding the functioning and dysfunctioning of modern democratic politics. Famous examples are Tocqueville's claim that the French Revolution was, in fact, no revolution at all; or that democracy is a political system that is essentially conservative.[68]

A more recent example of a 'perspectivist' political philosophy can be found in *The Passage to Europe* (2009) by Luuk van Middelaar, not coincidentally a former student of Ankersmit. The book consists of a critical history of the European Union, but instead of searching for a normative foundation that could help to overcome the problems that face the EU, Van Middelaar provides a *new perspective* on the EU, which he thinks has been largely unnoticed before: besides the 'outermost sphere' of sovereign states, and the 'innermost sphere' of Europe as a community (with the Commission and the Parliament as its central organs, which are focused on

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[66] Ankersmit 1996: 16.
[67] Although Ankersmit says that we can find these insights in historically oriented thinkers from all disciplines: not only "in the writings of historians such as Marx, Burckhardt, Meinecke, or Talmon – but it can also be found in political theorists like Hobbes or Rousseau; lawyers like Bodin or Montesquieu; statesmen like Machiavelli, Burke, Guizot or Tocqueville; philosophers like Locke, Hegel, or Popper; sociologists like Weber or Simmel; economists like Smith, Schumpeter, or Friedman; or even novelists like Stendhal, Balzac, or Orwell. Examples of this kind of understanding would be Tocqueville's insight into the inherent conservatism of democracy, Foucault's insight that in democracy power functions bottom-up instead of top-down, Claude Lefort's insight that we presently have an 'empty place' where power formerly had its visible center, or, to take a more recent example, Michel Albert's thesis about the differences between Anglo-Saxon and continental forms of democracy." 1996: 16. This list shows that Ankersmit's critique of foundationalism is less concerned with the historically oriented foundationalist philosophers and more with today's a-historical approaches in political philosophy.
[68] Ankersmit 1996: 330.

the ‘politics of regulation’), Van Middelaar identifies the ‘intermediate sphere’ of Europe’s member states (with the European Council as its central organ, which is focused on the ‘politics of events’). Simply put, whereas the ‘outermost’ sphere speaks the language of *national strategic interests* and the ‘innermost’ sphere the language of *shared values*, the ‘intermediate’ sphere speaks the language of *shared strategic interests*. Van Middelaar thinks that the perspective of this intermediate sphere has been neglected so far, and by re-writing the history of the European Union from this perspective, he hopes to provide new insights and open up new horizons and possibilities when reflecting on the EU and the problems that it faces today.[69]

Another example of a perspectivist argument can be found in Kari Palonen’s attempt to separate the work of Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner. Although both Pettit and Skinner are known for rehabilitating the notion of freedom as non-domination, Palonen considers Pettit as having a normative approach to freedom whereas Skinner has a political approach. As Palonen says: “Pettit is a builder of philosophical systems in search of a good order. In this sense, he recommends freedom as ‘non-domination’ as something analogous to the classical idea of contract, as something which should be generally acceptable, and, thus, above politics.”[70] Palonen backs this up with several quotes from Pettit; for example, Pettit’s description of freedom as non-domination as a ‘neutral political ideal’, which Palonen dismisses as a ‘truly oxymoronic formulation’. Skinner, on the other hand, operates more historically according to Palonen, namely as an “archeologist bringing buried intellectual treasure back to the surface, dusting it down and enabling us to reconsider what we think of it.”[71] According to Palonen, the point for Skinner is not so much to take sides and defend the republican understanding of freedom as the only possible ‘foundation’ of the political order, but his main interest is to overcome the monopolistic claims of liberals by adding a new perspective on freedom.[72]

In sum, one could argue that – despite the differences among the thinkers in the political-historical camp – they share a certain commitment to perspectivist political philosophy, which rests

[69] Interestingly, Van Middelaar’s book ends with a Machiavellian definition of human freedom, which is a clear example of what I have called a political approach to freedom: “De politiek van de tegenwoordige tijd heeft een grote, scheppende kwaliteit: ontvankelijkheid voor de gebeurtenissen. Hoe wisselender en woeliger de wereld, hoe sterker de noodzaak van deze deugd zich doet voelen. In deze omgang met de historische stroom ligt het wezen van de menselijke vrijheid.” 2009: 428.
[70] Palonen 2002: 98.
[71] Palonen 2002: 98.
[72] As Palonen quotes Skinner in an interview: “I’m not really interested in taking sides. […] I’m not asking you to say ‘Machiavelli looks a better theorist than Ronald Dworkin.’” In: Palonen 2003: 97.

on the idea that instead of searching for a deep foundational theory, model, or principle, it is more fruitful to stay at the complex surface of political reality and *add new perspectives* that contribute to a better understanding of the functioning and dysfunctining of our existing political machinery and that can open up new possibilities for thinking and acting. Compared to the understanding of critique in the social-ethical camp, one could perhaps say that one of the central differences is their different understanding of the *limits of what we can know and do* when trying to realize a free political society. Those in the political-historical camp deny the possibility of a privileged position or solid foundation, and at the same time stress the political danger of the desire to reach such a position or foundation, thus combining both epistemological and political arguments.[73] The thinkers in the social-ethical camp often have a more positive outlook concerning what we can know and do and for example still hold on to the possibility of developing context-transcending norms, as we saw with Honneth.

4. Finding common ground

Up until now I have attempted to give an account of the central differences between the social-ethical and political-historical camp in order to understand why there has been no constructive dialogue between the two. We have seen how those in the social-ethical camp set up their observation posts in the actual conditions of social life and try to identify social pathologies and from there develop a conception of the social preconditions of individual freedom, which can serve as 'context-transcending norms' (or as a 'privileged position' or 'situated foundation') for determining the contours of a free society. Those in the political-historical camp set up their observation posts in the actual conditions of political life and analyze situations (both past and present) in which politics has been 'ended' and from there then try to provide insights concerning the preconditions of 'doing politics'. They try to do this not by searching for deep foundations or privileged positions but by staying at the complex surface of political life and by adding new perspectives.[74]

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[73] For example, as Palonen shows, there is a clear parallel in Weber's work between monocratic science and monocratic 'Herrschaft' (i.e., monarchy and bureaucracy) and between ideal-typical science and parliamentary politics. 2010: 124.
[74] The accounts of Honneth and Ankersmit are of course not representative of all the thinkers in the social-ethical and political-historical camp. I have chosen their accounts because I think they give a good introduction to the general differences between the two camps, but in the course of the dissertation we will also encounter thinkers in the social-ethical and political-historical camp that have different views; for example, thinkers in the social-ethical camp that reject Honneth's search for context-transcending norms.

As we have also seen, these different ideas of critique and method lead to conflicting ideas about the preconditions of freedom, which can explain why there has been no constructive dialogue between the two camps; there simply seems to be no common ground. This is exacerbated by the fact that the willingness to engage in a constructive dialogue seems to be absent. The work of Ankersmit and Honneth is illustrative in this respect: whereas Ankersmit rejects normative political philosophy as such (which is common in the political-historical camp), Honneth largely neglects the thinkers in the political-historical camp (which is common in the social-ethical camp).[75]

My aim will be to overcome this impasse and set up a dialogue between the social-ethical camp (specialized in the critique of atomism) and the political-historical camp (specialized in the critique of homogeneous unity) because I think that this can be fruitful for better understanding today's problem of freedom revolving around the problematic pendulum swing between atomism and homogeneous unity. In order to do this, I want to turn now to the work of two contemporary philosophers – Pierre Rosanvallon and (again) Honneth – and explain why their philosophies are especially suitable for setting up this dialogue.

What makes the combination of Rosanvallon and Honneth interesting is that – even though Rosanvallon operates in the political-historical camp and Honneth in the social-ethical camp – they share a lot of common ground, which is unusual for thinkers from these camps. They share at least five characteristics, namely: 1) an interest in the *concrete study of 'the social'*; 2) they both have a *positive, productive understanding of struggle and conflict*; 3) they both do not reject normative political philosophy but want to re-connect it with the disciplines of *sociology and history*; 4) they both want to reconnect the ideals of *democracy and socialism*; and 5) they both articulate large reconstructions of modern society in which they try to identify *pathologies*. Let us look a bit closer at each of these points.

Concerning the first point, Honneth argues in *Freedom's Right* that whereas many moral or procedural approaches in political philosophy start from constructing normative principles that are then applied to existing society, he wants to develop an approach that starts from a *social analysis* and operates with normative principles that are already at work in society.[76] Similarly,

[75] Although one can find critical discussions in Honneth's work on almost every philosopher and critical social theorist operating in the moral and social-ethical camp, one looks in vain for discussions on thinkers like Machiavelli or Tocqueville. Also in *Freedom's Right*, Honneth neglects republican accounts of freedom and simply dismisses democratic theories inspired by Arendt and Lefort in a footnote. 2011: 619n598.
[76] Honneth 2011: 14-31.

Rosanvallon's work on democracy also does not shy away from the study of 'the social', which can be explained, first of all, by his background in democratic syndicalism, a movement that stresses the importance of intermediate institutions between the individual and the state for improving social solidarity and the vitality of democratic life.[77] Secondly, Rosanvallon is influenced by the French tradition of political sociology – from Guizot and Tocqueville to Aron and Lefort – and similarly combines the attempt to understand politics with a study of the social. This separates Rosanvallon from other thinkers in the political-historical camp such as Hannah Arendt or Kari Palonen,[78] who are more suspicious of 'the social'.

This shared interest in 'the social' shows itself in the similar diagnosis that Honneth and Rosanvallon give of today's problems concerning freedom and democracy, both arguing that we are facing a crisis of the social in the form of a *crisis of intermediate institutions*, leading to problems related to social integration and identification.[79] Both Honneth and Rosanvallon are concerned with rethinking the role of intermediate institutions, the social bond, and the foundations of solidarity – or, to use a single term, they are concerned with rethinking the problem of *social generality*.

This brings us to the second shared characteristic, namely that – in reflecting on the problem of 'social generality' – both give a central role to *struggle and conflict*, which they understand in a *positive* and *productive* way. In Honneth's work this reveals itself in the fact that his Hegelian account of 'struggles for recognition' ignores the famous master-slave-dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is the more common starting point for reflecting on Hegel's account of recognition and conflict. For example, in France the teachings on Hegel by Alexandre Kojève between 1933 and 1939 would influence a whole generation of French philosophers;[80] it was a teaching that made the dialectic between master and slave, or the "life-and-death struggle for pure prestige",[81] the key to understanding the development of world history. Honneth, however, is not interested in these abstract limit cases but in concrete, everyday struggles for recognition, which

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[77] Cf. De Haan 2012: 19, 13.
[78] Cf. Palonen 1998: 18-19.
[79] Whereas Honneth speaks of an "ideology of de-institutionalization" (2002b: 146), Rosanvallon talks about a "de-sociologization of politics" 1998: 421.
[80] Among Kojève's students were Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Queneau, and André Breton. The other important Hegel-scholar in France, Jean Hyppolyte, who was partly influenced by Kojève, would preach a similar story about Hegel to the next generation of French philosophers, including Foucault, Derrida, Althusser, and Deleuze. Cf. Poltier 1998: 29; Van Middelaar 1999: 25, 29.
[81] "lutte à mort de pur prestige." Quoted in: Van Middelaar 1999: 31.

he understands as positive and productive because they can function as a motor for generating social generality.[82]

In Rosanvallon, we find a similar attempt to give a central place to everyday struggles and conflict that are understood in a positive and productive way. Already in an article from 1988, in which he reflects on the question of how French democracy could be revitalized, Rosanvallon argues that we should resist the idea that a revitalization of politics requires returning to the great simplified combats of earlier times (as expressed in the popular Marxist or Schmittian accounts that understand struggle in terms of a final stand-off between 'friend' and 'enemy'). Rosanvallon proposes instead that we need to rethink *ordinary politics* that deal with economic, social, and cultural issues, which are decisive but cannot be considered as a question of life and death.[83] As Rosanvallon explains, whereas the French political culture has been oscillating for two centuries between the two extremes of *management* and *revolution*, between Comte and Marx, between manager and militant, between the "administration of things", and the "radical political experience of a confrontation between friend and enemy",[84] Rosanvallon proposes to search for a middle way by focusing on ordinary politics and 'normal' political action. Rosanvallon's ultimate goal of this focus on ordinary politics is to reflect on the conditions for the "construction of everyday life"[85] or as he calls it elsewhere "the construction of a common world".[86]

So both Honneth and Rosanvallon think that it is exactly through everyday struggles in society and politics that social generality, or a 'common world', can be generated. Yet because of the 'crisis of the social' and the crisis of intermediate institutions, they feel that the 'healthy' everyday struggles in society and politics have been undermined, which has led to more destructive forms of conflict.

The third agreement between their philosophies is that they do not reject normative political philosophy as such, but they want to reconnect it to the disciplines of sociology and history. Both are critical of what I have called the 'moral camp' in political philosophy, which is dominated by

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[82] When commenting in a recent interview on Paul Ricoeur's book *The Course of Recognition*, Honneth remarks that, "When I was reading Ricoeur I was surprised that he seemed to take struggle as being something very close to war. […] This is not how I am thinking. I take struggle as being an enormously productive force in our human life-world. […] I have a productive, positive understanding of struggle. I'm more interested in the small, everyday forms of struggle and not in the big struggles which are, I think, what Ricoeur has in mind." In: Marcelo 2013: 217.
[83] Rosanvallon 1988b: 185.
[84] Rosanvallon 1988b: 184.
[85] Rosanvallon 1988b: 185.
[86] Rosanvallon 1998: 465.

procedural approaches that have disconnected normative theory from the actual study of society and its history and that only focus on the abstract, juridical side of democracy.[87] By re-connecting political philosophy with the social sciences and history, Rosanvallon and Honneth think we can get a better grasp of the problems we are facing today and find solutions for them.[88]

A fourth similarity is that both Honneth and Rosanvallon want to reconnect the ideals of democracy and socialism. Whereas most socialists operate in the social-ethical camp, Rosanvallon forms an exception by combining the commitments in the political-historical camp with a socialist orientation. As he has written recently:

> The time has come to fight for *integral democracy,* which will come about through the mutual interaction of two ideas that have been kept apart for too long: namely socialism and democracy. The great intellectual and political debates of the future will involve clarifying the shape and meaning of these two ideas.[89]

Honneth argues in his recent book *The Idea of Socialism* for a similar reconnection of socialism and democracy.

Finally, both Honneth and Rosanvallon articulate large reconstructions of modern society that aim at identifying *pathologies*. However, they understand pathologies in a different way: Honneth understands pathologies as social developments that obstruct individual self-realization, whereas Rosanvallon is closer to thinkers like Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Aron, and Lefort, who compare political regimes and identify the sources of their potential 'corruption'.

Here we stumble on the fundamental difference between Honneth and Rosanvallon, namely that Honneth starts from a normative conception of the situated individual, whereas Rosanvallon is concerned with the preconditions of doing politics. This difference between a normative and a political approach to freedom is further illustrated by the central issue in their work, which is *recognition* (as precondition of individual freedom) in the case of Honneth and *representation* (as

[87] Honneth 2011: 126, 614; Rosanvallon 1998: 338-340, 2003: 25-28.
[88] As Rosanvallon says in an interview: "I'm not interested in rejecting the normative concern – political philosophy ought to include this dimension. Nevertheless, the normative approach should be redefined. We can't be satisfied with a normative approach that yields merely an ideal version of politics and democracy. The normative approach must be redefined in order to eliminate the existing gap between history and theory. Thus, this approach should follow from renovation of historical and sociological understanding, not through dissociation from it. Such is my goal." In: Sebastián 2007: 711.
[89] Rosanvallon 2011: 23.

precondition of 'doing politics') in the case of Rosanvallon. Furthermore, whereas Rosanvallon shares the conviction, common in the political-historical camp, that useful political insights can be gained not by searching for 'deep' normative foundations but by analyzing the historical complexity and the different perspectives at the 'surface' of political life, Honneth is convinced that we can still find context-transcending norms for critique in modern societies, which is reached through an 'immanent reconstruction'.

In sum, the mix of commonalities and differences in Rosanvallon and Honneth makes their work suitable to set up a dialogue between the political-historical and social-ethical camp in order to illuminate the problem of freedom today revolving around atomism and homogeneous unity.

However, one complication has to be addressed before proceeding. Up until now I have presented the social-ethical camp as being specialized in the problem of atomism and the political-historical camp as being specialized in the problem of homogeneous unity, but this hides the fact that we can also find interesting critiques of atomism in the political-historical camp and that there are also fruitful critiques of homogeneous unity in the social-ethical camp. In order to do justice to this fact, I want to compare the different ways in which both camps have criticized atomism *and* homogeneous unity, and in order to do this, I want to team up Rosanvallon and Honneth with two philosophers with a similar approach to freedom, namely Claude Lefort and Charles Taylor.

There will then emerge the following fourfold critique. Firstly, Lefort has perhaps provided one of the most lasting critiques of totalitarian homogeneous unity within the political-historical camp; secondly, in the work of Rosanvallon (also operating in the political-historical camp) one can find both a critique of homogeneous unity (influenced by Lefort) and of atomism; thirdly, in the social-ethical camp we find in Taylor's work both a critique of atomism and homogeneous unity; and fourthly, Honneth's work (also situated in the social-ethical camp) consists mainly of a critique of atomism. Hence, although my main focus will be on Rosanvallon and Honneth, I think that including a discussion of Lefort and Taylor will provide a more complete account of the different possible critiques of atomism and homogeneous unity in the political-historical and social-ethical camp. And this brings us, finally, to a more detailed account of how I will proceed in the dissertation.

5. General overview

The dissertation consists of three parts: in the first part I will discuss the understanding of freedom by Lefort (chapter 1) and Rosanvallon (chapter 2), which I will call *freedom as indeterminacy*, and in the second part I will analyze the understanding of freedom by Taylor (chapter 3) and Honneth (chapter 4), which I will call *freedom as complementarity*. In my discussion of how these four philosophers understand the preconditions of freedom, I will take as my starting point their different critiques of *atomism* and *homogeneous unity*. In the third part of the dissertation I will then try to illuminate some of the underlying causes of the different approach to freedom in the political-historical and social-ethical camp. I will do this by looking at how their reflections on the preconditions of freedom are informed by different conceptions of history (chapter 5) and by different understandings of the process in which form is given to a democratic society (chapter 6). Before I elaborate on each of these three parts of the dissertation, a brief note will be given on the notions of 'freedom as indeterminacy' and 'freedom as complementarity'.

A quick glance at the work of Rosanvallon and Honneth shows that they give a completely different evaluation of the notion of *indeterminacy*. For Rosanvallon indeterminacy is an essential feature of democratic societies, which is the result of insolvable tensions and ambiguities at the heart of their ideals and functioning, and he even considers his work as an elaboration of a "theory of democratic indeterminacy".[90] Here, indeterminacy has a 'healthy' (or at least 'neutral') connotation: for Rosanvallon it is exactly the attempt to once and for all overcome the indeterminacy of democratic societies – for example in populism or totalitarianism – that leads to 'pathologies'.[91]

For Honneth, however, indeterminacy has a negative connotation, which is clearly visible in the title of his Spinoza-lectures *Suffering from indeterminacy*. Honneth understands indeterminacy as the pathological result of a one-sided understanding of freedom. Starting from Hegel's distinction between abstract right, morality, and *Sittlichkeit*, Honneth argues that when the preconditions of freedom are reduced to abstract right and morality then this will obstruct the ability of individuals to participate in social life,[92] leading to feelings of 'loneliness', 'emptiness' and

[90] Rosanvallon 2015a: 241.
[91] Rosanvallon 2015a: 248.
[92] For example: "[S]omeone who articulates all of his needs and plans in the categories of formal right will become incapable of participating in social life, and thus be condemned to suffer from 'indeterminacy'". Honneth 2000a: 50.

‘*Gedrücktheit*’, which together point to a diagnosis of the age as “suffering from indeterminacy”.[93] To overcome this indeterminacy, Honneth introduces the ideal of ‘social freedom’ whereby, simply put, social cooperation and individual freedom go hand in hand, and whereby the preconditions of freedom are understood in terms of *complementarity*. The different evaluation of ‘indeterminacy’ thus illustrates once again the different starting point in the political-historical and social-ethical camps for reflecting on freedom: either starting from the preconditions of doing politics (Rosanvallon) or the social preconditions of individual freedom (Honneth).[94]

I will start in chapter 1 by looking at the ideas of Claude Lefort, one of the central critics of totalitarianism and one of Rosanvallon’s teachers, who had an important influence in shaping Rosanvallon’s ideas about freedom and democracy. Lefort’s philosophy clearly operates in the political-historical camp: he analyzes the problem of freedom not by starting from a normative conception of individual freedom but by comparing historical societies in which politics is ended and freedom has been eliminated (i.e., totalitarian societies) with societies in which the preconditions of doing politics are secured and political freedom is guaranteed (i.e., democratic societies). This comparative approach leads Lefort to the insight that what guarantees political freedom in democratic societies is that they acknowledge the *indeterminacy* of the social order by institutionalizing social division and conflict and by rejecting any privileged position from which to overcome this division and realize a unified social order. Totalitarian societies, however, try to overcome indeterminacy by suppressing internal social division and by erecting a Party that completely determines the social order, thereby ending political freedom.

A discussion of Lefort’s account of political freedom and indeterminacy is not only interesting because it gives a clear account of some of the general presuppositions in the political-historical camp or because it provides an intellectual background to Rosanvallon’s work but also because it provides a still relevant critique of one of the aspects of the problem of freedom today, namely that of *homogeneous unity*. Lefort’s work can be read as an important reminder that we need to continually resist the desire to realize a unified society without division if we want to preserve political freedom.

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[93] Honneth 2000a: 36. Honneth talks of the “necessary connection between the social pathologies of his time and the improper overextension of those two incomplete models of freedom.” 2000a: 36. And of “limited models of freedom and their pathological consequences”. 2000a: 44n22.

[94] In chapter 4 we will see that things are more complicated since Honneth also makes room for indeterminacy when he emphasizes the importance of negative and reflexive freedom, although this indeterminacy is slightly different from the one we can find in Rosanvallon’s work.

In chapter 2 I will then turn to the work of Rosanvallon, who also operates in the political-historical camp and whose work can be understood in many ways as a continuation of Lefort's work on freedom and democracy. However, in Rosanvallon's work we can also find a critique of the other aspect of the problem of freedom today, namely *atomism*. This is unusual because those who criticize atomism are usually to be found in the social-ethical camp, starting from a normative conception of individual freedom, whereas Rosanvallon approaches the problem of atomism by turning not to morality or ethics but to *history*. More specifically, Rosanvallon connects the problem of atomism to the problem of *representation*: he historically reconstructs the way in which the French people have tried to overcome the atomism inherited from the French Revolution by experimenting with new ways of representing the social. In doing this, Rosanvallon aims to illuminate the problem of atomism (and representation) that we are facing today. Therefore, I want to focus in chapter two on Rosanvallon's discussion of atomism and representation and show how this is also informed by an understanding of freedom as indeterminacy.

The second part of the dissertation will be concerned with the understanding of freedom as complementarity that can be found in Taylor and Honneth, although they understand this in a different way. This difference is caused by their different appropriation of Hegel. Although both take Hegel as their starting point when reflecting on the problem of freedom today, the difference is as follows: Taylor endorses Hegel's *diagnosis* of the problem of freedom, but he rejects Hegel's *solution* and instead turns to the insights of phenomenology and hermeneutics, whereas Honneth also tries to rehabilitate Hegel's *solution*, although translated into a post-metaphysical vocabulary. The resulting difference is that Taylor embraces the phenomenological idea of an 'implicit background understanding' that makes it impossible to ever reach a context-transcending, critical position in modernity, which brings him close to the perspectivist intuitions of those in the political-historical camp. In contrast, Honneth follows the road of the left-Hegelian tradition that still believes that we can find a rational, context-transcending perspective for normative critique in modern societies, although, as said before, not through 'moral construction' (as it is done in the moral camp) but through 'immanent reconstruction', or *immanent critique*. My aim of bringing Taylor and Honneth together is to shed light on the consequences of these different methodological commitments.

In chapter 3 I will discuss the work of Charles Taylor, who is known for his critique of atomism, but whose work also contains a critique of homogeneous unity. In order to find remedies

for these threats, Taylor, as I will try to show, extracts two issues from Hegel's philosophy – namely the issues of *identification* and *meaningful differentiation*, which are both understood as preconditions of freedom. This results in two confrontations in Taylor's work that together result in an understanding of freedom that can be called 'freedom as complementarity': first of all, a confrontation between *atomism* and the need for *identification*, whereby Taylor sounds like a typical exponent of the social-ethical camp by starting from an account of the social preconditions of individual freedom and then criticizing atomism for neglecting these; and secondly, a confrontation between *homogeneous unity* and the need for *meaningful differentiation*, whereby Taylor sounds much more like someone from the political-historical camp in emphasizing the lack of foundations and the inevitability of indeterminacy, permanent debate, and perspectivism. By exploring this tension, I will try to shed further light on the underlying differences between the social-ethical and political-historical camp and how this can help us to better understand the problems of atomism and homogeneous unity.

Chapter 4 will then be devoted to the work of Axel Honneth, who operates in the social-ethical camp and whose theory of recognition provides a critique of atomism. In my discussion of Honneth's work I will focus on three issues: first of all, I will look at a small passage in which Honneth criticizes theories of democracy inspired by Lefort, and from there I want to explore Honneth's own understanding of democracy and how this is informed by an understanding of freedom as complementarity, which he calls *social freedom*. Secondly, I will look at Honneth's understanding of *immanent critique*, which tries to find a privileged position for normative critique by way of an immanent reconstruction. I want to explore this by reconstructing one of the red threads in Honneth's work: namely his attempt to provide a *normative account of the economy*, as opposed to the idea that the market has its own objective logic, an idea that can be found in economics, sociology informed by functional differentiation, or Marxist depictions of capitalism. This account can be read as a critique of atomism, as a de-naturalization of the idea that market participants are self-sufficient individuals pursuing their own interest. In reconstructing Honneth's critique of atomism and his attempt to develop a normative critique of the economy, I will focus on the methodological changes throughout his work that are related to his attempt to find a privileged position for normative critique. Thirdly, I will look at how Honneth's left-Hegelian method of immanent critique relates to the political-historical camp. Honneth's search for a normative, privileged position is exactly what those in the political-historical camp reject in favor

of a political perspectivism; by confronting these positions, the intention is again to provide insights into the underlying presuppositions in the social-ethical and political-historical camp and how this can help us to better understand the problem of freedom today that revolves around atomism and homogeneous unity.

After discussing the work of Lefort, Rosanvallon, Taylor, and Honneth, including their accounts of 'freedom as indeterminacy' and 'freedom as complementarity' and their different critiques of atomism and homogeneous unity, the third part of the dissertation will then present two case studies that will more thoroughly explore the underlying different commitments in the social-ethical and political-historical camp: in chapter 5 the relation between freedom and history will be central, in chapter 6 I will look at the different ways in which the process of giving form to a democratic society is understood.

In chapter 5 I want to start from the fact that the reflections on freedom of Rosanvallon, Honneth, and Taylor are embedded in large historical reconstructions, which is surprising considering the devastating critiques of teleology and 'grand narratives' in the twentieth century. This raises the question about what kind of philosophy of history informs their reflections on freedom. I want to explore this by using a distinction made by Hayden White between 'tragic' and 'comic' conceptions of history. In a large historical reconstruction of my own, I will first show how the reflections of freedom during the Renaissance were informed by tragic conceptions of history (where I will base myself on the work of Skinner, Pocock, and Ankersmit). Then I will argue how the reflection on freedom during the Enlightenment became informed by comic conceptions of history (where I will draw on the work of Koselleck). Following this, I will discuss three post-Enlightenment thinkers: Herder (comic), Hegel (tragi-comic), and Guizot (tragic). I will look at how their historical thinking has influenced Taylor, Honneth, and Rosanvallon respectively. My overall aim will be to illuminate the general parallel between 'normative' and 'political' approaches to freedom and between 'comic' and 'tragic' conceptions of history.

In chapter 6 I want to explore the difference between Rosanvallon and Honneth when it comes to the question about how form is given to a democratic society. I will do this by presenting four short case studies: I will first discuss how Rosanvallon and Honneth have a different understanding of the problem of atomism and of how to overcome it by either by focusing on 'representation' and 'the political' (Rosanvallon) or on 'recognition' and 'social organicism' (Honneth); I will then look at their different evaluations of *universal suffrage*, whose importance

is often downplayed by thinkers in the social-ethical camp in the light of a more demanding intersubjective freedom, whereas those in the political-historical camp emphasize its importance in the light of political equality; after that, I will explore their different understanding of the relation between representations and social reality in connection to their understanding of pathologies; and finally, I want to bring these analyses together by discussing how the ideal of democracy relates to the ideals of the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

In the final conclusion, I will turn to the question of how the insights gained in the dissertation can raise the level of debate when trying to understand the problem of freedom today.

Part 1: Freedom as indeterminacy

In the strict sense of the term, there has never been a true democracy, and there never will be.

Rousseau[95]

[95] Rousseau 2006: 77.

Introduction: The French critique of totalitarianism

After Donald Trump got elected as the president of the United States, it was reported that the sales of classic anti-totalitarian books such as George Orwell's *1984* and Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* skyrocketed. Apparently, the public discerned parallels between today's populism and the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. This raises the question as to whether we can still learn something from the critiques of totalitarianism of the twentieth century when trying to understand today's problems related to freedom and democracy. In the following two chapters I want to discuss the ideas of Claude Lefort and Pierre Rosanvallon, whose names are connected to the French 'anti-totalitarian movement' that emerged in the second half of the 1970s and whose work contains – I would like to argue – valuable insights for understanding today's problems concerning freedom and democracy. Before turning to their work, I want to give a brief conceptual history of the word 'totalitarianism' in the twentieth century in order to understand the specificities of the French anti-totalitarian movement.

The adjective 'totalitarian' was first used by opponents of Italian fascism in 1923 to refer to its authoritarian character, but it was soon taken over by Mussolini and the Italian fascists themselves to describe the voluntarism of their movement. Mussolini spoke in 1925 of the "fierce totalitarian will" (*feroce volontà totalitaria*) of the fascists.[96] Several years later, certain intellectuals in the Weimar Republic who longed for a strong authoritarian state also started to use the adjective 'total': the notion of 'totale Staat' would appear in the work of Carl Schmitt in 1931,[97] and around the same time Ernst Jünger popularized the idea of 'totale Mobilmachung' (total mobilization).[98] However, when the Nazis came to power in 1933, they rejected – unlike the Italian fascists – the word 'total' or 'totalitarian' to describe their regime, which can be partly explained by a doctrinal difference concerning the role of the state: whereas the Italian fascists made the authoritarian state their ultimate end, for the Nazis the state was merely an instrument in the service of the domination of the *Volk* or race. But despite this rejection of the notion of 'totalitarian' by the Nazis themselves, in the literature of the exiled opponents of the Nazi-regime it became common

[96] Traverso 1998: 100.

[97] Schmitt distinguished between a 'quantitatively total state', whereby society completely dominates the state (i.e., the welfare state) and a 'qualitatively total state', whereby the state dominates society; it is the latter that Schmitt promoted. Cf. Gleason 1995: 20-23.

[98] Traverso 1998: 100.

to refer to Nazi-Germany as totalitarian. After the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939 it also became common to refer to the Soviet Union as totalitarian.

In this early period of totalitarian critique, the term 'totalitarian' was still vague and lacked theoretical elaboration: there was no agreement on the origins of totalitarianism or on its fundamental characteristics. What complicated matters was that all political orientations had their own specific explanation of the totalitarian phenomenon, from the Marxist critique of fascism and capitalism by the members of the Frankfurt School[99] – such as Franz Neumann's *Behemoth* (1942) or Max Horkheimer's *Autoritärer Staat* (1942) – to the liberal critiques in Friedrich von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) or Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945), and everything in between.[100]

It is only after the beginning of the Cold War in 1947 – the year in which president Truman gave his famous speech in which he announced a shift in policy that committed the United States to help democracies all over the world "maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose on them totalitarian regimes"[101] – that there would emerge a dominant interpretation of totalitarianism that would be generally shared in the Western world. This interpretation can be called 'politically liberal' and was predominantly inspired by two books, both written by European immigrants living in America, namely *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) by Hannah Arendt and *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956) by Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

For Arendt, the essence of totalitarianism is terror, which seeks to destroy the autonomous individual in order to establish the reign of an ideology. In her wide-ranging book, she mainly explores, as the title makes clear, the historical origins of totalitarianism, giving a central role to

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[99] As Gleason points out, it was Herbert Marcuse who was the first of the members of the Frankfurt School to use the word 'totalitarian', namely in his article 'Die Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatsauffassung' (1934). 1995: 34.

[100] As Enzo Traverso sums up, the concept of totalitarianism was used by, "German and Italian exiled antifascists, by leftist opponents of Stalinism, by political liberals, by ex-communists becoming anticommunists, by exiled intellectuals of Eastern Europe, by Marxists and anti-Marxists, by libertarians and conservatives, by ideologists of the Cold War and pacifists." 1998: 105. Traverso also sums up some of the different historical and intellectual origins of totalitarianism that were identified by different authors, namely Plato (Karl Popper), Rousseau and the Jacobin republic of 1793 (Jacob Talmon), socialist planning (Friedrich von Hayek), Machiavellianism (Raymond Aron), the saint-simonians and the positive sociology of Auguste Comte (Herbert Marcuse), Joseph de Maistre (Isaiah Berlin), and Burke, Gobineau, Chamberlain, and Disraeli (Hannah Arendt). 1998: 105-106.

[101] Quoted in Gleason 1995: 73. A year earlier, Winston Churchill had also used the word 'totalitarian' in his famous 'Iron Curtain'-speech: "[T]he fear [of nuclear weapons] might have been used by them [some Communist or neo-Fascist state] to enforce totalitarian systems upon the free and democratic world, with consequences appalling to the human imagination." Quoted in Gleason 1995: 69.

anti-Semitism and imperialism. The book by Friedrich and Brzezinski is less concerned with the historical origins of totalitarianism and focuses instead on the structural traits of totalitarian societies, of which they identify six: 1) an official ideology, 2) a single mass party led typically by one man, 3) a system of terroristic police control, 4) a technologically conditioned near-complete monopoly of control of mass communication, 5) a similarly technologically conditioned near-complete monopoly of control of armed combat, and 6) central control and direction of the entire economy.[102]

However, just at the time when these books helped to solidify a dominant interpretation of totalitarianism in the West, at least three developments complicated matters. First of all, the historical situation in the only remaining 'totalitarian' regime, the Soviet Union, would change after the death of Stalin in 1953, which would cast doubt on the validity and relevance of the dominant Cold War concept of totalitarianism.[103] Secondly, the increasingly sophisticated scholarship on the histories of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union started to show not only how the workings of these regimes had been much more complex than had been assumed so far, but it also showed the enormous differences between the two regimes, *pace* Arendt, Friedrich, and Brzezinski, who had emphasized their similarities. Finally, there was a growing resistance against the increasingly moralizing tone of the totalitarian literature in the 1960s, for example in the way it was used to justify the Vietnam War.[104]

These developments can explain why the concept of totalitarianism was at a low point in the mid-1970s, but this makes it even more puzzling why at this time there would suddenly emerge an anti-totalitarian movement in France. As Michael Scott Christofferson has argued in his book on the French anti-totalitarian movement,[105] the answer can be found if one looks at the specific political problems that intellectuals were struggling with in different countries, and how the concept of totalitarianism was instrumentalized in different ways.[106] As he explains, in countries like the USA, England, and West-Germany, the danger of totalitarianism was perceived to be *external*, and

[102] Quoted in Christofferson 2004: 6.
[103] As Christofferson writes: "The end of mass terror, the relative liberalization of Soviet culture life under Khrushchev, the emergence of dissidence after his ouster in 1964, and then the transformation of Bolshevik ideology into a justification of the staid power and privilege of the Nomenklatura under Brezhnev all dramatically contradicted the Cold War concept of totalitarianism's understanding of terror, ideology and the space available to dissent in the Soviet Union." 2004: 7.
[104] Christofferson 2004: 6-7.
[105] Christofferson 2004.
[106] Christofferson 2004: 11, 18.

the fate of the concept of totalitarianism was closely connected to international relations, whereas in countries like France and Italy there was a strong communist party, and the threat was thus perceived to be *internal*, making the fate of the concept of totalitarianism therefore dependent on domestic politics.

After the Second World War the concept of totalitarianism had found little resonance in France, and – as Christofferson argues – this can be partly explained by the influence of the French Communist Party (PCF), at that time having twenty-five percent of the votes, which had strong ties with Moscow and resisted the use of the word 'totalitarian'. This situation can explain why someone like Raymond Aron, one of the main French critics of totalitarianism, had difficulties with converting other intellectuals, or why *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* by Friedrich and Brzezinski was never translated into French and why Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* only appeared in a complete French translation in 1984.[107]

It is only in the post-1968 struggles about which political course the Left should take that the concept of totalitarianism found its belated entry into the French intellectual landscape. As Christofferson argues, an important event in this regard was the 'Union of the Left' in 1972, which was an alliance of socialist and communist parties, giving the Left the prospect of coming to power for the first time in the Fifth Republic. Especially among the intellectuals of the non-communist Left, the alliance with the communist PCF was controversial and the subject of intense debate,[108] which was further intensified after the publication of Alexandr Solzenitsyn's book *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1974, which described the widespread terror in the Soviet Union.

What emerged in the ensuing debates was a French anti-totalitarian movement that pointed its arrows at Marxism, communism, and the Soviet Union. It argued that political projects inspired by a revolutionary ideology inevitably lead to totalitarianism, that is, the suppression of liberty and pluralism. The fate of the concept of totalitarianism in France thus revolved around the relationship between anti-totalitarian intellectuals and the PCF, and in the following two chapters I will try to show that it is in this rather provincial debate on totalitarianism in France – a debate in which little reference was made to any of the existing international literature on totalitarianism – that we can

[107] Traverso 1998: 103; Christofferson 2004: 16.
[108] Lefort 1981: 13ff, 129-158; Christofferson 1999: 559ff.

find fruitful tools for understanding and analyzing contemporary problems related to freedom and democracy.[109]

[109] To finish the conceptual history of 'totalitarianism' in the twentieth century: After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the crisis of Marxism and communism at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, there was a temporary revival of the concept of totalitarianism. These reflections on totalitarianism were often accompanied by the myth of an 'end of history', see for example Ernst Nolte's *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg* (1987) or François Furet's *Le passé d'une illusion* (1995). Cf. Traverso 1998: 104.

Chapter 1: Claude Lefort on the preconditions of political freedom

On June 17, 1939 – less than three months before the beginning of the Second World War – Raymond Aron gave a talk before the French Society of Philosophy in which he compared democratic regimes and totalitarian regimes in order to determine how democracies could resist the totalitarian threat.[110] Such a *comparative* approach has been popular among those working in the political-historical camp: think of Machiavelli's attempt in his *Discourses on Livy* to understand the political problems of sixteenth century Florence by comparing the Florentine Republic to the Roman Republic, or Tocqueville's attempt in *Democracy in America* to illuminate the problems facing French democracy in the nineteenth century by comparing it to American democracy. Perhaps the reason for this popularity of a comparative approach – and here we stumble again upon the central characteristic of the political-historical camp – is that one can stay at the complex surface of political and historical reality and compare different *perspectives*, instead of abstracting from political and historical reality in search for deep foundations or privileged positions.

In the political philosophy of Claude Lefort we find a continuation of this tradition: similar to Aron, Lefort tries to gain insight into the preconditions of political freedom, not by starting from a normative conception of the individual – as it is common in the moral and social-ethical camp – but through a comparative analysis of totalitarian societies (in which political freedom is eliminated) and democratic societies (in which the conditions for political freedom are secured).

In this chapter I want to reconstruct Lefort's account of the preconditions of political freedom and show how it can contribute to a better understanding of the problem of freedom today revolving around the issues of atomism and homogeneous unity. As we will see, Lefort's philosophy provides important insights into the question as to why the desire for homogeneous unity keeps returning in modern societies, why it is problematic, and how we can secure ourselves against it; and his philosophy also reveals some problematic assumptions that often accompany the critique of atomism in the social-ethical camp. In the following I will first look at Lefort's early struggles with Marxism (§1.1) and his turn to the work of Machiavelli (§1.2), then I will analyze his comparison of democratic and totalitarian societies (§1.3), and finally I will discuss his account of the preconditions of political freedom (§1.4, §1.5).

[110] This talk was later published as 'États démocratiques et États totalitaire' (1946).

1.1 From Marxist revolt to Machiavellian virtù

Born in Paris in 1924, Claude Lefort was intellectually formed during and after the Second World War, which was a period in France dominated by Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism – embodied by philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Lefort started as a student of Merleau-Ponty in 1941-1942, following courses on Marxism and phenomenology. Soon afterwards, in 1943, Lefort would express, like many of his peers, his revolutionary sympathies and the desire to overturn capitalist society in order to overcome exploitation and domination. What distinguished Lefort as a young Marxist, however, was his anti-communism and his fierce criticism of the Soviet Union.[111] Whereas Sartre and Merleau-Ponty at that time were still defending communism, even when they knew about the concentration camps,[112] Lefort argued from the beginning that communist Russia was not the answer to overcoming capitalist exploitation and domination. Because of these convictions, Lefort did not join France's communist party (the PCF), but instead he ended up in the much smaller Trotskyist party (the PCI).

It is here that Lefort met Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) – a Greek Trotskyist who had fled from the Greek dictatorship in 1945 – and they soon decided to form an independent group, founded in 1949, which they called *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, including a journal with the same title. Characteristic of the group was its criticism of the Soviet-Union while at the same time expressing Marxist and revolutionary sympathies, which was an unusual combination.[113] Whereas Castoriadis was mainly concerned with unmasking the new forms of exploitation in the Soviet Union, Lefort was interested in the new forms of domination: he tried to show how there had emerged a new class division, how the state had been appropriated by the dominant class and turned into a bureaucracy, and how this had been accompanied by new forms of terror, which Lefort thought were not accidental features of the Soviet regime but instead were essential for its functioning.[114]

However, Lefort soon felt that the Marxist theoretical framework – with its exclusive focus on the economy, its dogmas concerning history and the proletariat, and its reductionist

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[111] Lefort published commentaries on eye-witness-accounts of those who knew the Soviet regime from the inside – for example on Victor Kravchenko in 1948 and Anton Ciliga in 1950 – more than 25 years before his famous commentary on Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1976. Cf. Lefort 1976: 8, 9n1.

[112] See Merleau-Ponty's *Humanisme et terreur* (1947) and 'L'U.R.S.S. et les camps' (1950); cf. Lefort 1981: 236. Whereas Merleau-Ponty would turn his back on communism after the Korean War (1950-1953) and would distance himself from Sartre in the long chapter 'Sartre et l'ultra-bolchevisme' in *Les aventures de la dialectique* (1955), Sartre would only become more radical as he got older, or as Lefort put it "glisser d'une position à une autre sans jamais rien renier des theses qu'il abandonnait". 1981: 248.

[113] Cf. Poltier 1998: 35.

[114] Cf. Lefort 1981: 160-161. For Lefort's early criticism of the Soviet Union, see the essays collected in Lefort 1971.

understanding of political emancipation as simply the result of economic emancipation – was no longer adequate for analyzing and understanding communism. When he published in 1956 for the first time an article in which he used the word 'totalitarian' to describe the Soviet Union,[115] this was considered a scandal in the eyes of many Marxists.[116] Within the Marxist perspective, in which emancipation is closely connected with the economic mode of production, it was democracy – always understood as 'bourgeois democracy' – that was understood as totalitarian, allowing the domination and exploitation of one class by another, whereas many Marxists remained blind to the wide-spread terror in communist societies and therefore resisted calling the Soviet Union totalitarian.[117] The problem for Lefort was that within the Marxist framework, bourgeois capitalism and democracy were seen as intimately connected; for Lefort this was problematic because the Marxist hatred for 'bourgeois democracy' made them blind to the nature of both democracy and totalitarianism.[118]

Therefore, Lefort would turn his back on Marxism in 1957,[119] leave *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1958, and focus on an academic career in which the understanding and comparing of totalitarian and democratic societies would be his central concern.[120] His aim was to show his Marxist peers why democratic societies provide the preconditions of freedom and communist and totalitarian societies provide the preconditions of servitude. In order to do this, Lefort searched for an alternative framework to think about politics and emancipation, and he would find this in the work of Machiavelli. Whereas Sartre would famously claim that, "Marxism is the unsurpassable horizon of our time",[121] Lefort looked beyond this horizon and started to write a book on Machiavelli, which would eventually serve as his doctoral dissertation supervised by Raymond Aron.

The writing of the dissertation on Machiavelli was interrupted in 1961 with the sudden

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[115] 'Le totalitarisme sans Stalin'. In: Lefort 1971. Cf. Poltier 1998: 71.
[116] Lefort 1981: 159.
[117] "Elle [Marxism] répugne à découvrir la liberté dans la démocratie puisque celle-ci est définie comme bourgeoise. Elle répugne à découvrir la servitude dans la totalitarisme." Lefort 1986: 19.
[118] Lefort 1981: 28.
[119] Although Lefort turned his back on Marxism, he would continue to critically engage with the work of Marx; the difference for Lefort was that Marxism was dogmatic and keen to eliminate any contradiction or ambiguity in Marx's work, whereas for Lefort it were especially these contradictions and ambiguities that made Marx's work fruitful for analyzing social and political reality.
[120] As Lefort recalls, the rupture with Marxism "incited me to draw out the consequences of my political interpretation of totalitarianism, to rethink the idea of liberty, that of social creativity, within the framework of a theory of democracy that does not elude the division, conflict and unknown of history; to reject the revolutionary tradition in all its variants, a tradition in its own way just as oppressive, just as rigid as those which it combated." Quoted in Breckman 2013: 149.
[121] "Le marxisme est l'horizon indépassable de notre temps." Quoted in Rosanvallon 1977: 7.

death of Merleau-Ponty, who had become a friend of Lefort and whose testament requested Lefort to be the editor of his posthumous work.[122] While reading Merleau-Ponty's later work, Lefort was confronted with a similar desire to break with Marxism and to develop a new kind of political philosophy.[123] In the preface to his last book *Signes* (1960), Merleau-Ponty lamented the state of political thinking in post-war France: "There has been a political obsession among philosophers that has resulted neither in good politics nor in good philosophy. […] Instead of uniting their virtues, philosophy and politics have exchanged their vices, leading to a cunning practice and a superstitious thinking."[124] The main culprit for Merleau-Ponty was Marxism, and especially its dogmatic approach to history, which treated it as something that can be known and mastered – resulting in the idea that revolt and revolution are the most important forms of political action, as they can steer history toward a classless society in which all violence and evil have been eradicated.

In opposition to this, Merleau-Ponty understands history phenomenologically. Just as we are situated within language and being, we are similarly situated in history: we cannot simply make it, we cannot simply escape from it, but we are *in the middle of it*, without ever fully knowing or mastering it, and without ever being able to completely eradicate all violence and evil from it.[125] Merleau-Ponty concluded therefore that the most important form of political action is not revolt and revolution, but *virtù*; this is Machiavelli's famous concept referring to the art of dealing with the contingency of history, of responding creatively and responsibly to political events and unforeseen circumstances. As Merleau-Ponty added ironically, aimed at his Marxist contemporaries, this conclusion is probably "a deception for those who believe in salvation, and in one means of salvation that can solve all problems."[126]

But whereas Merleau-Ponty was not given the opportunity to further develop these thoughts, Lefort would in the next decade travel the road of his teacher, from Marxist revolt to Machiavellian *virtù*. This resulted in his almost 800 page dissertation *Le travail de l'œuvre: Machiavel* (1972), which contains many of the central ideas of Lefort's political philosophy.

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[122] Cf. Poltier 1998: 37.
[123] The following is based on Van Middelaar 1999: 82-84.
[124] "Il y a eu une manie politique chez les philosophes qui n'a fait ni de bonne politique ni de bonne philosophie. […] Au lieu d'unir leurs vertus, philosophie et politique échangeaient dès lors leurs vices: on avait une pratique rusée et une pensée superstitieuse." Merleau-Ponty 1960: 10-11.
[125] Merleau-Ponty 1960: 28.
[126] "La conclusion, ce n'est pas la révolte, c'est la *virtu* sans aucune resignation. Déception pour qui a cru au salut, et à un seul moyen de salut dans tous les orders." Merleau-Ponty 1960: 47.

1.2 On social division and the symbolic function of power

In order to understand the insights that Lefort draws from the work of Machiavelli, we have to first better understand Lefort's specific approach to politics. Following Merleau-Ponty, Lefort wants to apply the insights of phenomenology to the study of politics and society.[127] What characterizes most political thinking, according to Lefort, is the idea that there exists a *privileged position* from which one can understand the political sphere: either the 'normative' position of political philosophy that starts from a certain conception of human nature, and from there tries to determine what politics *should be*, or the 'neutral' position of the political sciences that sees politics as a clearly demarcated domain about which one can accumulate objective knowledge about what politics *is*.[128] In opposition to these attempts at a rationalization or objectification of politics, Lefort is interested in those political thinkers, such as Machiavelli and Tocqueville, who give extensive descriptions of the political *relations* of their time, who try to interpret the *meaning* of these relations, and from there try to make more general claims about the *experience* of modern politics.

In this way, there is a clear analogy with phenomenology, which – in trying to understand human experience – also rejects both metaphysics and simple empiricism, and it starts instead from phenomenological descriptions of our everyday relation to the world, and from there it tries to interpret the meaning of this relation and make more general claims about human experience. Lefort thinks that if we approach politics not from a transcendental, external, or privileged position, and instead start by acknowledging that political relations are *always already there,* and start by looking at how politics *actually happens* between human beings, and how it actually *appears* in everyday life in political discourses, representations, and imaginaries, then we can gain important new insights. These insights, however, do not consist of rational or objective knowledge; instead they consist of a better understanding of certain ambiguities and paradoxes that are at the heart of modern politics – just as phenomenology gives us insights into the ambiguities and paradoxes that are at the heart of human experience.

The reason why Machiavelli is so important for Lefort is because he was the first political thinker to have such a 'phenomenological' approach to politics, both rejecting the traditional Christian and ethical approaches to politics and also being critical of pragmatic approaches that

[127] Cf. Poltier 1998: 39ff.
[128] Lefort 1986: 19-21.

have no principles at all; instead, he describes and analyzes existing political and social relations.[129] Furthermore, the originality of Machiavelli lies for Lefort in his sensitivity to the problem of the *symbolic* dimension of politics; that politics is not merely a play of forces,[130] but that it is about the understanding of symbols, representations, and imaginaries, i.e., of how politics *appears*.

Without going into the details of Lefort's 800-page book, we can illuminate his interpretation of Machiavelli by focusing on a passage where he comments on *The Prince*. As is well known, the political relation between the prince and his subjects, as Machiavelli discusses it in *The Prince*, is rather ambivalent because the actions of the prince, if he wants to remain in power and achieve honor and glory, should be guided by two conflicting principles: he has to win the trust of his subjects, but at the same time he must force them into obedience.[131] As Machiavelli historically illustrates, the prince who only follows one of these principles will fail – be it only winning the trust of his subjects like the Dominican priest Savonarola,[132] or only oppressing his subjects like the tyrant Agathocles.[133] What makes this discussion more puzzling at first sight is that Machiavelli does not seem to be concerned with the question whether the political actions of the prince are actually good or bad, and instead he seems to focus on how these actions *appear* to his subjects, that is, with how the subjects *imagine* the prince.[134]

In his attempt to understand the meaning of this ambivalent relation, Lefort turns to a passage where Machiavelli talks about the opposition between the nobles (*grandi*) and the people (*popolo*):

> These two different dispositions are found in every city; the people are everywhere anxious not to be dominated or oppressed by the nobles, and the nobles are out to dominate and

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[129] Machiavelli's "critique de la tradition doit osciller entre deux poles. A la fois, il s'emploie à ruiner la conception classique et chrétienne de l'État et à dénoncer la politique sans principe des pseudo-sages de Florence. Au prétendu savoir de la philosophie et de la religion il substitute un non-savoir, de telle sorte que son analyse de pouvoir semble un moment suspendue dans le vide; mais à l'ignorance des pragmatists, satisfaits des recettes de palais, il oppose les enseignements de l'Histoire, les exigences de la prévision rationelle et l''ordre des chose' – ordre des rapports de forces et de désirs." Lefort 1972: 400.

[130] "[L]'intelligence de la force plus que la force elle-même est au cœur de la politique." Lefort 1972: 363.

[131] Lefort 1972: 374.

[132] Machiavelli 1999: 21.

[133] Machiavelli 1999: 29.

[134] "[Machiavel] interrogee le paraître dans la certitude que le prince n'existe que pour les autres, que son être est *au-dehors*. Sa critique se déploie dans le seul ordre des apparences." Lefort 1972: 408.

oppress the people. These opposed ambitions bring about one of three results: a principality, a free city, or anarchy.[135]

It thus turns out that the subjects to which the prince relates do not form a unified group, but instead they always consist of two groups, the nobles and the people, whose respective desires – domination and non-domination – are opposite and can never be reconciled. As Machiavelli argues, the prince has the most chance of stabilizing his power if he suppresses the desire for domination of the nobles and supports the desire for non-domination of the people, who will then recognize the protection they get from the prince and thus struggle for him to remain in power.

The reason why this passage is central for Lefort is because it contains two general ideas that are radically different from Marxism. First of all, for Machiavelli internal social division is constitutive of every society: the opposition of the nobles and the people, of the desires for domination and non-domination, are a characteristic of every city.[136] Machiavelli thus believed that social division is not the result of contingent causes and this is very different from the Marxist belief that a different organization of the means of production can overcome conflict and division. This has, secondly, important consequences for how to understand the origin and function of political power. As Lefort argues, in Machiavelli's picture political power emerges from the permanent social conflict between the nobles and the people as a third party that has the task of regulating a society divided by conflict. This can only be done when political power places itself above the specific interests in society, and when this happens, Lefort says, society is no longer a *civil society* – characterized by merely private conflicts, without there being any third, independent parties that can mediate between the conflicting parties – but it becomes a *political society*. The task of political power is therefore to *institute a political society* that can deal in an adequate way with the permanent division and conflict in society.[137]

However, what makes this situation complicated is that political power has to be both concerned with responding in an adequate way to the permanent social conflict, while at the same

[135] Machiavelli 1999: 32. Quoted in Lefort 1972: 381.
[136] As Lefort emphasizes, Machiavelli does not start from a conception of the nature of the individual, but he starts from a division of desire that emerges when people live together: "Ce qui importe à [Machiavelli] ce n'est donc pas la nature humaine, prise en soi, c'est la division d'un désir qui ne se forme que dans l'état social ou, plus justement, l'état politique (là où il y a Cité): opprimer – ne pas être opprimé." 1978b: 222.
[137] As Poltier explains Lefort's idea: "[L]e référent en regard duquel évaluer une politique n'est pas l'image conçue de la bonne société mais l'être du social; la tâche de l'action est de répondre adéquatement à la division sociale." 1998: 150-151.

time it has the task of *representing society's unity*.[138] By detaching itself from society as a third party, political power creates the possibility of holding up a mirror to society, as it were, through which society can reflect on itself and its internal divisions, while at the same time it can come to understand itself as a unity, including a collective history and a shared identity. This is why political representations are so important for Lefort: the way political power represents its own origin, tasks, and relation to society is not merely an epiphenomenal superstructure or ideology, but it can actively constitute society's self-understanding and its social relations.

These two ideas that Lefort finds in Machiavelli – the permanence of social division and the importance of political representations – lead to a new way of distinguishing and comparing different political regimes; namely by looking at the different way they deal with internal social division and how this shows itself in different political representations. In Machiavelli, this leads to a distinction between a principality, a free city, and anarchy. Whereas in a *principality*, the prince suppresses the nobles and supports the people, in a *free city* (i.e., a *republic*) it is the impersonal institution of the *law* that regulates the social conflict. The law has the function of giving the people the ability to resist the domination of the nobles, or, differently put, it gives the people the *right* to do this. Both principalities and republics thus acknowledge social division, but the difference is that in the principality the domination of the nobles over the people is replaced by the domination of the prince over both nobles and people. The prince must oppress the desire of the people for non-domination when it comes to *himself*. In the republic, however, people are free, because the law is sovereign, and therefore the class conflict can be regulated without anyone being dominated by anyone else.[139]

The third possible result of the perennial social conflict between the nobles and the people is *anarchy*, which happens when there fails to emerge an independent political power that can regulate the social conflict. In that case, society is prey to the desire of the nobles to dominate. However, this does not have to mean that there is no political power at all in such a society, but when there is, it has lost its independent role as a third party vis-à-vis civil society and has become invaded by the dominant class. If this happens, for example in aristocratic despotism, the nobles

[138] This paradox, whereby political power has to represent both the unity and the division of society has become normal in our parliamentary democracies. Ankersmit characterizes this as "the paradox of impartial partiality": "On the one hand the state ought to be the state of all citizens and to be recognized by the citizens as such, but on the other hand it should also correctly represent all the dissensions existing among the citizens in society." 1996: 139.

[139] Cf. Poltier 1998: 139.

often try to legitimate their own dominating position by producing representations and imaginaries of society as harmonious and as 'One', of political power as the guardian of order and cohesion, and of an image of the people as sinful and perverse – that if society was left to the passions of the people, this would lead to disorder. In this way, such a society is not just based on the desire of the nobles to oppress the people but also on the incapacity to acknowledge this desire and to veil it under the fictional image of the common good and of a natural harmony of interests – a fiction that can only be maintained by oppressing the 'perverse' or 'sinful' desire of the people for non-domination, and by a suspension of the law.

It is on the basis of these different ways to deal with internal social division that Machiavelli distinguishes between *healthy* societies, such as principalities and republics, in which political power acknowledges the social division and the legitimacy of conflict and supports the desire of the people for non-domination, and *corrupt* societies, such as aristocratic despotism, in which political power denies internal social division and represents society as harmonious, conflict-free, and as 'one', a fiction which requires the oppression of the desire of the people for non-domination.

This distinction can be further illuminated by Machiavelli's historical study in his *Discourses on Livy* of the 'healthy' Roman Republic and the 'corrupt' Florentine Republic. Contrary to the interpretations of many historians of his time, Machiavelli argued that Rome was successful not *despite* the continuous conflict between the Senate and the Plebs, but exactly *because* of the fact that the Roman Republic acknowledged its internal social division and created institutions to deal with this division in a productive way.[140] The corruption in the Florentine Republic, on the other hand, can be explained by its failure to acknowledge social division, which Machiavelli understood to be the result of the dominant influence of Christianity. Although Machiavelli was not against religious worship and saw it as an important precondition for realizing virtù in citizens,[141] he preferred the ancient religion of Rome over the Christianity of Florence, since the latter "glorified humble and contemplative men", "set up as the greatest good humility,

[140] Lefort 1972: 470, 472, 474. Cf.: Skinner 1981: 65-67. Machiavelli says that "those who condemn the quarrels between the nobles and the plebs" under the ancient Republic are "caviling at the very things that were the primary cause of Rome's retaining her freedom." Quoted in Skinner 1978a: 181. This picture can be nuanced by pointing to the fact, as Gisela Bock (1990) has done, that Machiavelli is more critical of civil discord in his book *The History of Florence*. This leads Bock to distinguish between two understandings of civil discord in the work of Machiavelli: one centering on *umori* (humours) and the other on *sètte* (sects, factions), whereby the discordance caused by the former is considered to be natural, unavoidable, and may even lead, if checked and handled in a civilized way, to equality and the common good, whereas the latter are merely struggles for power, which are avoidable and hence should be avoided.
[141] Cf. Skinner 1981: 61-64.

abjectness and contempt for human things", and thus "made the world weak and turned it over as prey to wicked men."[142]

Lefort interprets Machiavelli's criticism of Christianity again in the light of the problem of social division. In Christianity, Lefort argues, the social division between nobles and people is replaced with the division between this-wordly and other-worldly aspirations. Christianity denies the social division of society and strives for a society united around virtue and harmony, but at the same time it acknowledges that this is impossible to realize because of the evil nature of man, i.e., of original sin, which makes the good society on earth impossible. Therefore, the dominant class can repress the 'sinful' desires of the people in the name of keeping social order, teaching them that they should be humble and not try to improve their lives in this earthly life, and that only then can they improve their chances in the afterlife. In this way, Christianity both delegitimizes the desire of the people for non-domination and reinforces the legitimacy of the rule of the nobles, which leads to a strong form of despotism because it is presented as the will of God.

For Lefort, Machiavelli's work thus provides an important alternative to Marxism; Machiavelli compares societies not by focusing on the economic mode of production but on the way political regimes deal with internal social division, something that shows itself in the representations located at the place of power. Unlike the Marxist idea of ideology, in which political representations are merely the superstructure of the economic base – in which, in other words, 'representations' and the 'real' are clearly separated – Lefort takes from Machiavelli the idea that political representations have an autonomy and dynamic of their own, and that they have an important role in shaping social relations and in realizing emancipation.[143] Although Machiavelli was not a thinker of democracy, Lefort applies these insights to the comparison of democratic and totalitarian societies, to which I will now turn.

1.3 Totalitarianism as a pathology of democracy

So how does Lefort understand the relation between democracy and totalitarianism? Just like Hannah Arendt, Lefort is convinced that the emergence of totalitarianism in the twentieth century was not the return of premodern forms of tyranny and despotism, but instead it was typically

[142] Quoted in: Skinner 1981: 63-64.

[143] "Bref, ce que Machiavel a en vue, pensons-nous, c'est la différence Etat-société civile, et ce qu'il éclaire, dans les conditions historiques où il est place, mieux que Marx, c'est la function du pouvoir d'Etat dans le processus de formation de la société civile." Lefort 1978: 237.

modern, something that could not have emerged in premodern times. More specifically, Lefort understands totalitarianism as a *pathology of democracy*, that is, as a pathological solution to the problems and uncertainties that emerged as a result of the modern democratic revolution.[144] Therefore, Lefort is convinced that if we want to know how to realize and consolidate a democratic society then a good starting point is the comparison of democratic societies with their Janus-face: totalitarian societies in which political freedom is abolished.[145]

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, Lefort wants to compare democratic and totalitarian societies by looking at how they deal differently with internal social division and how this shows itself in the representations at the place of power. To give an adequate account of Lefort's analysis, we should start with his interpretation of the transition of premodern societies to modern societies, inaugurated by the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century, and then look at how democratic and totalitarian societies provide different solutions for the problems and uncertainties initiated by this transition.[146]

What connected premodern societies despite all their differences – from Asian despotism to Medieval monarchies – was that the social order was determined by a transcendent source (e.g., mythical beings, divinities, God, foundational heroes) that was presented as being inaccessible to humans. Power, law, and knowledge – which for Lefort are the three central instances determining social relations – were determined by, and got their legitimacy from, a transcendent source. The place of power was occupied by a king who was represented as a mediator between the invisible, transcendent source and the visible social order, and he derived his legitimacy from his attempt to conform to and perpetuate the natural or divine order as wanted by the transcendent source.

The result was a social order that was represented as 'natural' and in which everybody had their 'natural' place; dependencies and hierarchies appeared as natural facts that could not be put into question. In this way, by 'naturalizing' social division, its disruptive effects were kept within bounds because it prevented the *instituted* character of hierarchy to appear as such. This identification of the social order with a natural fact, as something completely determined, explains

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[144] As Rosanvallon says: "Against purely descriptive approaches, which saw only the aggravated resurgence of dictatorship and tyranny, the originality of [Lefort] was to show that the [totalitarian] regimes in question had to be understood as deviant forms of democratic modernity – as its negative fulfilment, in a sense. […] Lefort opened up a way to understand democracy by starting from its pathologies" 2006a: 51-52.
[145] Rosanvallon: "[T]he strength of [Lefort's] analysis is to have shown that the understanding of totalitarianism was the condition for a democratic consolidation, and that democracy could only develop from the understanding of the concrete forms taken by its worst negations or its pathologies." 2012: 13.
[146] I rely in the following on the reconstruction given in Poltier 1998.

its conservative and ahistorical character, as being concerned with tradition and the past, not with the future and the new.

The transition from premodern to democratic societies was initiated by the denial of a transcendent foundation of the social order that is inaccessible to humans, replacing it with a new idea of the institution of society based on the sovereignty of the people. The institution of society was now guided by the ideal of autonomy: society masters its own order and development and finds its legitimacy in itself. Political power was no longer understood as having the task of perpetuating an unchanging order, but it was the instance that society detaches from itself in order to transform itself; it was a means for society to act on itself, of proposing changes and new solutions to the problems related to human coexistence. By creating a point outside of itself, society created the possibility of reflecting and acting on itself; it opened the possibility of a permanent self-transformation of society, which made democratic societies for the first time *historical* societies, which were concerned with change, transformation, the future, and the new.[147]

At the same time, democratic societies were characterized by the fact that – with the disappearance of a transcendent source and a natural or divine order – the central principles instituting society became de-substantialized and indeterminate. Without nature or the divine giving shape to the social order, principles like equality or popular sovereignty become abstract and formal ideals that always transcend any given social order, and they become the subject of a permanent debate on how to realize them.

Furthermore, democratic societies were characterized by the fact that they recognized and institutionalized this indeterminacy concerning its own principles and ideals; it recognized that the ideals of democracy can never be realized in any final, determinate order. Democratic societies acknowledged that – with the disappearance of a transcendent source determining the social order – no one has privileged access to the principles and ends of society, which now become the subject of permanent debate, a debate from which no one can be excluded, and in which no one can be advantaged or disadvantaged. Political equality is in this way based on an equality of not-knowing.

[147] Cf. Lefort 1981: 174. Tocqueville already said that democracies “are haunted by visions of what will be; in this direction their unbounded imagination grows and dilates beyond all measure.” Quoted in: White (1973): 198. As John Pocock reminds us, premodern men lacked “any concept of an indefinite secular future, open-ended and continuously being created by human action, and they supposed that the future – the socially new – could come into being only as the result of the sacred, divine or (in severely limited number of cases) heroic creativity. Therefore they lacked what has been a historically dominant paradigm of human social action as creative of a future: the paradigm of revolutionary action.” 1971: 273.

This institutionalization of indeterminacy shows itself at the place of power, which, in Lefort's celebrated phrase, becomes symbolically an *empty place*.[148] Although this may sound strange at first, since the sovereign people seem to be at the place of power in a democratic society, the problem is that 'the people' has become de-substantialized and indeterminate: it does not have a determinate collective identity anymore and it is internally divided.[149] Political power in a democratic society can therefore never legitimately claim to fully represent the will of the people, just as it cannot legitimately claim to have privileged knowledge of how to realize the principles instituting a democratic society – such as equality, freedom, and justice – in a determinate social order.

The symbolically 'empty place of power' – which symbolizes the recognition that no one has a privileged place in a democratic society and that the social order therefore remains indeterminate – thus entails the institutionalization of conflict: an open competition for political power, the existence of different political parties, universal suffrage, parliamentary opposition, social movements, an independent and pluralist press, etc. Within these political and social conflicts, legitimacy for Lefort is based on interpreting and referring to the universal principles instituting a democratic society (equality, justice, freedom, citizenship, sovereignty of the people, etc.) while acknowledging one's own particular standpoint, whereas illegitimacy results from claiming to occupy a privileged position from which one knows how to fully realize these universal principles in a determinate social order. The former leaves room for politics, pluralism, and debate, whereas the latter ends this by smuggling into modernity the premodern notion of a privileged, transcendent place from which the social order can be determined.[150] Lefort thinks that giving up on a firm foundation does not have to lead to relativism or to the impossibility of taking political decisions, it just means that there will always be a gap between the universal principles of democracy and any given social order, which is exactly the precondition of political freedom.

One of the most important results of this democratic revolution, Lefort argues, is the separation of the spheres of power, law, and knowledge. Because nobody has privileged access

[148] E.g. Lefort 1981: 172.
[149] Lefort: "La démocratie inaugure l'expérience d'une société insaisissable, immaîtrisable, dans laquelle le peuple sera dit souverain, certes, mais où il ne cessera de faire question en son identité, où celle-ci demeurera latente." 1981: 172-173.
[150] There are thus clear similarities with the work of Habermas, who also tries to replace political theology with communicative rationality through a "linguistification of the sacred", although there are some crucial differences. Cf. Accetti 2010 and Weymans/Hetzel 2012.

anymore to the principles and ends of society, political power has to affirm the legitimacy of political competition and social conflict, and this implies affirming the *exteriority* of both law and knowledge. An open political competition requires that political power recognizes the exteriority of law, i.e., of the constitutional procedural laws guaranteeing political competition, the periodical change of power, and the fundamental rights to opinion, expression, reunion, and association. In doing this, political power also acknowledges the exteriority of knowledge: human rights help to create a public space in which debate and interaction is possible without interference of political power, thus separating power and knowledge. Another way in which power and knowledge became separated was a result of the modern recognition that the social order is different from the natural order, i.e., that society follows rules and logics that work independently of nature or transcendent beings. This made possible the emergence of the social sciences operating independently of political power; knowledge of society no longer derived its legitimacy from a transcendent source or from the people in power but instead from a circle of competent professors; knowledge of the social became accessible to humans again and open to a general debate.

If we summarize Lefort's reconstruction so far, one could say that a central characteristic of political power in both premodern societies and in democratic societies is that they acknowledge something *exterior* to themselves. Premodern power recognized the exteriority of a transcendent source that determines the social order, and this resulted in a society characterized by heteronomy, but also by psychological security in the sense that everybody occupied their 'natural' place. Democratic power also acknowledges something exterior, namely law and knowledge. It recognizes, first of all, the exteriority of human rights, which are *indeterminate*, in the sense that they guarantee the continuous debate and conflict over the abstract principles instituting a democratic society, but they do not determine how these principles should be realized in a concrete way. It recognizes, secondly, the exteriority of knowledge of society, which is no longer inaccessible to humans but is open to a permanent debate in universities, the press, associations, public debates, etc. This results in a democratic society in which there is political freedom and autonomy, but the price to pay is a permanent feeling of insecurity and frustration.

Democratic societies are in this way characterized by a tragic paradox of autonomy: they are guided by the ideal of autonomy, of the sovereign people mastering its own destiny, but at the same time they recognize and institutionalize the impossibility of realizing this. The paradox is that the affirmation of a free, pluralist society also means the recognition that one can never control the

democratic process and the internal division of society, and thus one always faces an indeterminate future.[151]

This explains why it is often such a frustrating and disappointing experience to live in a democratic society: one has to endure the absence of a strong foundation of the social bond or a shared collective identity, the constant confrontation between different groups, and, especially in moments of crisis, the apparent dissolution of the social into an atomistic society without any coherence. It is not surprising, therefore, that modern democracy has been accompanied from the beginning with the desire to end its indeterminacies and insecurities by finding again a privileged place from which to determine the social order.

For example, among bourgeois and conservative thinkers there has been the continuous attempt to introduce notions such as the Nation, the Family, Property, or Civilization, which could function as substantial principles dictating how the social order should be instituted.[152] On the other side of the political spectrum, it was thought that the failure to realize the sovereignty of the people was because the bourgeoisie had confiscated power; therefore, they introduced History and the Proletariat as the new privileged principles that could tell us how to determine the social order. On both sides there was the conviction that society could still reach its 'natural' destiny when certain hostile forces were neutralized or eliminated, that is, when the internal social division was either denied or overcome.

This desire to overcome internal social division is also apparent in the continuous anti-parliamentarism, which is informed by the idea that the spectacle of internal division at the place of power cannot support a people in search for an identity that is strong and without ambiguity.[153] It also shows itself in the permanent threat in democratic societies of racism and exclusion. The lack of a clear, determinate, collective identity in a democratic society – which, positively, opens up the possibility of multiculturalism, of including different identities, cultures, and customs in one society – can negatively lead to the situation where a specific group is blamed for being the source of the indeterminacy and lack of unity in society. As Lefort comments on Hannah Arendt's discussion of antisemitism: "This *other* [that the Jews represent], didn't democratic society

[151] Cf. Poltier 1998: 270.
[152] Lefort 1981: 173. Poltier 1998: 271.
[153] Poltier 1998: 271.

engender it? […] It seems to me it was its own intolerable indeterminacy that it targeted, making of a determinate being the symbol of its own inability to be unified."[154]

In these different ways, living in a democratic society has thus always been accompanied by feelings of malaise and disappointment, which have fed the desire for social unity and a determinate collective identity. These feelings intensified in moments of crisis, when it felt as if society could fall apart at any moment; it is in these moments, Lefort argues, that the totalitarian adventure began.[155]

Totalitarianism, in Lefort's understanding, tries to do the impossible; to realize autonomy without paying the price of insecurity and indeterminacy. It tries to create a society in which modern autonomy (society is master over itself) and premodern security (everybody has their natural place) go hand in hand.[156] As Lefort argues, totalitarian power tries to realize this by creating the fiction of 'the One', the fiction of a harmonious, transparent society in which the people form a homogeneous unity, and in which one Party embodies the will of the people as a whole. This fiction requires the denial and repression of all forms of internal social division; the only division that is recognized (or more accurately, 'produced') in a totalitarian society is *external*, between 'the people' and its 'enemies'.[157]

An important internal division that totalitarian power abolishes is that between power and society, or between state and civil society. In order to uphold the illusion of a society-as-one and a people-as-one, totalitarian power has to completely infiltrate society by implementing ideology and micro-bodies that reproduce the general power structures; it has to control thinking and public speech and abolish all spontaneous social interaction and association that are beyond the control of the Party, which means the abolishment of human rights; of the rights that guarantee a democratic space.

In this way, totalitarian power eliminates real human interaction, in which one can encounter another individual in his or her alterity; what remains is encountering the other in his or her role within the determinate whole, such as friend or enemy, superior or inferior.[158] This is reflected in the paradoxical fact that a totalitarian society combines a radically *organicist* with a

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[154] Lefort 2007: 527.
[155] Lefort: "Dans ces situations limites s'effectue un investissement fantastique dans les representations qui fournissent l'indice d'une identié et d'une unite sociales, et s'annonce l'aventure totalitaire." Quoted in Poltier 1998: 272.
[156] Cf. Poltier 1998: 273.
[157] Lefort 1981: 165-166.
[158] Poltier 1998: 234.

radically *artificial* ideal of society, combining the metaphors of society as a *body* and as a *machine*[159] (and the corresponding characterization of enemies of the people as either *parasites* or *saboteurs*).[160] In this representation, society is both understood as a community in which its members are truly solidary with each other, and at the same time it is characterized by a permanent mobilization in order to construct and create a 'new man'.[161]

In this way, totalitarian power thus denies its difference from society and *becomes* society as it were, being the instance of society's conscience and of society's action on itself. In doing this, totalitarian power abolishes another internal division; the division between the spheres of power, law, and knowledge. Knowledge of the final ends of society and of the laws and principles that govern social practices, are now determined exclusively by the leader or the Party. Democratic indeterminacy is replaced by an ideology that completely determines power, law, and knowledge. In this sense, a power emerges that – unlike premodern or democratic power – does not recognize anything outside itself, be it a transcendent source, human rights, or truth; totalitarian power denies any exteriority and thus has no limits. By appropriating and incorporating once again the symbolically 'empty place', totalitarian power ends all forms of meaningful discussion and communication about the ends of society and represses any contestation of the given order – and thus abolishes freedom as a principle structuring collective life. The result of the attempt to reconcile modern autonomy and premodern security is thus the complete destruction of political freedom.

1.4 Freedom, indeterminacy, and human rights

On the basis of Lefort's comparison of democratic and totalitarian societies, we can conclude, simply put, that democratic societies provide the preconditions of freedom because they acknowledge internal social division (i.e., an internally divided people, the division between state and civil society, and the division between power, law, and knowledge) and *endure* the resulting indeterminacy, whereas totalitarian societies provide the preconditions of servitude because they deny internal social division and give in to the desire for the 'One' and thereby end pluralism and liberty. I now want to further unpack some underlying aspects of this understanding of freedom.

[159] Lefort 1986: 23; 1981: 169.
[160] Lefort 1981: 166.
[161] Lefort 1986: 23.

From the outset, one can say that Lefort's understanding of freedom is influenced by two different traditions. On the one hand, his understanding of freedom as the acknowledgment of democratic indeterminacy and of an 'empty place' at the heart of democracy has its roots in the French philosophy of the twentieth century – one can find similar ideas in the work of Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, or Sartre. In their different ways, these French thinkers associate freedom with the ability to breach the chain of past determinations and to begin a new series of determinations.[162]

Lefort connects this to the republican tradition in which freedom is understood as *non-domination*. As we have seen, in his reading of Machiavelli, Lefort argued that the desire of the nobles to dominate the people was often masked behind certain political representations presenting society as harmonious, conflict-free, and as 'One'. The desire of the people for non-domination is therefore closely connected to the possibility of the people to challenge and reject the given social order, and this is realized in a democratic society through the acknowledgement and institutionalization of its own indeterminacy, which creates the freedom to question any given order of society.

In this way, Lefort can be said to have a political approach to freedom that is concerned with the preconditions of doing politics, as opposed to the normative approach to freedom in the social-ethical camp that is concerned with a normative conception of the individual. This difference is illustrated by the fact that Lefort's conception of freedom is both *negative* and *relational*, which separates it from the usual understandings in the social-ethical camp of negative freedom as being individualistic or atomistic. For Lefort, freedom is not a property of an *individual*, but it is a principle that informs a specific *form of society* that embraces its own indeterminacy and internal divisions. This results in a certain 'way of being' in society in which social relations and the social order have to be permanently negotiated, which makes possible a spontaneous form of sociability and debate, i.e., a relational form of freedom – as opposed to premodern or totalitarian societies where the social relations and the social order are fixed.

In this sense, one could say that Lefort has a *holistic* approach to freedom, but in a different sense than in the social-ethical camp where an emphasis is made on the social preconditions of individual freedom. One could say that Lefort is in the end concerned with the freedom of *society* and *history*: only when we resist the idea that there is some privileged place from which we can determine what society or history are truly about, only then is a relational form of freedom possible

[162] Cf. Poltier 1998: 156.

in which individuals can spontaneously interact with each other and communicate about how to institute the social order; only when the indeterminacy of society is secured will there be room for the creativity of history – i.e., the creativity of human life – to unfold.[163]

We can further illuminate this difference between Lefort's political approach to freedom and the normative approach in the social-ethical camp by comparing Lefort's defense of human rights to the Marxist critique of human rights.

A central argument in the Marxist (but also conservative[164]) critique of the democratic revolution of human rights is that these rights are abstract, formal, and indeterminate, leading to an atomistic conception of individual freedom – and that we should therefore focus instead on concrete, historically and socially determined humans. In Lefort's understanding, however, the abstract, indeterminate character of human rights is exactly what makes them emancipating: it guarantees that no one can ever legitimately claim to know how to fully realize the ideals expressed in the declaration of human rights in a definitive social order. The gap between the ideal and the real, which Marxists (and Hegelians) try to close, is in Lefort's understanding a central precondition of freedom.

In order to fully grasp the underlying reasons for this different interpretation, we have to look more closely at the arguments of Marx and Lefort. As is well known, Marx argued in *Zur Judenfrage* (1848) that the democratic revolution of human rights in the eighteenth century has not really been emancipatory because the human right to freedom has been reduced to the right to have private property, which has resulted in an 'atomistic' understanding of freedom in which other individuals are not seen as a *precondition* and instead as a *limitation* to one's freedom.[165] The modern emancipation by means of human rights has been merely the emancipation of the *bourgeois*, the egoistic man pursuing his own interests, to which the *citoyen*, who is concerned with

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[163] Cf. Poltier 1998: 82, 157.

[164] Lefort refers to Joseph de Maistre's famous quote, "J'ai recontré des Italiens, des Russes, des Espagnols, des Anglais, des Français, je ne connais pas l'homme." 1981: 66.

[165] "Aber das Menschenrecht der Freiheit basiert nicht auf der Verbindung des Menschen mit dem Menschen, sondern vielmehr auf der Absonderung des Menschen von dem Menschen. Es ist das *Recht* dieser Absonderung, das Recht des beschränkten, auf sich *beschränkten* Individuums. Die praktische Nutzanwendung des Menschenrechtes der Freiheit ist Menschenrecht des *Privateigentums*. […] Das Menschenrecht des Privateigentums ist also das Recht, willkürlich, ohne Beziehung auf andre Menschen, unabhängig von der Gesellschaft, sein Vermögen zu genießen und über dasselbe zu disponieren, das Recht des Eigennutzes. Jene individuelle Freiheit, wie diese Nutzanwendung derselben, bilden die Grundlage der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Sie läßt jeden Menschen im andern Menschen nicht die *Verwirklichung*, sondern vielmehr die *Schranke* seiner Freiheit finden." Marx 2014: 225.

the common good, has been subordinated. The result is both a dissociation between individuals in society, and the separation of this atomized society and the political community.[166]

A central difference between Marx's line of argument and Lefort's defense of human rights is that Marx approaches the revolution of human rights from the perspective of *ideology*, where representations (human rights) are determined by the real (economic relations), whereas Lefort approaches it from the perspective of the *symbolic*, whereby representations are understood to have a certain autonomy and a certain power to change and shape relations in society. When looking at the revolution of human rights from this symbolic perspective, Lefort says, it is interesting to see that Marx says very little about all the restrictions on human action that were still in place in the Old Regime and that were abolished by the revolution of human rights.

For example, Lefort points out that Marx, in his discussion of the different articles of the Declaration, says nothing about the emancipating effects of articles 10 and 11, which are concerned with the liberty of opinion. These articles point clearly to a *relational*, and not an atomistic, understanding of freedom. As Lefort says, these articles made possible the liberty of communication, the freedom to transcend oneself, and to connect to others through speech, writing, and thinking. It created the possibility of a circulation of thoughts and opinions, of words and writings, that escape by principle – with some exceptions specified in the law – the authority of power. In this sense, Lefort argues, the revolution of human rights did not determine an atomistic understanding of freedom, but it abolished certain limits on human action, which resulted in a separation of *power* and *knowledge*, creating a new mode of access to the public sphere, and a new way of relating to others.

By understanding the revolution of human rights in this way, Lefort thinks we are also in a better position to understand the totalitarian revolution. From the Marxist framework, it is hard to explain how it can be that totalitarian societies are characterized by the abolishment of human rights, but that humans in those societies are *more dissociated than ever before*.[167] As we have seen in Lefort's account of totalitarian societies, the extreme dissociation between individuals is not caused – as it is claimed by Marxists – by the separation of civil society and the state, or because

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[166] Marx's criticism of human rights is still alive today, see for example Loick 2013 and Menke 2015.

[167] See also Hannah Arendt, who describes totalitarian societies as atomistic: "Totalitarian tyranny is unprecedented in that it melds people together in the desert of isolation and atomization" 1994: 348. "Hitler was able to build his organization on the firm ground of an already atomized society which he then artificially atomized even further." 1994: 356.

one is forced to be a bourgeois individual, but because political power controls and determines all forms of socialization and modes of activity in society, recognizing no exteriority to itself, be it law or truth. Human rights, however, can establish an exteriority to power that is the precondition for a relational form of freedom, whereby humans can come together to debate and discuss the principles and ideals of the social order without interference from political power.

Lefort tries to make this analysis more plausible by pointing to the fact that dissidents of communist countries, for example during the Hungarian revolution in 1956, were mainly concerned with retrieving rights and re-establishing in this way an exteriority to power.[168] Similarly, Lefort thinks that the relative success of the resistance in communist Poland can be partly explained by the persistence of Catholicism, which could not be appropriated and controlled by totalitarian power and ideology. Unlike other East-European countries, Poland was in this way able to keep in place something exterior to totalitarian power, in which a circulation of knowledge and true sociability was possible, forming the basis of resistance.[169]

With his analysis of human rights, Lefort is not denying that a critique of bourgeois capitalism or of atomistic conceptions of freedom is important and necessary. Instead, he wants to point to the difference between the *ideological* function of human rights that Marx perceived – where they *determine* an atomistic conception of freedom – and the *symbolic* function of human rights, where they provide the framework that guarantees *indeterminacy*: where the institution of society is understood as a permanent debate in an environment where power and knowledge are separated, which thus creates the preconditions of a *relational* form of freedom.

This points again to the different understandings of *political representations*, as we encountered them above: either as an ideological superstructure (in Marxism); or as having an autonomy and dynamic of their own and having an important role in shaping social relations and in realizing emancipation (in Machiavelli and Lefort). When political power acknowledges the exteriority of human rights, this shapes social relations in society, whereby individuals are free to communicate with each other about how to realize ideals.

Moreover, we see here how the different approach to freedom in the social-ethical and political-historical camp leads to very different evaluations of indeterminacy. Focusing on a normative conception of individual freedom, Marx comes to reject the indeterminacy of human

[168] Lefort 1981: 257-258.
[169] Lefort 1981: 324-325.

rights, whereas Lefort's focus on the preconditions of doing politics leads to a positive evaluation of the indeterminacy of human rights, as they guarantee a permanent gap between ideals and social reality, which is the precondition of political freedom and permanently doing politics.

According to Lefort, the reason why Marx remained blind to this positive, symbolic function of human rights is because he was longing for a new, communist society in which the indeterminacies of democratic societies were ended, and where there was thus no longer room for social division or political conflict. One could argue that Lefort's criticism of Marx illustrates the general danger accompanying the critique of atomism and indeterminacy in the social-ethical camp; namely that it is often accompanied by the desire to once again find a privileged position from which to determine the social order, one in which atomism, indeterminacy, and social division are overcome. Lefort's account is in this sense more fruitful because it can separate the critique of the existing social order (bourgeois capitalism, atomism, etc.) with a *defense* of formal democracy and human rights, which is understood as the framework that guarantees indeterminacy, i.e., that guarantees the permanent debate on how to institute the social order.[170]

1.5 The virtue of endurance

In conclusion, it is not difficult to see that Lefort's approach to freedom sits uncomfortably within the contemporary landscape of political philosophy, which is dominated by approaches that either start from a normative conception of human beings (e.g., Marxists, Hegelians, Kantians) or start from a conceptual analysis, either discussing the pros and cons of different conceptions of freedom (from Benjamin Constant's comparison of 'ancient' and 'modern' liberty[171] to Isaiah Berlin's discussion of 'negative' and 'positive' freedom), or analyzing the concept of freedom in order to determine, as John Rawls put it, "the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all."[172]

In all these cases the aim seems to be, in Lefort's terms, to find a privileged place from which one can determine how freedom can be properly realized in a determinate social order. In

[170] The Tocqueville-revival in France in the postwar era, initiated by Raymond Aron and followed by others such as Lefort, was closely related to this growing dissatisfaction with the Marxist framework and its inability to separate bourgeois capitalism from democracy, which thus made a critique of capitalism automatically a critique of liberal democracy and human rights. Tocqueville provided a way out of this framework by distinguishing between democracy as a political regime and as a *form of society*, informed by the 'equality of conditions'. Cf. Aron 1979: 36.
[171] Constant 1980.
[172] Rawls 1999: 220.

doing this, these approaches all seem to be dependent on an *imaginary place of certainty* or an *imaginary subject* from which the author can pronounce his truths, be it the proletariat, the rational subject, science, the communication community, or God.[173] In this way, the premodern idea of a transcendent, privileged place from which one can determine the social order is smuggled back into modernity in order to provide rational or objective knowledge about how to realize freedom.

Lefort pursued a different road, starting from a political approach to freedom that is concerned with the preconditions of political freedom and of permanently doing politics. By comparing different forms of societies, namely totalitarian and democratic ones, Lefort tried to illuminate the preconditions of freedom. He did this by using a phenomenological approach that did not strive for rational or objective theories or models, developed from a privileged viewpoint, and instead the goal was to better understand the meaning of the *experience* of freedom; that is, it aimed to illuminate what it means to live in a society that is informed by the ideal of freedom.

This approach led him to the insight that democratic societies are characterized by a paradox of autonomy: these societies affirm the ideals of the sovereignty of the people and the auto-institution of society, but at the same time they undermine this autonomy by affirming and institutionalizing their own internal social division and by acknowledging that there is no privileged position anymore from which to determine the social order. This acknowledgment leads to a situation in which the people are faced with the permanent indeterminacy of their society and their future, which can never be truly mastered. This, in turn, can lead to frustration and disappointment and the desire to 'end politics' by trying to once again find a privileged place from which one can determine the social order and overcome indeterminacy and insecurity.

If we follow Lefort's line of thinking, then the problem to be faced when reflecting on the preconditions of freedom is not how we can develop a better theory, concept, or model of freedom (or of democracy) that can end indeterminacy and uncertainty. Instead, we have to face this paradox of autonomy and ask the following questions: how can democracy's indeterminacies be dealt with without fleeing to a privileged position? How can the permanent frustration of a people that is internally divided be channeled? How do we find sources of solidarity that can provide the strength to affirm pluralism and resist the desire for the 'One'? How can we *endure* indeterminacy?

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in which the frustrations of living in a democratic society seem to reach their boiling point again, and in which the desire for the 'One'

[173] Cf. Habib 1993: 53-54.

seems to become dominant once again, this political-historical approach to the study of democracy and freedom seems to be more promising than developing yet another theory or model of democracy or freedom from an imaginary place of certainty in which all indeterminacies and tensions have been resolved.

This brings us to the work of Rosanvallon. Whereas the claim that democratic societies are characterized by indeterminacy remains rather general in Lefort's work, Rosanvallon provides a more detailed historical account of what these democratic indeterminacies actually consist of. His work can in this sense be understood as a continuation of Lefort's work, and it can provide us with a more detailed account of the challenges that face us when trying to understand and realize 'freedom as indeterminacy'.[174]

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[174] As Samuel Moyn writes: "Lefort's philosophy, though difficult, is nonetheless the key theoretical basis and precedent for Rosanvallon's work, and beyond much doubt the most lasting monument of the anti-totalitarian era." 2006: 8.

Chapter 2: Pierre Rosanvallon on the problem of representation

In the previous chapter we found in the work of Lefort a clear example of a philosophy operating in the political-historical camp: Lefort had a political approach to freedom that did not start from a normative conception of the individual but which started from an analysis of historical situations in which politics has ended, namely totalitarian societies. In this way, Lefort provided a critique of one aspect of the problem of freedom today: that of *homogeneous unity*. His work can be read as a big warning sign, which reminds us that we need to continually resist the desire to realize a society-as-One if we want to preserve political freedom.

If we now turn to the work of Pierre Rosanvallon we find someone who, just like Lefort, operates in the political-historical camp, but who also provides a critique of the other aspect of the problem of freedom today; the problem of *atomism*. This is unusual because those who criticize atomism are usually to be found in the social-ethical camp and start from a normative conception of the individual, whereas Rosanvallon approaches the problem of atomism by turning, not to morality or ethics, but to *history*. More specifically, Rosanvallon connects the problem of atomism to the problem of *representation* by historically reconstructing the way in which the French people have tried to overcome the atomism inherited from the French Revolution by experimenting with new ways of representing the social. Rosanvallon's aim of this historical reconstruction is to illuminate the problem of atomism and of representation that we are facing in today's society.

In the following, I will first give a general introduction to Rosanvallon's work (§2.1), then I will reconstruct Rosanvallon's historical story about the problem of atomism in relation to the problem of representation from the French Revolution to today (§2.2-§2.4), and finally I will argue how Rosanvallon's work can also be understood as revolving around a conception of 'freedom as indeterminacy' (§2.5).[175]

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[175] I am aware that Rosanvallon, if anything, is a thinker of *equality* and not of freedom. As Rosanvallon has recently stated: "Mon travail s'est très tôt organisé autour de deux grandes interrogations nées de la pratique: celle de l'analyse de l'entropie démocratique et celle d'une définition opératoire de l'égalité sociale." 2015a: 229. However, in the same text Rosanvallon also says that since democracy is a research-object that is indeterminate and therefore difficult to capture in a theory, his aim is "élaborant une *théorie de l'indétermination démocratique*, c'est-à-dire des éléments structurant son caractère aporétique" (241), and he wants to pursue this by "écrire l'histoire de la démocratie" (241). My aim will be to show that Rosanvallon's attempt to develop such a theory of democratic indeterminacy by turning to the history of democracy can be understood as a continuation of Lefort's account of freedom as indeterminacy.

2.1 From the 'second left' to the 'anti-totalitarian movement'

Rosanvallon's ideas about democracy were initially formed, not at the university, but at the trade union 'Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail' (CFDT), where he began a professional career after the revolution of 1968: first as an economic counselor (1969-1973) and then as the editor of the trade union's journal '*CFDT-Aujourd-hui*' (1973-77).[176] In this period, Rosanvallon would become one of the central theorists of the ideal of '*autogestion*',[177] which was adopted by the CFDT in the post-1968 period. The concept of 'autogestion' was first used in the 1960s to refer to the Yugoslav practice of having a worker-elected management in industry.[178] But it became a central concept in leftist discourse after 1968 in regard to the need to transform representative democracy.[179]

In his book *L'âge de l'autogestion* (1976), Rosanvallon spelled out his understanding of the ideal of 'autogestion', which for him did not only include a democratization of the workplace, but of society as a whole, breaking with hierarchy and decentralizing authority, leading to a pluralism and a democratic experimentalism in all sectors of society. In this way, Rosanvallon tried to combine a socialist rejection of bourgeois capitalism with a liberal condemnation of the bureaucratic state (either capitalist or communist) in the name of a liberated civil society. This resulted in his conception of a 'self-managed socialism' (*socialisme autogestionnaire*), that is, an anti-hierarchical, democratic socialism in which the egalitarian concerns of the traditional left were placed within a more liberal framework.

As a theorist of 'autogestion', Rosanvallon was part of the so-called 'second Left' – a term made popular by the manifest *Pour une nouvelle culture politique* (1977), written by Rosanvallon and Patrick Viveret – which referred to the political culture of the Left that was anti-hierarchical, experimental, and pluralist, as opposed to the 'first Left', which was characterized by a more hierarchical, state-centered political culture. In order to steer the Left toward the ideal of 'autogestion' and toward the political culture of the 'second left', Rosanvallon was not only active in the world of trade-unions, but also in political parties. In 1969 he joined the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU), and from 1974 to 1981 he was a member of the Parti Socialiste (PS), which was then

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[176] Jainchill/Moyn 2004: 111.

[177] As Rosanvallon tells us, the term 'autogestion' is difficult to translate; it has had different English translations such as 'industrial democracy', 'self-government', 'self-management', and 'labor-management'. 1976: 16.

[178] Jainchill/Moyn 2004: 112.

[179] Cf. Rosanvallon 2000: 408-411.

characterized by an internal struggle between the two cultures of the left, which was embodied by the two contenders for party leadership, François Mitterrand (first left) and Michel Rocard (second left).[180] Rosanvallon supported Rocard in this period, for example by serving as a speechwriter. After Mitterrand had won the elections in 1981 and became president of France, the culture of the second left was marginalized in the socialist party, and Rosanvallon would focus on an academic career.

Rosanvallon's understanding of democracy in this early period may at first sound rather typical of the post-1968 period, whereby a utopian vision of direct democracy is simply opposed to representative government. However, a closer look shows that Rosanvallon's work was from the beginning informed by the idea that, if we want to revitalize our democracies, then we need to have a more *realistic* grasp of democracy's difficulties and material problems, which he thought required a reconnection of the study of democracy with sociology and economics.[181] Rosanvallon would contribute to this at the end of the 1970s by rehabilitating the 'realist' sociologists of democracy, such as Moisei Ostrogorski and Robert Michels; he would set up a research center for economics and sociology with Jacques Delors called *Travail et Société*; and he wrote an influential book on the crisis of the welfare state, which he considered to be one of the central problems facing today's democracies.[182]

Around the same time, Rosanvallon also became involved with the so-called 'anti-totalitarian movement', whose critique of Marxism and communism partly overlapped with the ideas of the second Left. In 1977, François Furet – who had just become the director of the École des Hautes Etudes et Science Sociales (EHESS) – invited Rosanvallon to join an informal reading-group consisting of the older generation of Furet, Lefort, and Castoriadis, and the younger generation of Marcel Gauchet, Bernard Manin, and Pierre Manent.[183] The aim of the reading group was to reflect on the problem of totalitarianism in modern societies by re-reading the classics of political philosophy. This led to a re-evaluation of the tradition of French liberalism, including the

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[180] Jainchill/Moyn 2004: 113.
[181] Cf. Rosanvallon in Sebastián 2007: 705.
[182] Rosanvallon 1981. As Rosanvallon argues: "I think that any reflection on democracy is inseparable from a reflection on the material conditions of the social contract, conditions that in contemporary societies imply an agreement regarding social redistribution, and a compromise on problems of solidarity." In: Fernandez 706.
[183] Rosanvallon (2001): 51-52. The connection between democracy and indeterminacy was not restricted to Lefort and Rosanvallon, see for example also Bernard Manin 1995: 334-335.

work of Benjamin Constant,[184] François Guizot,[185] and Alexis de Tocqueville,[186] which had been largely neglected in France.[187] What connected these nineteenth century liberal thinkers was their perceptiveness to the dangers and pathologies connected to democracy, which resonated with the anti-totalitarian thinkers who believed – as we have seen in the last chapter on Lefort – that totalitarianism and the desire to 'end politics' is a pathology of democracy: it is considered to be the result of the voluntaristic desire to create a unified, transparent society without conflict or division, which leads to the suppression of liberty and pluralism.

Within this group of academics, it was especially the work of Lefort and Furet that had a lasting influence on Rosanvallon's thinking.[188] The work of Lefort – which had been marginal until then[189] – gained new relevance within the struggles of the Left in the 1970s because his longstanding criticism of communism and the PCF provided resources for developing an alternative leftist politics, which would replace traditional leftist ideology with a focus on democracy and pluralism. Rosanvallon had read Lefort's book on Machiavelli already in 1972 and was favorable to Lefort's attempt "to consider the question of political emancipation from the point of view of the 'realist' theorists of domination (Machiavelli, La Boétie, Pareto) rather than via Marx, for whom domination is above all economic domination, from which political domination is simply a derivative."[190] Lefort's work made clear to Rosanvallon that Marxism did not provide the resources for a realistic analysis of democratic politics.[191]

Furet was influential for Rosanvallon in applying the critique of totalitarianism to France's own history.[192] In his influential book *Penser la Révolution française* (1978), Furet discussed the supposed affiliation between totalitarianism and Jacobin revolutionary politics, suggesting that the

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[184] Gauchet 1980.
[185] Rosanvallon 1985a.
[186] Manent 1982.
[187] Cf. Gauchet: "[L]e XIXe siècle bourgeois a été largement gommé du paysage intellectual français.' 1980: 11. Rosanvallon: '[T]he question of liberalism in French political culture of the nineteenth century is 'missing' in contemporary thought." 2006a: 119. Around the same time, Michel Foucault would also revisit the liberal tradition, which resulted in his famous lectures on biopolitics and governmentality.
[188] Sebastián 2007: 707.
[189] Just like the work of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, the work of Lefort, Castoriadis, and their *Socialism et Barbarie*-group was marginal in their own time and only gained (relative) fame after the 1968 revolution.
[190] Quoted in Jainchill/Moyn 2004: 115.
[191] As Rosanvallon would later state: "[Marxism] was the reality of the 1960s. In the 1970s, it was necessary to move beyond the program of the re-foundation or reconsideration of Marxism. Why? Because the black hole of Marxism is not its economic analysis, but its vision of politics: there is no theory of democracy in Marx." Rosanvallon 2001: 49-50.
[192] For an account of the relation between Furet and Rosanvallon, see Jainchill/Moyn 2004.

French Left's roots in this revolutionary tradition made it particularly susceptible to totalitarianism.[193] Due to Furet's influence, Rosanvallon became convinced that a realistic understanding of democracy and its problems required not only the study of the sociological and economic aspects of democracy, but also its *history*.

Therefore, after first writing two dissertations (both supervised by Lefort) – the first being a critique of the ideal of the 'market society', which Rosanvallon considered to be a clear example of the desire to 'end politics',[194] and the second a rehabilitation of the political thinking of François Guizot[195] – Rosanvallon would then publish a series of books on the history of French democracy, including his celebrated trilogy on citizenship,[196] representation,[197] and sovereignty.[198] In his more recent work, Rosanvallon returned to his original concern of revitalizing today's democracy by providing a realistic understanding of the problems that it faces – such as the explosion of citizen activity based on distrust,[199] the problematic attempts to increase democratic legitimacy by installing independent authorities in society,[200] the growing inequality,[201] and the deteriorating quality of government[202] – but these analyses are now informed not only by the insights of sociology and economics, but also by an extensive knowledge of the complexity of democracy's history.[203]

I now want to trace one thread in Rosanvallon's wide-ranging work, namely his historical reconstruction of the problem of representation in relation to the problem of atomism.

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[193] As Christofferson argues, the reason why Furet pointed his critical arrows not just at the Soviet Union but also at France, was partly inspired by Furet's difficulty with coming to terms with his own communist past. Contrary to Lefort – who was praised in the 1970s for his early opposition to the PCF and Stalinism in the 1940s and early 1950s – Furet had been a member of the PCF in its most sectarian years. Furet's argument that the illiberal tendency toward totalitarianism had been an essential part of French political culture since the French Revolution provided him (at least according to Christofferson) with an excuse for his own communist past. 1999: 571-572.
[194] Rosanvallon 1979.
[195] Rosanvallon 1985a.
[196] Rosanvallon 1992.
[197] Rosanvallon 1998.
[198] Rosanvallon 2000.
[199] Rosanvallon 2006b.
[200] Rosanvallon 2008.
[201] Rosanvallon 2011.
[202] Rosanvallon 2015b.
[203] For the shifts in Rosanvallon's career, see the interview in Sebastián 2007.

2.2 The French political culture of generality

To get a grasp of how Rosanvallon historically connects the problem of atomism and the problem of representation, we should start with his account of the French Revolution. As is well known, the French Revolution caused the destruction of the hierarchical order of the Old Regime, and in its aftermath the Jacobins struggled to establish a new order based on the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. According to Rosanvallon, the Jacobins tried to do this by introducing a *political culture of generality*,[204] whereby 'generality' was understood in three ways.[205]

First of all, the Revolutionaries strived for *generality as a social form*: the ideal was to create a transparent, homogeneous society without differentiation or mediation, and this required the replacement of a society of hierarchically ordered bodies with a society based on equal civic rights, that is, a society of individuals.[206] In this new picture, social unity was realized without any mediation between individuals and the 'nation'. There was no longer a mediation between private and general interests, but the general interest was absolutized; the nation was conceived to be One and indivisible. This was accompanied by a criticism of intermediate bodies, such as corporations and associations, as obstructing the immediate unity between the individual and the nation, leading in 1791 to the Law of Chapelier, which prohibited all intermediate institutions in the economy, such as corporations and workers' associations.[207]

This attempt to realize a society of individuals resulted, however, in a very abstract conception of the social bond, which the Revolutionaries tried to make more concrete: first of all, by organizing revolutionary festivals, which had the function of staging the new, regenerated society and its harmonious unity;[208] and secondly, by stressing the importance of friendship and fraternity, which was an attempt to complement the 'cold' bond of the social contract with the 'warm' bond of sentiment and proximity. Similarly, the exclusion of women from civic equality by the Revolutionaries was instrumental to keeping intact the 'organic' universe of the family, which provided a 'warm', organic complement to the 'cold', atomistic bond of civil society.[209]

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[204] Rosanvallon 2004: 13.

[205] Cf. Rosanvallon 2004, Ch. 1-3.

[206] Rosanvallon 1990: 111.

[207] It was said in the Law of Le Chapelier: "There are no longer corporations in the State; there is no longer anything but the particular interests of each individual, and the general interest. It is permitted by no one to inspire an intermediary interest in citizens, to separate them from the public interest by a spirit of corporation." Quoted in Sewell 1980: 88. The Law of Le Chapelier was later joined by Article 291 of the Penal Code of 1810, which required prior government approval for any meeting of more than twenty individuals.

[208] Rosanvallon 1998: 38-39.

[209] Rosanvallon 1992: 188.

A second understanding of 'generality' was as a *democratic quality*, which revolved around the *principle of immediacy*. Here the idea was central that the general will of the people does not need any reflective political interface to take form, but instead it can be immediately expressed. Rosanvallon tries to illuminate this by distinguishing between *direct democracy* and *immediate democracy*: whereas the former endorses the idea of a continuously active people, the latter thinks 'the people' can express themselves immediately as a unified, meaningful totality and therefore display a negative attitude toward citizen activity because this could undermine the immediate unity of the whole. Whereas direct democracy criticizes the principles of *delegation* and *substitution*, immediate democracy is critical of any *political interface* and of any *reflexivity of society*. The Revolutionaries' ideal of immediacy led to a suspicion of political intermediary bodies, such as popular societies or clubs in which citizens could come together to discuss politics, because this could corrupt the general will.

The third understanding of 'generality' was as a *mode of regulation*, which was about the *cult of the law* that was very strong during the French Revolution. This 'nomophilia' resulted in an absolutization of legislative power at the cost of judiciary and executive power because only the former was concerned with generality, whereas the latter were concerned with particularity (i.e., interpreting laws and making political decisions).[210] This was accompanied by a utopian view of the legislator as someone who could know society completely and whose general laws would suffice to govern society.

Together, these three dimensions of generality resulted in the Jacobin political culture of generality that can be characterized as an *illiberal democracy*, in which generality is absolutized and all social particularity is rejected as interfering with the authentic expression of the general will. In the aftermath of the French Revolution it quickly became clear that this culture of generality was not able to create a stable political order.

One of the underlying problems – and this was not just a problem in France, Rosanvallon says, but it is a general problem when instituting a democratic society – was the growing tension between 'the people' as political principle and 'the people' as sociological reality: on the one hand there are the emancipating fictions of generality – namely the sovereignty of *the* people, and the

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[210] It is in the context of this idealization of law that one can understand Robespierre's remark in 1789 that "le mot de jurisprudence doit disparaitre de la langue"; executive power was limited to a purely mechanical action. Cf. Rosanvallon 1992: 220.

juridical equality of *the* subject – but on the other hand there is the complexity, particularity, divisions, and differentiations of the people in social reality.

The complication here is that, just at the moment when 'the people' is made the source of all legitimacy in modern democracies, it loses its 'substance' or 'body'. In order to make everyone a subject of rights, thus realizing the democratic imperative of equality, one has to set aside all differentiating and distinguishing characteristics of individuals in social reality, such as natural qualities or historical backgrounds. As Rosanvallon argues, the *juridical fiction of equality* goes hand in hand with a *de-substantialization of the social*.[211] The social loses its substance and consistency in favor of the formal principle of a juridical, atomistic construction. With this transition from a society of bodies to a society of equal individuals, 'the people' loses its bodily, organic form and becomes a force composed of individuals purely equivalent under the rule of law.

The French Revolutionaries exacerbated this abstraction by positing 'the people' as an indivisible unity, by rejecting intermediary bodies, and by ruling through general laws. For them it had become impossible to talk about the people in social reality because *any* characterization of social reality in terms of particularities, divisions, or intermediate bodies threatened both the juridical equality of individuals and the political unity of the sovereign people, understood as an indivisible nation. There thus emerged a growing tension between the people-as-political-principle and the people-as-social-reality. Being unable to give form to conflict and pluralism, Rosanvallon says, it is not surprising that France kept oscillating in the aftermath of the Revolution between the fantasy of social unity, and the violence of civil war.

The task in nineteenth century France was to rethink the Jacobin political culture of generality and find more fruitful ways of instituting a democratic society of individuals, and this revolved around the question how to once again give form and substance to the people in social reality. This led to a rethinking of the principle of association, of the role of intermediary bodies, and, more generally, of the problem of *representation*. Before turning to see how the French people in Rosanvallon's reconstruction experimented with new ways of representation, let us first look more closely at Rosanvallon's understanding of the problem of representation itself.

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[211] Rosanvallon 1998: 17. Rosanvallon also speaks of a 'disincorporation of the social'. 1998: 19. This is the reason according to Rosanvallon why in modern societies emancipation and alienation often go hand in hand. 1998: 17.

2.3 The problem of representation-as-figuration

Rosanvallon tries to illuminate the problem of representation by distinguishing between two ideas of representation: *representation-as-mandate* and *representation-as-figuration*.[212] The goal of representation-as-mandate is to constitute a representative government through elections in which citizens choose politicians to represent them. It consists of individuals voting as equal, atomistic individuals, thereby *legitimating a power* and stressing *unity* (albeit a fictional unity based on the majority principle). The goal of representation-as-figuration is to permit the expression of society in all its diversity, by giving all groups the possibility of making their voice heard. It *produces identities* and stresses *plurality*.

These two understandings of representation correspond to two different understandings of the conditions for 'good' representation. Representation-as-mandate is *arithmetic*: 'good' representation is when the vote of each citizen has equal weight, it is about the 'justice of numbers' in the electoral process. Representation-as-figuration is *sociological*: 'good' representation is about distinguishing between the most important social particularities so that the parliament can reproduce these on a smaller scale.

These two different understandings of representation also correspond to two different ideas about the *equality of the electorate*: Representation-as-mandate is about *quantitative* equality: it is about sovereignty that is shared equally by all citizens. Representation-as-figuration is a *qualitative* equality: it is about respecting differences and taking equally into account the specificities of the members of society in their plurality of activities and determinations.

For the French people in the nineteenth century who had inherited the political culture of generality from the French Revolution, it was especially the issue of representation-as-figuration that was the most urgent. In opposition to the Jacobin de-substantialization of the social, leading to a problematic atomism, the difficult task was now to give form to a democratic society that had lost its 'natural', 'organic' hierarchical form by representing the people in social reality in all its complexity. But how to do this? How to give form to diversity and plurality without compromising the ideals of generality, equality, and unity, and without returning to the society of bodies of the Old Regime?

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[212] As Rosanvallon says, whereas in the English and the French language there is only one word for both, namely 'representation', in German there are two separate words: *Stellvertretung* (mandate) and *Repräsentation* (figuration). 1998: 13n1.

Rosanvallon tries to illuminate these complications related to representation-as-figuration with the help of the opposition between passive *description* and active *construction*, which is closely connected to the historical opposition between premodern and modern societies. In premodern 'societies of bodies', society was considered as a grand organism with clearly identifiable parts, and the juridical framework overlapped without problems with the separate parts of society. Society was clearly 'readable' to everyone, and therefore representation-as-figuration was understood as being of a descriptive nature.

However, as soon as society starts to understand and organize itself on a contractualist and individualistic basis, society becomes more difficult to read and represent: because how do we give a descriptive and recognizable form to a juxtaposition of individuals? The problem is that a democratic society of individuals does not have a natural form anymore. The people in modern society cannot be ordered and represented anymore according to *a priori* differentiations based on Tradition, Nature, or History, but it can only become represented with categories that have to be *constructed*.[213] Still, as we will see below, there remains a tension in modernity between more descriptive and more constructive approaches when trying to represent society in all its diversity. A further complication is the opposition between those who think that social divisions in modern society are merely temporal remnants of premodern societies that can be overcome (e.g., Marxists), and those who think that they are permanent and irreducible.

The issue of representation-as-figuration is thus a complex problem when trying to institute a modern democracy, which is the result of the fact that a modern society of individuals does not have a natural form anymore, and that the central subject of a democracy, namely 'the people', is not a pre-existing fact that can be invoked or analyzed, but it has to be *constructed* through representation. This brings us back to the question: how to do this? How do we represent the people-as-social-reality? How can we identify and distinguish the specific traits or categories that have to be represented? How can we make sense of a society for which no *a priori* system of classification exists? What does a 'good' representation mean here? I now want to look at Rosanvallon's reconstruction of how the French people in the nineteenth century struggled with this task of overcoming the atomism of the French Revolution through representation-as-figuration.

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[213] Rosanvallon understands this construction as "democratic elaboration", not as a social construction of reality that is popular in sociology. 1998: 459.

2.4 The rise and fall of 'balanced' democracy

Rosanvallon explores the problem of representation-as-figuration by tracing four developments in nineteenth century France: the struggle by workers to be separately represented leading to the emergence of trade unions (2.4.1), the 'organic' turn in republican thinking at the end of the nineteenth century (2.4.2), the emergence of the 'network state' (2.4.3), and the discussions about proportional representation leading to the emergence of political parties (2.4.4). By reconstructing these developments, Rosanvallon tries to show how the atomism of the political culture of generality, even though it remained dominant *in theory* in nineteenth century France, started to be transformed *in practice* to make room for associations, intermediate bodies, and the political representation of interests and opinions, which would lead to a 'balanced democracy' at the turn of the twentieth century.[214] However, since the 1980s, Rosanvallon discerns a crisis of this balanced democracy and of representation-as-figuration, whereby the role of political parties, trade unions, and the network state become problematic (2.4.5), which leads to his analysis of today's pathological solutions (2.4.6) and constructive solutions (2.4.7) when dealing with the crisis of representation-as-figuration.

2.4.1 The struggle for representation by workers

The first development concerning representation-as-figuration in nineteenth century France that Rosanvallon reconstructs is the struggle by workers for separate representation. Very broadly, one can say that the struggle for emancipation by French workers in the nineteenth century can be separated into the period *before* and the period *after* 1848. Before 1848 the workers struggled to acquire the *right to vote*, which was eventually realized in 1848 with the institution of universal male suffrage. After 1848 – in the face of the disappointing effects of political and social-economic emancipation through voting – the workers would struggle for *separate representation*.

Concerning the period before 1848, it has to be reminded that suffrage was limited: it was based on a tax threshold, the so-called *cens*, and therefore it was called *suffrage censitaire*. According to the Charter of 1814, a citizen had to pay at least 300 francs in taxes to have a right to

[214] This is Rosanvallon's central revisionist move with respect to François Furet's *Penser le Révolution française*: whereas Furet argued that the political culture of generality remained dominant in France from the French Revolution untill the 1970s, Rosanvallon argues that an important break already occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. Cf. Jainchill/Moyn 2004.

vote, which at that time meant only 100 000 citizens out of a population of 23 million.[215] This meant that workers did not have a right to vote and were not represented. Until 1848, workers would therefore struggle for universal suffrage and in that way try to realize political equality. Equal representation was in this context understood in terms of representation-as-mandate, with its arithmetic, quantitative equality, and its stress on unity; the struggle for the right to vote was understood as the symbol and the means of the integration of workers into the national community.[216] This explains why the central emancipating word during the revolution of 1848 was 'the people', which was understood within a republican universalist framework, and not 'the workers', which was understood as a separate group within the whole.[217]

The wish for separate representation of workers emerged only after 1848, in the face of the disappointing effects of universal suffrage, especially in the 1860s when debates started about the need for worker candidates. As Rosanvallon shows, these debates resulted in the *Manifeste des soixante*, a manifesto signed by sixty workers and published in 1864, which pleaded for worker representation.[218] The *Manifeste* was organized around two arguments: the first was the, by then already well-known, argument that the political emancipation of workers has to be complemented by socio-economic emancipation because the realization of universal suffrage had been insufficient to emancipate the workers and to solve the 'social question'. It was the second argument that was new; namely that universal suffrage had also not been enough to realize *political* emancipation, since it did not adequately represent the workers. The second argument expressed the desire for an autonomous expression and separate representation of the workers.

This desire for separate representation was accompanied by two ideas that were opposed to the dominant political culture of generality. First of all, whereas it had been common to argue that after the French Revolution there were no classes anymore, only individuals – and that the subject of representation is therefore always the individual – the workers criticized this as being too

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[215] Cf. Craiutu 1999: 462n20.
[216] The right to vote was understood differently in France than, for example, in England. In England the right to vote was connected to the imperative of representing individual interest, whereby the general interest was understood as simply consisting of the composite of individual interests. In France, however, the right to vote was understood as a symbol of being a member of 'the people', which was understood as a collective subject that re-appropriates ancient royal power, and not as the construction of the general interest understood as an aggregate of individual interests. Rosanvallon 1992: 90, 131, 597-598.
[217] Rosanvallon 1998: 90-91.
[218] Rosanvallon considers the *Manifeste des soixante* to be one of the founding texts of the French workers movement, together with the *Manifeste des égaux* by Babeuf, the *Manifeste de la démocratie au XIXe siècle* by Victor Considerant, and the *Charte d'Amiens* adopted by the CGT in 1906. 1998: 94.

abstract, as neglecting the existing class division in social reality, and therefore they started to think of representation in terms of groups and classes.

Secondly, this shift from individual representation to group-representation was accompanied by a new understanding of the nature and qualities of the elected. The dominant understanding of the political competence of the elected had been in terms of individual merit and capacity – thus emphasizing the *distinction* of the elected as opposed to the voter.[219] The workers of the *Manifeste*, however, stressed the ideal of the *equality* and *identity* between the voters and the elected; the ideal of a substantial connection between them. They understood the function of the elected to be the *embodiment* of a social group. This stress on the identity between the voter and the elected was also informed by an epistemological point about political competence; namely that only workers can know and express the lived conditions of workers.

In the 1880s, the ideas expressed in the *Manifeste* were further developed in the movement known as *syndicalism*, which referred to the worker movement struggling for separate representation of workers in trade unions (*syndicats*), which were legalized in 1884.[220] Syndicalism radicalized the criticism of the individualistic, arithmetic representation-as-mandate, rejecting it in favor of representation-as-figuration, which it understood in an essentialist, substantial way. For the syndicalists, the trade union was understood as expressing a social fact – a natural community of sentiments revolving around profession and class. Representation-as-figuration was understood here in terms of a *social given,* not as a *political construction*; the idea was that social identities are directly *readable*, and that representatives should simply embody these identities.[221] Syndicalism thus had a naturalist and organicist conception of politics: as opposed to the individualism of

[219] Both the doctrinary liberals and the founding fathers of the Third Republic had an elitist conception of democracy, whereby the election was about the selection of the most capable men. As the republican jurist Saleilles said: "L'élection a pour but de faire sortir de la masse une aristocratie politique. Et c'est cette aristocratie qui gouverne, n'ayant de comptes à rendre que vis-à-vis d'elle et de conseils à prendre que d'elle-même." Rosanvallon 2000: 252.

[220] The legalization of trade unions in France was relatively late compared to England, for example, where union action had been legal since 1824. In France, the legalization of trade unions led to a rapid increase in their number: 68 in 1884, to 1006 in 1890, 3287 in 1900, and 5354 in 1908. In 1884 only a handful of workers were organized, in 1900 there were 600 000 members, and by 1914 more than a million. Still, these numbers were much smaller than in England or Germany. Rosanvallon 2007: 174.

[221] This explains the tension between syndicalism and French socialism: the former being a 'sociological' socialism directly derived from the activity of groups of workers striving for separate representation, the latter being a doctrinal, 'intellectual' socialism guided by an abstract philosophical theory of social unity. (Rosanvallon 1998: 290). This tension points to two understandings of worker emancipation: either the goal is to give expression to, and realize representation of, a specific part of the nation, thus implying the complementarity between workers and other groups, which is the ideal of *social-democracy*, or the goal is to overcome all division and differentiation in a new classless society, which is the ideal of *communism*.

representation-as-mandate, it affirmed the primacy of the social over the political, and the primacy of the group over the individual. At times, the arguments of the syndicalists came therefore close to the reactionary critique of universal suffrage, which was characterized by a similar anti-individualism and anti-constructivism.[222]

To sum up, the separate representation of workers and the legalization of trade unions marked a first important break with the Jacobin political culture of generality and a first attempt to give form to a democratic society through representation-as-figuration. However, new ideas concerning the representation of society could not only be found in the worker-movement, but also in the republican camp.

2.4.2 The 'organic turn' in republican thinking

The legitimation of trade unions and the emergence of worker representation cannot be fully comprehended, in Rosanvallon's view, if one focuses merely on the history of worker struggles. This is because these emancipatory struggles of workers converged with the *calculations* of republicans and liberals, who came to realize that intermediate bodies were essential for achieving stability and order.

These calculations started especially after the Revolution of 1848 in the face of the increasing demands of workers. In the absence of associations and intermediary bodies in society, all these demands poured into the state, which was the only embodiment of the general interest. This led to the fear among certain intellectuals about the growing role of the state, which now became the organizer of labor, the director of society, and the main source of individual assistance. There emerged a fear that the liberal state would be transformed into a socialist state – or, as it later would be called, a welfare state[223] – and this led to the idea that if socialism is to be stopped, a new attitude toward the issue of associations and intermediary bodies was needed. The hope was that if civil society could be revitalized and be made more independent with the help of associations, it would prevent the advent of a tutelary welfare state.

Another calculation that explains the legalization of trade unions was the immediate fear in the 1880s of a revolution in the face of a growing unrest among workers, and a growing amount of strikes. It was hoped that legalizing trade unions would moderate the worker-movement and result

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[222] Cf. Rosanvallon 2000: 387-388.
[223] The word 'welfare state' (*état-providence*) was first used in 1860 by Emile Laurent in his *Le Paupérisme et les associations de prévoyance*. Rosanvallon 2007: 307n10.

in a more coherent set of demands – a hope inspired by the history of England, where trade unions had been legalized in 1824 and which had subsequently seen very few strikes. As Alexandre Millerand would say, establishing trade unions "is tantamount to replacing an inorganic mob of workers with an organism capable of reflecting, willing, and acting."[224] This line of thinking expressed the general *fear of numbers* in nineteenth century France, which was a fear of a multitude of irrational workers. Whereas the response to this fear in the first half of the nineteenth century had been to *limit suffrage*, thereby excluding the masses from political decision-making, in the second half, when universal suffrage was institutionalized, the *legalization of trade unions* was seen as part of the solution.[225] It was hoped that in this way the unpredictable and irrational strikes of workers would be replaced by the more stable and rational demands of trade unions, which would neutralize potential subversiveness and diminish the danger of revolution.

Besides these calculations aimed at avoiding a tutelary welfare state or a social revolution, a third development can explain the embracing of intermediate bodies within the French political culture of generality; namely the 'organic turn' in republican thinking at the end of the nineteenth century. This development was closely connected to the emergence of *sociology* in the 1870s, which was characterized by a critique of abstract individualism and a defense of a more organic conception of society.[226]

Although the nineteenth century had seen various waves of moral or religious critiques of abstract individualism, the sociological critique had a more objective character because it was based on the actual study of society. According to sociologists, the actual structure of society did not correspond to the atomistic 'statist-individualist' picture of the Jacobin political culture of generality. Instead, as one of the pioneers Alfred Espinas said it, "[s]ociology finds that association, or grouping, is the general law of all organic and inorganic existence."[227] For sociologists, associations and 'secondary' groups were considered to be 'social facts'.

This new, scientific acceptance of the principle of association among republican thinkers led to a separation between republicanism and Jacobinism: the new republican sociologists and

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224 Rosanvallon 2007: 181.

225 Another republican solution was to make *education* mandatory, thus hoping to turn all citizens into rational thinkers, and in this way to turn the sovereignty of *number* into the sovereignty of *reason*. Rosanvallon 1992: 468ff.

226 This period also saw the emergence of *social psychology*, which took as its topic the 'masses' and its functioning. It also showed that the behavior of the masses cannot be explained within the explanatory model of a collection of individuals, and thus it also pointed to a new way of governing. However, social psychology did not deal with the problem of representation. Rosanvallon 1998: 142-3.

227 Rosanvallon 2007: 164.

jurists tried to persuade people that the Republic could step away from the statist-individualistic principles of 1789 without betraying itself. As Alfred Fouillée would say: "When the Revolution in France (rightly) destroyed privileges and monopolies, it allowed itself to go to far as to destroy the principle of association as well. This was its great blunder."[228] The goal of these republican thinkers would now become to explore the legal and political implications of the fact of association and to base the Republic on sound sociological principles.

This also led to a rethinking of the problem of representation-as-figuration among republican thinkers, which resulted in a general consensus concerning the need for *occupational representation*, whereby society is differentiated and represented based on *professional groups*. Whereas syndicalism had only been concerned with organizing the working class, the republicans wanted to expand this to society as a whole. However, there was much confusion about how to classify the professions and about which social categories to use. In the 1890s every author came up with a different classification, which points to the tension between description and construction when it comes to representation-as-figuration.

Earlier attempts in the nineteenth century to identify social categories based on professions already expressed this tension. Proudhon, for example, spoke of 'natural groups', suggesting that the determination of social categories was simply a question of empirically analyzing society; Saint-Simon and his followers, on the other hand, did not start from a social analysis and instead started from the question of what a rational government required, and they tried to determine *a priori* which professions should be represented in order for the government to function well.[229]

This confusion about how to establish the social categories to be represented returned in the republican debates about occupational representation. Some simply turned to conventional classifications of society. Charles Benoist, for example, simply adopted the classification that was used by general statistics for the census of the population: agriculture, industry, commerce, transport, public administration, liberal professions, and rentiers. Alfred Fouillée, to give another example, wanted to base representation on 'sociological functions'; namely "the perpetual and

[228] Rosanvallon 2007: 165.

[229] Saint-Simon proposed a re-organization whereby the parliament would consist of three professional chambers: the first would be the 'chamber of invention', which would consist of engineers and artists who would elaborate juridical projects; the second would be the 'chamber of examination', which would consist of mathematicians and physicians who would examine and select certain projects; and the third would be the 'executive chamber', which would consist of the industrial professions who would execute these projects. Rosanvallon 1998: 162.

collective interests of science, philosophy, art, morality, justice, national defense, national industry, finance, agriculture, etc."[230]

As Rosanvallon comments, the problem with this approach is that the use of these conventional classifications as the basis for representation-as-figuration will inevitably lead to the exclusion of those people who do not fall into any of these categories. Whereas the atomistic representation-as-mandate constitutes a universal principle of inclusion, every specification of the people-in-society-reality will on the contrary lead to a social residue; the paradox here is that the attempt to base representation on concrete knowledge of society runs the risk of introducing new forms of exclusion.

Rosanvallon also identifies a more general problem with these conventional classifications based on professions or sociological functions, namely the assumption that there exists a content of social life that is immediately 'readable'. They implicitly presuppose the possibility of attaining a natural substance of society – reinforced by their organic metaphors – whereby the constructedness of the social categories that are used to interpret society is masked. Rosanvallon argues that this leads to a 'passive' vision of representative democracy, based on simple description, which can be opposed to a more 'active' vision in which the work of representation-as-figuration is on the contrary perceived as a perpetual task of *constructing* society, of attempting an interpretation that is always fragile and provisional. With the analysis of Lefort in mind, one could say that the attempt by people such as Benoist, Fouillée, or Proudhon to scientifically *determine* the democratic order undermines the political freedom and equality that follows from the acknowledgement of the *indeterminacy* of the democratic social order.

However, there also emerged a slightly different approach to the problem of representation-as-figuration among republican organicists, which was related to the renewed interest in ancient corporations and bodies. Here Durkheim was a central figure, who argued that when people vote they should not vote as abstract, atomistic individuals, and instead they should vote as organized individuals; only then can a certain collectivity or universality be guaranteed.[231] Durkheim

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[230] Rosanvallon 1998: 163.

[231] "Pour que les suffrages expriment autre chose que les individus, pour qu'ils soient animés dès le principe d'un esprit collectif, il faut que le collège électoral élémentaire ne soit pas formé d'individus rapprochés seulement pour cette circonstance exceptionelle, qui ne se connaissent pas, qui n'ont pas contribué à former mutuellement leurs opinions et qui vont les uns derrière les autres défiler devant l'urne. Il faut au contraire que ce soit un groupe constitué, cohérent, permanent, qui ne prend pas corps pour un moment, un jour de vote. Alors chaque opinion individuelle, parce qu'elle s'est formée au sein d'une collectivité, a quelque chose de collectif." Quoted in Rosanvallon 1998: 145.

identified intermediate bodies between individuals and the state as the central solution to achieve this organization of individuals,[232] but unlike syndicalism and unlike many of his republican contemporaries, Durkheim understood intermediate bodies as being *themselves already a mediation of the social*. Unlike the idea of syndicalism that trade unions *immediately* express the social, or the idea – implied by the use of conventional classifications – that society's divisions and differentiations are simply a matter of *description*, Durkheim opened up the path toward a different understanding of representation-as-figuration; here intermediate bodies are not understood in an 'essentialist' or 'immediate' way, but they are understood as 'mediated' and 'constructed'. According to Rosanvallon, the approach by Durkheim, and other republican thinkers such as Duguit or Paul-Boncour, thus surpassed the limits of the initial republican attempts to give form to a democratic society through occupational representation, because – despite Durkheim's organicism and his speaking of 'social facts' – he opened up the way to a more 'active' account of giving form to democracy.[233]

The 'organicist turn' in republican thinking thus marked another important break with the atomism of the French political culture of generality, which led to a renewed legitimation of intermediate bodies. However, Rosanvallon points out that while the *social* influence of these republican organicists was considerable, their *political* influence turned out to be almost non-existent.[234] Although society found new ways of organizing and expressing itself, this did not lead to a rethinking of the monist vision of politics in France. Exploring the reasons for this will give us further insight in the complications related to representation-as-figuration.

2.4.3 Polarized democracy and the network state

A central characteristic of the republican model of the Third Republic was the radical separation between the social and the political. Although its leaders legitimized certain intermediary bodies in social and economic life (such as trade unions), there was no substantial modification of the monist conception of politics. The state had the monopoly on the general interest, and intermediate bodies in society had no access to the general will; a strict monism in the political sphere thus coexisted with pluralism in the social sphere. Rosanvallon speaks therefore of a *polarized* model

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[232] As Durkheim said: "Notre malaise politique tient à la même cause que notre malaise social: à l'absence de cadres secondaires intercalés entre l'individu et l'État." Quoted in Rosanvallon 1998: 145.
[233] Rosanvallon 1998: 175.
[234] Rosanvallon 2007: 215.

of democracy and sovereignty in the Third Republic, since the political is understood here as being *opposed* to the social, the general interest as being *opposed* to particular interests, the public *opposed* to the private, and the state *opposed* to civil society – and the former in each case has primacy over the latter.[235] Rosanvallon considers Waldeck-Rousseau and Léon Bourgeois to be two republican leaders who symbolized this tension between political monism and social pluralism.

Waldeck-Rousseau had allowed the legalization of trade unions, but in such a way that they had no access to politics. He conceived of trade unions and other intermediate bodies mainly as an expansion of civic freedom, not as a type of institution. He perceived them individualistically and purely functional, as a means for individuals to structure their activities and expand their scope, which remained within the private sphere and was excluded from the production of the general interest. In this way, the legalization of trade unions was firmly embedded within the polarized model separating the social and the political: the idea was that by confining labor conflicts to the social sphere, where they were mediated by trade unions, there would be less danger of their exploding into revolutionary threats.

This also explains why the same republicans who welcomed trade unions heavily criticized *religious congregations*, which they perceived as intermediary bodies that posed a direct threat to the monopoly of the state on articulating the general interest. Republicans thus started to welcome intermediary bodies, but only if they did not threaten the monist vision of the state. This also explains why the prerogatives of trade unions and other associations were limited, out of fear that if these were broadened, they might build themselves up into a power to rival that of the state; they might broaden their field of action to such a degree of generality that they might be tempted to enter the realm of politics.

Léon Bourgeois was another exemplary figure, combining a positive view of social pluralism with a republican fundamentalism in regard to the constitution. He rejected proposals by republican organicists for reforming political institutions: for example Foulliée’s call for a Senate that would represent ‘sociological functions’ to be established alongside a Chamber that would express individual wills by way of the ballot box; or Léon Duguit’s proposal for a Chamber consisting of elected representatives of the unions and his idea of corporatist and administrative federalism.

[235] Rosanvallon 2000: 429.

This tension in the Third Republic between social pluralism and political monism also showed itself in another important development related to representation-as-figuration, namely the emergence of, what Rosanvallon calls, the *network state*.[236] At the end of the nineteenth century there emerged different types of associations and institutions that functioned as auxiliaries to the state. First of all, there emerged *educational institutions*: there was an obsession with education as one of the key instruments of the state to uphold a democracy and the realization of the general interest, which led in 1882 to the passing of a law that made education compulsory. Secondly, there emerged *consultative institutions*, such as consultative chambers (e.g., Chamber of Commerce), that provided technical assistance to the state and improved its sources of information. Thirdly, there emerged *health institutions* related to Louis Pasteur's discovery of micro-organisms, which revolutionized the way health and illness (especially epidemics) were understood. From now on, illness was understood, not as an individual problem, but as a collective problem, and it would become the task of the state to prevent epidemics by improving hygiene, city-planning, etc., which required intermediate bodies and institutions to develop a new type of public action.

The old prejudice of the state concerning associations – the obsessive fear of 'states within the state' – thus gave way to a more pragmatic and utilitarian approach: the Jacobin idea of an omniscient state was replaced by a more modest account of government and administration as the state cannot govern and know everything and therefore needs external competences.

Together, these new intermediate institutions also led to new categories (along the lines of education, income, health, etc.) for 'reading' a society of individuals. Together with other forms of knowledge of society that became central in the nineteenth century, such as statistics, social inquiries, or the novels by Balzac, Flaubert, Hugo, and Zola, they provided new ways of social representation beyond the atomistic vote of universal suffrage. In doing so, they helped to make society more 'readable' and thus contributed to representation-as-figuration.

But again, these developments did not breach the polarized model of democracy and sovereignty. The social and economic institutions of the network state were seen as legitimate only because they were pure instruments of the monist state; they were understood to pose no threat to state supremacy. Indeed, they served the state and increased the government's ability to sink its roots deep into society. It became possible to think of intermediate bodies as pure instruments of the administration. The main aim of consultative institutions was thus not to realize a more

[236] Rosanvallon also speaks of "consultative state".

autonomous civil society but to realize a more effective state; there was no rethinking of political universalism.

However, if we now turn to the final development in Rosanvallon's story related to representation-as-figuration in the nineteenth century, we will encounter an important step toward political pluralism: the emergence of political parties.

2.4.4 Proportional representation and political parties

We have seen above that the notion of representation-as-figuration has been understood either in a more descriptive or a more constructive way. In syndicalism we encountered a way of understanding representation-as-figuration in an essentialist, immediate, and descriptive way, whereby social identities are based on shared interests (either of profession or class) and are immediately 'readable'. Similarly, with the republican use of conventional classifications to differentiate society, either based on professions or sociological functions, we found a similar descriptive account of social representations, although we found in Durkheim already a mediated and more constructive understanding, although this was still accompanied by organic metaphors. However, the discussion that would dominate the reflection on representation-as-figuration in the Third Republic revolved around *proportional representation*, which would lead to a different constructivist understanding that was harder to reconcile with social organicism.

The notion of 'proportional representation' points to an understanding of 'good' representation, which is concerned with the ideal that no vote gets 'lost'; that each vote is equally effective. This was a reaction to the problematic fact that with representation-as-mandate only the votes of the majority of citizens were effective, but not those of minorities. The ideal of making *every* vote effective thus required a rethinking of the organization of elections. This led to the idea of separating the moment of *deliberation* and the moment of *representation* and of allowing people with *similar opinions* to freely construct electoral associations. In this picture, the moment of deliberation results in voters being organized into several homogeneous associations based on shared opinions, who each provide candidates, and this could then be combined with the ideal of proportional representation, whereby seats in parliament are allocated so that they are in proportion to the votes cast. In this way, a big step could be made toward the ideal of 'good' representation whereby also the votes of minorities could be effective.

Although these ideas were already discussed in the 1820s, and more extensively in the 1860s, it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that there would emerge a consensus on the need for partisan politics and for a new way of organizing elections, which led first to *electoral comities*[237] and then, at the turn of the twentieth century, to *political parties*.[238]

This development was quite remarkable since parties and partisanship had always had such negative connotations; in the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century they were often rejected because they supposedly undermined the common good and generated division in society. Rosanvallon illustrates the changing connotations of parties by comparing traditional factions with modern political parties. Traditional factions, he says, were about the rivalry of clans, conflicting interests, or struggles for influence. Rosanvallon points here to David Hume, who developed a typology of these traditional factions, showing that they can be based either on interests (social or economic), sentiments (personal bonds of friendship and hate), or principles (e.g., religious principles).[239] The main characteristic of these factions was that they were not organized and structured in a permanent fashion, and their existence was usually dependent on a family, a small group, or a single person.

Modern political parties, on the other hand, are permanent organizations, and are less personalized. Rosanvallon argues that they have two functions. First of all, at the end of the nineteenth century they came to be perceived as a necessary, *technical solution* for framing and organizing elections in a mass society. In this period, it became a generally shared belief that political parties are a necessary tool for organizing universal suffrage in a mass society. This was accompanied by a general shift from a politics of persons to a politics of ideas: the person of the politician disappeared behind the party-program which he defended, a de-personalization whereby individual qualities largely disappeared behind opinions.[240]

Secondly, besides a technical solution for organizing a mass democracy, Rosanvallon emphasizes that political parties also have a *sociological* importance, as they contribute to the problem of representation-as-figuration. They are not just about giving parliamentary presence to

[237] Rosanvallon 2000: 290-299.
[238] "Le Parti radical et l'Alliance républicaine démocratique sont créés en 1901, l'Alliance libérale populaire en 1902, la Fédération républicaine en 1903 et la S.F.I.O. en 1905." Rosanvallon 1998: 246. For an account of Rosanvallon's views on political parties, see Weymans 2010.
[239] Although Hume rejected factions and parties, he argued that factions based on interest or sentiment are less destructive because they left room for compromise, whereas factions based on (religious) principles were more problematic. Cf. De Dijn 2010: 10-11.
[240] Rosanvallon 2000: 290.

minorities, but they introduce a new way of thinking about social pluralism: no longer in terms of the rather static categories of class interests, professions, or social functions, but in terms of *opinions*. The *dynamic of opinions* comes to be perceived as a legitimate form of social division and differentiation, making the political party a central institution between the state and the individual.

As Rosanvallon says, they created a new way for creating social identities and for providing possibilities for identification. Political parties made possible the formulation of relatively stable political identities, based on opinion, ideology, and personality that cannot be completely reduced to one's relation to a group. As Rosanvallon says, the political party provided an ambivalent mix of the production of a communitarian identity and the expression of a personal choice, and therefore they were in the middle of a double tension, between the individual and the collective, and between description and construction – satisfying the desire for both identity *and* particularity, for unity *and* plurality.

The understanding of representation-as-figuration that informed political parties was thus in many ways the opposite of the one informing syndicalism: conceived as ideal types, political parties and trade unions symbolized the two opposites between construction and description, between giving primacy to the political or to the social. Whereas political parties made *opinions* the basis of representation-as-figuration, trade unions made *interests* central. Syndicalists made a strong separation between the notions of class and party: they rejected the world of opinions as being fleeting and changing, and they considered class interests as providing the only solid foundation for representation-as-figuration. Syndicalists thus emphasized the primacy of the social over the political, and they were suspicious of every form of mediation or delegation – resulting in a more descriptive view of representation-as-figuration. In contrast, the political party is based on shared opinions and ideas that are the result of deliberation, and thus it affirms the autonomy of politics – resulting in a more constructive view of representation-as-figuration.[241] In reality, these ideal types would of course influence each other, resulting in phenomena like class parties or the introduction of electoral and deliberative mechanisms in trade unions.

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[241] Rosanvallon 1998: 294. 2007: 182. See also Nadia Urbinati's distinction between direct and reflected adhesion 2006: 49-50.

In this way, Rosanvallon says, both political parties and trade unions can be considered as "collectivity-shaping associations."[242] Their purpose is to mold a society of individuals and to make society more 'readable' by providing reference points for 'real' identification, thus producing social identities that can be represented, and thus giving shape to the people-as-social-reality.

However, trade unions and political parties were not unproblematic solutions to the problem of representation-as-figuration. From the beginning, a critique of political parties was articulated by people like Bryce, Ostrogorski, Michels, and Pareto, who warned that the sovereignty of the people would be confiscated by the new political professionals, and that aristocracy would in this way re-appear in a democracy of parties. At the same time, the 'essentialist' understanding of representation-as-figuration by syndicalists could be radicalized and politicized, as it was done in the twentieth century in Marxism-Leninism, leading to the idea of a Party incarnating 'the people'.[243]

Despite these dangers, Rosanvallon considers the emergence of political parties, trade unions, and the network state at the turn of the twentieth century – combined with the emergence of sociology and other innovative forms of generating knowledge about society – as contributing to the representation of society in all its complexity and diversity, and thereby contributing to the problem of representation-as-figuration. He argues that it led to the realization of a *balanced democracy*, with which he means that the combination of intellectual innovation and institutional experimentation helped to realize a temporary balance between the juridical fiction of generality and the sociological reality of pluralism and division; it helped to overcome atomism by organizing society with the help of associations and intermediate bodies into a comprehensive plurality, thereby making society 'readable' again. And despite big differences in national paths, Rosanvallon argues that especially after 1918, a comparable type of 'balanced democracy' starts to affirm itself in the Western world.

However, Rosanvallon emphasizes that this 'balanced democracy' was a fragile solution since the problem of representation *inherently* holds many tensions and problems that can never be

[242] Rosanvallon distinguishes between three types of associations: social associations, cooperative associations, and collectivity-shaping associations. Examples of social associations are circles, clubs, societies, recreational associations, etc., that create a level of sociability distinct from that defined by either family or citizenship; often they created a masculine space distinct from the feminine space of the home; here a different kind of civic life is constructed, no longer structured by either the legal organization of the professions or by imposed collective identities. Cooperative associations pool individual resources, making it easier for people to act, for example workers' associations or mutual aid societies. 2007: 187ff.

[243] Rosanvallon 2000: 387-391.

once and for all solved. In today's more individualized democracies in which the institutions of balanced democracy have become problematic, Rosanvallon thinks that we have to find new solutions to these problems and tensions related to representation-as-figuration.

2.4.5 Today's crisis of 'balanced democracy'

Rosanvallon's main purpose of reconstructing the problems related to representation-as-figuration and the emergence of a 'balanced democracy' in nineteenth century France is to provide insights into today's pathologies of democracy. Rosanvallon is especially interested in the shift in the 1980s when political parties, trade unions, and the network state start to lose their central role in representing and giving form to democratic societies, with the result that the old reference-points for reading society's differentiations and divisions disappeared. At the same time, Rosanvallon says, the old 'static' ways of generating knowledge about society have become increasingly inadequate to represent today's 'dynamic' society. Together, these institutional and epistemological problems have resulted in a growing experience of the opacity of society, an increasing difficulty to orientate and identify oneself, and a feeling of not being represented – a crisis that is made worse by the complexities of the processes of globalization that has increased the difficulty of 'reading' the world at large.

Let us take a closer look at the changes that Rosanvallon identifies concerning political parties, trade unions, and the network state. In the political sphere, Rosanvallon detects a *de-sociologization of politics*, causing a crisis of political identification. Rosanvallon points here, first of all, to the volatility and unpredictability of a growing number of voters. Voters easily change parties from one election to another, voting more and more strategically, thereby acting like political consumers or temporary judges of persons. This is different from the 'identification-vote', a vote based on one's identification with a collective identity, which at least until the 1960s had been central, and which explains the relative stability of the electoral landscape until then.

Furthermore, Rosanvallon sees a connection between the de-sociologization of politics and the *personalization* of politics. Whereas 'balanced democracy' since the turn of the nineteenth century was characterized by a depersonalization of politics, which centered on social and ideological confrontation between the 'left' and the 'right' and on opposing projects concerning society, either progressive or conservative, this has changed since the 1980s more and more in a democracy focused on morally evaluating the actions of individuals. Rosanvallon says that the

growing centrality of the problem of *corruption* corresponds to this development, whereby citizens increasingly distinguish not between 'left' and 'right', but between 'honest' and 'corrupt' politicians, who are either acting in the general interest or in their own interests.

In this transition toward a personalization of politics, the politician becomes more and more like a simple mandate-holder who has to account for his actions, and not someone who contributes to the problem of representation-as-figuration by making 'readable' a social situation or experience. For Rosanvallon this is problematic because as soon as political representation has no longer the function of structuring and expressing (or even constructing) forms of social identification, there emerges a sentiment of disaffiliation and a lack of belonging.

When it comes to the crisis of representation-as-figuration related to the economy and trade unions, Rosanvallon argues that economic de-regulation and growing unemployment since the 1970s and 1980s have contributed to making society more difficult to 'read'. This period also sees a crisis of trade unions, which is not only related to the declining number of members of trade unions, but also to the growing vagueness about what representation means in this domain. In principle, representation in the sphere of trade unions means a relation of identification between a homogeneous population (based on profession or class) and an organization. But, as Rosanvallon says, already in 1968 a law was passed in France that made the representative function of trade unions independent of any concrete social content, and since the law Auroux of 1982 a trade union can be considered to be representative completely independent of the number of its members. In this way, juridical representation became disconnected from sociological representation, leading to vagueness about what representation exactly means when it comes to trade unions, especially concerning the persons represented (either members of trade unions or employees) and the status of representation (either mandate, embodiment of interests, or delegation). This vagueness contributed to a de-vitalization of the institutions concerned with the cooperation of social partners (collective negotiations, etc.). Similar to political parties, one could thus speak of a de-sociologization of trade unions, whereby they increasingly lose their function as reference points for real identification.

Also the network state seems to lose its grip on society, not only because of the trend toward privatization and deregulation, leaving things to the market and increasing the autonomy of civil society, but also, as Rosanvallon says, because its sociological categories to differentiate and 'read'

society have lost their analytical power.[244] Rosanvallon illustrates this by looking at two groups that have become central in today's society and who are very difficult to represent: the long-term unemployed and households with debts. Both of these groups consist of very diverse individuals, having all kinds of backgrounds, who cannot be captured with the use of the old 'objective' categories of the social sciences. The main problem according to Rosanvallon is that these old categories worked only for understanding a static society of classes that is organized hierarchically, but not for today's complex society. Rosanvallon detects a need to shift from 'solid' differentiations to 'fluid' differentiations, from sociological classifications of collective identities based on 'objective' factors (sex, age, profession, income, education, geography, etc.) to an understanding of the social by looking at *individual trajectories and situations*.

From the perspective of the state, this individualized approach to the social requires the rethinking of both the notion of *subject* and of *right*. The subject of public action is no longer a class, but a group of individuals; each of which has its own specific trajectory leading to a situation of exclusion, which requires going beyond an arithmetic equality to an 'equality of treatment'. Here, individuals are given equal chances and opportunities when confronted with troubles that do not fall into the classical categories of insurance, in order for them to get their life back on track.[245] And whereas the classical notion of right is designed to constitute the individual and his autonomy – i.e., to outline an inviolable line behind which the individual is safe – in the case of social rights concerned with individuals in situations of exclusion and precarity, it is the social relation itself that is the object. The object of right is not allocation, but a social relation; through which the aim is to re-insert the individual back into social life.

This individualized representation and management of the social thus requires a *judiciarisation of the social*,[246] although Rosanvallon acknowledges the danger of a return to paternalism and new forms of social control, whereby the state morally evaluates individuals, for example by starting to classify poor people in terms of their merits, separating 'good' and 'bad' poor people.[247]

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[244] "Le sentiment d'opacité correspond au fait que les moyens d'investigation sociologiques antérieurs ne sont plus adaptés à la comprehension des mouvements d'une société aux énergies moins lisibles et plus diffuser." Rosanvallon 1998: 460.

[245] Rosanvallon 1995: 218.

[246] Rosanvallon 1995: 220.

[247] Rosanvallon 1995: 211. According to Rosanvallon the irony is that starting in the 1960s a large amount of literature emerged which suspected the welfare state of normalization and policing, but 30 years later when this problem really became urgent this literature had largely disappeared. 1995: 212.

2.4.6 Pathological solutions

In Rosanvallon's analysis, there has thus emerged a new crisis of representation-as-figuration caused by the fact that political parties, trade unions, the network state, and the analytical categories for knowing and representing society are increasingly inadequate to represent and give form to a society of individuals. They fail to provide reference points for real identification, thereby increasing the feelings of social dissolution, atomism and misrepresentation. Rosanvallon argues that this has formed the soil for at least three pathological solutions to the problem of representation-as-figuration: 1) populism, 2) proceduralism, and 3) a naturalization of identities.[248]

The most problematic of these three pathologies for Rosanvallon are the populist attempts to overcome the opacity of society and to solve the crisis of identification by re-creating the people-as-One in order to create an unfailing reference point for identity. Populism tries to re-establish a unified identity based on the double movement of obscuring internal social division and emphasizing differences with what is exterior or alien to 'the people', such as elites or immigrants. Rosanvallon calls this, using Robert Musil's expression, a "luciferian correction"[249] of the crisis of representation-as-figuration, since it refuses to understand the task of democratic politics to give form to social pluralism.

Secondly, Rosanvallon also explains the popularity of proceduralism – which emerged in the wake of the canonical works of Rawls and Habermas[250] and political theorists such as Robert Dahl – as closely connected to the crisis of representation-as-figuration. Rosanvallon understands proceduralism as an approach to democracy that *de-substantializes the social* and focuses exclusively on the *formal, juridical dimension* of democracy. In doing this, Rosanvallon says, proceduralism can suppress both the tension between law and will (i.e., the tension between liberalism and democracy) and the tension between generality and identity (i.e., the problem of representation-as-figuration). In this sense, Rosanvallon understands proceduralism, and its

[248] Rosanvallon 1998: 437ff.
[249] Rosanvallon 1998: 446.
[250] Rosanvallon's work contains several passages where he discusses Rawls and Habermas, albeit superficially. He was actually one of the first in France to critically discuss the theories of justice of Rawls and Nozick. Cf. Rosanvallon 1981: 59-106; 1998: 437-9; 2000: 39; 2003: 25–8. Lefort has not shown any interest in the proceduralism of Rawls and Habermas. In a late interview, he briefly distances himself from them as follows: "Je n'imagine pas que l'on puisse s'interroger sur l'essence de la justice ou sur la rationalité de la communication humaine sans être toujours prises avec une réalité à déchiffrer. Ces mouvements qui ont aujourd'hui tant d'écho, qui tendent à envahir la scène philosophique, sont pour moi marqués par une abstraction, peu soucieux de déchiffrer la réalité; et ça n'est d'ailleurs pas un hazard s'ils ont pratiquement ignore la question du totalitarisme." Lefort 1999.

renunciation of talking about actual society, as a *symptom* of the crisis of representation-as-figuration starting in the 1970s and 1980s, and not as a solution.[251] It is problematic because it *doubles* the original de-substantialization of the social that accompanies the institution of any democratic society. Symptomatic in this regard is Habermas's attempt to solve the problem of identification by pleading for a *Verfassungspatriotismus*, whereby citizens are asked, in Rosanvallon's terms, to identify with the juridical fiction of generality, instead of providing reference points in society for 'real' identification.

A third development that Rosanvallon identifies is connected with the emergence of 'identity politics'. Here, Rosanvallon points to the danger that with the disappearance of the old forms of identification, there can easily emerge pathological attempts to differentiate society according to naturalized identities – based for example on sex or ethnicity – and in this way restore a lost 'organicity' of society. This is problematic in many ways, for example leading to new forms of inequality, and turning identity into a prison.

The question for Rosanvallon is therefore how to rethink the problem of representation-as-figuration today while avoiding populism, proceduralism, or a naturalization of identities. He dismisses the answer that we should simply return to the 'balanced democracy' as it emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and flourished in the twentieth century – revolving around the old institutions of political parties, trade unions, and the network state. According to Rosanvallon, this way of organizing and representing society in terms of static collective identities does not work anymore in a society that has become too dynamic and individualistic. In his recent work, Rosanvallon has tried to find alternative solutions, to which I now want to take a closer look.

2.4.7 Constructive solutions

In his recent work, Rosanvallon has tried to analyze and evaluate the recent democratic activities and institutions that have aimed to overcome the crisis of representation today. In his books *Counter-democracy* and *Democratic Legitimacy* Rosanvallon has analyzed this both from the perspective of citizens, where he focuses on the issue of *trust*, and from the perspective of governments, where he focuses on the issue of *legitimacy*.

In *Counter-democracy* Rosanvallon looks at how the crisis of representation and the erosion

[251] Similarly, Rosanvallon understands the return in France in the 1980s of the republican vocabulary of law and universality as a symptom of the crisis of representation-as-figuration.

of trust of citizens in their leaders have led to new forms of citizen activity based on *distrust*. Rosanvallon distinguishes between three forms of these practices, namely surveillance (the oversight and control of government activity by citizens), impeachment (the power of citizens to veto government actions), and judgment (with the growing juridification of politics the notions of accountability and responsiveness have become central). These forms of citizen activity – which Rosanvallon together calls 'counter-democracy' and which he thinks is expanding today – are aimed at influencing and criticizing government behavior in order to make sure that the elected leaders keep the promises they made during election-time, and that they at all times keep serving the general interest. In this way, citizen activity has been expanded by new forms of socially re-appropriating power, and by new forms of expression, that have a *permanent* character as opposed to sporadically voting. As Rosanvallon argues, "a democracy of identification is largely replaced by a democracy of appropriation."[252]

In *Democratic Legitimacy* Rosanvallon looks at the same problem from the perspective of governments by examining the different ways in which governments have tried to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. Here he points to the recent increase in the creation of independent authorities in society, such as oversight bodies, regulatory agencies, and constitutional courts – which Rosanvallon together calls 'indirect democracy'. Furthermore, Rosanvallon focuses on the new behavior of political leaders that aims at being closer to citizens by continuously interacting with citizens and by being responsive to their criticisms.

What characterizes these new forms of regulation and government is that they have a different kind of legitimacy than the one based on the majoritarian logic. Independent authorities are characterized by a legitimacy based either on *impartiality* (oversight bodies, regulatory agencies), or *reflexivity* (constitutional courts), whereas the new behavior of leaders is an attempt to create legitimacy based on *proximity*. Governments thus try to expand their procedural legitimacy with new forms of legitimacy based on impartiality, reflexivity, and proximity.

What Rosanvallon sketches in these two books is a new economy of representation that is based on a permanent process of interaction between citizens and governments that in new ways tries to repair the flaws of representation-as-mandate. The result is a complex, dynamic interplay between 'majoritarian-representative democracy', 'counter-democracy', and 'indirect democracy'.

However, Rosanvallon argues that these new political practices are not without their

[252] Rosanvallon 2008: 350.

problems. The central problem is that the surveillance and supervision of governments and political leaders by citizens and independent authorities have, what Rosanvallon calls, an 'unpolitical' character. Although they certainly can have democratic *effects*, which can lead to the social re-appropriation of power, it is, in the end, an unpolitical activity.[253]

In the case of citizen activities based on distrust, this means that the activity is in itself negative and reactive and cannot serve to structure or bear a collective project.[254] Moreover, the distrust of citizens can easily turn into pathological forms of populism or anti-politics. In the case of independent authorities, the problem is that their members are appointed based on competence and not elected by the public. This can lead to the problem that these institutions become ivory towers that cannot be democratically appropriated anymore, or that they become invaded by special interests. Finally, in the case of politicians trying to be attentive to citizens, this can become pathological when – in combination with the media – it turns into a strategy of image management divorced from reality.

Therefore for Rosanvallon the central pathology facing today's democracies is not citizen passivity or de-politicization,[255] but it is the paradoxical fact that the new activities and institutions that have emerged in civil society blend democratic effects with unpolitical activity and that these practices can easily turn into pathologies.[256] Furthermore, the pluralization of forms of representation and legitimacy has not contributed to provide reference points for identification and to make it easier for citizens to orientate themselves; and the decentering of many political activities, moving from the traditional political arena to civil society or to an international level (e.g., Brussels), has made it more difficult to 'read' the workings of sovereignty.[257]

Therefore Rosanvallon argues that – besides the task of politicians, social scientists, and other instances to find new narratives and vocabularies that can capture the social experience of today's citizens in order to overcome the general feelings of misrepresentation[258] – much more study has to be done to better understand how these new practices and institutions of counter-democracy and indirect democracy work, and to understand how we can better institutionalize and politicize them so that they can really contribute to overcoming the problem of representation

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[253] Rosanvallon 2006a: 247.
[254] Rosanvallon 2006a: 247.
[255] Rosanvallon 2008: 327.
[256] Rosanvallon 2006b: 27.
[257] Rosanvallon 2006b: 28.
[258] Rosanvallon 2006a: 250.

today.[259] In this way, Rosanvallon tries to contribute to, what he calls, a *realistic* and *positive* account of democracy: "Realistic, because it takes account of the actual behavior of elected officials and their distance from the people they govern. But positive, because it points the way toward an effective social re-appropriation of power."[260]

For Rosanvallon, a central precondition of a free democratic society is thus the *permanent interaction between government and society* and the constant need to improve the quality of this interaction. Rosanvallon calls this ideal *complex democracy* or *complex sovereignty*,[261] which starts from the acknowledgement that the sovereignty of the people does not mean the expression of a single general will, and instead means that the people is complex and polyphonic, and to give form to it requires a plural political formation in which the 'people-as-social-reality' can make its voice heard and participate in decision-making in a succession of venues ranging from proximate to remote and from extremely informal to highly institutionalized.

The 'balanced democracy' that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century was for Rosanvallon an example of a fruitful period when intellectual innovation and institutional experimentation contributed to solving the problem of representation-as-figuration and realizing complex democracy and sovereignty; here new forms of knowledge and new intermediate institutions gave form to the 'people-in-social-reality' and increased the quality and complexity of the interaction between society and government. However, for Rosanvallon this 'balanced democracy' was in the end a fragile balance that was suited for democracies in the twentieth century, but not anymore for today's more individualized societies. Rosanvallon sees it as our task to create today a similar wave of intellectual innovation and institutional experimentation that can establish new ways of solving the problem of representation-as-figuration and complex democracy in today's circumstances.

2.5 Freedom as indeterminacy revisited

After this long reconstruction of Rosanvallon's analysis of the problem of atomism and representation-as-figuration, I now want to finally look at how Rosanvallon's approach can be understood as a continuation of Lefort's understanding of *freedom as indeterminacy*. Similar to

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[259] Cf. Rosanvallon 2006a: 249-252.
[260] Rosanvallon 2008: 351.
[261] Rosanvallon 2000: 432-434.

Lefort, Rosanvallon's reflections do not start from a normative conception of the individual, but instead they start from the historical analysis of a *form of society*, namely a democratic society. And just like Lefort, Rosanvallon sees indeterminacy as the central characteristic of this form of society, although he understands it slightly differently than Lefort.

As Rosanvallon has argued in a recent text,[262] Lefort understands the notion of indeterminacy in two ways: first of all, it refers to the fact that in modernity there are no ultimate foundations anymore for instituting and legitimating the social order – as opposed to premodern societies – and this lack of a solid ground beneath one's feet leads to existential and psychological insecurity. Secondly, for Lefort this indeterminacy is a normative ideal: if we want to secure political freedom, then the way to deal with the existential insecurity caused by the lack of a solid foundation should not be to once again find a privileged position from which we can determine the social order, but instead it should be to institutionalize this indeterminacy in order to make sure that there will always be the possibility for citizens, the press, parliamentary opposition, and social movements to question *any* given order, institutional arrangement, or procedure.

As opposed to this very general, almost metaphysical, idea of modern indeterminacy, Rosanvallon provides a more detailed picture, starting from a historical analysis of structural tensions and ambiguities that have emerged in modernity when trying to institute a democratic society. In each of his books, Rosanvallon takes a concept or ideal that has been central in trying to institute a democratic society, such as the state (1990), universal suffrage (1992), representation (1998), sovereignty (2000), intermediate bodies (2004), citizen activity beyond voting (2006), legitimacy (2008), equality (1996, 2011), and executive power (2015),[263] and in each case he reconstructs from the French Revolution to today both the theoretical struggles about the meaning of these concepts, and the different institutional experiments that have been attempted to give form to them. What these reconstructions reveal is that there are structural tensions, ambiguities, and confusions when trying to institute a democratic society that cause a permanent indeterminacy between incommensurable elements.[264]

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[262] Rosanvallon 2015a: 242-243.

[263] And then there are Rosanvallon's more activist writings where he reconstructs the history of trade unions (1988a) and of solidarity, social justice, and the welfare state (1981, 1995).

[264] It has to be emphasized here that Rosanvallon does not understand the structural tensions as transhistorical, *perennial* problems, but as *persistent* problems: they have haunted Western democracies from the French Revolution to the present, but this does not exclude the possibility that with new historical developments we will be confronted with different problems.

Furthermore, Rosanvallon focuses in his reconstructions on the way in which different political cultures (liberal, republican, conservative, socialist, etc.) have proposed different solutions for dealing with these structural tensions and indeterminacies. Instead of developing abstract models of each political culture (as it is common in contemporary political philosophy[265]), Rosanvallon reconstructs the actual historical debates between these political cultures and focuses especially on those theoretical views and institutional experiments that ended democratic indeterminacy, and thus *ended politics*, in the sense that they *one-sidedly* solved the structural tensions at the heart of democracy.

Also, Rosanvallon emphasizes that the structural tensions that accompany the instituting of a democratic society have played out in different countries in different ways, depending on what is considered possible and impossible within each national 'social imaginary'. For example, we have seen that France was characterized by a political culture of generality, in which it was difficult to do justice to particularity. This resulted in a continuous illiberal tendency, which was very different from, say, England, in which representation was more naturally thought of as the representation of individual interests, which in turn resulted in the inability to completely eliminate hierarchy and privilege.[266] So although Rosanvallon thinks that there are certain structural tensions and ambiguities that every democracy has to deal with, in his reconstructions he likes to compare how these tensions played out differently in different countries and how different political cultures *within* these countries had different theories and practical solutions to deal with these tensions.

So Rosanvallon's approach clearly fits with those in the political-historical camp since he is not searching for a normative foundation in order to resolve the structural tensions that face the institution of a democratic society. Instead, he stays at the complex *surface* of historical and political reality and compares different *perspectives* by focusing especially on situations in which *politics has ended*. From there he tries to gain insight into the *preconditions of doing politics*, which he considers to be – similar to Lefort – as securing *indeterminacy*.

In the above reconstruction of the problem of atomism and representation-as-figuration we have seen a detailed example of how Rosanvallon proceeds. The structural tension that Rosanvallon encountered there was the tension between *generality* and *identity*, or between the juridical fiction

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[265] E.g., Habermas 1992: 324ff.

[266] Other specificities of France are the fact that it never managed to uphold a constitutional monarchy like many other Western democracies (cf. Rosanvallon 1994), and it never embraced a model of social democracy or Christian democracy, which were central in other Western countries.

of generality and the sociological reality of pluralism and division: according to Rosanvallon, history teaches us that every attempt to institute a democracy is accompanied by a fiction of generality (i.e., the sovereignty of *the* people, the equality of *the* subject). This then leads to a de-substantialization of the social and to atomism, which then requires a process of representation-as-figuration that once again gives form to society by providing possibilities for real identification.[267]

The reason why this task of representation-as-figuration can never be settled once and for all, according to Rosanvallon, is because pluralisms and identities in modern society change constantly and cannot be apprehended as *given*, as inscribed in the social, or, at least, such a naturalization would result in the ending of politics.[268] For Rosanvallon, the difficult task in modern societies is thus to overcome an atomistic, unreadable society of individuals while at the same time resisting the return to social organicism[269] and instead understand the task of representation-as-figuration as a permanent constructive task of interpretation and elaboration. In this way a compromise has to be found between the structural tension between the juridical fiction of generality and the sociological reality of pluralism and division.[270]

As we have seen, this structural tension between generality and identity is closely connected to the tension between two different definitions of 'the people': a *political* definition, understanding the people as a civic body, accompanied by an idea of unity and totality, and a *sociological* definition, where the people is understood as social reality, including diversity, plurality, and conflict. These two non-overlapping definitions of 'the people' point to different understandings of legitimacy; either quantitative arithmetic equality or qualitative sociological equality, that is either generality or identity.

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[267] Rosanvallon 1998: 21.

[268] Nadia Urbinati puts this point slightly differently: "[Representation] can never be truly descriptive and mimetic of social segmentations and identities because of its unavoidable inclination to transcend the 'here' and 'now' and to project instead a 'would-be' or 'ought-to-be' perspective that translates almost naturally into advocacy." 2006: 6. Cf. 2006: 46.

[269] Rosanvallon 1998: 240.

[270] As Weymans helpfully summarizes Rosanvallon's idea: "Een democratische samenleving is noodzakelijk tot op zekere hoogte zonder een vaste vorm, en elke poging om deze onbepaaldheid te vervangen door een 'substantiele' samenleving, dreigt de democratie zelf op te heffen. Dat het volk structureel een vaste vorm mist, betekent echter niet dat dit gebrek aan vorm niet kan worden 'gecompenseerd'. Juist omdat de vorm van een democratische samenleving niet onmiddellijk is gegeven, is er ruimte voor bemiddeling door een hele reeks instellingen en organisaties die een samenleving vormgeven. Het structurele gebrek aan vorm betekent echter wel dat geen enkele van deze organisaties onmiddellijk met het abstracte volk samenvalt. De uitdaging in een democratische samenleving bestaat er in om aan het volk een werkelijkheid te geven, zonder daarom de abstracte bepaling van het volk, die de garantie is voor vrijheid, recht en democratie, op te geven." 2005b: 330-331.

As history shows, this is further problematized by the fact that the procedures to construct these two definitions of 'the people' – representation-as-mandate and representation-as-figuration – can never do that in a satisfactory way: the majority resulting from democratic elections is just an approximation, purely conventional, of a unified people-as-civic-body; and every attempt to do justice to the people-as-social-reality by articulating and representing the most important differentiations and particularities in society is in the end merely a contestable interpretation that is always in danger of excluding certain individuals.

At the same time, we have seen how Rosanvallon in his reconstruction of these tensions continuously pointed out one-sided solutions to these issues: some absolutizing the pole of juridical generality (such as the Jacobin culture of generality and today's proceduralism), and others absolutizing the identity pole, endorsing an essentialist, descriptive approach to the problem of representation-as-figuration (such as syndicalism, totalitarianism, populism, or identity politics, which are all holding on in their own way to an organic conception of society).

This tension between generality and identity is just one example that can be found in Rosanvallon's work. Another main source of structural ambiguities and tensions when trying to institute a democratic society is the complicated relation between *democracy* and *liberalism*. As Rosanvallon shows, this has created confusion both in the past and the present, not in the least because the words 'democracy' and 'liberalism' are themselves very ambiguous. The fact that the word 'democracy' usually needs an adjective to make any sense – social, radical, liberal, minimal, procedural, real, etc. – already illustrates its ambiguity. This is made more confusing by the fact that democracy can be understood both as *citizen activity*, as a *political regime*, as a *social ideal*, or as a *mode of government*.[271] Also the word 'liberalism' can be understood, as Rosanvallon says, "simultaneously, and often in contradictory fashion, as a theory of the rule of law and individual liberties, the first attempt at a modern expression of the democratic ideal, an economic theory of regulation by the market, or a bourgeois ideology whose function was to dissimulate class relations."[272]

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[271] Rosanvallon 2008: 358-359. Instead of choosing one of these understandings as the most fundamental, Rosanvallon has tried to do justice to democracy's complexity by devoting each of his last four books to one of these four understandings respectively: *Counter-democracy* (citizen activity), *Democratic Legitimacy* (political regime), *The Society of Equals* (social ideal), and *Le bon gouvernement* (mode of government). Cf. 2015: 31

[272] Rosanvallon 2006a: 119.

Alongside this confusion, there have emerged tensions that result from the conflicting requirements of the ideals that liberalism and democracy often represent, such as the conflict between reason and will, the individual and the citizen, expertise and opinion, rational action and the power of number, etc. For example, as Rosanvallon points out, democracy has been historically defined both as having the function of *legitimating representatives*, but also – as liberals have stressed – to *protect the represented*. The first requires the development of a relation of *trust* between representatives and represented, whereas the second requires the organization of *distrust*. Again, there is a continuous danger that this tension is one-sidedly solved: if the goal of legitimating representatives is absolutized, there is the danger of a tyranny of the majority whereby the representatives, once authorized, think that they can govern without limits, which results in an *illiberal democracy*; if the goal of the protection of individuals is absolutized it can endanger the idea of politics as a collective project, thus leading to an *undemocratic liberalism*.

Similar tensions between the conflicting demands of liberalism and democracy can be found in the attempts to realize ideals such as equality, freedom, and justice. For example, as Rosanvallon says, when it comes to the ideal of social justice, modern democracies have been characterized by the contradiction between the 'principle of citizenship', which recognizes an 'objective' debt to society, and the 'principle of autonomy' which focuses on the 'subjective' behavior of individuals, which results in the continuous tension between solidarity and responsibility.[273] When it comes to the ideal of emancipation, Rosanvallon discerns a historical tension between on the one hand 'a desire for individual autonomy (with law as the privileged vector)' and on the other hand the 'project of participation in the exercise of social power (that therefore puts politics in the place of authority)',[274] which results in permanent tensions between reason and will, the individual and the citizen, and between individual autonomy and the auto-institution of society. And again, as Rosanvallon shows, history shows an impressive range of one-sided solutions to these tensions, which try to once and for all *end the indeterminacy* that is caused by these structural tensions, often having destructive effects.

Rosanvallon further explains that the structural tensions and ambiguities that accompany the instition of a democratic society – such as the ones related to generality and identity, or liberalism and democracy – have for a long time been masked because of the ideological divide

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[273] Rosanvallon 2003: 27-28; 1995: 21.
[274] Quoted in Jainchill/Moyn 2004: 126.

between liberals and Marxists; that is, between the advocates of classical parliamentary democracy and the champions of 'real' democracy. For a long time, both groups believed to possess the key to the perfect realization of a democratic society, and that problems and tensions concerning the realization of democracy were simply caused by the obstructing forces from the other group, either the 'uncivilized masses' or the 'bourgeoisie who had taken over power'. When this ideological divide largely disappeared, especially after 1989, the indeterminate nature of democratic societies suddenly became visible: the irony was that the general victory of democracy in the world was accompanied by the simultaneous rediscovery of its problematic, indeterminate nature.

However, as Rosanvallon says, this did not result in renewed vigor and fruitful debate on how to find constructive compromises concerning these complex tensions, but there emerged a desire to overcome democracy's indeterminacy, first by rational politics (i.e., technocracy), leaving things to the market and the rule of law, which was later complemented by a culture of voluntarism (i.e., populism) that wanted to restore a strong collective identity and will.[275] Instead of facing the structural tensions and ambiguities of democracy in all their complexity, they were simplified and one-sidedly solved, thereby ending indeterminacy and thus *ending politics*.

According to Rosanvallon this is not unique to our times: in his historical reconstructions he shows that modern democratic politics from the French Revolution to today has led again and again to simplified, one-sided solutions that ended politics, which have oscillated between the pathology of *rationalist liberalism*, which reduces politics to the market and the rule of law, and the pathology of *democratic voluntarism*, which creates social unity by suppressing liberty and pluralism.[276] Or, in the terms of this dissertation, modern politics has been oscillating between the pathologies of atomism and homogeneous unity. By better understanding how and why the pathological desire to 'end politics' keeps re-emerging in modern democracies (either in its liberal or democratic guise), Rosanvallon hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how to institute a democratic society in such a way so that indeterminacy is not ended and that the preconditions of 'doing politics' are secured.[277]

[275] Rosanvallon 2003: 43.
[276] Rosanvallon 2000: 441.
[277] Jainchill and Moyn speak of Rosanvallon's "devotion to liberal democracy as the telos of modern politics, while also highlighting the pathologies to which both liberalism and democracy in his view are prone. The goal throughout, in light of these pathologies, is to pursue a form of liberal democracy that can inoculate itself against its own potential diseases." 2004: 125.

Conclusion Part 1

Coming to the end of Part 1, we can conclude that the work of Lefort and Rosanvallon provides a picture of atomism and homogeneous unity as problems that are *internal* to democratic societies: since the institution of a democratic society is accompanied by a juridical fiction of generality that de-substantializes the social, a democratic society loses its natural form, which is the reason why the feeling of social dissolution and the desire to re-create unity are endemic in democracies. Lefort and Rosanvallon agree that there is indeed a need to give form and substance to modern democratic societies in order to overcome atomism, but they say that if we want to do this in such a way that homogeneous unity is avoided and freedom is secured, then we should not search for a normative foundation (for example based on human nature) or long for a return to social organicism, but we should instead focus on the political process of *representation* and ask how we can improve its quality. For Lefort and Rosanvallon, it is through political representation that form and substance can be given to a democratic society in such a way that the preconditions of *freedom as indeterminacy* are secured.[278]

When we now turn to the work of Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth we will find a different approach that does not consider *representation* and instead *recognition* as the key toward a free democratic society.

[278] Cf. Weymans 2005a.

Part 2: Freedom as complementarity

Liberty and solidarity are identical expressions from a social perspective.

Proudhon[279]

[279] Quoted in Honneth 2015: 34.

Introduction: Three understandings of a social pathology

In the first part of the dissertation we have looked at two philosophers from the political-historical camp, Lefort and Rosanvallon, who had a *political* approach to freedom that revolved around the *preconditions of doing politics* leading to their understanding of *freedom as indeterminacy*. Furthermore, their work contained a critique of both homogeneous unity and atomism that was not based on a 'deep' normative foundation, but on the insights of history concerning the complex perspectival 'surface' of political reality.

In this second part of the dissertation I want to turn to the work of Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth, two philosophers who operate in the social-ethical camp. Unlike Lefort and Rosanvallon, they have a *normative* approach to freedom that revolves around the identification of *social pathologies*, on the basis of which they try to establish the *social preconditions of individual self-realization*, and this leads to their understanding of *freedom as complementarity*. This approach also leads them to a critique of atomism and homogeneous unity, which is different from the critique given by Lefort and Rosanvallon.

Before turning to a discussion of the work of Taylor and Honneth I want to look more closely at the notion of 'social pathology', since it plays a central role in the social-ethical camp, and because it is at the same time a 'red flag' for many in the political-historical camp, since the notion of social pathology seems to imply an 'organic' conception of society, which they associate with totalitarian societies and with 'forcing individuals to be free'.[280] However, if one turns to the work of Honneth in order to get some clarification on the notion of 'social pathology' – since Honneth seems to be using the notion of social pathology most prominently within the social-ethical camp – one is disappointed, as Honneth himself seems to be confused about it, sometimes speaking of "pathologies of reason",[281] at other times of "pathologies of the social",[282] and most recently of "illnesses of society".[283]

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[280] To quote Isaiah Berlin again: "The perils of using organic metaphors to justify the coercion of some men by others in order to raise them to a 'higher' level of freedom have often been pointed out." 1969: 132. Interestingly, however, even though the notion of 'social organicism' is uniformly rejected by those in the political-historical camp, one can still find in their work naturalistic metaphors when discussing the problems facing democracy: Rosanvallon speaks for example of "democratic entropy" (2015a: 229), Ankersmit says that we have to find a balance between the "centrifugal and centripetal forces" in democracy (1996: 340), and also Furet uses a rhetoric of health and pathology when comparing Anglo-American and French democracy (cf. Jainchill/Moyn 2004: 109).
[281] Honneth 2009.
[282] Honneth 2007a.
[283] Honneth 2014b.

Therefore, I want to turn instead to a helpful distinction made by Arvi Särkelä between three understandings of social pathology.[284] The first understanding of social pathology that he identifies is that of a *Reflexionsblockade*. Here, the pathology results from the inability of social actors to reflexively grasp the constitutive, normative content of social practices. In this scenario, what is at stake is not an evaluation of the legitimacy of the normative content of social practices (which is left to the moral camp), but the aim is to diagnose the causes of the systematic failure of social actors to reflexively retrieve this normative content. Särkelä finds this understanding of social pathology in Honneth's *Freedom's Right*, in Habermas's *Erkenntniss und Interesse*, and in Rahel Jaeggi's *Kritik von Lebensformen* – and, as we will see, it is also central in the work of Taylor.

A second understanding of social pathology is as an *illness of the social organism*, whereby the analogy between society and the human body, and between institutions and organs, is central. In this account, things revolve around the issue of *social reproduction*: when institutions and practices fail to contribute to the reproduction of society, then they are considered to be 'dead', causing the social organism to become 'ill'. Särkelä finds examples of this understanding in Plato and Comte, in Durkheim's understanding of 'anomie', in Hegel's account of 'objective spirit', and in Honneth's recent article 'Krankheiten der Gesellschaft'.

The third understanding of a social pathology is as a '*toter Zustand im sozialen Leben*'. In this understanding, the naturalistic vocabulary of identifying pathologies is preserved, but it is disconnected from the metaphor of society as an individual organism. This metaphor is rejected because it is too static and makes radical critique impossible. This is because the reproductive goals of an individual organism are static and given, whereas the goals and purposes of human social life can be *negotiated*, resulting in a continuous dynamic *process* that is open to the radically new. The static image of a single organism is therefore replaced with the dynamic image of society as a general *life-process*. Instead of focusing on problems related to society's reflection on itself, or on illnesses of the social organism, in this third account of social pathology it is attempted to identify stagnations and degenerations of a distinctive social life-process.

As Särkelä says, each of these understandings of social pathology is informed by a different ontology, namely a *relational,* a *substantial*, and a *processual* ontology, each giving primacy to a

[284] Särkelä 2016: 105ff.

different aspect of social reality, either relations, substances, or processes.[285] In his dissertation, Särkelä tries to develop the third, processual understanding of social pathology on the basis of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and John Dewey's later work. What is interesting about this account is that it is accompanied by an understanding of 'immanent critique' that appears to share many characteristics with the perspectivist approach that we found in the political-historical camp.

Särkelä starts by criticizing the current fashion in Critical Theory to develop a *model* of immanent critique, since it problematically assumes that one can separate the *model of critique* and the *praxis of critique*, as if the critic can first develop a critical model on a meta-level, and only after that start with the actual praxis of critique. As Särkelä says, for Hegel and Dewey, this search for a privileged place for critique is a problematic remainder of the traditional, epistemological search for certainty, which distances the critic from the criticized practice and makes the model sterile.

As opposed to this, Särkelä extracts from Hegel and Dewey an understanding of immanent critique as a *self-transforming praxis*, which starts from the idea that immanent critique does not only transform the objective, criticized practice, but also the situation and the self of the critic, and thereby the praxis of critique itself. Whereas in the 'model-approaches' to immanent critique the notion of 'immanency' refers to the quality of the *criteria*, in Särkela's account of immanent critique as a self-transformative praxis, 'immanency' refers to the process of the *critical practice itself*, whereby critique cannot be brought to rest in a meta-critical model.

As Särkelä explains, this self-transformative understanding of immanent critique is accompanied by two central commitments, namely 'strong corrigibilism' and 'radical fallibilism'.[286] Strong corrigibilism means to give up the idea that before the actual critique begins, one should first ask about the conditions of the possibility of critique and develop some kind of model based on transcendental, quasi-transcendental, formal-anthropological, or social-ontological arguments. Instead, as Särkelä argues, Hegel and Dewey urge us to simply start with our critical analysis of society and in the course of the *experience of critique* to evaluate and analyze the consequences of this critique. So the preconditions of critique are to be gotten not *before* the critique, but in its *self-evaluation*. As Särkelä says, by trusting that experience can be a self-correcting process this has the advantage of giving experience a fair chance.

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[285] As Särkelä says, in the natural sciences this would be the difference between Aristotle (substantial), Galilei/Newton/Lamarck (relational), and Darwin (processual).
[286] Särkelä 2016: 13.

‘Radical fallibilism’ refers to the willingness of the critic towards self-transformation in the process of the self-correcting experience of critique. Not only should the results of critique be submitted to critical evaluation, but also what critique as such could mean. It is radical because it applies to the methodological implications of the critical praxis itself. This means that there are no metaphysical guarantees that any methodological convictions are safe from the need for revision.

If one takes strong correctivism and radical fallibilism seriously, Särkelä says, then the legitimacy of immanent critique will not be about following the right model or norms, but instead immanent critique will spread out on the table as “die ‘Karte’ (Dewey) des ‘Wegs der Verzweiflung’ (Hegel), den der sich vollbringende Skeptizismus beschritten hat”.[287] Other critics can choose their own path in this ‘landscape of critique’ and report if what they have found corresponds with the presented map. In this way, Särkela argues, immanent critique can become a truly *social* practice of self-transformation.[288]

Särkelä’s account of social critique thus seems to be informed by methodological commitments that sound very similar to the perspectivist commitments in the political-historical camp in the sense that both reject the search for a privileged position from which to exercise critique. And this complicates the story I have been telling so far: until now I have presented the social-ethical camp as searching for context-transcending norms (or privileged positions or situated foundations), but apparently there are also approaches in the social-ethical camp that, just as those in the political-historical camp, reject this search for certainty.

And indeed, this is precisely the difference between Taylor and Honneth, as I will try to show in the next two chapters: whereas Taylor’s philosophy is informed by the idea that there is no solid foundation or privileged position from which to exercise critique in modernity, Honneth’s philosophy holds on to this possibility. One could thus say that the question concerning the *limits of what we can know and do* when exercising critique and when trying to realize a free society is thus not only a source of division between the social-ethical and political-historical camp, but also between those *within* the social-ethical camp.

[287] Särkelä 2016: 14.
[288] Särkelä 2016: 14.

Chapter 3: Charles Taylor and the problem of situating freedom

The philosophy of Charles Taylor can be understood as a reflection on the problem of freedom today that attempts to find a middle way between atomism and homogeneous unity. One can find many passages in his work where he expresses this ambition. Already in one of his first books, *The Pattern of Politics* (1970), Taylor says he wants to find an alternative to "either totalitarian conformity around an established ideology, or a completely privatized society", an alternative which he calls a "dialogue society".[289] Similarly, when trying to legitimize his attempt to rehabilitate the philosophy of Hegel in his books *Hegel* (1975) and *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979) Taylor argues that, "Hegel provides useful insights for an age that must avoid both the illusions and distortions of the utilitarian, atomistic tradition and the Romantic counter-illusions that these continually generate."[290] Or again, in his commentary on the liberal-communitarian debate, Taylor endorses a middle way between atomism and holism, namely "holist individualism", which means a position "that is fully aware of the (ontological) social embedding of human agents but, at the same time, prizes liberty and individual differences very highly."[291]

In this chapter I want to reconstruct the way in which Taylor has tried to find a middle way between atomism and homogeneous unity, which could be called the problem of 'situating freedom'. This will lead us to Taylor's specific account of freedom, which I will call *freedom as complementarity*. In doing this, one of my aims will be to better understand why Taylor – who fits clearly into the social-ethical camp, since he is concerned with the social preconditions of individual freedom – at the same time shares many 'perspectivist' intuitions with the political-historical camp. What exactly are these intuitions and where do they come from?

I will proceed by first showing how Taylor retrieves two insights from Hegel: that freedom requires the *identification* of citizens with their society, and it also requires a *meaningful differentiation* of society (§3.1). In the rest of the chapter I will then explore how Taylor plays out the need for identification against atomism (§3.2, §3.3) and the need for meaningful differentiation against homogeneous unity (§3.4, §3.5).

[289] Taylor 1970: 124.
[290] Taylor 1979: 134.
[291] Taylor 1995: 185.

3.1 The need for identification and meaningful differentiation

Taylor's critique of atomism and homogeneous unity has its roots in his experiences with, and thoughts on, Canadian politics.[292] In *The Pattern of Politics* – Taylor's most political work in which he sketches a political program for Canada – both themes are clearly present. The critique of atomism appears in the form of a critique of Canada's economic dependence on America. According to Taylor this is problematic because the American economic model is based on the ideal of corporate autonomy, which forces governments to cut public spending in favor of private investments.[293] This in turn undermines the possibility for collective action that is required to secure the needs of the public sector, and, more generally, it undermines the possibility for citizens to participate in power and to identify with their society and its institutions.[294]

Taylor's critique of homogeneous unity is present in his striving for Canadian unity by reconciling the English-speaking and French-speaking parts; or, in the expression used as the title of one of Taylor's books, by 'reconciling the solitudes.'[295] As Taylor emphasized, this unity should not be realized by assimilating the French part to the English one, thus creating a homogeneous unity, but by realizing, in Taylor's words:

> […] a bicultural society, not just in the sense of a society in which the rights of both languages are respected, but in the sense of a society (very rare in today's world) in which both groups can learn from each other and be enriched by living side by side. This country is one of the few that can show the world how to make diversity a source of richness.[296]

In his subsequent books *Hegel* (1975) and *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979) Taylor would further analyze the dangers of both atomism and homogeneous unity by turning to Hegel's diagnosis of the problem of freedom in modernity. Taylor reconstructs Hegel's philosophy of

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[292] Between 1961 and 1971, Taylor pursued a political career in the newly founded New Democratic Party (NDP), which was not a success: Taylor was defeated four times during the federal elections that took place in Canada between 1962 and 1968, and he was defeated in his Mount Royal riding by Pierre Trudeau in 1965. From 1966 to 1971 Taylor was federal vice-president of the NDP, but with a change of party leadership in 1971 he cut back on his political activities and focused on his philosophical work. Cf. Taylor 1993: xii-xiii.
[293] Taylor 1970: Ch. 2.
[294] Taylor 1970: Ch. 5.
[295] This expression refers to the Canadian novel *Two Solitudes* (1945) by Hugh MacLennan, which tells about the lack of communication between the English- and French-speaking parts of Canada. Cf. Taylor 1970: 128.
[296] Taylor 1970: 132.

freedom as an attempt to find a synthesis between *radical autonomy* and *expressive unity*.[297] What is at stake here, simply put, is the question about how we can realize autonomy for each individual, while at the same time realize the conditions in which individuals do not feel alienated from society and can instead *identify* with it and feel part of a meaningful larger life. And since Hegel considered Kant to have the most sophisticated account of autonomy, and since he considered the Greek *polis* as the paradigmatic model of a society in which individuals can identify with their institutions, Taylor also speaks of Hegel's philosophy of freedom as an attempt to find a synthesis between the "radical moral autonomy of Kant and the expressive unity of the Greek *polis*".[298]

In order to understand how Taylor uses Hegel's philosophy of freedom for further developing his critique of atomism and homogeneous unity, I want to look at Taylor's discussion of Hegel's understanding of *practical reason* and how it differs from the understanding of practical reason in 1) Plato, 2) utilitarianism, and 3) Kant. In comparing these accounts, Taylor focuses on their different conceptions of *reason*, *nature*, and *order*.

Starting with Plato's account of practical reason, Taylor argues that reason refers here to the power to grasp the true structure of things, the world of the Ideas. To act according to reason means to act according to this true structure, which was understood as being the same as acting according to nature. This understanding of reason and nature presupposed a larger hierarchical order to which man essentially belongs, a cosmic order that was reflected in a social order based on hierarchical differentiation – an idea that was central in the premodern world. Individuals had their 'natural' place in a hierarchical order, which provided the conditions for identification (or expressive unity), but there was no room yet for individual autonomy.

This premodern understanding of reason, nature, and order would be undermined in the seventeenth century, when the idea of a larger rational cosmos was rejected and replaced with the idea of a self-defining subject. This led initially to Enlightenment utilitarianism in which the starting point of practical reason became nature understood as the *de facto* desires of individuals. Reason was understood as the intelligent calculation of how to maximize the realization of these desires, and social order was understood as an instrument for securing satisfactions for individuals. In this picture, man does not conform to a larger meaningful order, but he tries to create a society in which a perfect harmony of desires is realized.

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[297] Taylor 1979: 68.
[298] Taylor 1975: 388; Taylor 1979: 95.

For Taylor this utilitarian picture is problematic because, even though it stresses the importance of individual freedom, one cannot derive a meaningful social order from it with which people can *identify*. In general, it leads to a social engineering whereby society is justified not by what it *expresses*, but by what it *achieves*, namely the efficient production of goods which are consumed by individuals. This outlook was defended by the Enlightenment utilitarians by telling a narrative of 'maturity': whereas in earlier times people needed a 'childish' myth, fable, or religion to identify with their society, now 'mature' individuals could be attached to their society simply because of what it produces for them. However, as Taylor argues, this theory has both in the past and the present been unable to provide a sound basis for men's identification with their society. If society is nothing more than an instrument for the satisfaction of desires, it often comes to be experienced as a spiritual desert or as a disciplining machine – not as a meaningful larger life with which one can identify.

This brings us to Kant's account of practical reason, which can be understood as a reaction to Enlightenment utilitarianism. Kant rejected the utilitarian identification of good with interest and of reason with calculation. Kant strived for a radical autonomy – that is, to a freedom that renounces all heteronomy, including nature – whereby reason obeys only the dictates of the autonomous will. Hegel criticized Kant's philosophy because, even though he agreed with Kant that we should strive for radical autonomy, he thought that Kant realizes radical autonomy at the price of *emptiness*. In trying to avoid any appeal to the way things are, either an order of Ideas (Plato) or *de facto* desires (utilitarianism), Kant ends up with a purely *formal* criterion for moral action – i.e., the maxim that we can universalize a certain action without contradiction – which, according to Hegel, can basically allow anything as a morally possible action; that is, in the end it remains empty. This issue of emptiness returns in Hegel's criticism of Kant's account of political order in which rationality requires that: 1) man be treated as a rational subject, that is, as an end and not only as a means; and 2) that the state be ruled by law. Although Hegel agrees with these two principles, he objects that these principles alone do not provide the means for giving *particular content* to society; the social order remains formal and empty.[299]

This is the reason why Hegel saw a parallel between Kant's radical autonomy and the general will doctrines that informed the French Revolution. Hegel interpreted the French Revolution as the ultimate attempt to renounce all heteronomy and remake society entirely

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[299] Taylor 1979: 82.

according to autonomous reason; the aim was to found society on no particular interest or traditional positive principle, but on freedom alone. This introduced a new ground for identifying with one's society, which was not based on the idea that society reflects a cosmic order (Plato) or the idea that society produces a harmony of interests (utilitarianism), but that society is a product of radical autonomy, of a free moral will. But according to Hegel, the principle of radical autonomy of the French Revolutionaries was as equally empty as Kant's as it provided no basis for a new articulated structure of society. The drive to radical autonomy only led to the destruction of the old order, but it was incapable of recreating a new society to replace the one it had destroyed; instead it remained fixed in its negative, destructive phase, which led to the Terror.

According to Taylor, Hegel's attempt to overcome the problems in utilitarian and Kantian accounts of practical reason was original because his account did not start from *human reason*, as the utilitarians and Kant did, but from *cosmic reason*, or *Geist*. Hegel believed that man realizes himself by seeing himself as part of a larger life, namely *Geist*, whose content is the Idea, which produces a differentiated world out of itself. In his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel showed how the Idea dictates a certain structure of society; namely a structure in which the moments of *immediate unity*, *separation*, and *mediated unity* all reach compatible expression, which resulted in Hegel's articulation of the state into 'estates' (*Stände*) and into levels of society (family, civil society, state).[300]

As Taylor explains, Hegel thus tried to rehabilitate the premodern idea of a cosmic order – of a larger, differentiated life with which one can identify – but this was now fully based on autonomous reason.[301] This is, very simply put, Hegel's solution to finding a synthesis between radical autonomy and expressive unity, a solution that separated Hegel from his Romantic contemporaries, who also tried to re-establish a connection to a meaningful larger life, namely nature, but for whom the basis of identification was feelings and emotions, and not reason.

In his evaluation of Hegel's philosophy, Taylor states that Hegel's solution to the problem of freedom is dead, because nobody believes his ontology anymore.[302] What is more interesting for Taylor is Hegel's general *diagnosis* of the problem of freedom in modernity, especially the problematic tension between, on the one hand, the utilitarian, atomistic, and instrumental picture

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[300] Taylor 1979: 80.
[301] Taylor 1979: 81.
[302] Taylor 1975: 570. Cf: "[N]o one actually believes [Hegel's] central ontological thesis, that the universe is posited by Spirit whose essence is rational necessity." Taylor 1975: 538.

of society and freedom, which has become dominant in modernity and informs many of our institutions (such as the market and the bureaucratic state), and on the other hand, the more demanding aspirations toward radical autonomy and expressive unity that keep re-emerging in modern societies, often in problematic forms that strive for homogeneous unity.[303]

What Taylor wants to save from Hegel's work in the context of this problematic tension is his theory of *how man is situated in society*, which, as Taylor says, is "by itself far from implausible or bizarre. Indeed, it is much superior to the atomistic conceptions of some of Hegel's liberal opponents."[304] More specifically, Taylor is interested in two issues that Hegel put on the philosophical agenda with his theory of how man is situated in society: 1) the idea that a free society, if it wants to survive and reproduce itself, requires that citizens can *identify* themselves with their society (or, in different words, that they can participate in it as a larger, meaningful life) – something which Hegel called *Sittlichkeit*; and 2) that the realization of freedom requires a society that is characterized by some kind of *meaningful differentiation*, as opposed to the ideal of a completely homogeneous, transparent society that we can find in general will theories, nationalism, or Marxism.

In his subsequent work, one could say that Taylor tried to find a middle way between the utilitarian picture of man and society (often leading to atomistic fragmentation) and the ideals of radical autonomy and expressive unity (often leading to an undifferentiated, homogeneous unity), by rethinking these two issues that Hegel put on the philosophical agenda, namely the issue of *identification* as an antidote to *atomism*, and the issue of *meaningful differentiation* as an antidote to *homogeneous unity*. However, as we will see, Taylor would pursue this critical road by moving away from the Hegelian framework and by turning instead to the insights of the Romantic tradition concerning language, meaning, and expression (i.e., Herder, Humboldt, and Hamann) and to the 'anthropologies of situated freedom'[305] developed in the tradition of phenomenology and hermeneutics (i.e., Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, the late Wittgenstein, and Michael Polanyi).

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[303] Cf. Taylor 1979: 72.
[304] Taylor 1979: 94.
[305] Taylor 1989: 515.

3.2 Two critiques of naturalism

In order to properly understand Taylor's critique of atomism, we have to start by looking at his broader *critique of naturalism*. Naturalism can mean two things in Taylor's philosophy: either it refers to contemporary attempts in the human sciences to study humans with the methods of the natural sciences, or it refers more broadly to the naturalization of a certain disengaged world-disclosure that emerged in modern times, whereby the self objectifies and controls his surroundings.[306] In the following I want to look closer at Taylor's critique of these two understandings of naturalism, which will then set the stage for looking closer at his confrontation between atomism and the problem of identification.

In his early work, Taylor's critique of naturalism revolved around what one could call 'scientific, methodological naturalism', whereby the human sciences try to analyze humans by imitating the natural sciences, that is, by taking a disengaged stance, objectifying one's research object and searching for causal laws.[307] In order to show why these attempts are flawed, Taylor developed his own philosophical anthropology based on the insights of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Romantic 'constitutive' theories of language.[308]

One of the starting points of Taylor's philosophical anthropology is the distinction made by Harry Frankfurt between *first-order desires* and *second-order desires*. Whereas all animals have first-order desires, Frankfurt claims, it is only humans who have second-order desires about their first-order desires, which means that they reflectively *evaluate* their desires and hence regard some as desirable and others as undesirable. Taylor agrees with Frankfurt, but he adds the distinction between *weak* and *strong evaluation*. When humans evaluate their first-order desires, they can do that in a merely calculating and quantitative way; for example comparing two desires to see which one is more convenient or reflecting about how to get the most overall satisfaction. This 'weak' evaluation of first-order desires is mainly concerned with outcomes. 'Strong' evaluation, however, is not concerned with outcomes but with the *quality of our motivation* and with the qualitative *worth* of different desires. Whereas with weak evaluation, for something to be judged as good it is enough that it is desired, with strong evaluation there are evaluative terms for which being desired

[306] Cf. Rosa 1998: 341.

[307] Taylor finds this tendency for example in behaviorism – which he criticized in his dissertation *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964) – but also in certain schools in psychology and the social sciences, such as socio-biology, cognitive psychology, rational-choice theory, or Artificial Intelligence. Cf. Taylor 1985a, 1985b.

[308] Taylor 1985a.

is not sufficient, and many desires are judged to be ignoble, trivial, superficial, or unworthy.[309] Strong evaluation is thus intimately connected to our *normative self-interpretation* and our *identity*; that is, to our interpretation of what it means to be a human being and how to live a more 'worthy', 'full' or 'good' life.

Central in Taylor's argument is the idea that these normative self-interpretations in the form of strong evaluations are not merely epiphenomenal, but they *constitute* who we are. This is the reason why Taylor rejects 'naturalist' approaches in the human sciences, because when trying to understand humans and society, they neglect the terms people themselves use to make sense of their lives; that is, they abstract from people's normative, first-person self-interpretations and try to give a third-person account of humans in neutral, objective terms. The goal of these theories is *Erklären* and not *Verstehen*, which presupposes that one can clearly distinguish between reality and representation, between what a human objectively is, and how a human normative interprets himself and the world. Taylor rejects this approach because if our normative self-interpretation is constitutive of who we are, then refraining from people's self-interpretations by taking a disengaged, objective standpoint will distort our understanding.[310] In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor presents an alternative to naturalism, namely the 'best account principle', which refers to the idea that when trying to understand the human world, we have to start from the meanings things have for people; that is, we have to start from the 'best account' people can give of their lives from their situated perspectives.[311]

However, Taylor is not satisfied with just showing that scientific, methodological naturalism in the human sciences is mistaken, but he also wants to understand – given his idea that humans are always guided by strong evaluation – what motivates the defenders of these naturalist theories. What qualitative distinctions do *they* make?

This leads Taylor to pursue a much larger problem, namely the 'naturalization' of a disengaged world-disclosure that emerged during the seventeenth century whereby the self objectifies and controls his surroundings. Taylor argues that the success of this naturalization largely rested on historical narratives that were dominant during the Enlightenment, which he calls

[309] As Taylor says: "[S]trong evaluation deploys a language of evaluative distinctions, in which different desires are described as noble or base, integrating or fragmenting, courageous or cowardly, clairvoyant or blind, and so on." 1985a: 19.
[310] Cf. Rosa 1998: 243-244.
[311] Taylor 1989: 68-69, 106. Cf. Rosa 1998: 245.

‘subtraction stories’.[312] These stories reconstructed the transition from premodern to modern societies as a simple subtraction: first there were premodern societies informed by tradition, religion, and dubious metaphysics, but then Enlightened people freed themselves from these shackles and the scales fell from their eyes, and they could for the first time see reality as it really was, including the underlying perennial features of human nature that had been there all along, such as the fact that we are disengaged, autonomous individuals.[313] These stories were usually told in terms of coming to adulthood: the Enlightenment had overcome the childish illusions of religion and metaphysics and now faced reality as it really was, with courage and responsibility.[314] Taylor thinks that these subtraction stories fail to do justice to the complexity of the emergence of the modern disengaged world-disclosure, and therefore he has tried in *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* to articulate his own alternative historical reconstruction.

In his reconstruction of the emergence of the modern disengaged world-disclosure, Taylor gives a central place to three developments:[315] first of all, the emergence of the natural sciences and especially the scientific revolution of Francis Bacon, who rejected the idea of science as the contemplation of the cosmic order as being vain and misguided, and who replaced it with an idea of science that was aimed at improving everyday human flourishing through instrumental-rational control;[316] secondly, the *modern tradition of epistemology*, starting with Descartes, which understood knowledge as the correct representation of an independent reality; and thirdly, the *Reformation*, which contributed to the ‘disenchantment’ of the world, an affirmation of ordinary life (i.e., seeing family and work as the locus of the good life), and an instrumental stance toward society and the self.[317]

According to Taylor, each of these developments helped to replace a *substantive* conception of reason – as it was central in pre-modern societies, whereby reason refers to having a true vision of the cosmic order that is considered to be good – with a *procedural* conception of reason that

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[312] Taylor 2007: 22, 253.
[313] “I mean by [subtraction stories] stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerges from this process – modernity or secularity – is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside. Against this kind of story, I will steadily be arguing that Western modernity, including its secularity, is the fruit of new inventions, newly constructed self-understandings and related practices, and can’t be explained in terms of perennial features of human life.” Taylor 2007: 22. Cf. 2007: 573.
[314] Taylor 2007: 575.
[315] Taylor 1989: 233.
[316] Taylor 2007: 542-543, 1989: 85, 213, 230-232.
[317] Taylor 2007: 77, 98-99.

would become dominant in modern societies.[318] In this modern procedural conception, the universe is no longer seen as the embodiment of a meaningful order which can define the good for us, but it becomes disenchanted and grasped mechanistically and functionally as a domain of potential instrumental control. Our task is no longer to contemplate a *given* cosmic order, but to *construct* a world guided by disengaged reason.[319] Taylor argues that part of the success of this new disengaged, instrumental outlook was that it was closely connected to the ideal of *autonomy*: "To be free in the modern sense is to be self-responsible, to rely on your own judgment, to find your purpose in yourself."[320] This, in turn, was accompanied by a feeling of *dignity*: one was no longer dependent on an outside authority.[321]

However, what is problematic about the emergence of this new disengaged world-disclosure, according to Taylor, is that it became presented by Enlightenment thinkers, not as one normative account of human agency among others, revolving around the ideals of individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing, but it was *naturalized*: its features were read into the ontology of the subject.[322] Taylor distinguishes between three of these naturalized features of the subject: 1) disengagement, 2) instrumental reason, and 3) atomism.[323] As he summarizes:

> The first is the picture of the subject as ideally disengaged, that is, as free and rational to the extent that he has fully distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds, so that his identity is no longer to be defined in terms of what lies outside him in these worlds. The second, which flows from this, is a punctual view of the self, ideally ready as free and rational to treat these worlds – and even some of the features of his own character – instrumentally, as subject to change and reorganizing in order to better secure the welfare of himself and others. The third is the social consequence of the first two: an atomistic construal of society as constituted by, or ultimately to be explained in terms of, individual purposes.[324]

[318] Taylor 1989: 156.
[319] Cf. Taylor 1989: 168.
[320] Taylor 1995: 7.
[321] Taylor thinks that this is the (implicit) strong evaluation that accompanies the 'naturalistic' human scientists: they strive for an objectification of their research object guided by the ideal of self-responsible reason and the dignity that accompanies it, as opposed to the fickle task of hermeneutically interpreting how humans understand themselves and how they give meaning to their world.
[322] Cf. Taylor 1989: 514.
[323] Taylor 1995: 7.
[324] Taylor 1995: 7.

For Taylor, the problem is that there emerged a normative ideal of individual autonomy in modernity that was 'naturalized' into a *disengaged anthropology* and an *atomistic social ontology*. In the course of modernity this Enlightenment outlook became dominant, leading to the capitalist, technological, and bureaucratic mode of existence that is still central today; a mode of existence in which the increasing of individual freedom, dignity, and flourishing by way of disengagement and instrumental reason is central. At the same time, Taylor says, this outlook has been continuously criticized for suppressing and neglecting important values and ideals, for example by Romantic or religious counter-movements that want to overcome alienation and fragmentation by stressing the need for expressive unity.

However, as Taylor says, because of the naturalization of the disengaged world-disclosure, the debates between Enlightenment thinkers and these romantic or religious counter-movements often become polarized in an unhelpful way: the Enlightenment thinkers who want to defend the modern ideals of individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing often think that they therefore have to necessarily defend the disengaged anthropology and atomistic social ontology, whereas those who think that this anthropology and social ontology are flawed, often believe that they therefore have to reject the modern ideal of individual autonomy altogether.[325] This polarization is one of the reasons, in Taylor's account, for the pendulum swing between atomism and homogeneous unity in modernity. The polarization is made worse, Taylor argues, by the fact that the Enlightenment thinkers cannot articulate their own underlying ideals of the good, since they present themselves as neutral, and therefore they can only generate moral motivation negatively, or parasitically, by criticizing and ridiculing the stupidity, irrationality, or childishness of their opponents, especially religion.[326]

What is therefore needed, according to Taylor, if we want to avoid either this destructive polarization, or, alternatively, a situation in which the Enlightenment outlook has become an unchallengeable background in which alternatives are impossible to imagine,[327] is a *de-naturalization* of the Enlightenment world-disclosure; that is, to show that it is just one normative account of human agency among others.[328] Only then will there be a possibility of finding a healthy

[325] Taylor 1989: 514.
[326] Taylor 1989: 339.
[327] Referring to Wittgenstein, Taylor argues that in this way "a picture can hold us captive". 2007: 565.
[328] Taylor speaks of "illegitimate naturalizations of what are in fact profound cultural mutations." 2007: 590.

balance between different world-disclosures and of realizing individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing in a less one-sided way so that it does not necessarily lead to alienation and fragmentation.

Taylor's two critiques of naturalism – the first opposing naturalism in the human sciences with his own philosophical anthropology, the second opposing the 'subtraction stories' of the Enlightenment with his own 'grand narrative' about the emergence of the disengaged world-disclosure and the modern individual – thus illustrate his sensitivity to a specific kind of pathology in modernity: given his idea that human beings are always guided by strong evaluation, he is very alert to those ideas and practices whereby people pretend to stand on *neutral, objective ground*, free from any normative self-interpretation.[329] Taylor's critique of naturalism is thus a clear example of the first social pathology that Arvi Särkelä identified, namely that of a *Reflexionsblockade*: according to Taylor, naturalists fail to reflexively grasp and articulate the normative ideals that inform their specific world-disclosure. This brings us to Taylor's critique of atomism.

3.3 Atomism and the problem of identification

As we have seen, Taylor considers atomism to be connected to the emergence of a disengaged, instrumental world-disclosure in modern times that is informed by the ideals of individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing, but this world-disclosure is then naturalized by Enlightenment thinkers and read into the ontology of the subject. When the resulting disengaged anthropology is applied to social and political issues – as it has been done in Enlightenment utilitarianism, and social contract theories – this leads to an atomistic social ontology. In his article 'Atomism', Taylor argues that society is then perceived as consisting of *self-sufficient individuals*[330] who pursue *individual goods*,[331] there is an emphasis on the *primacy of rights*,[332]and society is viewed merely as *instrumental*[333] to the realization of individual goods.

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[329] Examples of these ideas and practices are the 'naturalistic' human sciences, the modern epistemological tradition, Enlightenment 'subtraction stories', the 'liberalism of neutrality', 'designative' language theories, or the idea of 'negative freedom' as an opportunity-concept. As Taylor complains: "[A]ll these accounts 'naturalize' the features of the modern, liberal identity. They cannot see it as one, historically constructed understanding of human agency among others." 2007: 571.

[330] Taylor 1985b: 189; 1975: 27-28.

[331] Taylor 1985b: 187, 292.

[332] Taylor 1985b: 189, 187.

[333] Taylor 1985b: 187.

In his attempt to show what is wrong with atomism, Taylor wants to make sure that his criticism is not interpreted as a rejection of the underlying ideals of individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing. As we have seen above, Taylor thinks that this is a common confusion in modern societies: as a result of the naturalization of the Enlightenment outlook, liberal Enlightenment thinkers who defend individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing think that they therefore necessarily have to defend a disengaged anthropology and atomistic social ontology, whereas the counter-movements, who are critical of the disengaged anthropology and atomistic social ontology, often think that they therefore have to reject the ideal of individual autonomy altogether. The naturalization of the Enlightenment position thus leads to an unhealthy polarization whereby more nuanced positions get lost from view.

Taylor considers the recent debate in political philosophy between 'liberals' and 'communitarians' as an example of such a polarized debate that leaves no room for nuanced positions. When Michael Sandel articulated his 'communitarian' critique of John Rawls's disengaged anthropology – revolving around 'unencumbered selves' – this was read by many as a criticism of the ideals of individual autonomy and as a defense of collectivism. According to Taylor this led to an unhelpful polarization whereby one had to be either pro-individual or pro-community.[334]

Taylor tries to overcome this confusion by making a distinction between *ontological* and *advocacy* issues. Ontological issues "concern the terms you accept as ultimate in the order of explanation"[335] when it comes to social life, and which has been divided between 'atomists' and 'holists'. Advocacy issues, on the other hand, "concern the moral stand or policy one adopts",[336] which oscillates between individualism or collectivism. According to Taylor, the relation between ontological and advocacy issues is complex: for example, when one defends a 'holist' position on an ontological level, one can still be an 'individualist' when it comes to advocacy. This is the reason why Taylor thinks we should get rid of the opposition between liberalism and communitarianism, as it presupposes that there are only two options to choose from, blending out more nuanced positions, such as Taylor's own position of *holist individualism*, which means a position "that is fully aware of the (ontological) social embedding of human agents but, at the same time, prizes

[334] Taylor 1995: 184.
[335] Taylor 1995: 181.
[336] Taylor 1995: 182.

liberty and individual differences very highly."[337] In other words, what becomes possible when distinguishing between ontological and advocacy issues is a critique of atomism that is compatible with an endorsement of the ideals of individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing.

So with these nuances in place, we can now take a further look at Taylor's critique of atomism as a specific social ontology (and not as an advocacy for individual freedom). In general, one could say that Taylor's critique of atomism is about the neglect of the social and cultural preconditions of individual freedom. This can be further divided into three closely related criticisms: 1) Taylor criticizes the atomistic idea that the modern autonomous individual is a *neutral starting point* that precedes society, 2) he criticizes the conception of *negative freedom* that often goes hand in hand with atomism, and 3) he questions the *viability* of an atomistic society.

Taylor's first criticism points its arrows at the idea that the modern autonomous individual can be conceived as a neutral starting point that precedes society, an idea that is common in Enlightenment utilitarianism and social contract theory. In this view, the individual is morally self-sufficient, and it pursues goods that it in principle can formulate outside of society and attain alone; the association with other individuals in a society has mainly instrumental purposes, seeking either advantage or the defense of individual rights, either prosperity or security.

This atomistic conception has been criticized from the beginning in different ways by Aristotelian, republican, Hegelian, and Marxist accounts.[338] Taylor draws on these accounts when he argues that man is a social animal,[339] which does not only mean that individuals cannot survive physically outside of society, but that "they only develop their characteristically human capacities in society. The claim is that living in society is a necessary condition of the development of rationality […] or of becoming a moral agent in the full sense of the term, or of becoming a fully responsible, autonomous being."[340] For Taylor the modern autonomous individual does not precede society, but it is the *result* of a well-functioning society.

Taylor gives his own twist to this familiar argument by linking it to his own philosophical anthropology, which revolves around the idea that all humans are guided by strong evaluation. Taylor argues that strong evaluation cannot be understood in an atomistic way, as if individuals could do this by themselves outside of society. Instead, Taylor says that we grow up in a certain

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[337] Taylor 1995: 185.
[338] Forst 1994: 20.
[339] Taylor 1985b: 189.
[340] Taylor 1985b: 191.

family, community, and culture in which a dominant self-interpretation is already there, and in our youth we usually live our lives accordingly, and only when we grow older can we question this dominant self-interpretation and revise or reject it.[341] Taylor therefore says that strong evaluation is not a *monological* but a *dialogical* endeavor:[342] our normative self-interpretation is formed in the course of our lives through discussions with family, friends, and colleagues and through books and art and by experiencing different cultures, etc.; Taylor calls these "webs of interlocution".[343]

This is the reason why society cannot be understood as merely an instrument for realizing goods that the individual can articulate outside of society, but it is only by being integrated in a community of language that one can become an autonomous, individual agent that pursues his or her conception of the good.[344] It is in this sense that atomism neglects the social and cultural preconditions of individual freedom; it is blind to the way in which the community is constitutive of the individual.[345]

This brings us to the second point of Taylor's critique; namely his critique of the conception of *negative freedom* that often accompanies atomistic conceptions of society. Taylor defines negative freedom as the independence of the individual from interference by others, whereas positive freedom is about collective control over the common life. Taylor argues that these two ideas are often presented as caricatures: negative freedom is portrayed as simply the absence of external obstacles as it is formulated by Hobbes and Bentham; positive freedom is presented as the communist idea that freedom can only be realized when exercising collective control over one's destiny in a classless society, which justifies the destruction of formal subjective freedoms and the use of coercion in realizing the classless society. But, as Taylor says, behind these caricatures there are genuine ideals: the idea of individual independence is motivated by the ideal of individual self-realization and the modern idea that each person's self-realization is original to him/her and is

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[341] As Taylor writes: "Das Individuum schöpft […] seine besonderen Entwürfe und Pläne aus der gemeinsamen Überlieferung seiner Sprachgemeinschaft. Zuerst verfährt er, wie 'man' verfährt, und erst danach kann es genuin individuelle Absichten fassen. Das selbstzentrierte Individuum setzt die Gemeinschaft voraus und folglich einen Rahmen von Gebräuchen un Normen, innerhalb dessen es handelt." Quoted in Rosa 1998: 216.
[342] Taylor 1991: 33, 1995: 189.
[343] Taylor 1989: 36.
[344] As Taylor summarizes: "[A] social view of man is one which holds that an essential constitutive condition of seeking the human good is bound up with being in society. Thus if I argue that man cannot even be a moral subject, and thus a candidate for the realization of the human good, outside of a community of language and mutual discourse about the good and bad, just and unjust, I am rejecting all atomist views; since what man derives from society is not some aid in realizing his good, but the very possibility of being an agent seeking that good." 1985b: 292.
[345] As Taylor says: "The community is […] constitutive of the individual, in the sense that the self-interpretations which define him are drawn from the interchange which the community carries on." 1985a: 8.

therefore something to be pursued independently; the idea of collective self-government finds inspiring articulations in the republican tradition where self-rule is considered as an activity valuable in itself, and where the importance of freedoms outside the context of collective self-government is not denied.

In criticizing the notion of negative freedom, Taylor's starting point is the strange fact that the defenders of positive freedom are quick to distance themselves from the communist caricature, whereas the defenders of negative freedom seem to be very comfortable with the crude picture of Hobbes and Bentham. Taylor tries to explain this by making his own distinction, namely between an *opportunity*-concept and an *exercise*-concept of freedom. The opportunity-concept defines freedom as the possibility to do what you want, i.e., to not be obstructed in pursuing one's desires. The exercise concept is about self-realization, about the ability of the agent to fulfill his purposes based on his strong evaluations. Here, being free cannot just be a question of doing what you want, but it must also be that what you want does not run against your self-realization. This presupposes that one has developed certain capacities involving self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-control; when these capacities are unfulfilled or blocked, then we can follow desires that go against our self-realization, motivated by fear, inauthentically internalized standards, or false consciousness. So whereas the opportunity-concept of freedom is concerned with the absence of *external* obstacles, the exercise-concept is also about the absence of *internal* distortions.

As Taylor says, negative freedom can be understood both as an opportunity-concept (in the caricature version of Hobbes and Bentham) and as an exercise-concept (in the more demanding picture of individual autonomy as self-realization), but the defenders of negative freedom prefer to stick to the opportunity concept because then they can simply dismiss all theories that focus on self-realization. The reason for this, according to Taylor, is that the issue of self-realization (i.e., an exercise-concept of freedom) introduces the idea of internal distortions, and thus the idea that the individual is not always the best judge on his own self-realization, which is considered to be the slippery slope leading eventually to totalitarian regimes 'forcing their citizens to be free'.

However, Taylor thinks that negative freedom as an opportunity-concept has to be rejected because a theory of freedom cannot be disconnected from the question of self-realization. He argues that even when we understand freedom as the absence of external obstacles, we already make qualitative distinctions between obstacles as being more or less serious obstacles to freedom based on our strong evaluation. Taylor gives the example that most people will experience a

significant difference between an extra traffic light being put up in their street or a law that forbids them to practice their religion. So even negative freedom, understood as the absence of obstacles, requires an idea of what is significant to you, i.e., a vocabulary of strong evaluation, according to which some obstacles are seen to be without relevance for freedom altogether, and others are judged as being of greater and lesser importance. But if we accept this idea, Taylor says, then we cannot deny that there can also be internal obstacles: it then also matters if the goals and purposes that I am pursuing are obstructed by motivational blockages – i.e., if my desires go against my self-realization – or if I am completely wrong about my basic purposes.

So if one accepts that there can be both external and internal obstructions to freedom, then the opportunity-concept of freedom has to be rejected, according to Taylor, because "freedom now involves [1] my being able to recognize adequately my more important purposes, and [2] my being able to overcome or at least neutralize my motivational fetters, as well as [3] my way being free of external obstacles."[346] Taylor thinks that the first two of these conditions require the ability (or exercise) of self-understanding, which, again, is dependent on growing up in a certain community of language and walking the 'dialogical' path amidst 'webs of interlocution' through which one acquires the capacities for self-understanding and finding out what is significant to you. So Taylor's criticism of the opportunity-concept of freedom, which often goes together with atomistic conceptions of society, again points to the neglect of the social and cultural preconditions of freedom.

But even if one would understand negative freedom no longer as an opportunity concept, but as an exercise concept of freedom, then this still leaves open the question of *positive* freedom; namely if freedom can only be realized within a society that considers collective self-government as essential. This brings us to the third aspect of Taylor's critique of atomism concerned with the *viability* of an atomistic society; that is, the ability to defend and uphold its institutions over a longer period of time. According to Taylor this is closely related to the question of if and how citizens can identify with their society. He tries to illustrate this by opposing contemporary *procedural liberalism* and the tradition of *civic humanism* (or republicanism), and the different forms of citizen-identification that can be found in them.

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[346] Taylor 1985b: 228.

To illustrate this, Taylor starts by making a distinction between matters "which are for me and for you" and those "which are for us".[347] Taylor gives the example of saying to your neighbor that the weather is fine: the weather is now no longer something that is there for me and for my neighbor separately, but by starting a conversation it becomes something for us, we are now attending the weather together. A conversation (but also a dance or two men sawing a log) is for Taylor not the coordination of actions of different individuals, but it is a *common* action, it is *our* action in an irreducible sense. Taylor thinks that this idea can also be applied to goods, namely that some goods have 'value to me and to you' and some have 'value to us'; Taylor calls the former *convergent* goods and the latter *common* goods. An example of a convergent good is the security provided by the army, the police force, and the fire brigade: each individual needs this good but cannot provide it for himself, and therefore it is provided through collective instrumental action. This is different from common goods, such as friendship, love, collective self-government, or religious rituals, where what is central is just *that there are common actions and meanings*; where the good is *that we share*. In Taylor's terminology, we can experience here not merely 'convergent I-identities' but 'we-identities', and we can partake not just in 'collective instrumentality' but in 'common action'.

On the basis of these distinctions, Taylor compares the different attachment of citizens in procedural liberalism and republicanism. In procedural liberalism, Taylor says, there is only a pursuit of *convergent goods* and the attachment of citizens is therefore based on *enlightened self-interest*, whereas in a functioning republic the bond with one's fellow citizens is based on a sense of *common good*, that is, "a sense of shared fate, where the sharing itself is of value."[348] Taylor calls this *patriotism*, which "involves more than converging moral principles: it is a common allegiance to a particular historical community. Cherishing and sustaining this has to be a common goal, and it is more than just consensus on the rule of right."[349]

Taylor thinks that this deeper kind of patriotic identification is an essential condition of a free society because it can provide the motivational resources for citizens to do their civic duties and uphold and reproduce the structures and institutions of society. Taylor's argument here is based on the idea that the problem of motivation is not acute in a despotic regime, where fear works as

[347] Taylor 1995: 189.
[348] Taylor 1995: 192.
[349] Taylor 1995: 198. Patriotism is also defined as "strong citizen identification around a sense of common good" 1995: 194.

the main motivation for subjects to do their duties, but in a free society citizens have to find their motivation autonomously, which requires self-imposed discipline. Taylor thinks that enlightened self-interest is not enough in the long run, but it requires that citizens can identify with their society.

At the same time, Taylor is aware that patriotism has been responsible for a lot of evil, and therefore he makes the amendment that the patriotism of a free society has to celebrate its institutions as realizing a meaningful freedom that safeguards the *dignity of citizens*. As Taylor argues, this dignity cannot just be defined in terms of what is to be *secured* for a citizen, but it involves a notion of *citizen capacity*. Whereas citizen capacity in procedural liberalism is mainly understood as *judicial retrieval*, that is, the power to retrieve individual rights and ensure equal treatment, in the republican conception it is understood in terms of *public duty and participatory self-rule*, which are seen as essential to a life of dignity.[350] Taylor thinks that only this last definition of citizen dignity and capacity can figure in a viable patriotism, which he thinks is needed to provide the motivational resources for upholding the institutions of a free society.[351]

After having discussed these three aspects[352] of Taylor's critique of atomism, it is not surprising – given his stress on the need of patriotism and a sense of common good in order to solve the problem of identification – that Taylor is often criticized for being a 'substantialist' communitarian who presupposes a homogeneous ethical community that is incompatible with modern ethical pluralism and liberal individualism.[353] This is for example argued by Quentin Skinner, whose Machiavellian theory of freedom shares two similarities, but one crucial difference, with Taylor. Similar to Taylor's account, Skinner argues – *pace* the liberal account of freedom – that the individual is not always the best judge of his own interests, which is why individuals can be legitimately forced by law to serve the public interest in order to uphold the institutions of a free

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[350] E.g., Taylor 1989: 196-197.

[351] As usual in his style of argumentation, Taylor does not end up making strong claims: he admits that he might be wrong and that procedural liberalism is viable after all. Also, he points out that these questions of viability cannot be answered generally and abstractly, but that they have to be particularized to each society's tradition and culture. Taylor 1995: 202.

[352] A fourth aspect that Taylor does not expand on is the issue of 'applicability', which is about the question of whether procedural liberalism and its atomistic conception of society is ethnocentric, that is, typically American. Here Taylor seems to be again concerned with protecting Canada from American influences. 1995: 202-203.

[353] See for example Rainer Forst: "Wenn nämlich nicht die Übereinstimmung bezüglich grundlegender Gerechtigkeitsprinzipien und die Partizipation an politischen Diskursen genügen, um die Loyalität der Mitglieder zu verbürgen, scheint Taylors Theorie sehr hohe Anforderungen an die Homogenität einer politischen Bevölkerung zu stellen, die nur schwer mit dem 'Faktum' ethisch, etnisch und kulturell pluralistischer Gesellschaften in Einklang zu bringen sind." 1994: 168.

republic.[354] Another similarity is that Skinner also rejects atomism and the exclusive focus on individual rights, which in the republican tradition is conceived to be the shortest way to individual corruption.[355] But the crucial difference is that Skinner starts from ethical pluralism, from the fact that people in a republic have different goals in life that are not commensurable, and he argues that his Machiavellian critique of atomism does not require a conception of a common good, unlike Taylor's critique.[356]

In the next two paragraphs I want to complicate this picture of Taylor as a substantial communitarian striving for the common good by focusing on Taylor's critique of homogeneous unity and his defense of meaningful differentiation (including permanent conflict).

3.4 Recovering meaningful differentiation: the dialogue society

The idea that Taylor is a 'substantial communitarian' looking for a homogeneous ethical substance becomes questionable if one looks at the positive role that *conflict* plays in his work. For example, in the opening paragraph of *The Pattern of Politics*, Taylor argues that Canada should strive for a "politics of polarization" and reject a "politics of consensus".[357] Elsewhere, Taylor praises Max Weber for having provided one of the most convincing theories of modernity, especially because "it has a lively sense of the conflict among goods."[358] In yet another passage, Taylor shares his insight that "a genuinely free society can take as its self-description the slogan […] 'la lotta continua', the struggle goes on – in fact, forever."[359] This does not sound like the Taylor we met in the last paragraph, where he was striving for patriotism and a sense of common good. So how do we explain this discrepancy? In order to answer this, I want to return to *The Pattern of Politics*

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[354] As Skinner writes, whereas for Hobbes and Locke "the law preserves our liberty essentially by coercing other people", for Machiavelli "the law preserves our liberty not merely by coercing others, but also by directly coercing each one of us into acting in a particular way." 1990: 305. Cf. Palonen 2003: 105.

[355] As Skinner says: "To insist on rights as trumps, […] is simply to proclaim our corruption as citizens. Contemporary liberalism, especially in it so-called libertarian form, is in danger of sweeping the public arena bare of any concepts save those of self-interest and individual rights." 1990: 308. For Machiavelli, "the justification of law has nothing to do with the protection of individual rights, a concept that makes no appearance in the *Discorsi* at all. The main justification for its exercise is that, by coercing people into acting in such a way as to uphold the institutions of a free state, the law creates and preserves a degree of individual liberty which, in its absence, would promptly collapse into absolute servitude." 1990: 305.

[356] "I have tried to show that the dichotomy here – either a theory of rights or an exercise theory of liberty – is a false one. The Aristotelian and Thomist assumption that a healthy public life must be founded on a conception of *Eudaimonia* is by no means the only alternative tradition available to us if we wish to recapture a vision of politics based not merely on fair procedures but on common meanings and purposes." Skinner 1990: 308.

[357] Taylor 1970: 1.

[358] Taylor 1989: 512.

[359] Taylor 1991: 78.

where Taylor introduces his ideal of the 'dialogue society'. In exploring this ideal, I want to complement Taylor's well-known account of atomism and identification with his lesser-known critique of homogeneous unity and his rethinking of meaningful differentiation, thus providing a more balanced picture of Taylor's philosophy.

In *The Pattern of Politics*, Taylor is concerned, among other things, with the intertwinement of two ideals of *participation* in modern societies: first, there is the aspiration to participate in a meaningful, larger life (which Taylor thinks is a universal human aspiration[360]) and secondly there is the aspiration to participate in power, that is, toward a further democratization. Taylor argues that the first of these aspirations has become increasingly difficult in modern societies because of the 'atrophy of public meanings',[361] which means that there are no longer clearly defined meanings, ideologies, or faiths that are considered fundamental by everyone in society. This, in turn, creates the continuous danger in modern societies "that people will be tempted to try to recreate a community which will be tightly organized around certain defined values."[362] More specifically, Taylor says it can lead to a "re-sacralization of politics,"[363] whereby politics becomes the central focus for people's aspiration to be part of something meaningful, which can lead to destructive forms of nationalism and totalitarianism.

The liberal answer to this threat, Taylor tells us, has been to *privatize* the question of meaning, whereby each man's search for meaning and significance becomes a private affair.[364] The political consequence of this privatization, Taylor thinks, is that it leads to a *politics of consensus*: "Within this vision of politics, the ideal maturity of a society comes with the 'end of ideology', when all politics revolve around negotiable differences of interest rather than confrontation between deeply felt principles."[365] Politics becomes bargaining over advantage and to reach an acceptable consensus, or, in the terminology used above, it is a vision of politics revolving around 'converging goods' and 'enlightened self-interest'.

Taylor argues that this kind of consensus-politics has become dominant in Canada, and he finds this problematic because, in the end, it also cannot satisfy the aspiration of people to

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[360] Taylor 1970: 103.
[361] Taylor 1970: 124. Cf: 57, 106-107.
[362] Taylor 1970: 124.
[363] Taylor 1970: 112.
[364] Taylor 1970: 106-107.
[365] Taylor 1970: 3. Cf.: "[T]he main thesis of consensus politics: that politics is the domain of problems and solutions, and not of the confrontation of fundamental opinions." 1970: 7.

participate in a meaningful larger life and also leads to a re-sacralization of politics, albeit of a different and less destructive kind; what Taylor calls the "cult of the new young leader".[366] which is his characterization of the popularity of politicians like Pierre Trudeau and John F. Kennedy.[367] Instead of the old style of politics, consisting of the confrontation between fundamentally different political programs, the consensus politics of the 'new young leader' consists of a new style of politics whereby "the charismatic leader reaches out for the dream that floats before the minds of the people […] and turns it into policy without benefit of intermediaries."[368] Taylor speaks of a shift from a 'ministerial' to a 'presidential' style of politics,[369] and he thinks that this new style of politics is problematic because it tries to create an imaginary unity around a certain political image on which everybody can project their dreams.[370]

Although this liberal scenario of consensus politics is probably to be preferred over the destruction of nationalism or totalitarianism, Taylor argues that both are problematic because in both cases the aspiration for contact with some larger significant life enters the political sphere and is centered around the ideal of *unanimity* – "either of a dream-celebration around an image or of an imposed ideological uniformity"[371] – but in this way they both go against the aspiration to truly participate in power and toward a further democratization, which requires in Taylor's view that *real differences are expressed and confronted*. In order to combine the aspiration to participate in a meaningful, larger life *and* the aspiration to a further democratization of society, we require, in Taylor's view, the realization of a "dialogue society".[372]

In describing his ideal of a dialogue society, Taylor starts from the fact of pluralism: "In a modern pluralist society what we are is far from clearly determined; and what we want to become is the subject of an on-going and interminable debate."[373] Here Taylor sounds almost exactly like

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[366] Taylor 1970: 7.
[367] Taylor 1970: 10.
[368] Taylor 1970: 10.
[369] Taylor 1970: 10.
[370] "[T]he striking thing about the contemporary cult of the NYL [new young leader] is its dream-like nature; everything crucial happens inside the head of the participant. For the image of youth and renewal is left quite indeterminate as to content; it is an invitation to each and all to project their own hopes and dreams into it and see them as ratified by it. No one will contradict you, for the image itself has no inherent shape, offers no resistance. And just as what one receives is one's own dream, so one's participation is without real substance. This must be so, for it could only have substance if people's goals really weighed in the outcome, and this presupposes the kind of hard political dialogue in which dream-projection can have no place." Taylor 1970: 113-114.
[371] Taylor 1970: 127.
[372] Taylor 1970: 124.
[373] Taylor 1970: 123.

Lefort, as he also starts from the idea of *indeterminacy* and *permanent debate*. And just like Lefort, Taylor also connects this to the *absence of a privileged position* in modern societies. Taylor defines the dialogue society as follows:

> This society would start from the fact of pluralism, from the fact that we are of many different faiths, beliefs, and moralities; but it would also start from the fact that we are all less satisfied and dogmatic in our possession of the truth, that we are all in some way searchers; and that the fact of pluralism has entered into the very content of our varied beliefs so that we are already in dialogue within ourselves with the ideas of others.[374]

Because of the fact that nobody occupies a place of complete certainty, and because of the fact of modern ethical pluralism, Taylor argues – similar to Lefort – that it is the *permanent dialogue itself* that has to take the place formerly occupied by religion or ideology.[375]

However, after having planted his foot firmly in the political-historical camp by affirming indeterminacy, permanent debate, and the lack of a privileged position, Taylor then makes another move that transports him back into the social-ethical camp. He argues that despite pluralism and divisions we should still strive toward unity, but not by searching for a homogeneous ethical substance, but through *complementarity*. Taylor is convinced that the plurality of human ideals and life-forms in modern societies – when properly articulated and discussed – can enrich each other. The reason why this transports Taylor back to the social-ethical camp is because this is an ethical argument about human self-realization. Taylor is not content with simply acknowledging the fact of pluralism, but he goes a step further by saying that this plurality of ideals and life-forms can be complementary and should therefore be articulated and confronted with each other.

This explains why Taylor argues that only a *politics of polarization* (and not a politics of consensus) can lead to a meaningfully differentiated unity:

> [R]eally meaningful unity can only be attained by another kind of division. But this is no real paradox. People of different regions, backgrounds, languages, and cultures can only come together around some common project; and if this is meaningful, and not some magic

[374] Taylor 1970: 124-125.
[375] "A dialogue society is one that would put the fact of dialogue itself in the central position occupied in earlier societies by an established religion, and in totalitarian societies by the official ideology." Taylor 1970: 125.

consensus-dream in which everyone can project what he wants, then it is bound to inconvenience somebody and thus raise opposition.[376]

Here we find perhaps the clearest expression of the fact that Taylor is not looking for a homogeneous ethical substance or a common good: because of ethical pluralism people can never be united around a common good, he says, but people can still come together around a *common project*.[377] And if this is to be a meaningful project – a project which can fulfill both the aspiration to be part of a larger significant life and to really participate in power – then this will necessarily lead to polarization, and this is not an evil to be avoided, but it is the only way to realize "a much more meaningful political dialogue between genuinely different views."[378]

However, this requires in turn a sense of common purpose,[379] which means that despite the polarization around genuine differences we should still be able to identify with the common project of our particular historical community.[380] In this way, Taylor hopes that the dialogue society can be experienced as a larger meaningful life in which we can participate, and at the same time – unlike totalitarian ideology or liberal consensus – is compatible with real democratization because it does not deny but affirms the division and diversity in society.[381]

In sum, Taylor's early statement on the dialogue society illustrates the strange combination in his work of a realistic sensitivity to the permanence of struggle and conflict (siding him with the political-historical camp) and his idealistic hopes that the public confrontation of our deepest ideals and values can potentially lead to a complementary enrichment (transporting him back in the social-ethical camp). This raises the question of why Taylor actually believes this second, more idealistic claim, which separates him from almost all other thinkers who start from the fact of pluralism. In order to answer this question, I want, finally, to turn to Taylor's theory of Western modernity

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[376] Taylor 1970: 134.

[377] See also Hartmut Rosa who argues that when Taylor speaks of the need for patriotism or a sense of common good he is not concerned with finding a homogeneous ethical substance, but instead he wants to find the identification of citizens with a *common political project*. Rosa 1998: 442.

[378] Taylor 1970: 134.

[379] "[M]eaningful unity […] can only come through a common purpose." Taylor 1970: 144

[380] As Taylor writes about Canada: "[T]he entire outcome of these negotiations between Quebec, the other provinces, and Ottawa will depend on whether they are carried on in a surrounding atmosphere of alienation between the two groups or in the context of a strong sense of significant common purpose." 1970: 145.

[381] "The dialogue society […] provides for channels of contact with the larger significant life of society, for participation in the search for meaning in a way which accepts, instead of trying to wipe out or gloss over, the diversity and even divisions in society." Taylor 1970: 127.

revolving around conflicting *moral sources*, which, I would like to argue, can be understood as a continuation of his account of the dialogue society and the politics of polarization.

3.5 Toward an illusion-free self-interpretation

We have seen above that Taylor's philosophical anthropology rests on the idea that humans are self-interpreting animals who are guided by vocabularies of strong evaluation consisting of an interpretation of what a higher, fuller, more worthy life looks like. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor extends his philosophical anthropology by introducing the notions of 'constitutive goods' and 'moral sources'. The central idea here is that we do not only have a certain conception of a higher and fuller life, but we also have a certain conception of our human moral predicament that makes this higher, fuller life *appropriate* and *realizable*.[382] A central aspect of this conception of our human moral predicament is an understanding of *human motivation* and the *possibility of its transformation*.[383]

Taylor understands a 'constitutive good' as something that we identify, which can realize a transformation of our motivation, moving us from a lower to a morally higher plane. He gives the example of Plato, for whom the constitutive good was the Idea of the Good: by contemplating it and by acquiring knowledge of it, humans could transform themselves, moving from the shadows on the wall of the cave (passions, appearances) toward the light of the sun (Idea of the Good). In Medieval Christianity, God is the constitutive good: because of our sinful nature we need God's grace to transform ourselves toward 'agape'.[384] In these pre-modern examples the transformation was only possible for a dedicated few – philosophers in Plato's case and saints, priests, and monks

[382] As Taylor explains: "I was struck in some of the comments on *Sources* [*of the Self*] by how many people couldn't seem to grasp what question I was addressing. They took 'moral sources' to be another name for the highest principles. They literally couldn't think outside the contemporary agenda [of moral philosophy]. But, one wants to protest, don't you see that it also matters whether people can actually bring themselves to do the right thing? But then your interlocutor looks at you blankly and says: of course, but that's not moral philosophy; how people actually get motivated, that's in the domain of psychology, or sociology, or whatever. In other words, these two issues, what we should do and how we come to do it, which were unproblematically seen as part of the same inquiry by Plato, Augustine, and just about everybody else until the last three centuries, have been neatly sundered and placed in noncommunicating intellectual universes." In: Heft 1999: 120. Cf: "[O]ur notions of moral order contain more than just a definition of norms or ideals; they also offer us a picture of what it is in God's will, or the universe, or ourselves, which makes these norms appropriate and possible of realization." Taylor 2007: 255.

[383] The central question for Taylor is: "[H]ow to define our highest spiritual or moral aspirations for human beings [i.e., the question of strong evaluation, while showing a path to the transformation involved which doesn't crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity [i.e., the question of moral sources]?" 2007: 639-640.

[384] Taylor 1989: 410.

in Medieval Christianity – and the rest of society was concerned with the lower activities of production (work) and reproduction (family).

The central innovation in modern times, Taylor argues, is that people started to identify the constitutive good, or the potential for moral transformation, *within* each and every human,[385] although there were different accounts of how this works. For example, Enlightenment thinkers identified *disengaged reason* as the constitutive good that can transform us by moving us from a selfish perspective to a universal perspective, which would release a feeling of universal benevolence.[386] In Romanticism the constitutive good is *nature*: by re-connecting with our deep inner nature we can release a feeling of universal sympathy. And since religion survived the transition to modern societies, Taylor usually speaks of three ideal-typical constitutive goods in modernity: God, disengaged reason, and nature.[387]

In each case, there is thus a different account of human motivation and a different potential that can transform it: in Christianity human motivation is initially *sinful*, but with God's grace it can be turned toward agape; the Enlightenment thinkers consider human motivation as *neutral*,[388] but guided by disengaged reason it can be turned to the general good; and in Romanticism human motivation is initially *good*,[389] but we have lost contact with our nature and have to reconnect with it.[390]

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[385] "[H]uman motivation had to be reconceived so as to attribute to us the capacity to live out [our] morality without the help of any transcendent source. It is not just God's mercy that has to be ruled out; the Platonic recourse to the Form of the Good and the Stoic reference to the divine Logos within – all of this becomes redundant. The sources of morality as well as the most exalted altruistic devotion [must now be] fully immanent." Taylor 2005: 229.

[386] Taylor 2007: 251.

[387] Taylor 1989: 314, 495-496.

[388] Taylor speaks of the 'innocentizing strategy' of the Enlightenment utilitarians, that is, a rehabilitation of ordinary, untransformed human desire, which in premodern societies was seen as an obstacle to a higher, fuller moral life, but which is now considered as neutral; what is now crucial is to what extent this 'neutral' desire is guided by our power of disengaged reason. 2007: 253.

[389] Taylor thinks here of Rousseau, who followed a 'positive strategy', whereby original, unspoiled human desire and motivation is considered to include a bent to solidarity. 2007: 254.

[390] Taylor 1989: 410-411. These different ideas about human motivation during the Enlightenment and Romanticism are of course ideal types, Taylor emphasizes the mutual influence of these ideals: "[O]ur ideas about moral motivation show a confusing mixture of fusion, mutual influence, and rivalry among the different sources." 1989: 412. As Taylor further argues, Kant (and German Idealism after him) in a way synthesized the different ideas about moral motivation that were emphasized by the utilitarians and Rousseau. As Taylor argues: "[For Kant] our noumenal nature is indeed something innate to us; but it takes a long discipline of reason to emerge." 2007: 257. Later, with the coming of new pessimistic conceptions of nature, initiated by Schopenhauer, new ideas about human motivation would appear, for example in Nietzsche, where all human motivation is understood as a will to power, which makes him reject an ethics of universal benevolence as being a form of self-denial, and instead he replaces it with a warrior ethic which is life-affirming. 1989: 452-454.

Taylor argues furthermore that these different constitutive goods constitute different *life goods* as good (hence the name *constitutive* goods).[391] If one believes that humans have the potential to move with the help of their disengaged reason to a higher, fuller moral life, then this will 'constitute' certain life goods as good, such as discipline and rational self-control. But not only that, it will also constitute a certain idea of the self (an autonomous self, guided by disengaged instrumental reason), a certain narrative about human history (a linear narrative in which we have left behind the childish illusions of religion and tradition), and an account of society (a society aimed at mutual benefit, which is populated by individuals following their enlightened self-interest). In other words, a constitutive good constitutes a specific account of the four aspects of the modern identity that Taylor identifies: good, self, narrative, and society.[392]

To give another example, if one thinks that the transformation to a higher, fuller life consists of connecting to our deep inner nature, then this will constitute other life goods as good, such as spontaneity, self-expression, or living in harmony with nature; but it also constitutes a different conception of the self (a self with inner depth that has to come to expression), a certain narrative (a spiral narrative moving from paradise to fall to restored harmony), and a certain conception of society (expressive community, nationalism).

This brings us to the question of what Taylor means by *moral sources*. When people turn to their understanding of the constitutive good to acquire inspiration, Taylor speaks of moral sources: "'Moral sources' has been my term of art for constitutive goods insofar as we turn to them in whatever way is appropriate to them – through contemplation, or invocation, or prayer, or whatever – for moral empowerment."[393] As Taylor stresses, this empowerment is very much dependent on *articulation*,[394] that is, the articulation of what exactly is involved in the transformation when one turns to God, or when one is guided by disengaged reason, or when one comes into contact with one's deep inner nature; and it is also an articulation of what makes these potentials for transformation worthy, noble or, admirable. Being clear on this, Taylor says, can at the same time help to define more exactly and vividly the virtues of the life goods that are involved

[391] "[T]he life goods refer us to some feature of the way things are, in virtue of which these life goods are goods. This feature constitutes them as goods, and that is why I call them constitutive." Taylor 1989: 93.
[392] Taylor 1989: 105, 498.
[393] Taylor 1989: 310-311.
[394] "Moral sources empower. To come closer to them, to have a clearer view of them, to come to grasp what they involve, is for those who recognize them to be moved to love or respect them, and through this love/respect to be better enabled to live up to them. And articulation can bring them closer." Taylor 1989: 96.

and what it means to realize them.[395] When this is done in an inspiring, 'resonating' way, these articulations can motivate and empower us to live up to the demands of our moral lives.[396]

In Taylor's view, modernity is thus characterized by a plurality of constitutive goods (or moral sources), each constituting a different picture of the modern identity (good, self, narrative, and society), and it is exactly the public confrontation of these meaningful differences – a polarization embedded in a sense of common purpose – that, Taylor hopes, can form the basis of a meaningfully differentiated unity in modern societies. Taylor wants to avoid both totalitarian unity, whereby one moral source and its picture of the modern identity gets absolutized (like in religious and nationalistic fundamentalism or, in a different way, in Enlightenment naturalism), and a liberal 'overlapping consensus', whereby people publicly agree on some moral ideals but keep in the private sphere their different accounts on how to realize these ideals, i.e., their different accounts of the constitutive good that can transform our motivation to a higher plane. Instead, Taylor strives for a dialogue society in which people publicly articulate and confront their 'best accounts' of our human moral predicament, and one can find two main reasons in Taylor's work as to why he thinks this is so important.

The first reason is that Taylor is worried about the fact that the issue of the transformation of our motivation (i.e., the issue of moral sources) has completely disappeared altogether in contemporary discussions, not only in moral philosophy, but also in society and politics. This would not be very problematic, Taylor says, if the general view of the capacities of human nature were very low, but in fact, it makes extremely high demands of people.[397] As Taylor says:

> People are thought to be capable of a very strong sense of equality, an absence of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, and so forth, and to be able to eschew violence and violent reactions, and so on. On the other side, they are not seen to be susceptible to a radical change in their motivations. They are thought to be ready as they are, given

[395] Taylor 2011: 11-12.

[396] "Articulating a constitutive good not only helps us fine-tune what we want to be and do, it also inspires and moves us to want to be and do it." Taylor 2011: 12. Taylor argues that moral sources function differently in pre-modern and modern societies: in pre-modern societies the constitutive goods are transcendent (God, Idea of the Good, cosmic order, providential order) and therefore we can feel a *love* for them. In modern times, with the coming of internalized constitutive goods (disengaged reason, inner nature) one feels *respect*: "[T]he empowering motive has changed from love to respect." 1989: 95.

[397] "Our age makes higher demands of solidarity and benevolence on people today than ever before. Never before have people been asked to stretch out so far, and so consistently, so systematically, so as a matter of course, to the stranger outside the gates." Taylor 2007: 695.

appropriate training and institutions, to reach a very high standard on the 'liberal' requirement.[398]

Taylor says that this blindness to the issue of the transformation of human motivation can be explained by the contemporary 'code-fetishism' or 'nomolatry': there is an obsession with capturing our high moral ideals in a single principle or code.[399] Taylor recognizes this obsession especially in contemporary moral philosophy with its exclusive focus on questions of obligations and duties and its assumption that these can be captured in a code that can be generated from a single source or principle, as in the debates between utilitarians and Kantians.[400] But also in religion, in society, and in the political realm, Taylor sees a code-fixation.[401] Taylor uses here a metaphor distinguishing between the *horizontal* dimension of our moral lives, i.e., the sphere of the moral code, where we use the language of obligations, duties, reciprocity, etc., and the *vertical* dimension, which is concerned with the question of transformation, that is, "how do we all have to change, in our most basic motivation, in order to live up to the ideals we've set for ourselves?"[402] Taylor argues that modern 'nomolatry' has absolutized the horizontal dimension and has made us blind to the vertical dimension, and in this way "dumbs us down, morally and spiritually."[403]

Taylor is worried that "the combination of high demands and utter insensitivity to a vertical dimension of transformation leads to some terrible consequences."[404] As he tries to show, the patterns of moral motivation that are currently dominant in our society, which neglect the vertical dimension – namely 1) a feeling of self-worth, 2) the recognition of the worth of others, and 3) feelings of moral indignation – are all problematic, and, in combination with high ideals, can lead to "disconcerting reversals: from dedication to others to self-indulgent, feel-good responses, from

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[398] Taylor 2011: 362.
[399] Taylor 2007: 707; 2011: 351; "Code-fetishism means that the entire spiritual dimension of human life is captured in a moral code." 2011: 353.
[400] Taylor 2007: 704.
[401] "It is taken for granted that the way to achieve certain important collective goods, like tolerance and mutual respect, lies in a code of behaviour." Taylor 2007: 704. "[A]n understanding of religion so one-sidedly in terms of a morality of correct conduct" 2007: 228.
[402] Taylor 2011: 363.
[403] Taylor 2007: 707.
[404] Taylor 2011: 362 Cf: "[H]igh standards need strong sources",1989: 516. Cf: "My aim [is] to identify this range of questions around the moral sources which might sustain our rather massive professed commitments in benevolence and justice. This entire range is occluded by the dominance of proceduralist meta-ethics, which makes us see these commitments through the prism of moral obligation […]." 1989: 518.

a lofty sense of human dignity to control powered by contempt and hatred, [...] from a flaming desire to help the oppressed to an incandescent hatred for all those who stand in the way."[405]

This is the reason why Taylor thinks it is important to put the issue of moral sources back on the agenda.[406] By articulating our conception of the human moral predicament including an account of human motivation and the possibility of its transformation, we can get a clearer view on how our pursuit to realize our high moral ideals can easily be colonized by 'bad' motivations, or how it perhaps is suppressing certain parts of our humanity.[407] In *A Secular Age* Taylor has called this the question of the 'maximal demand', which, I would like to argue, is the ultimate question that guides Taylor's philosophy: "[H]ow to define our highest spiritual or moral aspirations for human beings [i.e., the question of strong evaluation], while showing a path to the transformation involved which doesn't crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity [i.e., the question of moral sources]?"[408] Taylor sums up five related issues that should be part of an answer to this question: "a) Some idea of what the motivations are which can carry us towards [this fuller life]"; "b) some idea of the motivations which bar our way to it"; "c) some notion of how integrally fullness can be achieved; is it merely an ultimate, even utopian ideal which no human will reach in its entirety, but which can be approximated? Or is an integral transformation possible which will realize it totally?"; "d) to what extent can the negative motivations under *b* be vanquished"; "e) if the negative motivations in *b* cannot be utterly set aside, what are the costs of denying or overriding them?"[409] It is a debate about these questions, a debate about the 'maximal demand', that Taylor would like to see as central to a dialogue society, whereby people would publicly articulate and confront their 'best accounts' of our human moral predicament.[410]

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[405] Taylor 2007: 699. Cf: "[Modern] humanism leaves us with [1] our own high sense of self-worth to keep us from backsliding, [2] a high notion of human worth to inspire us forward, and [3] a flaming indignation against wrong and oppression to energize us. It cannot appreciate how problematic all of these are, how easily they can slide into something trivial, ugly or downright dangerous and destructive." 2007: 698.

[406] "[A] key issue for our times is that of moral sources, whether, for instance, we can maintain the high level of philanthropy and solidarity we now demand of ourselves, without these degenerating into their opposites: contempt, the need to control. The issue here is the quality of our moral motivation – in more old-fashioned terms, the quality of our will and the nature of the vision that sustains it." Taylor in: Heft 1999: 120.

[407] "Coming to clarity on 'why we are doing this' can help identify and neutralize other extraneous motives – such as self-righteousness, contempt and hatred of wrong-doers, and a sense of civilizational superiority – which may muddy action and lead us away from our goals. And it will characteristically also inspire us and strengthen our resolve. A motivation which has this kind of potential to empower I want to call a 'moral source'". Taylor 2007: 693.

[408] Taylor 2007: 639-640.

[409] Taylor 2007: 604-605.

[410] Taylor says that it "remains very much an open question whether a form of exclusive humanism can be designed which can meet the maximal demand." 2007: 642. He then continues to argue that, although he thinks Christianity is in a better position, the problem is that "in the nature of things, Christianity offers no global solution, no general

But of course, Taylor is aware that this will lead to polarization, since the different moral sources and their different pictures of the modern identity do not go well together. This brings us again to the question of how to realize a polarization embedded in a sense of *common purpose*. What could this common purpose be? This brings us to the second reason why Taylor thinks a confrontation and polarization in a dialogue society is valuable: the idea of *complementarity*.

Taylor thinks that each of the moral sources (God, disengaged reason, nature), and the different pictures of the modern identity that they have constituted, have opened up *real human potentialities*.[411] That is, they are normative self-interpretations that have made a meaningful self- and world-relation possible for a large number of peoples. Similar to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Taylor thus presupposes that there can be different world-disclosures that do not necessarily have to refute each other.[412] This is further supported in Taylor's view by the fact that many people, even though they may identify a specific moral source, still incorporate life-goods constituted by other moral sources – for example using discipline and instrumental reason at work, while striving for self-expression in the private sphere. Or, they can even try to combine moral sources: Taylor interprets Marx as combining the moral sources of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, whereby the transformation to a morally higher, fuller life includes both disengaged reason and expressive unity.[413]

Furthermore, Taylor takes over a central phenomenological idea, namely that humans are embedded in an implicit background understanding that, *pace* Hegel, can never be made fully explicit.[414] Due to this, there is no way of reaching an objective foundation or privileged position

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organization of things here and now which will fully resolve the dilemma, and meet the maximal demand. It can only show ways in which we can, as individuals, and as churches, hold open the path to the fullness of the kingdom." 2007: 643.

[411] "I want to argue that our present predicament [in which there is a plurality of moral sources] represents an epistemic gain, because I think that the alternative moral sources [disengaged reason and nature] which have opened up for us in the past two centuries represent real and important human potentialities." Taylor 1989: 313.

[412] Hubert Dreyfus calls Taylor's idea *pluralistic robust realism*: "Because [Taylor] has broken free of the last version of the inner-outer mediational picture – the claim that we must be imprisoned in our description of reality – he can agree with Rorty that there is no *one* language for correctly describing the universe, while holding, contra Rorty, that there could well be *many* languages each correctly describing a different aspect of reality. Taylor's anti-epistemology could then be characterized as pluralistic robust realism." Dreyfus 2004: 79.

[413] Taylor 1975: 547ff.

[414] "We are all acting, thinking, and feeling out of backgrounds and frameworks which we do not fully understand." Taylor 2007: 387. Taylor acknowledges that this idea can also be found in Hegel but that this insight is lost at the end of Hegel's story when Absolute Spirit comes to complete explicit clarity in a conceptual statement: "Our explicit consciousness is [then] no longer surrounded by a horizon of the implicit, of unreflected life and experience, which it is trying to render faithfully but which can never be fully, articulately, definitively brought to light. On the contrary, in the Hegelian synthesis the unclear consciousness of the beginning is itself made part of the chain of conceptual

from which to determine which of these moral sources is right or wrong. They can only be critically compared by confronting 'best accounts' in which individuals articulate from their situated perspective, and in a language that does not try to be universal and objective, but in a personal language that resonates *for them*,[415] their account of a higher, fuller life and what is involved in the transformation toward it. In doing this, the only thing that can support our interpretation that, say, God or disengaged reason is an indispensable part of our human moral predicament is the feeling that "we got it right,"[416] that our ontology (articulation) matches our phenomenology (experience).[417] But in the course of our lives, after new experiences and interactions, there is a possibility that our world-disclosure can go 'dead', and we can realize that our interpretation was deluded or incomplete and can identify a different moral source as central to our best account, which Taylor calls a "conversion".[418] Our best accounts will thus always be tentative, fragile, and open to revision;[419] we will always remain oscillating between intuitions and explicit articulations, between a phenomenology and a (hermeneutic) ontology, without ever reaching a point of complete certainty. Similar to Lefort, Taylor realizes that this indeterminacy will lead to insecurity and

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necessity. The unclear and inarticulate, just as the external and contingent, is itself shown to have a necessary existence. The approximate and incompletely formed is itself derived in exact, articulate concepts." 1975: 569.

[415] In this sense Taylor understands his *Sources of the Self* as his 'best account': "I have throughout [*Sources of the Self*] sought language to clarify the issues, and I have found this in images of profound personal resonance like 'epiphany', 'moral sources', 'disengagement', 'empowering', and others." 1989: 512. As Taylor shows in his discussion of modern poetry, the subjective and the transcendent can go together: the most subjective articulation of our human moral predicament can realize an epiphany in which we come into contact with a meaningful aspect of reality. 1989: 493.

[416] Taylor 1989: 85.

[417] "[…] the issue of how to align our best phenomenology with an adequate ontology" 2007: 609. In this way, Taylor rehabilitates in a peculiar way a *substantive* conception of practical reason, which is informed by the idea that our self-interpretation and our interpretation of the world can 'get something right'. This has been central in Taylor's conflict with Rorty, who also encourages us to develop our own vocabularies, but who is convinced that there is nothing that 'we can get right about' and that no discussion is possible between different vocabularies. For Taylor, Rorty in this way does not overcome the epistemological tradition, as he claims to do, but paradoxically, he completes it, since in Rorty's story we are trapped in our vocabularies without any recourse to the world out there, which is the ultimate absolutization of the subject-object distinction introduced by the epistemological tradition.

[418] Taylor 2007: 252. See Taylor's discussion of 'conversions' 2007: 728ff.

[419] "Modern moral culture is one of multiple sources, it can be schematized as a space in which one can move in three directions. There are the two independent frontiers [i.e., disengaged reason and nature] and the original theistic foundation [i.e., God]. The fact that the directions are multiple contributes to our sense of uncertainty. This is part of the reason why almost everyone is tentative today, why virtually no one can have the rooted confidence in their outlook." Taylor 1989: 317 Cf: "[T]hese articulations [of moral sources] are never complete. They leave gaps where mystery intrudes, where the claims to truth are not fully grounded, where seeming refutation or contradiction lie half visible. In a sense, all require some degree of faith that these difficulties could in principle be resolved. And this is true as much of the naturalist and materialist ones as of the 'faith-based' ones." 2011: 299.

frustration, and he urges that we do not try to overcome this, for example by absolutizing or naturalizing our own self-interpretation and projecting all evil outward.[420]

For Taylor, the aim of the confrontation of 'best accounts' is therefore not, positively, to reach a privileged position of certainty – which is not available in modernity – but, negatively, to strive toward *the most illusion-free self-interpretation*,[421] that is, to give an answer to the question of the 'maximal demand' that is as free of illusion as possible.[422] And here we come full circle with Taylor's critique of atomism: again he argues that we cannot reach this illusion-free self-interpretation as subjects alone, monologically, but only collectively and dialogically. This is because every normative self-interpretation and every world-disclosure will leave out or suppress some important human potentialities or insights. Only a confrontation between different 'best accounts' can make us aware of what crucial aspects we are missing or suppressing in our situated interpretation of the human moral predicament.[423] This is how Taylor understands the sense of common purpose that he hopes can be central in a dialogue society; namely the acknowledgement that the striving for an illusion-free interpretation of our human moral predicament is a collective, complementary task to which we can all contribute from our limited, situated perspectives.

Taylor's hope is that this articulation of 'best accounts' can in the end lead to a reconciliation between the supporters of different moral sources,[424] a hope which is mainly based on his Catholic faith. In Taylor's own 'best account' God is the indispensable moral source, since he thinks that only 'agape' can adequately provide the moral transformation needed to realize our

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420 "[W]e try to overcome our disorientation by the false certainty of closure, and then try to shore up this certainty by projecting the chaos and evil we feel in ourselves onto some enemy." Taylor 2007: 769.

421 Cf: "In fact, a good deal of our confidence in our own faiths comes through another route, the unmasking of our illusions, which allows us to abandon earlier, more questionable views. This process is, of course, never complete, but views which can survive such winnowing of illusion are less incredible than those which cannot." Taylor 2011: 299. "In my lexicon, the ideally emancipated subject would be as free from illusion as possible." 2003: 179. Cf: 2011: 299; 1989: 341-342.

422 The question is "who can respond most profoundly and convincingly to what are ultimately commonly felt dilemmas." Taylor 2007: 675.

423 So far, we have been talking about Taylor's concern with the conflict between 'best accounts' concerning moral sources and strong evaluation in Western modernity. In 'The Politics of Recognition' Taylor considers the relation between the West and other cultures and argues that also here a proper recognition of other cultures is only possible when we recognize that their world-disclosure and self-interpretation can *possibly* teach us something important that is absent or repressed in our own world-disclosure. 1994: 72-73. Although, in these cases communication is even more difficult. As Taylor says: "I am evoking the picture of a plurality of human cultures, each of which has a language and a set of practices which define specific understandings of personhood, social relations, states of mind/soul, goods and bads, virtues and vices and the like. These languages are often mutually untranslatable." Quoted in Rosa 1998: 181.

424 "Articulacy is a crucial condition of reconciliation." Taylor 1989: 107.

high moral ideals.[425] His belief is that "great as the power of naturalist sources might be, the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater."[426] In his religious account Taylor articulates his understanding of complementarity as the idea that humans are made in the image of God, that is, of the Trinity.[427] The idea is that humans can reach unity and wholeness, not by acknowledging sameness, but by recognizing difference and complementarity.[428] Taylor speaks of "a oneness of diverse beings who come to see that they cannot attain wholeness alone, that their complementarity is essential, rather than of beings who come to accept that they are ultimately identical."[429]

But in claiming all this, Taylor realizes that also he himself has no firm ground to stand on and that it is merely *his own* attempt at articulating a 'best account'. He admits that if he is wrong – that is, if articulation will not lead to reconciliation – then we are worse off because it will only lead to greater conflict. Nevertheless, Taylor thinks we should take this risk because then, at least, we have "put an end to the stifling of the spirit and to the atrophy of so many of our spiritual sources which is the bane of the modern naturalist culture."[430]

So to conclude, when it comes to the issue of meaningful differentiation, one can say that whereas Hegel tried to secure meaningful differentiation in modern societies by differentiating between the family (immediate unity), civil society (separation), and the state (mediated unity), Taylor sees the confrontation between 'best accounts' (i.e., situated accounts of our human moral predicament, including an account of strong evaluation and moral sources) in a polarized dialogue

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[425] Simply put, Taylor approves of modernity's focus on increasing everyday human flourishing, but he thinks that in order to realize this ideal we have to affirm something that is *beyond* ordinary life. In *A Secular Age* Taylor tries to illuminate this idea by making a distinction between the *practical* and the *metaphysical* primacy of life: "[I] think that the practical primacy of life has been a great gain for human kind, and that there is some truth in the self-narrative of the Enlightenment: this gain was in fact unlikely to come about without some breach with established religion. (...) But [I] nevertheless think that the metaphysical primacy of life espoused by exclusive humanism is wrong, and stifling, and that its continued dominance puts in danger the practical primacy." 2007: 637. A central paradox in Taylor's work is thus that we need to go *beyond* ordinary life (namely to open up to God's *agape*) in order to be able to truly affirm it. 1989: 342.

[426] Taylor 1989: 518.

[427] "Human diversity is part of the way in which we are made in the image of God." Taylor 2011: 168.

[428] "[U]nity-across-difference, as against unity-through-identity." Taylor 2011: 168.

[429] Taylor 2011: 168. Adriaan Peperzak (also having a Catholic background) has aptly expressed this idea: "Een algemene overdenking [van heil] is niet het werk van een subject, dat boven alle andere zou uitrijzen omdat hij alles ziet, maar een gemeenschappelijk werk, waaraan iedereen vanuit zijn particuliere ervaringen en gedachten een bijdrage levert. Lukt dit, dan realiseert zich een synthese van het algemene en het individuele, echte algemeenheid, die niet buiten de veelstemmigheid van alle hier-en-nu kan." 1971: 61. Hubert Dreyfus has tried to show that Taylor's ideal of complementarity is also inspired by Merleau-Ponty's idea that we can only collectively get a 'grip' on reality. Dreyfus 2004: 74.

[430] Taylor 1989: 107.

society, guided by a sense of common purpose (i.e., the idea that only through complementarity can we reach the most illusion-free self-interpretation), as the basis for a meaningfully differentiated unity. In this scenario, atomism and homogeneous unity are overcome by identification and meaningful differentiation: citizens can identify with, and participate in, a meaningful larger life (namely the common project of striving for an illusion-free self-interpretation), without thereby denying diversity and division; it is exactly through the articulation of these differences that we can realize freedom as complementarity.

Chapter 4: Axel Honneth on the social foundations of democratic life

In the work of Axel Honneth we find another example of a reflection on the problem of freedom today, which takes the philosophy of Hegel as its starting point. Central in Honneth's philosophy is the attempt to make Hegel's intuitions about the importance of recognition for individual freedom fruitful for a contemporary critical social theory. As Hegel based these intuitions on metaphysical ideas about nature and history that are hard to defend nowadays, Honneth has been trying to develop a theory of recognition that is based on a post-metaphysical, empirical foundation.

In his book *The Struggle for Recognition* (1992) this resulted in a largely anthropological account about how individuals need different forms of recognition – namely love, respect, and social esteem – to develop a healthy self-relation and become an autonomous person. Here, Honneth still followed the Hegel-interpretation of Jürgen Habermas, who argued that Hegel only developed an intersubjective theory of recognition in his early Jena-period, which he then abandoned in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for a monological theory about the self-development of Spirit. However, Honneth soon became convinced that also Hegel's later work can be read as a theory of recognition, which resulted in the reformulation of his theory by following the structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*; at first tentatively in his Spinoza-lectures *Suffering from Indeterminacy* (2000), and then more elaborately in *Freedom's Right* (2011).

In developing his theory of recognition Honneth clearly operates in the social-ethical camp: he has a normative approach to freedom that is concerned with the social preconditions of individual freedom. Furthermore, Honneth's work can be read as a critique of atomism that emphasizes the social preconditions of individual freedom in order to overcome one-sided conceptions of freedom that lead to social pathologies. Interestingly, however, the way Honneth uses Hegel in developing his normative account of freedom differs from Taylor: whereas Taylor endorsed Hegel's *diagnosis* of the problem of freedom, yet rejected Hegel's *solution* and instead turned to the insights of phenomenology and hermeneutics, Honneth also tries to rehabilitate Hegel's solution, although translated into a post-metaphysical vocabulary. Similar to Hegel, Honneth tries to give concrete form to the differentiated, complementary moments of 'immediate unity', 'separation', and 'mediated unity' – either in the form of love, respect, and social esteem (in *The Struggle for Recognition*), or in the form of personal relations, the market economy, and democratic will-formation (in *Freedom's Right*).

The resulting difference is that Taylor embraces the phenomenological idea of an implicit background understanding that makes it impossible to ever reach a privileged, critical perspective in modernity – bringing him close to the perspectivist intuitions of those in the political-historical camp – whereas Honneth ends up in the left-Hegelian tradition that still believes that we can find a rational, privileged position for normative critique in modern societies, although not through 'moral construction' (as it is done in the moral camp) but through 'immanent reconstruction', or *immanent critique*.

Even though one could say that both Taylor and Honneth in the end have a conception of *freedom as complementarity*, they understand this in a different way, which is connected to their different appropriation of Hegel and their different methodological commitments. My aim in this chapter will be to analyze 1) how Honneth understands freedom as complementarity, which he calls *social freedom*, 2) how he understands the methodological approach of *immanent critique*, and 3) how his work relates to the convictions in the political-historical camp.

In the first two paragraphs I will look at Honneth's understanding of *social freedom* by focusing on his recent work on democracy. As my starting point, I want to look at a short passage in which Honneth criticizes democratic theories inspired by Claude Lefort, which will lead us to Honneth's own understanding of democracy inspired by John Dewey (§4.1). This will then be further developed by looking at Honneth's theory of democracy in *Freedom's Right*, which revolves around the notion of social freedom (§4.2). The third paragraph will examine Honneth's method of immanent critique, which I will do by giving a reconstruction of Honneth's attempt to develop a normative account of the economy, which runs as a red thread through his work and which is closely intertwined with Honneth's attempt to develop a left-Hegelian, immanent approach (§4.3). And finally, I will look at how Honneth's ideas about social freedom and immanent critique have been criticized from within the tradition of Critical Theory (§4.4) and how they differ from the ideas in the political-historical camp (§4.5).

4.1 Three criteria for a democratic theory

As is typical for those in the social-ethical camp, Axel Honneth's critical arrows are mainly aimed at those in the moral camp or at fellow critical social theories in the social-ethical camp, whereas the political-historical camp is largely neglected. However, one can still find a short passage in his work where he criticizes democratic theories inspired by Claude Lefort, and I want to take this as

my starting point for discussing Honneth's ideas about freedom and democracy.

In his article 'Fragen der Zivillgesellschaft' (1994), Honneth reflects on the renewed popularity of the concept of 'civil society', which he considers to be the result of the wide-spread aspiration toward a further democratization of society. Honneth argues that any theory of civil society that wants to contribute to a further democratization has to fulfill three criteria. First of all, it has to provide a *normative account* of the idea of democratic will-formation on the basis of which the existing state of democracy can be critically evaluated. Secondly, through an analysis of power-relations, it has to make clear which *structural blockages* prevent a further democratization (for example, unequal distribution of economic, political, or cultural means of power). And thirdly, it has to give an account of *motivational resources* that will explain why citizens would want to strive for a further democratization of society.[431]

Honneth then turns to a recent German collection of essays on civil society and democracy that is inspired by Claude Lefort[432] and argues that their accounts on all three points are ambivalent. Honneth is especially critical about the first point and the fact that the Lefort-inspired authors do not provide a clear normative account. As Honneth says, when a democratic civil society is understood in the Lefortian way as a space in which all privileged positions and transcendent justifications of power are rejected and replaced with a space in which people can publicly compete for political positions and permanently debate about political goals, then this is only normative in a very weak sense because – although it can indeed criticize all forms of totalitarian or religious justifications of power – it does not provide clear criteria by which to evaluate different ways of instituting a liberal democracy, which must all appear as equally justified.[433] Honneth thus comes close here to Rosanvallon, who considers Lefort's work as an important warning sign for any form of totalitarianism, but he also wants to move beyond Lefort by saying more about the 'healthy' institution of a democratic society. At the end of *Freedom's Right,* Honneth repeats his criticism by arguing that democratic theories inspired by Lefort or Arendt are problematic because they do not provide clear normative criteria for critically evaluating existing democracies.[434]

Before turning to Honneth's own account of these three issues (i.e., normative account of democratic will-formation, structural blockages, and motivational resources), we can ask why

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[431] Honneth 1994: 82.
[432] See *Die demokratische Frage* (1989) by Ulrich Rödel, Günter Frankenberg, and Helmut Dubiel.
[433] Honneth 1994: 86.
[434] Honneth 2011: 619.

Honneth thinks these particular three issues are crucial when developing a democratic theory. This becomes clear when one looks at Honneth's general account of the task of Critical Theory.[435] As Honneth reminds us, Critical Theory initially emerged as a Marxist movement in the 1920s and 1930s that was confronted with a social situation in which there was no proletariat that could realize the social revolution. This led to a rethinking of the relation between *theory* and *practice*, based on the insight that, as Honneth puts it, "the working class does not automatically develop a revolutionary readiness to convert the critical content of theory into society-changing practices."[436]

As Honneth argues, in rethinking the relation between theory and practice, Critical Theory is committed to three issues. First of all, it takes over the Hegelian and Marxist idea that *reason is at work in history*, although not in the movement of *Geist*, but that it unfolds in history as a *human learning process* – either through interaction with nature (subject-object) or through communicative relations (subject-subject). Honneth says that this learning process leads to the insight that, simply put, freedom can only be realized through social practices of cooperation. Secondly, Critical Theory studies 'social pathologies', that is, it studies social developments leading to a *deformation of reason* that causes this learning process to be blocked, which then leads to social situations in which individuals cannot realize themselves. Thirdly, Critical Theory not only identifies pathologies but also analyzes the conditions for emancipation by empirically studying the *motivational states* and critical readiness of subjects. Informed by the insights of moral psychology and psychoanalysis, Critical Theorists try, in Honneth's words, "to uncover the motivational roots that sustain the readiness for moral cognition in individual subjects, despite any rational impairment."[437]

Therefore it is clear that Honneth's three requirements for a theory of democracy are modeled on the three general aims of Critical Theory. This brings us to Honneth's own democratic theory – in which he tries to give an account of these three issues (normative account of democratic will-formation, structural blockages, and motivational resources) – which he first articulated in his article 'Democracy as reflexive cooperation: John Dewey and the theory of democracy today'. In this article, Honneth starts from Habermas's discussion in *Faktizität und Geltung* of three

[435] See Honneth 2009.
[436] Honneth 2009: 37.
[437] Honneth 2009: 38.

normative models of democracy, namely a *liberal* one, a *republican* one (associated with Hannah Arendt), and a *procedural* or discourse-theoretical one (Habermas's own position).[438]

Each of these theories give a different normative account of democratic will-formation. One of the central differences, Honneth says, is that the liberal model reduces political participation to periodically legitimating political power through voting, whereas the republican and procedural model – which Honneth characterizes as 'radical-democratic' positions – wants to extend citizen participation to permanent deliberation within the public sphere.[439] However, the latter two have a different understanding of the conditions of public deliberation: as Honneth explains, the republican position presupposes a solidary, self-ruling community and citizen virtues, whereas the procedural position defends the ideal of a society that tries to rationally solve political problems in a legitimate way, which requires a morally justified procedure.

In his discussion of these different normative accounts of democratic will-formation, Honneth emphasizes that they rest on different understandings of freedom: the liberal view defends a *negative* understanding of liberty in which individuals can realize their freedom independent of social interaction, which explains why periodically voting suffices. The two radical-democratic positions defend a *communicative* understanding of freedom in which individuals can realize their autonomy only through interaction in the public sphere, which makes periodically voting insufficient.

Although Honneth endorses the normative account of democratic will-formation revolving around public deliberation and communicative freedom, he argues that republicanism and proceduralism lack a convincing account of the *motivational resources* (republicanism) and of *structural blockages* (proceduralism). Honneth thinks that the republicanism of Arendt is too ethical: it presupposes too demanding political virtues of citizens, and it presupposes that political participation should be the central goal in all citizens' lives, which is irreconcilable with ethical pluralism in modern societies. The problem with the proceduralism of Habermas, Honneth says, is that it is too formal and one-sidedly concerned with only the political aspect of democracy, which

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[438] Habermas 1992: 324ff.

[439] Here one can agree with Rosanvallon that the reflection on democracy by starting from different *models* of democracy is unhelpful because it glosses over historical complexity: for example, if one looks at nineteenth century France, it was the doctrinary liberals who defended limited suffrage, but they tried to compensate for this by giving a central role to public opinion and permanent interaction between society and government, whereas the republicans of the Third Republic absolutized universal suffrage as the only legitimate way of political intervention. Cf. Rosanvallon 2000: 334.

hinders an understanding of structural blockages in society; for example the way in which political deliberation is dependent on social-economic equality.[440]

In John Dewey's conception of democracy, Honneth thinks he has found a fruitful alternative to both republicanism and proceduralism – an alternative in which more convincing answers can be given to the three intertwined questions of normative account, structural blockages, and motivational resources. Although Dewey also criticizes the liberal, individualistic conception of freedom and gives a normative account of democratic will-formation revolving around a communicative idea of freedom, he bases this not on a model of *intersubjective reason*, but on a model of *social cooperation.* Dewey understands individual freedom as the self-realization of an individual within a cooperative division of labor, and he understands democratic deliberation as the problem-solving, reflexive moment of such a cooperative society.

However, this ideal of democracy requires that the division of labor in society is organized in a fair and just manner so that every member can understand himself as part of a cooperative whole. Only when individuals can understand their work as a meaningful contribution to a cooperative society can they see the value of democratic deliberation as being the best instrument to rationally solve collective problems.[441] In this way, Honneth argues, Dewey connects the two ideals of a democratic community and rational deliberation, which in the discussions between republicans and proceduralists have become separated;[442] in Dewey's work we can find the connection of democracy as a political *and* socio-economic ideal.[443] This differs from other accounts of deliberative democracy, such as those by Putnam or Habermas, in the sense that the normative account of democratic will-formation focuses not only on the *cognitive* and *moral* superiority of deliberation, i.e., that finding solutions for problems in society with the help of

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[440] For an early criticism of Habermas on this point, see Honneth 1986a.

[441] Dewey also emphasizes another requirement, namely a *habituation of democratic attitudes*, which he thought required a democratization – not only of the public sphere and the state – but of society as a whole, especially of the institutions of *education* and the *workplace*. Honneth interestingly does not mention the issue of education in the article, and he is also silent about it in *Freedom's Right* (staying closer there to Hegel's account that the family and the corporation are the integrating institutions that can give individuals a 'taste of universality'). Only after *Freedom's Right* Honneth acknowledged the importance of education, see Honneth 2012.

[442] Honneth 2000b: 286.

[443] Honneth 2000b: 309. See also Dewey: "We have had occasion to refer in passing to the distinction between democracy as a social idea and political democracy as a system of government. The two are, of course, connected. The idea remains barren and empty save as it is incarnated in human relationships." Dewey 1927: 143. Honneth writes that for Dewey "die für die Demokratie notwendige Vergemeinschaftung nicht innerhalb der Politischen Sphäre vollziehen muß, sondern vorpolitisch innerhalb der Strukturen einer als Kooperation erfahrbaren Arbeitsteilung." 2000b: 306.

citizen deliberation leads both to more intelligent and more just solutions, but is also *ethically* superior in the sense of improving the quality of social relations, or *Sittlichkeit*, in society.[444]

In sum, Honneth's *normative account* for evaluating the quality of democratic will-formation in a certain society is an intersubjective, communicative understanding of freedom based on a model of social cooperation. This is accompanied by an analysis of *structural blockages*, namely the identification of those pathologies that obstruct the understanding of social practices as forms of social cooperation, and by an account of *motivational resources*, namely that only when citizens can understand social practices as forms of social cooperation will they have the motivation to participate in democratic will-formation.

In *Freedom's Right*, where Honneth presents a more elaborate account of his democratic theory, he sticks to this Deweyan account, but he would reformulate it following the structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and speak of a 'theory of democratic *Sittlichkeit*' revolving around the ideal of 'social freedom', to which I now want to take a closer look.

4.2 Social freedom and democratic *Sittlichkeit*

Honneth presents his critical theory of democracy in *Freedom's Right* as a 'Hegelian' theory of justice that claims to be a more fruitful alternative to the Kantian 'constructivist' theories of justice initiated by John Rawls.[445] In the short and dense introduction of *Freedom's Right*, Honneth presents the methodological premises of his 'Hegelian' theory of justice. His starting point is that a theory of justice should be developed on the basis of a *social analysis*. Instead of constructing free-standing moral principles that are then applied to existing society – as is common in Kantian theories of justice – Honneth argues that a society can only reproduce itself through shared values and ideals, and that a theory of justice should start by analyzing those shared ideals that are already at work in society, including the practices and institutions that make the realization of these ideals possible. Since Honneth is convinced that *individual freedom* has been the central ideal at work in modern societies, he proposes to 'normatively reconstruct' the way in which this ideal has played a role in the reproduction of modern societies and to identify those practices, institutions, and social developments that have contributed to its realization.

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[444] Cf. Renault 2015: 339.
[445] Honneth 2011: 21.

In the first part of the book, Honneth addresses the problematic fact that there has been no consensus at all in modern times on what the preconditions of individual freedom are. Honneth distinguishes three conceptions of freedom that have been central in modernity – negative, reflexive, and social freedom[446] – each of which has its own account of what a just society requires.[447] Negative freedom refers to the absence of outside constraints and the freedom to pursue one's unreflected interests without being hindered by others, which Honneth sees as central in Hobbes' political philosophy and, more recently, in Sartre's existentialism or Nozick's theory of justice. Here, the main precondition for individual freedom is considered to be the rule of law. Reflexive freedom is more demanding in the sense that the individual pursues goals that are autonomous, which requires reflection on one's desires and wishes. Honneth shows that this ideal originated in Rousseau and then split into the Kantian ideal of moral autonomy and the Romantic ideal of authentic self-realization, which today are represented by theories of justice that either develop a procedural model for self-determination ('liberals') or articulate the cultural preconditions of self-realization ('communitarians').

Social freedom refers to the Hegelian understanding of freedom as 'being-with-oneself-in-the-other'. Hegel's analysis of freedom focused on those social spheres in modern society that are both needed for material and social reproduction, while at the same time being spheres of freedom, namely the family, civil society, and the state. The question was how to organize these spheres in such a way so that they could fulfill both the preconditions of reproduction *and* make it possible for individuals to experience themselves as free while participating in these practices.[448] For Hegel, the solution was, simply put, to organize these spheres in such a way so that the actions of individuals can complement each other, whereby these complementary duties are not experienced as a moral *Sollen* but as the realization of one's freedom. I can only say that social freedom is realized when I can experience my pursuit of individual goals as not being limited by but as *depending on* others also freely pursuing *their* individual goals.[449]

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[446] In *Suffering from indeterminacy* Honneth still distinguished between 'negative', 'optional', and 'communicative' freedom. 2000: 43.

[447] The word 'right' in the title *Freedom's Right* should be understood in the Hegelian sense as having "the double meaning of being at the same time both a 'necessary condition' and a 'justified claim'" Honneth 2000a: 28.

[448] As Neuhouser writes: "[O]ne of the central tasks of [Hegel's] social theory is to delineate how the institutions of modern *Sittlichkeit*, when working in concert, are especially well-suited to achieve the two primary ends of the social organism as a whole, namely, its material reproduction and the formation of conscious agents of social reproduction who are free as persons and moral subjects." 2000: 132.

[449] Honneth defines social freedom as: "Freiheit meint hier, wenn wir Hegel folgen, die Erfahrung einer persönlichen Ungezwungenheit und Erweiterung, die daraus resultiert, daß meine Zwecke durch die Zwecke des anderen befördert

Honneth largely endorses Hegel's account but rejects Hegel's notion of the state[450] and speaks instead of the three spheres of *personal relations*, the *market-economy*, and *democratic will-formation*.[451] Honneth stresses that the realization of social freedom in these spheres is largely dependent on the quality of social integration: social freedom can only be realized when individuals are socially integrated in such a way that they learn to articulate their interests not in a monological, but in a dialogical way; only then does a possibility emerge for realizing complementary self-realization. The ideal of social freedom thus leads to a much more demanding picture of the preconditions of a just society compared to negative or reflexive freedom: it now requires the organization of society in such a way that complementary forms of self-realization become possible. Whereas in the models of negative and reflexive freedom the existing social reality remains external to the ideal of freedom itself, the model of social freedom makes the quality of social relations in existing practices and institutions an essential precondition for the realization of freedom.

However, even though the ideals of negative, reflective, and social freedom point to different preconditions for a just society, according to Honneth it is not a matter of choosing between them because he thinks that negative, reflexive, and social freedom are all legitimate in their own way. He argues that negative and reflexive freedom – and their institutionalization in legal and moral practices – are both *necessary* and *one-sided*. This means that they are necessary preconditions for the realization of freedom, but when they are absolutized and taken as the whole of freedom then social pathologies will arise. This is because they are only *possibilities* of freedom: they give the individual the freedom to step outside of existing practices and either retreat to one's legally protected private sphere or reflexively question the moral legitimacy of existing practices; but the actual *realization* of freedom is dependent on participating in social life, that is, in personal relations, the market-economy, and democratic will-formation.

Although Honneth uses a different vocabulary in *Freedom's Right* than in his Dewey-article, the three issues of democratic will-formation, structural blockages, and motivational

werden." 2011: 115. Honneth also speaks of "normativen Praktiken, in denen die Subjekte […] ihre Zwecke wechselseitig so befriedigen, daß sie in der Erfahrung dieser Gemeinsamkeit ihre individuelle Freiheit verwirklichen." 2011:117.

450 Honneth 2011: 471.

451 Honneth considers the third sphere of social freedom to be "der Institution der demokratischen Öffentlichkeit als einem gesellschaftlichen Zwischenraum, in dem sich unter den Bürgerinnen und Bürgern im deliberativen Widerstreit die allgemein zustimmungsfähigen Überzeugungen bilden sollen, an die sich dann gemäß rechtsstaatlicher Verfahren die parlamentarische Gesetzgebung im weiteren zu halten hat." 2011: 471.

resources remain central. Honneth's normative account of democratic will-formation revolves around the ideal of social freedom, which again is based on a model of social cooperation, whereby individuals can realize themselves through complementarity. Within this account, structural blockages to a further democratization are caused either by *social pathologies* or *misdevelopments*. Honneth considers social pathologies as the result of the absolutization of negative or reflexive freedom that makes it impossible for individuals to understand social practices as spheres of cooperation.[452] Misdevelopments refer to institutional changes and developments that also undermine the realization of social freedom, for example the de-legitimation of intermediate institutions in the economy, which makes it more difficult to understand the economy as a sphere of social cooperation.[453] Finally, Honneth also repeats his account of motivational resources: Honneth again makes the Deweyan claim that the motivation of individuals to participate in democratic will-formation is dependent on the quality of social integration in the two spheres of the family and the economy, as well as on the possibility to understand these spheres as cooperative spheres of social freedom.[454] It is this interdependency between the political and social dimension of democracy that Honneth tries to capture with his notion of 'democratic *Sittlichkeit*'.[455] More recently, Honneth has tried to restate this idea of complementarity and interdependency in terms of 'social organicism'.[456]

All in all, we find in Honneth's work an understanding of democracy that is very different from Lefort's. Whereas Lefort is concerned with political freedom, which he thinks is dependent on the acknowledgement of the indeterminacy and the permanent internal division of democratic societies, Honneth's concern with social freedom leads him to the claim that democracies can only be revitalized if society is organized in such a way so that individuals can experience their social

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[452] "Von einer sozialen pathologie können wir in Zusammenhängen der Sozialtheorie immer dann sprechen, wenn wir es mit gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen zu tun haben, die zu einer nennenswerten Beeinträchtigung der rationalen Fähigkeiten der Gesellschaftsmitglieder führen, an maßgeblichen Formen der sozialen Kooperation teilzunehmen." 2011: 157. For the pathologies resulting from an absolutization of negative freedom see 2011:160, and for reflexive freedom, see 2011: 207.

[453] Honneth says: "[J]e mehr derartige diskursive Mechanismen der Perspektivübernahme im Marktverkehr verankert sind, desto größer dürfte die Chance sein, ein kooperatives Bewußtsein sich ergänzender Verantwortlichkeiten wachzuhalten." 2011: 351. For the difference between pathologies and misdevelopments see 2011: 230-231. With the help of Särkelä's threefold understanding of social pathologies, one could say that Honneth understands a 'social pathology' as a *Reflexionsblockade*, and a 'misdevelopment' as an *illness of the social organism*, without discussing the conflicting ontological commitments involved.

[454] Honneth 2011: 612ff. Cf. 2011: 516-517.

[455] Honneth stresses the interdependence between "free market participants, self-aware democratic citizens and emancipated family members" 2011: 616. Cf. 2011: 472-473.

[456] Honneth 2014b; 2015: 142ff.

life once again as a sphere of cooperation. This illustrates again the conflicting perspectives on the preconditions of freedom in the political-historical and social-ethical camp: what Lefort understands as the precondition of a free society (acknowledging indeterminacy and internal social division), Honneth understands as that which has to be *overcome* in order to realize a free society. And whereas for Lefort it might appear as if Honneth – with his ideal of social freedom – smuggles a privileged position into modernity, a position from which to determine the social order and thereby minimizing or ending politics, for Honneth, as we have seen, the Lefortian outlook is normatively too weak to critically analyze different ways of instituting a liberal democracy.

One way to further explore these differences is to analyze Honneth's method of *immanent critique*: Honneth's ideal of social freedom, which informs his theory of democratic *Sittlichkeit*, is not simply a privileged position understood as an external *Sollen*, but it is a critical position that is acquired through *immanent reconstruction*. In the following I want to explore what this could mean by reconstructing how Honneth has been trying to develop such a left-Hegelian critical approach. I will do this by focusing on Honneth's attempt to develop a *normative approach to the economy*.

4.3 Immanent critique applied to the economy

In a 'Festschrift' celebrating Charles Taylor's 80th birthday, Honneth voiced his disappointment about the fact that Taylor did not further develop the critique of capitalism that can still be found in his early work.[457] This points to one of the central differences between Honneth and Taylor: although both try to de-naturalize a one-sided, atomistic understanding of freedom, Taylor pursues this extensively in many areas (ethics, politics, society, epistemology, theory of language) but remains relatively silent about the economy, whereas for Honneth the de-naturalization of a certain account of the capitalist market has been a red thread in his career. This concern can be traced back to Honneth's early criticism of the social theory of Habermas:[458] Honneth is convinced that Habermas's system-theoretical approach to the economy – which analyzes it as a norm-free sphere that can reproduce itself independently of the moral approval of its participants – cannot give an adequate account of social reproduction and social change in the economic sphere. Since then, Honneth has been trying in different ways to de-naturalize the idea of the market as a sphere with its own 'system-logic' whereby atomistic individuals pursue their individual interests – as can be

[457] Honneth in: Kühnlein/Lutz-Bachmann 2011: 78.
[458] Honneth 1980; 1986a.

found in different ways in economics, in sociological theories informed by functional differentiation, or in Marxism[459] – and instead he has tried to develop his own normative account of the market, thereby rehabilitating the tradition of 'moral economics'. Besides this project, Honneth has also initiated as the director of the 'Institüt fur Sozialforschung' a research-project that studies the paradoxes of contemporary capitalism, whereby researchers from different disciplines try to analyze and criticize the recent change from a social-democratic to a 'neoliberal' society.

As said above, Honneth's studies on the economy are closely intertwined with his attempt to develop a left-Hegelian critical method, which is often called 'immanent critique'.[460] In recent Critical Theory it has become common to make a distinction between *external*, *internal*, and *immanent* critique. Simply put, whereas external criticism constructs its own norms and values and then projects it externally on existing society, internal criticism tries to reconstruct and recover the underlying ideals that already guide society and then criticize the gap between current social practices and these underlying ideals. These two forms of criticism are usually rejected by Critical Theorists: it is argued that external criticism (read: Kantian constructivism) usually results in an unfruitful moralism, and internal criticism (read: hermeneutical approaches) usually have the conservative tendency to take the existing ideals in society for granted without providing a critical perspective from which a transformation becomes possible.

Immanent critique is then usually presented as a more promising form of critique because it starts from the normative ideals already at work in society, but it also provides a context-transcending position from which one can analyze which ideals and social developments are emancipating and which are pathological. This context-transcending position is reached not through *moral construction*, but through *immanent reconstruction*. Or, in different words, the context-transcending position is not understood as a strong metaphysical position, but it is developed in a post-metaphysical framework based on 'materialistic', 'quasi-transcendental', 'formal-anthropological', or 'social-ontological' arguments.

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[459] Cf. Honneth 2011: 358.

[460] For an account of the left-Hegelian method, see also Fraser/Honneth 2003: 274ff. For a more detailed account of Honneth's methodology see Honneth 2011: 14-31. See also Iser (2008), Celikates (2009), and Stahl (2013): Iser compares the different ways in which Habermas and Honneth have applied reconstructive criticism, Celikates compares Honneth's approach to critical methods in French sociology (Bourdieu and Boltanksi), and Stahl tries to articulate the social-ontological presuppositions of immanent criticism. For a comparable, but slightly different approach, see Jaeggi (2014), who contrasts Honneth's reconstructive, immanent criticism with her own approach which she calls "negativistisch inspirierte transformativ-immanente Kritik" 2014: 294.

In a short essay called ‘Reconstructive social criticism with a genealogical proviso’, Honneth gives his own account of how he understands the left-Hegelian methodology of immanent critique that has informed the Frankfurt School. As Honneth tells us, this methodology consists of three moments: a *reconstructive* moment, a *constructive* moment, and a *genealogical* moment.[461] First of all, the normative ideals with which the Frankfurt School criticizes society are not to be imposed from the outside, as they should already be at work in society, and therefore a *reconstruction* of the immanent normative ideals in society is required. However, not all ideals at work in society are emancipating, so in order to be able to decide which normative ideals and developments are emancipating and which are pathological, a *constructive* moment is needed, and in Honneth’s understanding this means the construction of a context-transcending concept of rationality. Finally, because certain normative ideals that were initially emancipating can, in subtle ways, change their meaning and become pathological, a *genealogical* moment is needed that looks historically at the changing ways in which certain normative ideals are actually being understood and applied in society.

It is now easier to see how Honneth’s two projects on the economy relate: in his attempt to develop a normative alternative to Habermas’s system-theoretical account of the economy, Honneth has been struggling to develop a critical approach that is both *immanent* and *rational* (i.e., context-transcending), which combines the *reconstructive* and *constructive* moments of the left-Hegelian methodology; and with the interdisciplinary studies at the ‘Institut für Sozialforschung’, he has complemented this with a *genealogical* analysis to try to understand how certain normative ideals in the economy that were initially emancipating have changed their meaning during the ‘neoliberal revolution’ and turned into pathological, disciplining ideals. In the following, I want to reconstruct these two projects and see how Honneth’s account of the left-Hegelian method shifted along the way.

4.3.1 The craftsman ideal

The problems related to the development of a normative approach to the economy that is both immanent and rational are clearly illustrated in an early essay by Honneth called ‘Arbeit und instrumentales Handeln’. In this article, Honneth praises Habermas for having opened up new ways out of the Marxist paradigm of the first generation of Critical Theory by making the distinction

[461] Honneth 2007b: 63.

between ‘labor’ and ‘interaction’. The problematic connection made by Marx between work and emancipation is analytically separated by Habermas into two different types of action – instrumental and communicative action – each of which has its own rational potential, and this thus opens up the possibility of conceptualizing emancipation in intersubjective terms.[462]

Although Honneth welcomes Habermas’s ‘intersubjective turn’, he objects to the fact that Habermas reduces moral-practical emancipation to the sphere of communicative action (i.e., the life-world) because this makes him blind to the moral-practical struggles of workers within the sphere of instrumental action. In order to bring these struggles into focus, Honneth tries in his article to rehabilitate the Marxist distinction between alienated and non-alienated work. After pointing to contemporary empirical studies that show how industrial workers are trying to re-appropriate their alienated working conditions, Honneth argues that this struggle for autonomous, non-alienated working-conditions – which he calls the *craftsman ideal* – is the immanent norm at work in the economy.[463]

However, after writing the article, Honneth soon realized that this craftsman ideal cannot be universalized and made into a legitimate rational principle. Due to the complex division of labor in contemporary capitalism, and because the jobs that are necessary for society’s reproduction in our post-industrial service economy are of such a diverse nature, it seems impossible to structure them all on the same craftsman ideal. Therefore, Honneth moved away from analyzing the conditions of the *working activity* itself toward the moral norms underlying the *capitalist organization of labor*.[464]

4.3.2 The problem of social esteem

Based on his reading of the philosophy of Hegel and the labor histories of Barrington Moore, E.P. Thomson, and Richard Sennett,[465] Honneth became convinced that social conflicts – including

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[462] As Honneth writes elsewhere: “Habermas [hat] der Tradition kritischer Gesellschaftstheorie insofern eine entscheidende Wendung gegeben, als er das emanzipatorische, transzendierende Potential von der Praxisform der Arbeit abgezogen und auf das Handlungsmuster der sprachlich vermittelten Interaktion übertragen hat.” In: Fraser/Honneth 2003: 284.

[463] “[D]ie taylorisierte, sinnentleerte Industriearbeit [ist] immer von einem gegenläufigen Handlungsprozeß begeleitet, in dem die Arbeitssubjekte kooperativ die Kontrolle über ihre eigene Tätigkeit zurückzugewinnen versuchen; aller entfremdeten Arbeit wäre dann ein Moment praktischer Erinnerung daran eigentümlich, daß ihr ungerechtfertigte Herrschaft innewohnt.” Honneth 1980: 225.

[464] Looking back on his craftsman ideal, Honneth describes it as “strong perfectionism”. In: Brink/Owen 2007: 360. Cf. Honneth 2010a: 84-88. For a recent rehabilitation of a critical approach that revolves around the quality of the working activity itself, see the articles in Smith/Deranty 2012.

[465] Honneth 1992: 267-269.

those in the economy – should be understood not as interest-based struggles but as moral struggles for recognition. This idea of moral struggle in the economy was absent, however, in the dominant critical theories of Horkheimer, Adorno, Foucault, or Habermas. As Honneth argued in his dissertation *The Critique of Power,* the reason why these moral struggles have no place in these critical theories, is that they each make the mistake of a "hypostatization of social spheres as systems,"[466] which means that they present social spheres such as the economy as reproducing themselves independently of the moral consensus and approval of the subjects involved. Honneth therefore wanted to develop a critical social theory that stayed close to the everyday, first-person experiences of individuals in order to give these normative social struggles a proper place, as well as to give a more convincing account of how society and the economy reproduce themselves.

This resulted in *The Struggle for Recognition* where Honneth articulates a critical theory that revolves around the idea that individuals need different forms of recognition (love, respect and social esteem) for their healthy self-realization.[467] In developing his theory, Honneth again tried to fulfill the two left-Hegelian criteria: by articulating an empirically grounded phenomenology of the forms of recognition he tried to fulfill the criterion of immanence[468] and by developing a formal conception of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) he tried to fulfill the criterion of context-transcending rationality.[469] It is again the rational, context-transcending moment of the left-Hegelian method that causes Honneth the most difficulties.

Honneth argues that the aim of his theory of recognition is not just to provide an explanation of the causes of social conflicts and struggles, but it is also to place these struggles within a framework of moral progress in which they can be understood as different stages in a moral learning process.[470] In order to provide normative criteria with which to evaluate which struggles

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[466] Honneth 1986b: 332.
[467] In articulating his critical theory, Honneth leaned on earlier Hegelian scholarship that had focused on the link in Hegel's philosophy between recognition and individual self-realization, such as Andreas Wildt's *Autonomie und Anerkennung*. In the following quote, where Wildt explains Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit*, he summarizes the main idea informing Honneth's critical theory: "Demnach geht es bei dem Wollen des Willens anderer nicht nur kantianisch darum, ihr Recht auf gleiches Wollen, gleiche Freiheit und Selbstverwirklichung zu wollen, sondern tendenziell auch darum, ihr besonderes Wollen zu wollen, d.h. sich mit diesem Wollen zu identifizieren und solche Institutionen zu wollen, die eine spezifisch sittliche Beziehung auf das besondere Wollen der anderen ermöglicht. Die spezifische sittliche Beziehung auf den Willen anderer und die adequate praktische Selbstbeziehung denkt Hegel dabei in notwendiger Verknüpfung: Erst in der sittlichen Beziehung auf andere gewinnt das Individuum 'sein Selbstgefühl' (Rph §7 Zus., vgl. §147), seine emotionale Identität, die das Fundament jeder Ichidentität ist." 1982: 392.
[468] Honneth 1992: 150, 259.
[469] Honneth 1992: Ch. 9.
[470] This connection of moral progress and recognition-relations rests on Honneth's idea that there is a certain, "Logik der Erweiterung von Anerkennungsbeziehungen" (Honneth 1992: 269-270), or, as he explains it elsewhere, there is a

for recognition are contributing to moral progress and which are undermining it, Honneth articulates a hypothetical end state of this moral development – which he calls a 'formal conception of ethical life' – in which all the intersubjective preconditions of individual self-realization are in place.[471]

One of the requirements of this formal conception of ethical life, Honneth argues, is that it should be compatible with modern ethical pluralism and modern autonomy, and therefore it should not prescribe a specific idea of the good life. As Honneth realizes, this requirement becomes problematic when it comes to providing the social preconditions for *social esteem*. Following Hegel and Mead, Honneth endorses the idea that individuals need social esteem of their specific traits and abilities to establish a positive self-relation.[472] He further argues that individuals can only acquire this form of social esteem when they contribute to the collective goals and projects of society in which their traits and abilities can be of specific value. In this way, social esteem is dependent on the specific ethical horizon of a society, which determines its goals and projects and thus the value of certain traits and abilities.

The challenge for Honneth is therefore to find an ethical framework for a post-traditional solidarity, in which people can be socially esteemed, but which is also 'thin' enough to be open to different individual life-goals. At the end of *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth concludes that both Hegel and Mead failed to meet this challenge, and he admits that he does not have the answer either. He ends his book by saying that there is an unresolvable tension we have to live with, which is that social esteem is necessary for healthy human self-realization, but that the shared ethical ideas needed for social esteem are themselves the object of constant social struggles and therefore cannot be settled by theoretical argument.

"Geltungsüberhang" ('validity surplus') within the different recognition orders (Fraser/Honneth 2003: 207, 219-220; Honneth 2010b: 224).

[471] This is a strategy that is commonly rejected in the political-historical camp. Raymond Aron speaks critically for example about those who "conjure up for themselves an imaginary moment in history, which one group christens 'the classless society', the other 'the mutual recognition of man and man'. […] This 'privileged state' will give a meaning to the whole. Assured of knowing in advance the secret of the unfinished historical adventure, they observe the confusion of the events of yesterday and today with the pomposity of the judge who looks down on the quarrels of others and dispenses praise and blame with autocratic impartiality." 1957: 135.

[472] Honneth 1992: 196.

4.3.3 From 'thick' solidarity to 'thin' achievement

One of the reasons why the economy plays a minor role in *The Struggle for Recognition* is because Honneth still rejected the proposal of Mead and Durkheim to see the *modern division of labor* as the basis of solidarity and social esteem within an ethically plural society.[473] However, Honneth soon became convinced that the principle of achievement (*Leistung*) is 'thin' enough to provide individuals with social esteem without being dependent on shared ideas of the good life. By linking social esteem to the individual's contribution to the cooperative task of the material reproduction of society, Honneth now thinks he can largely avoid problems concerning ethical differences, thus moving from the 'thick' principle of solidarity to the 'thin' principle of achievement.[474] This cleared the way for articulating a recognition-theoretical approach to the economy.

In his dialogue with Nancy Fraser in *Redistribution or Recognition?* Honneth argues that the immanent norms at work in Western capitalism have been the struggles for two forms of recognition: social esteem based on one's achievements in society, and respect based on equal rights. At the same time, Honneth presents two context-transcending principles with which to evaluate which struggles contribute to moral progress and which do not; namely the principles of *individualization* and *social inclusion*.[475] This means that only those struggles for recognition that either recognize new aspects of the individual that were not recognized before (fostering the process of individualization[476]) or that increase the number of people that are included in the

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[473] As Honneth says: "George H. Mead hatte demgegenüber, ähnlich wie etwa zur gleichen Zeit Durkheim, die gesellschaftliche Arbeitsteilung als die gemeinschaftliche Zielsetzung begriffen, von der jene solidarisierende Kraft ausgehen soll, durch die von alle Subjekte sich als wertgeschätzt wissen können; sein Vorschlag mußte jedoch daran scheitern, daß die Organisation der sozialen Arbeitsteilung, erst recht aber die Bewertung der verschiedenen Arbeitsleistungen, ihrerseits wieder von ethischen Wertvorstellungen abhängig ist." Honneth 1992: 286.

[474] As Honneth explains: "[I]f social esteem is linked conceptually to the exchange of services, then this problem [of the need of a shared ethical horizon] will not necessarily arise, at least not directly. Wholly independent of the ethical aims that individual members of society might pursue, they must share an interest in securing the material conditions of their social existence. It is for this reason that in my debate with Nancy Fraser I detached solidarity from the recognition of 'individual particularities' and linked it to the performance of individual contributions in economic exchange." In: Petherbridge 2011: 407. Although this might seem like a minor theoretical change in Honneth's work, I believe it is important because it opened up the way for the social 'organicism' in his later work, whereby the problem of ethical pluralism is pushed into the background.

[475] Fraser/Honneth 2003: 218. Cf. "Als Kriterium für die Bewertung eines Strukturwandels der Anerkennung in modernen Gesellschaften kann also zunächst der Grad gelten, in dem eine Anerkennungsordnung durch Individualisierung und Inklusion Freiheit garantieren kann." Honneth 2013a: 296.

[476] One should keep in mind here that Honneth understands 'individualization' in the tradition of Hegel, Marx, Durkheim, and Dewey in which one can only become an autonomous individual *within* society: this is in opposition to both the 'social contract' tradition in which individuals are understood as preceding political society, as well as the existentialist tradition (Kierkegaard, Heidegger, etc.) in which one has to resist the leveling tendencies of society in order to become an authentic individual.

recognition order of the economy (improving social inclusion) can be understood as moral progress.

On the basis of these criteria Honneth reconstructs the developments leading to the emergence of Western capitalism as moral progress.[477] These struggles started when the bourgeoisie rejected the status-based forms of recognition within hierarchical, aristocratic societies. They demanded that these traditional forms of recognition should on the one hand be *democratized*, by recognizing everyone as subjects of equal rights, thereby increasing the level of social inclusion, and on the other hand *meritocratized*, by recognizing one's achievements within society, which increased the level of individualization.[478] Honneth is mainly interested in the two struggles that continue this initial process: either people struggle for a reinterpretation of the meritocratic achievement principle in order to overcome one-sided, ideological interpretations,[479] or people struggle for social rights, demanding, in the name of equal recognition, a minimum of basic goods for everybody, independent of one's achievement. The historical result of these struggles, in Honneth's account, has been the welfare state, in which a small part of the goods of society are being distributed on the basis of equal social rights, and the remaining, larger part is divided according to the achievement principle.[480] In this way there was a balance achieved between the two context-transcending principles of individualization and social inclusion.

4.3.4 Neoliberal pathologies

In his work with the *Institut für Sozialforschung*,[481] Honneth has tried to show that this emancipating development of capitalism has taken a pathological turn in our time – which brings us to the *genealogical* moment of the left-Hegelian methodology. Honneth argues that the new aspirations toward authenticity and self-realization, prevalent since the 1960s, have become entangled with neoliberal practices, which has resulted in the paradoxical development that these aspirations did not lead to a qualitative increase in freedom and instead to an *ideology of de-*

[477] Fraser/Honneth 2003: 219.
[478] Fraser/Honneth 2003: 166.
[479] Of course, one can ask if the notion of 'individualization' can still serve as a context-transcending principle when the principle of achievement has become distorted by neoliberal discourses about self-realization in terms of entrepreneurship and self-responsibility. It seems that it has become impossible for the critical theorist to decide which developments in this context are emancipatory and which are ideological. Cf. Honneth 2007c.
[480] Fraser/Honneth 2003, 176-177.
[481] Honneth 2002a; 2010b; 2013a.

institutionalization[482] whereby the social preconditions of individual freedom are de-institutionalized, which leads to new kinds of social pathologies.

Whereas social pathologies in overregulated societies, such as those of the 1950s and 1960s, were usually the result of the disciplining and normalization of individuals to conform to socially prescribed roles, in our current deregulated societies it seems that a new disciplinary model has emerged in which permanent creative self-realization has become the new conformism. The constant social pressure to take initiative, to be flexible, and to be creative – all in the name of market competitiveness – has become the new social coercion. This social demand of permanent creative self-realization – combined with the idea that there are no limits to the power of individuals to shape their own lives – has resulted in an increase of depressive symptoms in society, with many people being uncertain about their identity, suffering from feelings of inner emptiness, and having a lack of self-confidence.[483]

Another way to describe these developments is that the struggles for respect and social esteem have recently developed in such a way that they have undermined the processes of individualization and social inclusion. The central ideals associated with individualization, such as self-responsibility and self-realization, have changed their meaning, which has made it more difficult for individuals to receive social esteem for their achievements,[484] and at the same time more and more individuals are excluded altogether from the recognition-order of the economy.[485] Whereas the welfare state represented a healthy balance between the processes of individualization and social inclusion, the neoliberal politics of deregulation and the ideology of de-institutionalization have caused a pathological development, making it more and more difficult for people to receive respect and esteem in their economic lives.

[482] Honneth 2002b: 146.
[483] Cf. Menke/Rebentisch 2011; Rebentisch 2012.
[484] Cf. Voswinkel 2002.
[485] As Honneth recently described the current 'pathological' situation: "Die institutionalisierten Spären der wechselseitigen Anerkennung scheinen an ihren Rändern wie zugemauert und in ihrem Inneren jedes allgemeinen, achtungssichernden Prinzips beraubt; immer mehr Gesellschaftsmitglieder sind auf kompensatorische, nicht-öffentliche Wege des Erwerbs der Selbstachtung angewiesen, immer weniger können für ihre Bestrebungen und Verrichtungen eine intersubjektiv geteilte Anerkennung reklamieren." 2013a: 38.

4.3.5 Normative functionalism

In his more recent work, Honneth has introduced the methodological approach of 'normative functionalism'[486] to critically analyze the economy, which is largely a continuation of his approach as discussed so far. However, Honneth now connects the issue of the economy closer to the ideal of democracy, as we have seen above in his Deweyan account, which stressed that the revitalization of democracy presupposes a 'democratic *Sittlichkeit*' that is anchored in the *consciousness of social cooperation*. Honneth's method of 'normative functionalism' is therefore concerned with the question about which institutional mechanisms and forms of socialization contribute to such a consciousness of social cooperation and solidarity.[487]

Honneth's method of normative functionalism finds its origin in the 'tradition of moral economics' – consisting mainly of Hegel, Durkheim, Parsons, and Polanyi – which Honneth tries to rehabilitate in *Freedom's Right*. This tradition emphasizes the importance of normative social integration in the economy and argues that the market economy can only properly function and reproduce itself when it is embedded in reciprocal moral norms that obligate us to act in a fair and just manner, such as Durkheim's notion of the 'pre-contractual elements of the contract.'

However, as Honneth admits, it is rather unclear how we should understand these functionalist claims, since there have been many historical periods, for example in the nineteenth century, when the economy expanded and reproduced itself perfectly without any of these moral norms being realized. Honneth therefore proposes to re-describe the approach of Hegel and Durkheim as 'normative functionalism', which means that they analyze the economy not by looking at how the economy *actually* functions and reproduces itself, but only by focusing on the normative conditions for the economy to reproduce itself in such a way that it can be understood by all participants as a legitimate sphere of social freedom (or social cooperation).

What Honneth finds especially interesting about Hegel and Durkheim is that they analyzed the institutional mechanisms that can foster such an understanding of the economy as a sphere of social freedom.[488] Honneth identifies two of those, namely *discursive mechanisms* and *legal reforms*.[489] Both Hegel and Durkheim emphasized the importance of intermediate institutions such

[486] Honneth 2011: 332ff.
[487] Honneth 2011: 327.
[488] Honneth 2011: 349.
[489] Honneth 2011: 360. Honneth gives different names to these discursive mechanisms, such as "Mechanismen der Bewuβtseinsbildung" (349-350), "diskursiver Mechanismen der Perspektivübernahme" (351) and "Mechanismen der Verallgemeinerung von Interessen" (408).

as corporations and professional groups, as these are crucial for integrating individuals in such a way into the economy that they learn to articulate their individual interests within a framework of cooperative responsibilities. Within these discursive mechanisms, individuals learn to take the perspective of others while articulating their own interests, and in this way they learn to understand the market sphere as a cooperative sphere of social freedom.[490] Honneth speaks here of the *normative plasticity of interests*,[491] which means that economic interests are not necessarily individual and fixed – as presumed in marginal economics – but it depends on the way in which individuals are integrated into the economy and the way in which they learn how to articulate their interests, either monologically or through cooperative discursive mechanisms. There is thus a clear parallel here between Honneth and Taylor, as they both stress the importance of a dialogical form of integration for the possibility of complementarity, although Honneth applies it to the economy.[492]

It was Durkheim who – besides emphasizing the importance of discursive mechanisms – also pointed to the importance of *legal reforms* for realizing equal and fair chances within the market sphere and thus for increasing the number of people that can successfully integrate into the economy.[493] But Durkheim was at the same time aware that the emergence of social rights also had a negative effect; the *subjective* character of these rights weakened the cooperative bonds and forced individuals to understand and articulate their interests monologically. In this way, by making the conditions in the market sphere more equal, subjective rights have contributed to an understanding of the market as a just and fair cooperative project, but at the same time they have undermined the flourishing of discursive mechanisms.[494]

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[490] As Honneth says: "[J]e mehr derartige diskursive Mechanismen der Perspektivübernahme im Marktverkehr verankert sind, desto größer dürfte die Chance sein, ein kooperatives Bewußtsein sich ergänzender Verantwortlichkeiten wachzuhalten" 2011: 351.

[491] Honneth 2011: 350, 359; 2013b: 353, 360. Honneth's idea of the normative plasticity of economic interests seems to be mainly influenced by economic sociology, such as Albert Hirschman's "possibilism" (see Honneth 2013b: 359-360; 2014a) and the work of Jens Beckert (1997, 2012). In a recent article, Honneth follows William Sewell in connecting the normative plasticity of interests also to *historical events* (2013b: 353), which means that economic interests cannot only be influenced by different forms of integration but also by influential historical events.

[492] As Hartmut Rosa writes about Taylor's political philosophy: "Die möglichkeit der dialogischen *herstellung* gemeinsamer Präferenzen bzw. starker Wertungen und kollektiver Zwecke im politischen Prozeß ist von den Befürwortern eines republikanisch-partizipatorischen Politikmodells immer wieder betont worden. Während eine 'naturalistische' Politik, die Interessen oder Präferenzen einfach als gegeben annimmt und sie dann aggregiert und daraus Kompromissen zu schmieden versucht […] setzt das hier entwickelte Modell auf die Möglichkeit der *Transformation* von Präferenzen und Wertungen im Verlauf partizipatorischer politischer Auseinandersetzung." 1998: 468.

[493] Honneth 2011: 351ff.

[494] Honneth 2011: 426-429.

One can clearly recognize in Honneth's discussion of 'discursive mechanisms' and 'legal reforms' the two institutional mechanisms that contribute to the realization of the two context-transcending principles of *individualization* and *social inclusion* that were discussed earlier. Discursive mechanisms stimulate the recognition of individual qualities within a cooperative whole, whereas legal reforms can increase the level of social inclusion. It is not surprising, therefore, that Honneth takes these two institutional mechanisms – which together determine the moral quality of social integration in the economy – as his guide in his normative reconstruction of the consumer market and the labor market in *Freedom's Right*.

Besides analyzing which *institutional mechanisms* contribute to the understanding of the economy as a sphere of social cooperation, Honneth has also tried, in his recent article 'Labor and recognition: a redefinition', to articulate the *reciprocal norms* that can be found in the work of Hegel and Durkheim, which should be in place in the labor market in order for participants to understand it as a sphere of social freedom. In Hegel he finds two of these norms: the *obligation* to work for one's living by satisfying others' needs and to develop abilities and talents in such a way that they can contribute to society; and the *opportunity* to do reasonably paid work that has a certain degree of complexity, and in which certain skills can be demonstrated, so that the work can be understood and recognized as a worthy contribution to society.[495] Honneth adds – drawing on Durkheim – that the working activity should have a certain transparency, so that the individual can understand how his work meaningfully relates to the cooperative whole.[496]

These norms imply that someone who is willing to work and make a contribution to society can make a justified claim to the availability of paid work that has a certain complexity and which can support a decent living.[497] The realization of these norms presupposes, however, that there are already discursive mechanisms in place that foster the reciprocal adjustment of economic interests in order to make them complementary.

Honneth finds another moral norm in Durkheim, namely that the exchange of services takes place under just and fair conditions, especially concerning equal chances. When the inequality between different classes in society exceeds a certain threshold, the understanding of the market as a sphere of social freedom becomes impossible, and therefore relative equality is a precondition

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[495] Honneth 2010a: 89-90.
[496] Honneth 2010a: 98.
[497] Honneth 2010a: 94.

for a consciousness of social cooperation. The institutional mechanisms for achieving this are legal reforms.

Honneth's conclusion in his later work has been that the current dominant understanding of the market as a sphere of individual freedom, and not of social freedom,[498] is largely the result of the disappearance of discursive mechanisms and the subjective character of social rights. As individuals are not socially integrated in such a way that they can understand the economy as a cooperative sphere of social freedom, the reciprocal norms that are a precondition for the economy to be understood by all participants as legitimate cannot be realized.

Coming to the end of our reconstruction of Honneth's attempts to develop a normative approach to the economy, we can conclude that his solution to the problem of atomism revolves around the *moral quality of social integration*,[499] which in turn aims at improving the *quality of recognition-relations*[500] and the possibility of understanding the economy as a sphere of *social freedom*. By pointing to the normative plasticity of economic interests, by analyzing the institutional mechanisms that can improve the moral quality of social integration, and by articulating the underlying moral norms that should be in place for everybody to understand the economy as a sphere of social freedom, Honneth tries to contribute to a *de-naturalization* of the supposed 'objective logic' of the economy propagated in different ways by mainstream economics, orthodox Marxism, and sociologists informed by functional differentiation. In this way, Honneth wants to open up new possibilities for cooperation and solidarity in the economy, which, as we have seen, he considers as a central precondition for revitalizing democracy.[501]

4.4 Critique as a social practice

On the basis of the above reconstruction of Honneth's attempt to develop a normative critique of the economy, one could say that Honneth seems to have moved between two opposites in the thirty

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[498] "Zum ersten Mal seit dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs, ja vielleicht sogar seit den ersten Schritten zur Etablierung des Wohlfahrtsstaates, wäre wieder eine Deutung des kapitalistischen Marktes kulturell zur Vorherrschaft gelangt, nach der dieser nicht eine Sphäre sozialer, sondern rein individueller Freiheit bildet." Honneth 2011: 462

[499] Fraser/Honneth: 2003: 209-210, 213.

[500] Fraser/Honneth 2003: 219.

[501] In this sense, one can agree with Nicholas Smith and Arto Laitinen that Honneth is part of a tradition of philosophers who promote 'socio-economic solidarity': "We find versions of [this socio-economic solidarity] in Hegel, Marx, Durkheim, Mauss, and Dewey; prominent contemporary expounders of it include Axel Honneth and Christophe Dejours. […] For each of these thinkers, the experience of interdependency and cooperation that arises in socio-economic contexts of action is at least as important a source of solidarity as shared identification with a political, cultural, or national community, and participation in a public sphere separated from the world of production and exchange." Smith/Laitinen 2009: 62.

years between the articles 'Labor and instrumental action' (1980) and 'Labor and recognition' (2010).[502] Whereas his early 'craftsman ideal' was immanent but lacked rationality, his recent approach of 'normative functionalism' is rational but seems to lack immanence – at least if one follows Honneth's own assessment that there has been hardly any collective, higher-level protest nowadays against the violation of the moral norms that he identifies as being necessary for the economy to be understood by all participants as a sphere of social freedom.[503]

In this way, although Honneth's development of a normative approach to the economy started as a critical reaction to Habermas, he ends up with an approach that is very similar to that of Habermas.[504] Just as Habermas tried to articulate the moral norms underlying the life-world (i.e., the ideal speech conditions), Honneth articulates the moral norms underlying the economy. And just as Habermas – after being criticized that his approach is idealistic – started to talk about the underlying moral norms in the life-world as 'counterfactual presuppositions', Honneth recently also started to argue that we should understand the moral norms underlying the economy as counterfactual.[505] This means that even when these norms do not have a proper force in the actual historical development of capitalism, they have not lost their moral legitimacy, as only when these norms are in place can all participants understand the market as legitimate. Therefore, when Honneth speaks of the market as 'embedded' he does not mean that these moral norms are always factually at work in the market, but it means that the economy is always dependent on them for its moral legitimacy.[506] In this way, one could ask if Honneth's search for a context-transcending position does not move him too far away from his own methodological demand that his approach

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[502] As Franck Fischbach argues, both in 1980 and in 2010 Honneth went against the grain by putting the issue of labor on the critical agenda. At the beginning of the 1980s Honneth went against the grain of many *theorists* who had given up the attempt to connect work and emancipation, as expressed for example by Habermas in *Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus* or by Jacques Rancière in *Adieux au proletariat*. Thirty years later, in 2010, Honneth's hope to reconnect work and emancipation went against the grain because this hope seemed to have also largely died in *practice*, i.e., with the workers themselves. 2015: 110.

[503] In a recent interview Honneth argues: "[W]hy is the crisis we're having today in western capitalist societies not leading to higher forms or higher degrees of social protest? (…) If we compare this situation to the one we had 40 years ago, when the degree of politicization was very high, we are simply surprised by the degree of de-politicization we have now." In: Marcelo 2013: 212. Cf. Honneth 2010a: 99; 2011: 459ff.

[504] Cf. Deranty 2016: 53.

[505] Honneth speaks of "kontrafaktische Geltungsgrundlage" (2010a: 95) and "kontrafaktische Unterstellungen" (2010a: 96, 98).

[506] As Honneth says: "Hier von einer 'Einbettung' zu reden bedeutet also, das Funktionieren des kapitalistischen Arbeitsmarktes von normativen Bedingungen abhängig zu machen, die er selbst nicht zwangsläufig erfüllen können muß: Das Geschehen auf dem weitgehend undurchsichtigen Markt des Austauschs von Arbeit vollzieht sich unter der Voraussetzung von moralischen Normen, die auch dann in Geltung bleiben, wenn die historische Entwicklung gegen sie verstößt." 2010a: 95.

should be immanent and should remain close to the everyday, first-person experiences of individuals in society.

Such a criticism has been articulated by Robin Celikates in his book *Kritik als soziale Praxis*, where he argues that we should reject the search for a rational, context-transcending position for critique, and only then can we exercise a critique that is truly immanent. Celikates's account is in some ways very close to the perspectivism in the political-historical camp, and therefore I want to first look more closely at Celikates's arguments. Following this I wish to discuss how Honneth's approach of immanent critique and his ideal of social freedom and democratic *Sittlichkeit* relate to the convictions in the political-historical camp.

In his book, Celikates makes a distinction between three understandings of 'reconstructive critique'[507] (which is identical to 'immanent critique'). Celikates extracts the first understanding of reconstructive critique from Habermas's *Erkenntniss und Interesse*, in which the reconstructive method of *psychoanalysis* is taken as the paradigmatic model. For Habermas, the task of the therapist in psychoanalysis is to reconstruct from the dreams, repetitions, and spontaneous slips of the patient that which is forgotten; and the patient, confronted by the hypothetical reconstructions of the therapist, can remember that which is suppressed, whereby only the memory of the patient decides if the reconstruction is accurate or not; if so, then this triggers a process of self-reflection in which the patient now has to fit in this lost piece of life-history. Translated to critical theory, this leads to the idea of reconstructive criticism whereby the critic interacts with suffering subjects in society and then presents a hypothetical reconstruction of the social origin of this suffering, and in this way he hopes to "trigger processes of self-reflection" and a "re-organization of the self-understanding of its addressees".[508]

Celikates also finds the second understanding of reconstructive critique in Habermas, namely in his 'formal-pragmatics'. As Celikates says, already in an afterword to *Erkenntnis und Interesse* in 1973, Habermas added an important distinction, namely the "Differenzierung zwischen Nachkonstruktion und Selbstreflexion im Sinne der Kritik." Celikates explains this distinction as follows:

[507] Celikates 2009: 188-195.
[508] Celikates 2009: 189.

> [Es gibt] einerseits die Reflexion auf die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit von Kompetenzen des erkennenden, sprechenden und handelnden Subjekts *überhaupt* [i.e. Nachkonstruktion], und andererseits die Reflexion auf die unbewußt produzierten Eingrenzungen, denen sich ein *jeweils bestimmtes* Subjekt […] in seinem Bildungsprozeß selber unterwirft [i.e. Selbstreflexion].[509]

In other words, as Celikates argues, we witness here the transition in Habermas's work to his more famous attempt of a rational 'Nachkonstruktion' that aims, in the form of a quasi-transcendental formal pragmatics, to reconstruct the normative structures of all action and communication in order to give Critical Theory a sound normative foundation.

Finally, a third understanding of reconstructive critique – which Celikates describes as 'left-Hegelian' – can be found in Honneth. In Honneth's account, Celikates says that a normative reconstruction has the task "an der sozialen Wirklichkeit einer gegebenen Gesellschaft diejenigen normativen Ideale freizulegen, die sich als Bezugspunkte einer begründeten Kritik deswegen anbieten, weil sie Verkörperungen gesellschaftlicher Vernunft darstellen."[510] In this case, what is reconstructed are the "als vernünftig ausweisbaren normative Gehalte institutionalisierter Anerkennungsbeziehungen."[511] Here, the reconstruction is critical insofar as it can show that the normative substance has a 'validity surplus' in relation to existing institutionalizations and thus does not fully realize the normative potential, even though these institutionalizations may realize it better than earlier ones. This validity surplus is understood as providing normative pressure that causes that this developmental logic can be understood as progress.[512]

Celikates further illuminates the differences between these three understandings of reconstructive critique by answering the question of *what* is reconstructed and *how* it is reconstructed. Concerning the *what* question: the first reconstructs pathologies and their origin; the second is about universal rules and competences; and the third is about the normative and rational substance of a specific praxis or life-form. Celikates adds that the object of reconstruction is in the first case historically concrete, in the second abstract and trans-historical, and in the third it is in between these two poles. Concerning the *how* question: in the first case the reconstruction proceeds

[509] Celikates 2009: 190.
[510] Celikates 2009: 190.
[511] Celikates 2009: 190.
[512] Celikates 2009: 190.

in analogue to psychoanalysis by connecting theoretical reflection and dialogical interaction with the addressee of critique; the second proceeds similar to Chomsky and Piaget by reconstructing ideal-typical cognitive and communicative competences, rule-systems, and developmental logics, and in this way searches for 'quasi-transcendental' structures, namely the conditions of possibility of communicative interaction and social relations as such; and the third approach operates analogue to Hegel's reconstruction of the underlying rational and normative structures of institutions and practices, which cannot be understood either on the level of a formal pragmatics nor as contingent historical developments, but instead it must be understood as stages in the process of a progressive historical realization of reason.

Interestingly, Celikates wants to rehabilitate the first, psychoanalytical understanding of reconstructive critique and is critical of the second and third approach, a criticism that is informed by his rejection of the search for a context-transcending position. According to Celikates, what distinguishes Habermas's formal-pragmatic and Honneth's left-Hegelian approach from the psychoanalytical approach is that they are more demanding in the sense that they do not reconstruct *historically contingent*, but *constitutive* structures, that is, they want to disclose normative structures that are constitutive of social practices as such. The result of this, Celikates thinks, is that their critical methods – despite "dialogischer Rückbindung und fallibilistischer Vorbehalte"[513] – have a *monological* character, since the disclosure of constitutive structures is in principle not dependent on the specific self-understanding of social actors. Celikates argues that this *monological* identification of *constitutive* structures is not as such problematic, as long as it presents the resulting reconstruction of modern societies as *one possible reconstruction among others*, but it becomes problematic when the reconstruction is presented as rational, context-transcending, or 'quasi-transcendental' – and this is exactly the tendency in both formal-pragmatics and left-Hegelianism, which either hypostasize one's reconstruction by presenting it as a "Selbstauslegung der Vernunft" (Habermas) or as the progressive realization of reason in history (Honneth).[514]

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[513] Celikates 2009: 191.

[514] As Celikates says: "Ob die Rekonstruktion nun formalpragmatisch oder linkshegelianisch verfährt – das Problem entsteht, sobald sie auf eine 'quasitranszendentale' Ebene gehoben wird und mehr zu sein beansprucht als eine mögliche Interpretation des Selbstverständnisses der Akteure, die umstritten ist und in Konkurrenz zu anderen Rekonstruktionen steht, zwischen denen allein in der gesellschaftlichen Praxis der Selbstverständigung entschieden oder abgewogen werden kann." 2009: 193.

Celikates' argument is that only when we give up the idea of a context-transcending or quasi-transcendental place from which to exercise critique, can the praxis of immanent critique for the first time become a truly *social* praxis.[515] And this sounds very similar to the attempt in the political-historical camp to replace normative foundationalism with perspectivism: we can think here of the claims by Lefort and Rosanvallon that political freedom and permanent debate can only be preserved if we give up the idea of a privileged position in modern societies, or Taylor's idea that we should not search for objective foundations, or naturalize our own normative self-interpretation, but instead articulate and confront our 'best accounts'. This brings us to the question of how Honneth's understanding of immanent critique and his ideal of social freedom and democratic *Sittlichkeit* relate to the convictions in the political-historical camp.

4.5 Tensions between political and social freedom

We have seen in the past chapters that the 'political' approaches to freedom in the political-historical camp are concerned with the preconditions of doing politics, which it analyzes by studying historical situations which are characterized by the 'ending of politics', preferably totalitarian societies, whereas the 'normative' approaches to freedom in the social-ethical camp try to articulate the social preconditions of freedom by focusing on forms of social suffering in existing societies in which these preconditions are not fulfilled. In this regard, it is interesting to see that Honneth's reconstruction of modernity in *Freedom's Right* takes the ideal of individual freedom as its guiding thread, and when his reconstruction reaches the era of national-socialism, he argues simply that this period is the 'other' that cannot be integrated in a progressive history of the realization of freedom,[516] which clearly illustrates the different starting point in the social-ethical and political-historical camp.

And indeed, if one looks at Honneth's work from the perspective of the political-historical camp, then one can detect many problems. This can be illustrated by going back to Ankersmit's critique of foundationalist political philosophy and his argument that the freedom of the individual is best guaranteed not by starting from a normative conception of the individual but by acknowledging 1) the *autonomy of politics* and 2) the *brokenness of the political order*.

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[515] This is very similar to Särkelä's account, who also argued that immanent critique can only become truly *social* when it does not start from the development of a norm or a model of critique. 2016: 14.

[516] Honneth 2011: 598-599.

When one looks at Honneth's *Freedom's Right* with Ankersmit's critique in mind, then one can establish, first of all, that Honneth does not acknowledge the autonomy of politics. Instead, he subordinates democratic politics to a normative social theory that is informed by the ideal of social freedom. This subordination becomes especially visible when Honneth argues that there must be a certain 'moralische Parteilichkeit' or 'Richtingssinn' to democratic discussions; namely that they should focus on the question of how to improve social freedom in the spheres of personal relations and the market-economy.[517]

Secondly, Honneth also does not acknowledge the brokenness of the political order or the incommensurability of ideals. It is interesting in this regard that Honneth's early work was still characterized by a general concern with the problem of ethical pluralism, which in his later work is pushed in the background in favor of the ideal of social organicism. The only conflict one can find in Honneth's later work is between different understandings of freedom (negative, reflective, and social freedom), but Honneth thinks that these can be reconciled when given their proper place, and the only social differentiations one can find are between the general spheres of personal relations, market-economy, and democratic will-formation, which he also thinks can operate in a complementary way, but it is hard to find any discussion of problems related to ethical pluralism, incommensurability, or social division in Honneth's later work.

One could argue that one of the consequences of not acknowledging the autonomy of politics and the brokenness of the political order is that it becomes difficult for Honneth to distinguish between 'necessary' and 'unnecessary' suffering. As we have seen, for Lefort and Rosanvallon the experience of living in a democratic society will necessarily lead to frustration, disappointment, and suffering, given the indeterminacy and division of the social order; and they warn that we should not give in to the totalitarian desire to once and for all overcome this by realizing a society-as-One. Also Taylor envisions a conflict between different moral sources, whereby he stresses that we should endure the insecurity and frustration caused by the lack of firm ground beneath our feet and not try to end this by absolutizing one's own position and projecting all evil outward. All three of them thus acknowledge in their own way the following: 1) ethical pluralism and a certain incommensurability of ideals, 2) the rejection of a context-transcending position from which to reconcile these ideals and end conflict, and 3) the embracement of the resulting suffering as a necessary part of living in a free democratic society. Honneth's account is

[517] Honneth 2011: 618-620.

different because he holds on to the left-Hegelian idea of a privileged position – namely the ideal of social freedom – from which he wants to determine the contours of a free social order and thereby suppress the issue of pluralism and incommensurability, which then leaves no room for the idea that we should endure a certain political suffering and alienation that necessarily accompanies living in a free democratic society.

In this regard, Honneth's argument, at the end of *Freedom's Right*, that the motivation to participate in democratic will-formation is dependent on the realization of social freedom in the spheres of work and family, reminds of the many criticisms in the political-historical camp of the tendency in Marx to reduce political alienation to economic alienation. Paul Ricoeur argues for example that:

> I believe it must be maintained, against Marx and Lenin, that political alienation is not reducible to [economic alienation], but is constitutive of human existence, and, in this sense, that the political mode of existence entails the breach between the citizen's abstract life and the concrete life of the family and of work.[518]

For Ricoeur and others in the political-historical camp, the danger of the line of thinking whereby politics is understood as being dependent on the cooperative unity of society, is that it is usually the first step toward the ending of politics.

One could thus argue that, from the perspective of the political-historical camp, Honneth's theory of social freedom and democratic *Sittlichkeit* is problematic because his attempt to overcome atomism does not efficiently bar itself against the threat of homogeneous unity and the ending of politics. Or, at least, there seems to be a problematic tension between political and social freedom.

[518] Ricoeur 1984: 261.

Conclusion Part 2

In this second part of the dissertation, we have seen that the critique of atomism and homogeneous unity by Taylor and Honneth differs from the critique we encountered in the work of Lefort and Rosanvallon. The latter argued that atomism is a necessary aspect of the institution of a democratic society, whereby a juridical fiction of generality de-substantializes the social, thereby replacing a 'society of bodies' that has a natural form with a 'society of individuals' that has lost its natural form. For Lefort and Rosanvallon, the task in a modern democracy is to once again give form to a society of individuals in order to overcome atomism, but they argued that if we want to do this without falling into the opposite trap of homogeneous unity, then we should not search for a normative foundation (for example based on Nature or History) or long for a return to social organicism, but we should understand the task of giving form to a democratic society of individuals as a permanent political process of *representation* and analyze how we can increase the quality of this process.

Taylor and Honneth have a different approach: they understand atomism as a *social pathology* caused by what Särkelä called a *Reflexionsblockade*, although Taylor and Honneth understand this slightly different. For Taylor, the problem of atomism is connected to the emergence during the Enlightenment of a disengaged world-disclosure that is informed by the normative ideals of individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing. However, instead of presenting it in this way, the Enlightenment thinkers *naturalized* this disengaged world-disclosure, and its features were read into the ontology of the subject. The resulting disengaged anthropology was then applied to social and political issues (i.e., Enlightenment utilitarianism, social contract theories) leading to an atomistic social ontology. For Taylor the problem here is a *Reflexionsblockade*: by naturalizing their world-disclosure and their account of human agency, the Enlightenmen thinkers are unable to articulate the normative ideals that inform their world-disclosure.

Taylor further argues that this has led to a situation in modernity whereby those who want to defend the modern ideals of individual autonomy, dignity, and flourishing often think that they therefore have to necessarily defend the disengaged anthropology and atomistic social ontology, whereas those who think that this anthropology and social ontology are flawed – such as Romantic and religious counter-movements – often believe that they therefore have to necessarily reject the

modern ideal of individual autonomy altogether.[519] This polarization is one of the reasons, in Taylor's account, for the unhealthy pendulum swing between atomism and homogeneous unity in modernity.

Taylor sees the overcoming of the *Reflexionsblockade* of 'naturalistic' thinkers therefore as an important step if we want to overcome atomism: once the naturalistic thinkers start to understand their world-disclosure as merely one normative account of human agency among others, then a more nuanced debate in modernity is possible.

At the same time, we have seen that for Taylor the overcoming of atomism does not mean that we have to embrace an ethically homogeneous society, quite the opposite. Once the naturalistic thinkers overcome their *Reflexionsblockade* and start to articulate their normative ideals, then the problem of freedom is not solved but only begins, as one is then still faced with a society where people with seemingly incommensurable accounts of our human moral predicament, including different accounts of strong evaluation and moral sources, have to live together. Taylor's religiously inspired solution is to strive for a 'dialogue society' in which individuals confront their 'best accounts' of our human moral predicament in order to collectively strive for the most 'illusion-free self-interpretation', that is, to strive for 'freedom as complementarity' whereby diversity is endorsed and not suppressed; although Taylor left open the possibility that such a confrontation may not lead to reconciliation and would only affirm that these different self-interpretations are incommensurable and thus exacerbate the divisions in modernity.

Honneth also understands atomism as the result of a *Reflexionsblockade*. As he argues in *Freedom's Right*, when social actors absolutize one-sided understandings of freedom, such as negative or reflexive freedom, then they become unable to reflexively grasp the full normative content of modern societies, namely the ideal of social freedom. Honneth connected this to the issue of 'discursive mechanisms' in society that can increase the moral quality of social integration: if individuals are integrated in such a way that they learn to dialogically define their interests, instead of monologically, then this will increase their ability to reflexively grasp the normative content of social freedom.

However, what is missing in Honneth's account, as I have tried to show, is an effective barrier against homogeneous unity: because social freedom is presented as the central ideal to which everything else can be harmoniously subordinated (i.e., negative freedom, reflexive

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[519] Taylor 1989: 514.

freedom, democracy), and because Honneth connects social freedom to an 'organicist' conception of society, the problems of ethical pluralism, incommensurability, and social division are pushed into the background. Honneth's understanding of social freedom is in this sense different from Taylor's understanding of 'freedom as complementarity': in Honneth's case there is a *privileged position* from which one can determine a free society, namely the ideal of social freedom, whereas in Taylor's account this privileged position is absent, and there are only different *perspectives* (different 'best accounts' of our human moral predicament), without a privileged place or solid foundation from which one can know how to reconcile these seemingly incommensurable perspectives; the only thing that Taylor has, is his own situated 'best account' in which the religious hope for reconciliation plays a central role.

In this sense, one could say that Lefort, Rosanvallon, and Taylor – in their critique of both atomism and homogeneous unity – share a sensitivity to the incommensurability between ideals in modernity, whereas Honneth only provides a critique of atomism and seems to be less interested in the issue of incommensurability or the problem of homogeneous unity. This different orientation can be explained by the fact that Lefort, Rosanvallon, and Taylor all reject the existence of a privileged position in modernity, whereas Honneth holds on to this idea. In the next part of the dissertation I want to explore the underlying causes of these different commitments.

Part 3: Freedom in history

A more or less thorough acquaintance with history, and especially with that of free peoples, is not merely of interest to cultivated minds; it is a necessity to every citizen who feels desirous to take part in the affairs of his country, or merely to appreciate them correctly.

Guizot[520]

[520] Guizot 1851: 8.

Introduction: Tragedy and critique

So far we have seen that Lefort and Rosanvallon, when reflecting on the preconditions of freedom and democracy, start from the idea that there are certain structural ambiguities and indeterminacies underlying democratic societies, which make the task of realizing a free, democratic society an endless and frustrating task because one can never realize a perfect harmony between its incommensurable components. Also in Taylor, we found the idea of a permanent conflict in modern society, although his religious beliefs kept up his hopes for a possible reconciliation. Only in Honneth's work – even though his theory of recognition gives a central place to struggle – does this idea of incommensurability seems to be largely absent.

Perhaps one could say that whereas the work of Lefort, Rosanvallon, and Taylor is characterized by a sensitivity to *tragedy* – that is, to the tragic incommensurability between different ideals and requirements in modern democratic societies[521] – this seems to be largely absent in Honneth's work in which a reconciliation seems possible. This difference seems to be closely related to the fact that Lefort, Rosanvallon, and Taylor all reject in their own way the idea of a *privileged position*, whereas Honneth's left-Hegelian approach still holds on to this idea. This, in turn, leads to a different understanding of *suffering*: Lefort, Rosanvallon, and Taylor emphasize that we have to endure the insecurity, frustration, and suffering caused by tragic incommensurability and the lack of foundations and not give in to the desire to end that suffering. However, in Honneth, and in the tradition of Critical Theory in general, the focus seems to be mainly on social suffering caused by capitalist modernity, which seems to be accompanied by an understanding of suffering that is by definition bad and as something that can and should be overcome by realizing a more rational social order.

This complex relation between the issues of *tragedy*, of the possibility of a *privileged position* for critique, and of the status of *suffering*, can be explored a bit further by looking at an article by Christoph Menke in which he tries to answer the question of why the tradition of Critical Theory has always been suspicious of the language of tragedy.[522] As Menke recalls, Max Horkheimer presented Critical Theory as a form of knowledge of society that is characterized by a

[521] As Menke puts it: "Die Gehalt einer Philosophie des Tragischen ist die Begrenztheit der konfliktlösenden Kraft der Vernunft durch kollisionen, die notwendig und auszuhalten sind. Daher besteht die der tragischen Erfahrung angemessene Haltung nicht in einer Versöhnung der, sondern *mit* den als notwendig erfahrenen Kollisionen." 1996: 21-22.

[522] Menke 1997.

specific goal, namely emancipation. As Horkheimer said, Critical Theory is part of the struggle to realize a "vernünftige Zustand" consisting of a "Gemeinschaft freier Menschen", and its specific goal was "gesellschaftliche Prozesse, die nicht vernünftig beherrscht und aus Freiheit hervorgebracht sind, ihres Scheins der Notwendigkeit zu entkleiden."[523] In other words, Critical Theory is concerned with *de-naturalizing* the current state of society: by taking away the cloak of necessity in which the current state of society is disguised – a cloak that is held in place by 'traditional' theory – it tries to transform a fatalistic, passive attitude amongst people into agency, freedom, and emancipation.[524]

According to Menke, this self-understanding of Critical Theory explains its suspicion of the 'tragic' affirmation of necessary contradictions or incommensurabilities that would prevent the realization of a free society. The first generation of Critical Theorists was united in their rejection of 'tragic necessities', which Horkheimer denounced as a "Resignation in der Praxis"[525] and Walter Benjamin as an "Einübung in die Katastrophe".[526] Menke says that Critical Theorists such as Horkheimer worked with two understandings of necessity, either *natural necessity*, or the *social appearance of necessity*: necessity was either the result of yet uncontrolled nature or of the reflex of powerlessness of a society that had not yet found the road toward a reflexive, rational organization of society. Both are forms of necessities that can be overcome, but there was no place for a tragic understanding of necessity; an understanding that Menke wants to rehabilitate.

Menke argues that the dualistic account of necessity of Horkheimer presupposes an understanding of social praxis and reflection whereby people can completely know and produce a rational, free social order. Menke opposes this to an alternative understanding that acknowledges that reflection can never completely grasp social reality, that it always operates against an opaque background and that humans can therefore never completely produce a free society because they can never completely know it.[527] Menke is thus yet another example of someone working in contemporary Critical Theory who rejects the idea of a privileged position from which society can

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[523] Quoted in: Menke 1997: 51.

[524] Horkheimer speaks of traditional theory "die Gesellschaftliches zu unveränderbar Notwendigem verklärt", and critical theory "die Gesellschaftliches als notwendig zu Verändern erklärt". In: Menke 1996: 21.

[525] As Menke paraphrases Horkheimer: "Die Philosophie des Tragischen verwendet die Idee des Schicksals dazu, den 'einzig von den Menschen selbst abhängenden Verhältnissen' eine quasi-natürliche, 'überhistorische, ewige' Notwendigkeit zuzusprechen. Und: 'Die Behauptung absoluter Notwendigkeit des Geschehens meint letzten Endes dasselbe wie diejenige der realen Freiheit in der Gegenwart: die Resignation in der Praxis.'" 1996: 21.

[526] Menke 1997: 44.

[527] Menke speaks of "[d]ie Einsicht in die Endlichkeit und Begrenztheit aller Reflexion und Produktion." 1997: 53.

be known and formed, and instead he acknowledges – similar to those in the political-historical camp – the limits to what we can know and do when trying to realize a free society.

If one accepts the limits of reflection and production, Menke says, then a more differentiated view on freedom and necessity becomes possible. It can lead to the insight that not all necessities are illusory and can be overcome; that there are necessities that are *constitutive* of a free society and that some of these necessities can be 'tragic', being both a precondition and a possible threat to a free society. One could think here for example of Lefort's account in which the acknowledgment of the indeterminacy of the democratic social order is both a precondition of political freedom and at the same time leads to the frustration and disappointment that fuels the totalitarian desire to overcome indeterminacy, which ends political freedom.[528]

The task of critique would then become, in Menke's words, to "1) dissolve false necessity (freedom as liberation *from* necessity), 2) disclose constitutive necessity (freedom as relation *to* necessity), and 3) endure tragic necessity."[529] In this way, Menke thinks that Critical Theory and tragic knowledge could complement each other. Without the corrective of Critical Theory, tragic knowledge would affirm all necessities as impossible to overcome, and without the corrective of tragic knowledge, Critical Theory would hold all necessities to be illusory and thus regress in the idealism of completely transparent reflection and production; but together they can both *dismantle false necessities* and *affirm constitutive and tragic necessities*.[530]

On the basis of Menke's account, one could perhaps make the broader claim that the social-ethical camp seems to be specialized in the de-naturalization of the false necessities of capitalist modernity, whereas the political-historical camp seems to be specialized in discerning the constitutive and tragic necessities in democratic politics. Understood like this, the possibility of a fruitful division of labor might emerge: whereas the social-ethical camp is concerned with articulating the preconditions of social freedom by de-naturalizing the false necessities of capitalist modernity, the political-historical camp articulates the preconditions of political freedom by focusing on the tragic necessities in democratic politics. Unfortunately, as we saw in the last

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[528] Menke gives the example of somatic impulses, which are a precondition of moral practices but that can also easily go against morality. 1997: 58.

[529] "Auflösen falscher Notwendigkeit (Freiheit als Befreiung *von* Notwendigkeit), 2) Aufzeigen konstitutiver Notwendigkeit (Freiheit als Verhältnis *zum* Notwendigkeit), and 3) Aushalten tragischer Notwendigkeit." 1997: 56.

[530] Menke 1997: 62.

chapter, things are more complicated because of the underlying methodological commitments in both camps that are hard to reconcile.

Instead of trying to reconcile the two camps, I want to further explore their different methodological commitments. I will take my cue from two issues that we encountered in Robin Celikates's criticism of Honneth. First of all, Celikates pointed to the relation in Honneth's work between his left-Hegelianism and a certain *conception of history*, namely that reason is at work in history. This raises the question as to whether the historical reconstructions of the other philosophers that I have discussed are also guided by a certain philosophy of history. In chapter 5 I want to explore this issue by providing my own historical reconstruction of the different ways in which reflections on the preconditions of freedom have been intertwined with conceptions of history.

Secondly, Celikates argued that Honneth's left-Hegelian approach tends to be monological and does not stay close enough to the first-person self-interpretations of actors in society. In this regard, it is interesting to see that in Rosanvallon's historical reconstructions one can read on every page what political and social actors said and claimed, whereas in Honneth's work one never hears subjects in society speak. I want to try to explain this difference in chapter 6 by focusing on the different way in which Rosanvallon and Honneth understand the issue of how *form is given to a democratic society*.

Chapter 5: Tragic and comic conceptions of history

In this chapter I want to analyze the different ways in which reflections on the preconditions of freedom can be informed by different conceptions of history. We have already seen how the reflections on freedom by Rosanvallon, Honneth, and Taylor[531] are informed by large historical reconstructions of modernity, which is surprising given the devastating liberal attacks on teleology in the twentieth century – for example by Weber, Popper, Hayek, Mandelbaum, or Berlin – and the rejection of 'grand narratives' by Lyotard and the postmodernists. So one could ask: why do Rosanvallon, Taylor, and Honneth turn once again to large historical reconstructions? And is their work informed by teleology or by a certain philosophy of history? And how is this connected to their understanding of freedom's realization?

I will try to answer these questions by taking as my guiding thread a distinction made by Hayden White between *tragic* and *comic* conceptions of history.[532] White argues that the narrative emplotments of both comedy and tragedy acknowledge the importance of conflict and division in human life, but that in comedy this starting point leads in the end to integration and reconciliation.[533] As he explains:

> In Comedy, hope is held out for the temporary triumph of man over his world by the prospect of occasional *reconciliations* of the forces at play in the social and natural worlds. [...] The reconciliations which occur at the end of Comedy are reconciliations of men with men, of men with their world and their society; the condition of society is represented as being purer, saner and healthier as a result of the conflict among seemingly inalterable opposed elements in the world; these elements are revealed to be, in the long run, harmonizable with one another, unified, at one with themselves and the others.[534]

Tragedies, on the other hand, do not end with harmony and reconciliation but with a *revelation* of the nature of the opposing forces and a *resignation* "of men to the conditions under

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[531] Lefort's work consists mainly of close-readings of political-philosophical texts and of commentaries on political events, but it does not contain large historical reconstructions, and therefore his work will not be discussed in this chapter.
[532] White 1973.
[533] As Northrop Frye says (on whom White bases his discussion): "The theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it." 1957: 43.
[534] White 1973: 9.

which they must labor in the world. These conditions, in turn, are asserted to be inalterable and eternal and the implication is that man cannot change them but must work within them. They set the limits on what may be aspired to and what may be legitimately aimed at in the quest for security and sanity in the world."[535]

As White argues, these dramatic emplotments cannot only be found in ancient (or modern) plays, but they also inform works of historians and philosophers of history. And indeed, from the outset it appears that the reflections on freedom by Taylor and Honneth are informed by Comedy, whereby struggle can in the end lead to reconciliation, whereas Rosanvallon's reconstructions seem to be informed by Tragedy: he tries to reveal the nature of the opposing forces of liberalism and democracy under which we have to work without the hope of ever reconciling these. And more generally, it appears that the stories about modernity and freedom in the social-ethical camp are often informed by Comedy, and in the political-historical camp by Tragedy.

So what is behind these different emplotments? I will try to illuminate this by providing in this chapter my own historical reconstruction: I will start by comparing the changing conceptions of the relation between freedom and history in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which will reveal that the republican thinkers of the Renaissance such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini had a tragic conception of history that stressed the incommensurability of the different components of the political order (§5.1), and that the thinkers of the Enlightenment were guided by a comic conception of history, introducing utopian philosophies of history that projected the reconciliation between the different components of the political order in the foreseeable future (§5.2). By contrasting these two periods, we will see how tragic and comic conceptions of history go hand in hand with different reflections on the problem of freedom: simply put, reflections on freedom informed by a tragic conception of history usually subordinate morality and ethics to politics and history, whereas comic conceptions subordinate politics and history to morality and ethics. By exploring the reasons for this different approach in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, we will touch on the roots of the differences between the political-historical and social-ethical camp and between political and normative approaches to freedom.

This will then provide the background for discussing the attempt to rethink the relation between freedom and history by Herder (§5.3), Hegel (§5.4), and Guizot (§5.5), who have been influential for Taylor, Honneth, and Rosanvallon respectively. I will try to show that Herder and

[535] White 1973: 9-10.

Taylor have a comic conception of history, that Hegel and Honneth have a tragi-comic conception, and that Guizot and Rosanvallon have a tragic conception, and by exploring these differences I hope to provide a better understanding of the underlying differences between the political-historical and social-ethical camps when reflecting on the problem of freedom.

5.1 Renaissance and tragedy: Republican freedom and the problem of Fortuna

One of the central revolutions in modern times has been the emergence of a modern historical consciousness, which is often referred to as 'historicism'. One of the meanings of this complex term is the ontological belief in the fundamental historicity of man, culture, and society. In his influential book *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (1936), Friedrich Meinecke argued that historicism emerged at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century as a reaction to the a-historicist conception of social and political reality that was adopted by Enlightenment natural law philosophy.[536] However, others have argued that the emergence of a modern historical consciousness can be traced further back, namely to the republican theory of the Renaissance.[537] For example, the opening sentence of John Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* expresses the intention "of depicting early modern republican theory in the context of an emerging historicism."[538] In the following, I want to explore this latter interpretation and explore the new awareness of the historicity of social and political reality in the Renaissance and how this was connected to a new approach to the problem of freedom.

Early modern republican theory, also known as 'civic humanism' – which blossomed in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy, culminating in the work of Machiavelli and Guicciardini – can be characterized as a reflection on the preconditions of political freedom.[539] As Quentin Skinner tells us, freedom is understood in this republican tradition as a combination of *independence* and *self-government*: "liberty in the sense of being free from external interference as well as in the sense of being free to take an active part in the running of the commonwealth."[540]

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[536] As Meinecke states: "Alles kam darauf an, das starre naturrechtliche Denken mit seinem Glauben an die Unveränderlichkeit der höchsten menschlichen Ideale und an die zu allen Zeiten vorhandene Gleichartigkeit der menschlichen Natur zu erweichen und in Fluß zu bringen." 1936: 13.
[537] E.g. Pocock 1975; Ankersmit 2005.
[538] Pocock 1975: 3. Pocock goes on to call "republican theory an early form of historicism" (ibid).
[539] "[T]he fundamental ideal to which these theorists give their allegiance is that of political liberty." Skinner 1978a: 155.
[540] Skinner 1978a: 77. This is also how Machiavelli understands liberty in his *Discourses*: "By 'liberty' [Machiavelli] means first of all independence from external aggression and tyranny. […] Secondly […] he also had in mind the corresponding power of a free people to govern themselves instead of being governed by a prince." 1978a: 157-158.

The central inspiration in the republican tradition is Aristotle's political philosophy and the idea that man is a *zōon politikon*, i.e., that participating in political life is the essence of man's nature.[541] Aristotle's ideal was a self-governing community, and the central precondition to realize this was the ability of citizens to devote themselves to the *common good* and not place their own interests above those of the community – an ability that was referred to as *virtue*. The reflection on the preconditions of freedom in the Aristotelian tradition is therefore closely connected to the question of how civic virtue can be realized and maintained.

However, the attempt by Renaissance political theory to revive Aristotle's political philosophy was complicated by two ideas in Augustine's *The City of God* that had dominated the Middle Ages. The first was the idea that virtue was not something that could be realized by men themselves and was in the end dependent on God's grace.[542] The second idea was, more generally, "that the true Christian ought not to concern himself with the problems of this temporal life, but ought to keep his gaze entirely fixed on the everlasting blessings that are promised for the future."[543] Augustine's picture of the human predicament thus effected a de-politization of social life because the realization of virtue was understood in terms of Providence and God's grace and not in terms of human agency.

The Renaissance thinkers broke with the Augustinian picture by arguing that virtue *can* be attained by men and that it is their duty to make it the main aim of their lives.[544] The ultimate aim of this striving for virtue – of developing one's talents in the service of the common good – was to attain honor, glory, and praise. This devalued the ascetic goals of Christian life and revalued the *vita activa* at the cost of the *vita contemplativa*.[545] This in turn led to a 'politicization' of virtue; because if virtue is understood as the active participation in public life in order to contribute to the common good, then this is dependent on the virtue of other citizens and on the political health of the city.[546]

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[541] Cf. "republican theory is in essence Aristotelian political science" Pocock 1975: 320. "the Aristotelian polity, the ultimate paradigm of all civic humanism" Pocock 1975: 478.
[542] Skinner 1978a: 91.
[543] Skinner 1978b: 349.
[544] Skinner 1978a: 93.
[545] Skinner 1978b: 99.
[546] Pocock 1975: 75.

This new outlook on man's predicament was accompanied by a renewed focus by civic humanists on 'this temporal life', which Augustine had devalued.[547] The Christian, Medieval world had subordinated secular history to eschatology and had difficulties with making sense of contingency, events, change, and particularity; Pocock speaks of a "rigorously limited epistemology of the secular."[548] The republicans however – with their new understanding of virtue and human agency – developed a heightened awareness of the problem of time, contingency, and particularity. They started to reflect on how to realize the values of civic virtue and liberty in *secular time*, in a particular, finite republic.[549] It is this struggle between virtue and secular time – which the civic humanists portrayed as the struggle between *virtue* and *Fortuna* – that contributed significantly to the emergence of a modern historical consciousness.[550] In order to get a glimpse of the complexity of these developments, we can compare two different accounts given by John Pocock and Frank Ankersmit.

One of the main aims in Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* is to illustrate and explain the conceptual change in the republican tradition from 'Fortuna' to 'corruption'. As Pocock shows:

> '*Fortuna*' started out as being a Goddess of randomness, contingency, and chance, who undermined the realization of a virtuous, stable republic, and whose fickle ways could not be predicted or known (which was still very close to the idea of Providence). This image became gradually replaced, however, by the more human concept of 'corruption'.[551]

Pocock argues that this conceptual change can be explained by the development by republican thinkers of a more and more sophisticated analysis of the social and material causes that were responsible for undermining virtue and liberty. In this way, the forces that undermined the

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[547] Pocock: "[T]he primacy of politics […] reappeared in early modern thought in the form of a Christian heresy. In a cosmos shaped by the thought of the Augustinian *civitas Dei*, it affirmed that man's nature was political and could be perfected in a finite historical frame of action, and the ambiguities of the *saeculum*, which it thus revived, are with us still as the ambiguities of action in history." 1975: 552.

[548] Pocock 1975: 402.

[549] Pocock speaks of "the republic's struggle to attain self-sufficient virtue and stability in a context of particularity, time, and change." 1975: 328.

[550] Pocock: "The quarrel between civic virtue and secular time has been one of the main sources of the Western awareness of human historicity." 1975: 551. Cf. Ankersmit: "Not only did *virtu* inspire the first attempts of Western man to conceptualize his efforts to get hold on social and political reality, *virtu* also gave us history. Creative politics and history are branches of one and the same tree – the tree of the struggle between Fortune and *virtu*." 1996: 172.

[551] 1975: 333, 402, 405.

republic's stability were no longer perceived as unintelligible (Fortuna), but they were understood as social and material processes that could be known and controlled (corruption).[552]

Pocock illustrates this shift by looking at Machiavelli's analysis of the preconditions of liberty in his *Discourses on Livy*. One of the innovative aspects of Machiavelli's analysis was his disconnection of *virtù* from virtue: Machiavelli understood the *virtù* of the citizen as consisting of all actions that contributed to the maintenance of liberty in the republic – just as the *virtù* of the prince consisted of all actions that helped the prince to 'maintain his state' – and these actions did not necessarily have to be virtuous in the classical or Christian sense.

One of the results of this innovative change was that Machiavelli was less concerned with the *moral* preconditions of liberty – as the earlier civic humanists had been – but mostly in the institutional, social and, material preconditions.[553] According to Machiavelli these included: the necessity of setting up a *citizen army* instead of hiring mercenary soldiers; the importance of *equality*, understood as "ensuring that the pathway to honor is kept open to all citizens, each of whom must be given an equal opportunity to fulfil his highest ambitions in the service of the community"[554]; the idea that freedom and *poverty* go together, which was informed by the perceived threat to virtue by "an excessive devotion to the pursuit of private wealth";[555] the belief that the most suitable *constitution* is the dynamic expansionism of the Roman Republic and not the peaceful stability of Venice; and finally, Machiavelli's two most controversial and innovative claims, namely that *social disunity* is crucial for maintaining liberty and that it is important to disconnect the Christian virtues from republican *virtù* because, as Machiavelli says, "we cannot pretend that such virtues as kindness, truth-telling and the maintenance of justice will always – or

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[552] Pocock understands corruption as "a means […] of introducing secondary causes into what was otherwise an image of pure randomness. In this respect there has been an intensification of historical self-understanding." 1975: 333. Cf. Palonen: "Der Übergang von der *fortuna* zur Korruption bedeutet also nicht bloß eine Säkularisierung der Kontingenz, sondern wird von der Einschätzung begleitet, daß die Machbarkeit der Welt doch größer ist, als die *fortuna*-Denker es sich vorstellten. Die Korruption wird als eine Abweichung behandelt, die zwar überall droht, die aber mit normativen und institutionellen Mittlen eingegrenzt werden kann." 1998: 47.

[553] "There is consequently a sociological as well as a merely moral analysis of corruption to be found in the *Discorsi*." Pocock 1975: 208. See also Skinner 1978a: 170-171, who notes that whereas early humanists had mainly focused "on the question of how to promote the right kind of civic spirit amongst the people and their leaders, assuming that this in turn would serve to maintain the liberty of their city as a whole", later republicans, such as Machiavelli, began "to turn their attention to examining the machinery of government, asking themselves what role is played by laws and institutions in relation to the preservation of freedom."

[554] Skinner 1978a: 179.

[555] Skinner 1978a: 162.

even very often – turn out to be compatible with the whole-hearted pursuit of the general good of the community."[556]

What emerged in this way in the republican tradition, Pocock says, was a "sociology of liberty"[557] that could give a much more sophisticated diagnosis of the different social, institutional, and material forces that undermined the republic. And this, in turn, provided much better tools for making sense of historical change. In this way, the reflection on the preconditions of freedom and the emergence of a modern historical consciousness are linked. As Pocock summarizes, the republican tradition started to provide:

> […] a set of norms for the attainment of stability which reduced the totality of virtue to concrete and manageable terms. […] [T]hese became parameters for the measurement of historical change. To the extent that they did so they greatly increased the capacity for historical understanding, simply by enriching its technical vocabulary.[558]

The conceptual change from 'Fortuna' to 'corruption' was thus the result of a better conceptual vocabulary to make sense of historical change, i.e., the result of a more sophisticated 'epistemology of the secular'.

Frank Ankersmit points to a different development that contributed to the emergence of a modern historical consciousness, namely the discovery by Machiavelli and Guicciardini of the domain of *unintended consequences of human action*.[559] Ankersmit argues that Machiavelli and Guicciardini had experienced the year 1494 as a traumatic turning point: this was the year in which the Duke of Milan, Lodovico il Moro, fearing for his position, convinced the French King Charles VIII to invade Italy, which opened a Pandora's Box of problems and disasters that marked the end of an era, i.e., of the world of Lorenzo il Magnifico, of peace, order, and the pursuit of knowledge and artistic perfection.[560]

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[556] Quoted in Skinner 1978a: 183.
[557] Pocock 1975: 211, 466-467. "[T]he end-product of the Florentine experience was an impressive sociology of liberty […] which arose in reply to the challenge posed by the republic's commitment to existence in secular history." 1975: 85.
[558] Pocock 1975: 402.
[559] "[I]t was historians like Machiavelli and Guicciardini […] who were the first to see the unintended consequences of human action as the true domain of meaningful historical investigation." Ankersmit 1996: 211.
[560] As Guicciardini wrote: "The King entered Asti on September 9, 1494, bringing with him into Italy the seeds of innumerable disasters, terrible events and change in almost everything. His invasion was not only the origin of changes of government, subversions of Kingdoms, devastation of the countryside, slaughter of cities, cruel murders, unknown

What is crucial here, according to Ankersmit, is that Machiavelli and Guicciardini experienced the problems that were unleashed in their country not – as it had been common until then – as the blind fate of Fortuna but as the result of shortsighted and irresponsible political action. Ankersmit detects this new insight especially in Guicciardini, who experienced a similar chain of events in his own career as the main adviser of Clemens VII when he recommended risking a conflict with Charles V, which would eventually lead to the destruction of Rome in 1527. Guicciardini, who had been so confident about his own supreme political wisdom, had to recognize that he had harmed Italy just as Lodovico had done a generation before. This led, according to Ankersmit, "to an intense awareness of the tragedy of history."[561]

This traumatic experience would make Guicciardini sensitive to the problem of the unintended consequences of human action, which would become central in his historical works, such as his *History of Italy*. As Ankersmit states:

> [W]hereas a previous generation would have seen the hand of the Goddess Fortuna, Guicciardini tried to discover a historical explanation for the discrepancy between intentions and consequences. And the immense achievement of Guicciardini was therefore to make the domain of the unintended consequences, of the Goddess Fortune […], accessible to historical Reason.[562]

For Ankersmit, the emergence of a modern historical consciousness is thus closely connected to the traumatic experience of the loss of a past reality as the result of unintended consequences of human action. In such a situation there emerges a disconnection between past and present, between intentions (the past's perspective) and their unintended consequences (visible only from the present). Ankersmit's theory also explains why the full-blown modern historical revolution emerged in the aftermath of the French Revolution, which was perhaps the ultimate example of a chain of events that led to the traumatic loss of a past world (the Old Regime) in combination with a Pandora's box of unintended consequences.[563]

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till that day; and the instruments of peace and harmony in Italy were thrown into such confusion that they have never since then been reconstituted, so that other nations and barbarian armies have been able to devastate and trample wretchedly upon her." Quoted in Ankersmit 2005: 356.

[561] Ankersmit 2005: 357.

[562] Ankersmit 1996: 173.

[563] Ankersmit 1996: 133.

Both Pocock and Ankersmit thus provide an analysis of the emergence of a modern historical consciousness by pointing to a process in which the Goddess Fortuna was made accessible to Reason, either through a sociology of liberty (Pocock) or through a secular historiography that focuses on the unintended consequences of human action (Ankersmit). If we return to the issue of tragic and comic conceptions of history, one could say that – despite these improvements concerning the understanding of historical change – the general conception of history in this period was still *tragic*. Despite the growing knowledge about the forces of Fortuna that undermine the realization of virtue and liberty in the republic, Pocock and Ankersmit agree that this did not lead to the idea that these forces can be once and for all contained and reconciled into a harmonious, stable republic – at least not at the time of Machiavelli and Guicciardini.

What was still missing was the modern idea of progress; the Renaissance had been informed by a cyclical conception of history (inherited from Aristotle and Polybius) in which the mortality of republics was stressed.[564] The work of Machiavelli and Guicciardini was characterized by a sensitivity to the fragility and incommensurability of the elements of social and political life, which also explains why they were less interested in the abstract lessons of morality and ethics than in the practical insights of historiography and everyday politics.[565]

If we now turn to the Enlightenment, we will be confronted with a very different situation in which the reflection on freedom will be exclusively informed by morality and ethics, and where the insights of history and everyday politics are largely ignored.

5.2 Enlightenment and comedy: The emergence of utopian philosophies of history

In order to illuminate the relation between freedom and history during the Enlightenment I will turn to Reinhart Koselleck's doctoral thesis *Kritik und Krise*, which was finished in 1953 and published as a book in 1959. It was written in a period when many thinkers reflected on the origins of totalitarianism – think of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944), Karl

[564] Rousseau expresses this idea in *The Social Contract* when he compares the republic with a human body: "Si Sparte et Rome ont péri, quelle État peut espérer de durer toujours? […] Le corps politique, aussi bien que le corps de l'homme, commence à mourir dès sa naissance et porte en lui-même les causes de sa destruction." Book III, Chapter XI. Hobbes, on the other hand, argued that men can prevent the collapse of the political body from internal diseases by using reason: "Though nothing can be immortal, which mortals make: yet, if men had use of reason they pretend to, their Commonwealths might be secured, at least, from perishing by internal diseases." Quoted in Habermas 1978: 49.

[565] One could make this story more complex by comparing the differences between Machiavelli and Guicciardini when it comes to the question about what we can learn from history, whereby Guicciardini was more sceptical than Machiavelli.

Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945), Friedrich Meinecke's *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (1946), Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), or J.L. Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1960) – that often traced totalitarianism back to the Enlightenment, or even to Ancient Greece. Also in Koselleck's book, although it does not respond directly to these books, we find a similar inquiry into the problematic legacy of the Enlightenment, which focuses on the relation between *morality* and *politics*.

In his short but dense book, Koselleck reconstructs the shifting relation between morality and politics in the period from the religious wars in the sixteenth century until the French Revolution, a period that marks the beginning and ending of the *absolute state*.[566] Koselleck reconstructs how the absolute state emerged out of the religious wars and then shows how the Enlightenment emerges out of the shadows of the absolutist state. In doing this, Koselleck is especially interested in understanding the emergence of utopian 'philosophies of history' in the work of Enlightenment thinkers. As will become clear, Koselleck paints a picture of the relation between freedom and history during the Enlightenment that is very different from the Renaissance.

Koselleck starts from the well-known fact that the absolute state initially emerged in order to provide a solution to the religious wars that had started in sixteenth century Europe. It did so by establishing a separation of morality and politics: the absolute state was placed above the conflicting religious parties and was given a monopoly on power and political responsibility in order to create a secure and peaceful *modus vivendi*. Within this formal understanding of politics, the state was only interested in its subjects insofar as they were obedient to its laws and remained indifferent to their inner conscience and moral convictions. The subject was thus morally free in the private, inner sphere of his conscience, but in the public world his actions were subjected to the judgement and decisions of the sovereign; as a *human* he was 'in secret free', but as a *citizen* he was a subject who had transferred all rights and political responsibility to the sovereign.[567]

In the historical context of the religious wars, this separation of politics and morality – on which the legitimation of the absolute state was based – was not experienced as problematic. Koselleck illustrates this by looking at the arguments of Hobbes for whom the subjects in the historical situation of the religious wars were provided with two alternatives: either war or peace. That is, either a continuation of the civil war, or the institution of a stable political order. Because

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[566] Koselleck 1959: 11.
[567] Koselleck 1959: 25, 29.

Hobbes perceived the ending of the civil war to be the highest moral duty, the institution of an absolute state, and the obedience to this absolute state, were perceived by him to be in harmony with morality. In the face of the religious wars, the tasks of politics and morality were identical, namely to end the civil war, and therefore the actions of the absolute state were not considered to be opposed to morality.[568]

It is only in the eighteenth century, when the religious wars had been successfully stabilized and had become a memory of the past, and when the citizenry felt secure and started to long for emancipation, that the subordination of morality to politics by the absolute state became more and more experienced as problematic. As Koselleck shows, a central striving in the eighteenth century became the attempt by morality to become political,[569] which is illustrated by the gradual expansion of morality from the private sphere of the subject's inner conscience toward society. This was most notable in the form of 1) the Freemasons and 2) the 'République des lettres'.

With the emergence of the *loges* of the Freemasons – which Koselleck considers to be the most important social institutions of morality in the eighteenth century – the situation under the absolutist state whereby the subject is morally free only 'in secret' was expanded to *secret societies*. These developed their own moral system of brotherhood and equality and existed 'in secret' alongside the laws of the absolute state.[570] The Freemasons dismissed existing politics because it was guided by *raison d'état*, and not by morality; whereas the state had a monopoly on power, the freemasons understood their societies to have a monopoly on morality;[571] and the idea of protection *by* the state was replaced by the freemasons with the idea of protection *from* the state.[572] Even though these men were excluded from politics, had no direct political influence, and operated in secret, the Freemasons had an indirect political influence by both questioning the absolute state and by sharpening the division between morality and politics and between society and the state.[573]

The emergence of the 'République des lettres' can be understood similarly as an attempt by men who were locked in the private sphere and who were excluded from politics to develop new moral systems and gather in 'unpolitical' institutions such as the Parisian salons. Koselleck argues that this community of enlightened *philosophes* can be metaphorically understood as a civil war in

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[568] Koselleck 1959: 26.
[569] Koselleck 1959: 31.
[570] Koselleck 1959: 60.
[571] Koselleck 1959: 60.
[572] Koselleck 1959: 58.
[573] Koselleck 1959: 53, 68.

the sphere of morality: a war of all against all, whereby the shared goal is the Truth, and the true sovereign is Critique (*Kritik*), which everybody exercises but is also subjected to.[574] In this process everything (theology, art, history, law, reason itself) is brought before the supreme court of Reason and has to justify itself. As Koselleck shows, whereas this 'reign of critique' initially left the absolute state alone in order to protect itself, in the course of the eighteenth century – when the authority of the *philosophes* grew – it also brought the state to trial.[575] Whereas for Hobbes the actions of the absolute state had still been moral, for the enlightened *philosophes* the absolute state became the negative pole of all its dualisms.[576]

However, although the aim of the moral critique of the Enlighteners was to bring down the absolute state, they were still politically powerless. Koselleck claims that in order to bridge this gap between their moral systems and their political powerlessness, the Enlighteners introduced utopian philosophies of history,[577] which were secular versions of Christian eschatology, replacing Providence with human progress.[578] History was transformed in a "trans-political, moral process",[579] whereby both history and politics were subordinated to morality. This meant that the Enlighteners started to present history – looked at from a God's-eye point of view – as evidence for the correctness of their own moral positions.[580] One could thus say that the Enlighteners had a *comic* conception of history in which the problems of politics and political action disappeared behind the grand narrative of a linear movement of world history toward the victory of morality. In doing so, they used the same strategy as the absolutist state had once used: whereas the latter had elevated itself above the religious parties in civil society and had looked down mockingly on

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[574] Koselleck 1959: 91.

[575] Koselleck 1959: 6, 101. Koselleck quotes Kant who gave a clear statement of this new self-confidence of Enlightened critique in the 'Vorrede' of his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*: "Unser Zeitalter ist das eigentliche Zeitalter der Kritik, der sich alles unterwerfen muß. *Religion* durch ihre *Heiligkeit* und *Gesetzgebung* durch ihre *Majestät* wollen sich gemeiniglich derselben entziehen. Aber alsdann erregen sie gerechten Verdacht wider sich und können auf unverstellte Achtung nicht Anspruch machen, die die Vernunft nur demjenigen bewilligt, was ihre freie und öffentliche Prüfung hat aushalten können." Quoted in Koselleck 1959: 101.

[576] Koselleck 1959: 95.

[577] Koselleck 1959: 108.

[578] Koselleck 1959:108.

[579] Koselleck 1959: 156.

[580] Koselleck 1959: 155. As Ankersmit comments: "When pretending to speak the language of world history, these liberal Enlightened philosophers (and their idealist successors) were, in fact, still speaking the language of the moral of the drawing room – from which their moral language and moral convictions had originated. The enormous distance between their moral systems and actual political reality was not interpreted by them as an indication of the potential weakness of these ethical systems, but instead, of the utter depravity of actual politics and the urgent necessity to completely reform it. Morality thus effected, down to the present day, an alienation between politics and itself, as Koselleck correctly points out: 'Due to the separation of politics and morals, moral principles must necessarily estrange themselves from political reality.'" 1996: 184.

the fighting clergies and priests, the Enlightenment philosophers used their philosophies of history to elevate themselves above the world of politics and looked down from their study rooms on the fussing about of politicians.[581]

For Koselleck, the emergence of utopian philosophies of history illustrates the problematic relation of the Enlightenment to politics. Because of the manichaeistic separation of politics and morality, the Enlightenment remained in an *indirect* relation to politics.[582] One could say that the Enlightenment wanted to be involved in politics and overthrow the absolute state *without* leaving the 'innocent' sphere of private morality within which they had been locked up since the birth of the absolute state.[583] This problematic relation to politics showed itself first of all in the fact that the Enlighteners presented their moral positions and judgements as unpolitical and as 'Überparteilich',[584] which thereby concealed the fact that they were representing the interest of a specific party in society, namely the bourgeoisie, who wanted to emancipate themselves from the church and the state.

More gravely, however, was that the Enlighteners' utopian philosophies of history concealed the fact that the growing crisis between society and the state required concrete political decisions and actions,[585] which were instead projected in the future in such a way that the end of history coincided with the peaceful victory of morality, freedom, and equality.[586] This is illustrated by the way in which the Enlightenment thinkers started to talk about 'revolution' as a counter-concept to 'civil war'.[587] Whereas revolution was about the fulfillment of moral postulates,[588] civil war was associated with the religious wars, which were considered to be a thing of the past.[589]

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[581] Ankersmit refers in this context to Hegel's famous statement when he was looking down upon Napoleon from the window of his study in Jena in 1806: "*I* know what *he* is doing." 1996: 183.
[582] Koselleck 1959: 39.
[583] Ankersmit 1996: 184.
[584] Koselleck 1959: 90, 95, 103, 123.
[585] "Die konkrete Frage, wo und wie das moralische Recht und die Macht zusammenfallen, d.h. die Frage nach der politischen Gestalt einer moralischen Staatsordnung, wird durch die dualistische Aufspaltung von Moral und Politik umgangen und als politische Entscheidungsfrage ignoriert. Moralisch gesehen, soll die König im Namen der Moral, d.h. der Gesellschaft, herrschen; daß aber, politisch gesehen, die Gesellschaft im Namen Königs diktieren will, wird nicht gesagt und muß auch nicht gesagt werden, da die Gesellschaft ja rein moralisch ist. Die politische Frage nach dem Träger der Souveränität, die moralisch bereits gelöst ist, wird ausgespart." 1959: 123.
[586] Koselleck 1959: 110, 151.
[587] Koselleck quotes Wieland who wrote in 1788: "Der gegenwärtige Zustand Europas nähert sich einer wohltätigen Revolution, einer Revolution, die nicht durch wilde Empörungen und Bürgerkriege … nicht durch das verderbliche Ringen der Gewalt mit der Gewalt bewirkt werden wird."1979: 74-75.
[588] Koselleck 1959: 156.
[589] Koselleck 1979: 74-75.

Because the Enlightenment thinkers remained in an indirect relation to politics, they were blind to the problems of everyday politics and to the dangers and risks of all political actions and decisions.[590] The moralization of politics concealed the fact that it is a sphere of responsible decision-making.[591] In this way, the Enlightenment's indirect relation to politics and its utopian philosophies of history contributed not only to the silencing of actual politics but also to the destruction of the idea of politics *as such*, as a permanent task for humans living together, replacing it with the construction of utopian futures.[592]

Perhaps an interesting side-note – in the context of the difference between 'social-ethical' and 'political-historical' approaches – is that Koselleck argues that it was Rousseau who used the word 'crisis' for the first time, taken from the medical vocabulary, to refer to the growing tension between the political and social sphere.[593] The notion of 'crisis' refuted the utopian philosophies of history because it suggested an unknown future and the requirement of concrete political decisions, and therefore Koselleck considers Rousseau as a truly political thinker. In Axel Honneth's reconstruction of the tradition of social philosophy, however, Rousseau is presented as the first to identify pathologies in society that obstruct individual self-realization. It is here that Rousseau is hailed as the first *social* philosopher. Although both Koselleck and Honneth may be right in their claim about Rousseau, it once again illustrates the difference if one has one's observation post either in the political sphere, guarding the vitality of everyday politics (political-historical camp), or in the social sphere, analyzing social pathologies (social-ethical camp).

In summarizing Koselleck's reconstruction, one could say that in the course of the eighteenth century the absolute state – whose legitimacy had been based on the subordination of morality to politics in order to end civil war – had become opposed, in a properly dialectical way,[594] by an absolute moral society that subordinated politics to morality by using philosophy of history as its main weapon and thereby, in the end, causing a new civil war.[595]

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[590] Koselleck 1959: 156.
[591] Koselleck 1959: 170.
[592] Koselleck 1959: 9, 157.
[593] Koselleck 1959: 133-135, 140.
[594] Koselleck's book was initially titled 'The dialectic of Enlightenment' until he realized that this title already existed. Cf. Müller 2014: 78.
[595] Koselleck saw the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union as a contemporary pathological result of this disconnection between politics and morality in modernity. Here both parties understand themselves to have (a philosophy of) history on their side and whose world-view does not leave space for political opponents, with the result being a struggle that cannot be solved by politics and prudent decision-making but only by destroying the other party. For Koselleck, this illustrates that a stable political order is not possible as long as the historical-philosophical world-views prevent the recognition of political opponents and of political responsibility.

With respect to the problem of freedom, one could say that the problematic relation between morality and politics during the Enlightenment led to an abstract reflection on the preconditions of freedom whereby the Renaissance insights concerning the problem of political action and of Fortuna were forgotten. Kari Palonen helpfully summarizes it as follows:

> Koselleck's point is that philosophers of history and the natural law theorists have a common ideal, which is oriented toward an elimination, or at least a minimization, of time, history and politics. They understand freedom as a realization of a plan, of a law or a future ideal state. All contingencies – pluralisms, conflicts, unforeseen consequences, historical accidents, etc. – appear suspicious to them, instead of being treated as dimensions of human freedom in history.[596]

On the basis of the different understanding of the relation between freedom and history in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, as I have traced it, one could argue the following: *tragic* conceptions of history – such as those of Machiavelli and Guicciardini – are informed by the language and insights of history and politics (or *raison d'état*) under which morality and ethics are subsumed, whereas *comic* conceptions of history – either religious eschatology or Enlightenment philosophies of history – are informed by the language of morality and ethics, under which history and politics are subsumed. One of the contributions of Koselleck's book is to have shown how the coming into being of modernity is accompanied by the growing alienation between these two vocabularies, of a political and historical *raison d'état*, and an a-political and a-historical moral critique, which led to the failed attempt to realize freedom during the French Revolution.[597] It is against this background that we have to understand the attempts by Herder, Hegel, and Guizot to rethink the relation between freedom and history, to which I now will turn.

[596] Palonen 2002: 99.

[597] This alienation is still with us to the present day, for example in today's populism. As Jan-Werner Müller defines it: "Populismus, so laut meine These, ist eine ganz bestimmte Politikvorstellung laut der einem moralisch reinen, homogenen Volk stets unmoralische, korrupte und parasitäre Eliten gegenüberstehen." 2016: 42.

5.3 Herder on pluralism and empathy

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was one of the first to develop a critique of the Enlightenment philosophies of history and their a-historicist conception of Reason and Nature.[598] Together with other pre-Romantics such as Rousseau, Justus Möser, Edmund Burke, and the *Stürmer und Dränger*, Herder shared a general antipathy toward the rationalism of the Enlightenment and a sympathy for those aspects of both history and humanity which the Enlighteners had viewed with condescension, such as the life of primitive cultures or the role of emotions in human life.

Before turning to Herder's arguments, we can briefly look at Voltaire's *Essay on the Manners and Mind of Nations* (1756) in order to get an idea of what Herder and the pre-Romantics were up against. Voltaire's *Essay* was one of the most influential Enlightenment philosophies of history and also the work in which the term 'philosophy of history' was used for the first time.[599] Voltaire articulates in his *Essay* an anti-religious interpretation of history that does not take Providence but human reason as its guiding principle, which he understood to be timeless and everywhere the same.[600] However, according to Voltaire this timeless reason had been suppressed and hidden behind the superstitions, illusions, and prejudices of tradition and religion. Voltaire thus understood history as a conflict between opposites – of truth against untruth, reason against folly, and enlightenment against superstition and ignorance – and he tried to historically reconstruct the gradual emancipation of reason from tradition and religion.[601] More specifically, for Voltaire rational progress meant the development of sciences and skills, morals and laws, and commerce and industry, and the main obstacles for rational progress were dogmatic religions and wars.[602] Voltaire was thus not interested in history as such, but he saw it primarily as an educational means to overcome the errors and follies of the past and to further the causes of reason in the present and the future. The ultimate ideal in this regard was to establish a human society that was completely based on reason.

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[598] Cf. Herder 1774, 1784.
[599] Löwith 1949: 1, 104; Meinecke 1936: 76.
[600] Cassirer 1932: 294-295.
[601] Meinecke 1936: 387.
[602] In this way, Voltaire tried to understand history in the same way as the natural sciences tried to understand nature. Starting from a conception of rationality that was influenced by the physical sciences, Voltaire tried to understand history in terms of cause-effect relationships, with the causes in question being the forces of reason and unreason, and the effects being enlightened men on the one hand, and superstitions and ignorant men on the other hand. Cf. White 1973: 65. The reason for why Voltaire's *Essay* was so successful was that it provided the rising bourgeoisie with a historical justification of its own ideals by suggesting that all history was leading up to the eighteenth century. Löwith 1949: 107.

Herder's critique of Enlightenment rationalism, as exemplified by Voltaire, consisted both of a *new approach to history* and a *new conception of human nature*.[603] Starting with the former, Herder called his new method of historical inquiry 'empathy' (*Einfühlung*);[604] instead of applying one universal criterion to all past cultures and events (i.e., a timeless Reason), Herder tried to understand each historical culture or epoch on its own terms.[605] His general attitude was one of humility before the diversity of cultures: he was fascinated by the language, poetry, folklore, religion, and myths of earlier cultures, and he studied them in order to understand their unique world-views. As Hayden White says:

> Herder did not presume to place himself above anything he encountered in the historical record. Even the slovenly natives of the far-off land of California, reports of whom he had from a missionary, excited in him more wonder than the disgust they would have inspired in Voltaire.[606]

For Herder, history was not a linear progression, but it consisted of a succession of distinct and heterogeneous civilizations, of individual cultures and epochs, each with their own language, value, and inner unity – not as steps toward some other, more perfect, life.[607]

However, although Herder's conception of history stressed the importance of individuality and particularity, it was at the same time informed by a religious idea of Providence. He was convinced that the diversity of cultures was somehow part of God's plan and that there was a unity

[603] Ernst Cassirer stresses that this break between Herder and the Enlightenment should not be exaggerated, since many of Herder's ideas were already present, at least implicitly, in the work of Enlightenment thinkers. For example, the principle of individuality was already present in Leibniz's monad-theory, and Montesquieu and Hume already pointed to historical changes in human nature. Cassirer therefore concludes that: "Die Überwindung der Aufklärung durch Herder ist daher eine echte Selbstüberwindung; sie ist eine jener Niederlagen, in der sich ihr Sieg vielleicht am klarsten ausspricht, und in dem sie einen ihrer höchsten geistigen Triumphe erreicht." 1932: 312. Cf. Meinecke 1936: 361, 379-380.

[604] Meinecke 1936: 357. As Artur O. Lovejoy describes Herder's attitude of 'empathy': "Towards all the elements of all cultures other than one's own – whether of some earlier period in history or of another race or region – one should cultivate a catholicity of appreciation and understanding." 1948: 172.

[605] "Erstes Bestreben des Geschichtsschreibers muß es daher sein [according to Herder], seine Maße dem Gegenstand anzupassen; nicht dagegen diesen Gegenstand einem einförmigen und ein für allemal fertigen Maß zu unterwerfen." Cassirer 1932: 309.

[606] White 1973: 76.

[607] Cf. Gadamer: "Historisch denken heißt jetzt, jeder Epoche ein eigenes Daseinsrecht, ja eine eigene Vollkommenheit zugestehen. Diesen schritt hat Herder grundsätzlich getan." 1960: 188. Cf. Berlin 1976: xxv-xxvi; Cassirer 1932: 309.

in diversity, even though humans could not grasp this larger meaning.[608] As Hayden White puts it: "Herder affirmed the redemptive nature of the historical process itself; history as *apparent* chaos which is presumed to be working *ultimately* toward a total integration of its infinitely numerous components. He saw history as a Comedy."[609] Because Herder did not work this out in a clear systematic way, later generations would often be selectively inspired either by Herder's stress on individuality (Romantics) or his stress on a universal force that is at work in history (Idealists).

Interestingly, one can find this different reception of Herder also in the work of Taylor and Berlin. Berlin argues that Herder's main intellectual contribution has been to show "the incompatibility of ultimate human values."[610] Herder's stress on the individuality and authenticity of nations and cultures is interpreted by Berlin as one of the first formulations of ethical pluralism and of the incommensurability of values. However, Berlin neglects Herder's belief that this ethical plurality is moving toward an ultimate reconciliation, which is the aspect that Taylor emphasizes.[611] In other words, we see here a struggle between a political-historical and a social-ethical thinker, with each trying to lure Herder in their respective camp: Berlin emphasizes the *incommensurability* in Herder's philosophy, and Taylor stresses Herder's belief in an ultimate reconciliation.

In terms of the opposition between tragic and comic conceptions of history, one could say that both Herder and Taylor have a *Comic* conception of history: there is a hope, or belief, that by fully articulating our ideals of the good, and by making the effort of empathy toward the articulations of others – thereby humbly recognizing that each of us can only disclose a particular perspective on our human moral predicament and that we can only realize ourselves collectively, through complementarity – a Comic reconciliation of values is perhaps possible.

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[608] "Welt und Natur als einen lebendigen Kosmos gottentsprungener Kräfte anzuschauen und zu empfinden, ihre Einheit in Gott und ihre Mannigfaltigkeit in der Erfahrung zugleich als notwendig zu begreifen, war [Herder's] Grundgedanke." Meinecke 1936: 380.

[609] White 1973: 73.

[610] Berlin 1997: 417.

[611] See for example the end of his 'Politics of recognition'-essay where Taylor says: "Herder […] had a view of divine providence, according to which all this variety of culture was not a mere accident but was meant to bring about a greater harmony. I can't rule out such a view." 1992: 72. The ideal here is that of *complementarity*, the belief that different cultures with different world-disclosures all partake in a shared transcendent reality that is God. In the final pages of *A Secular Age* Taylor fully endorses this view, see 2007: 768-769.

In this way, although the 'recognition theories' of both Honneth and Taylor are usually linked to the work of Hegel, I think one should distinguish Honneth's Hegelian theory from Taylor's Herderian theory – a distinction that was already hinted at by Isaiah Berlin: "Hegel's famous definition of freedom as *Bei-sich-selbst-Sein*, as well as his doctrine of *Anerkennung* – reciprocal recognition among men – seem to me to owe much to Herder's teaching." 1997: 417. What distinguishes the theory of recognition of Herder/Taylor is that the main issue is *cultural* recognition whose realization is dependent on *empathy (Einfühlung)*, which Taylor reformulates in terms of Gadamer's notion of a "fusion of horizons". Taylor 1994: 67.

At first sight, one would expect Berlin then to have a tragic conception of history, but this is not accurate. Berlin clearly considers human life as 'tragic'. He writes for example:

> If, as I believe, the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict – of tragedy – can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social. The necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition.[612]

However, Berlin uses the notion of 'tragedy' here different than Hayden White; not as applying to a conception of history but as a 'timeless' aspect of the human predicament. Indeed, Berlin explicitly rejects the understanding of history as a drama, whether as tragedy or comedy, because this implies that individuals are not responsible for their actions and choices but are merely acting out their part in a pre-written 'script'.[613] Given Berlin's concern for not forcing history into a dramatic mold, it is not surprising that he plays out the 'teleology-card' against Taylor. As Berlin writes:

> The chief difference between my outlook and that of Charles Taylor is that he is basically a teleologist – both as a Christian and as a Hegelian. He truly believes, as so many in the history of thought have done and still do, that human beings, and perhaps the entire universe, have a basic purpose. […] I do not believe in teleology. I do not deny that society and cultures develop in a certain fashion – nobody can understand either human beings or history who does not grasp that. But like Spinoza, Hume and other thinkers less sympathetic to Taylor than they are to me, I believe that purposes are imposed by human beings upon nature and the world, rather than pursued by them as part of their own central natures or essences.[614]

[612] Berlin 1969: 169.
[613] Berlin: "To those who use this figure [of life as a dramatic play], history is a piece – or succession of pieces – comical or tragical, a libretto whose heroes and villains, winners and losers, speak their lines and suffer their fate in accordance with the text conceived in terms of them but not by them; for otherwise nothing could be rightly conceived as tragical or comical […]. Yet to take such metaphors and turns of phrase literally; to believe that such patterns are not invented but intuitively discovered […]; to think that there exists *the* pattern, *the* basic rythm of history […] that is to take the game too seriously, to see it as the key to reality. Certainly it is to commit oneself to the view that the notion of individual responsibility is, 'in the end', an illusion." 1969: 54.
[614] In: Tully 1994: 1-2.

For Berlin, the problem is that all forms of teleology go hand in hand with *determinism*, whereby large impersonal forces are made responsible for the course of history, thereby denying individual responsibility and freedom of choice.[615] Berlin thus repeats the argument that is common among twentieth century liberals (e.g., Weber, Popper, Mandelbaum, or Hayek), namely that teleological conceptions of history are one of the main threats to freedom.

Although it is hard to deny that Taylor's philosophy is informed by the idea that humans have a basic purpose and – especially in his religious passages – by a certain teleology, at the same time Taylor's account does not seem deterministic or deny individual responsibility. For Taylor, human history contains certain revolutionary moments when a new world-disclosure (or new constitutive good) emerges that opens up new human potentialities and goods: the two main revolutions for Taylor are the Axial Revolution in the first millennium B.C. – when simultaneously there emerged 'higher' forms of religion in different civilizations, which were founded by famous figures such as Confucius, Gautama, Socrates, and the Hebrew prophets[616] – and the modern revolution, which led first to the 'disengaged' world-disclosure of the Enlightenment and then to the 'resonant' world-disclosure of Romanticism.

Taylor does not explain these developments deterministically: as he tries to show in his large reconstructions, these revolutions are the result of a very complex interplay of cultural, social, political, and other innovations. At the same time, however, Taylor argues that although the *emergence* of these new world-disclosures may be largely contingent, once these potentialities are there, they are irreversible. Taylor calls this the "ratchet effect": "History seems to exhibit some irreversible developments. […] I'm talking about changes that seem irreversible because those who go through them can't envisage reversing them, because they become standards for those who come after them."[617] This means that the preconditions for human self-realization are dependent on our situatedness in a large historical process and on the potentialities that have been opened up in this process. Furthermore, Taylor argues that the potentialities (or constitutive goods) that have been central in modernity (God, disengaged reason, and inner nature) conflict with each other and

[615] E.g. Berlin 1969: 140.
[616] See Taylor's essay 'What was the Axial Revolution?' in Taylor 2011. See also Robert Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution*, which gives an extensive account of the Axial Revolutions in Greece, Israel, China, and India.
[617] Taylor 1995: 161. Some other examples of potentiality that Taylor gives are: the potentiality of *rationality* as developed by the Greeks; the *universalism* of modern culture, that is, the premise that all human beings count and have rights; and modernity's *lower tolerance of avoidable suffering or death*. 1995: 161.

constitute conflicting life goods; he thus acknowledges, like Berlin, the problem of ethical pluralism. In dealing with this situation of pluralism, Taylor does not deny individual responsibility: he challenges us to articulate and confront our 'best accounts' and not flea into false security by naturalizing or absolutizing one's own position and by projecting all evil outwards.

So although Berlin is right that Taylor's work contains a form of teleology and the idea that humans have a basic purpose, perhaps one should correct Berlin by saying that Taylor's ideas on history are not inspired by Hegel (as Berlin says in the quote above) – who envisioned a *single* potentiality that unfolds in fixed stages in history[618] – but by Herder's belief that there is a *plurality* of human potentialities and world-disclosures that, although they may appear at first to be conflicting, can perhaps complement each other with the help of articulation and empathic confrontation. This correction does not undo the fundamental differences between Berlin and Taylor, but it illustrates once again how Taylor – despite his Comic conception of history, which is common in the social-ethical camp – shares many intuitions with those in the political-historical camp, which can be partly explained by having Berlin as a friend and teacher.

5.4 Hegel on modernity as being beyond tragedy

When we now turn to the work of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) we can find a different conception of history that is not comic but *tragi-comic* and which is not based on religious belief but on *reason*.[619] In order to understand the role of tragedy and comedy in Hegel's philosophy of history, a brief look at Friedrich Meinecke's discussion of Hegel in his book *Die Idee der Staatsräson*[620] can be illuminating. Meinecke presents Hegel as someone who tried to synthesize the approaches to politics of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Meinecke argues that since the Renaissance there has been a growing conflict between the tradition of 'Staatsräson' and modern natural law. Whereas the former empirically studies historical and political facts concerning the *real* state, the latter rationally deduces the *ideal* state from certain premises about the nature of the individual.

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[618] Cf. Taylor 1995: 160.

[619] Cf. White: "Hegel recognized that Herder and others like him had correctly perceived that *change* was a fundamental category of historical analysis, but he also perceived that neither Herder, nor the Absolute Idealists (Fichte and Schelling), nor the Positivists had provided a *rational* theory adequate to the determination of what this change imported for human life in general, what the meaning of this change, its direction and ultimate purpose, might be." 1973: 73.

[620] Meinecke 1924: 403ff.

In Hegel's philosophy, Meinecke says that the 'real and the ideal' and 'empiricism and rationalism' are not opposed anymore because Hegel famously said: "Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig."[621] To be able to say this, Meinecke continues, Hegel had to *historicize* reason: reason is no longer understood to be timeless but as realizing itself *in history*. And the final embodiment of this historicized reason, according to Hegel, is the *state*. Thus, whereas Machiavelli's 'Staatsräson' had operated separate from (Christian) morality, and the morality of the Enlightenment was alienated from the actual state, Hegel's philosophy attempts a synthesis: state and morality become one.

What interests me here is Meinecke's depiction of Hegel's work as an attempt to find a synthesis between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which provides us with a perspective from which we can understand the idea that Hegel's philosophy is informed by a conception of history that is *both tragic and comic*. As I have argued above, one can describe the Renaissance understanding of history as 'tragic', in which republics go through a cyclical pattern of rise and fall and are characterized by incommensurable forces that cannot be reconciled. In contrast, the Enlightenment's conception can be characterized as 'comic', in which the realization of a harmonious social order is projected into the future, as the endpoint of a utopian philosophy of history. In Hegel, as Meinecke pointed out, we find a synthesis of these two traditions: on one level, Hegel's account of world history consists of the rise and fall of civilizations, whereby each civilization perishes as the result of internal, 'tragic' conflicts; but on another level, Hegel understands this process as a 'comic', reconciliatory development toward the self-realization of Spirit.[622] Let us look a bit closer at what this could mean.

Hegel's philosophy of history is guided by the idea that Spirit – whose substance is freedom – tries to come to consciousness of itself, and in order to do this it must bring into existence a reality, namely a community, that fully expresses and embodies reason and freedom.[623] This happens through a succession of communities, the earlier ones being very imperfect expressions of reason and freedom and the later ones being more adequate expressions. The motor of this historical movement is *inner contradiction* that causes the dissolution of each community but also brings

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[621] In the *Vorrede* of the *Philosophy of Right*.

[622] White: "Hegel's purpose is to justify the transition from *the comprehension of the Tragic nature of every specific civilization* to *the Comic apprehension of the unfolding drama of the whole of history*." 1973: 117.

[623] Hegel expressed this famously by saying that, "Die Weltgeschichte ist der Fortschritt im Bewußtsein der Freiheit" Hegel 1986: 32.

forth a new principle around which a new community will develop.[624] Another important factor in this process are the *'world-historical' individuals*:[625] when a certain stage in the historical process has played out, and Spirit has deserted that specific form of life, they are the first to instinctively sense the next stage of the historical process and inspire others to follow.

Nevertheless, central in Hegel's account is the idea that men do not fully grasp what they are doing in history, which is captured in his notion of the *cunning of reason*,[626] meaning that Reason is 'using' the passions of men to fulfill her own purposes.[627] Hegel thus emphasizes the unintended consequences of human action, but not in the political realist way of Guicciardini and more like the Scottish Enlightenment, such as Mandeville's 'private vices, public benefits', and Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'. In Hegel's philosophy of history, we are caught up as agents in a drama that we do not fully understand. Only when we have played it out do we understand what has been going on: in Hegel's metaphor, the owl of Minerva only flies at the coming of dusk.[628]

Christoph Menke has argued that in Hegel's philosophy of history, the understanding of tragedy is different from the modern tradition of tragedy-thinkers, such as Max Weber, Isaiah Berlin, Bernard Williams, or Martha Nussbaum.[629] This modern tradition starts from the fact of value pluralism and then concludes that tragic conflicts necessarily will arise because of the limits to human action and possibilities. Hegel's conception of tragedy, on the other hand, is informed by the idea, not that conflicts *as such* will necessarily arise, but that *certain* conflicts will necessarily arise depending on the specific historical state of the world. Depending on the specific stage of a

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[624] As Hegel states: "The life of a people ripens to a certain fruit; its activity aims at the complete manifestation of the principle which it embodies. But this fruit does not fall back into the bosom of the people that produced and matured it; on the contrary, it becomes a poison-draught to it. That poison-draught it cannot let alone, for it has an insatiable thirst for it: the taste of the draught is its annihilation, though at the same time the rise of a new principle." Quoted in White 1973: 119-120.
[625] Hegel 1986: 45.
[626] Hegel 1986: 49.
[627] In this way, as Hayden White explains "[In Hegel] the dualism of reason and passion which the Enlighteners had failed to overcome is transcended along with the (Romantics') false monism of passion's hegemony over reason and the (Subjective Idealists') false monism of reason's absolute hegemony over passion." 1973: 108.
[628] As Hegel famously wrote in the *Vorrede* of the *Philosophy of Right*: "die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug." As Hayden White comments: "Hegel asked us to regard ourselves as actors in a drama, which, although its actual end is unknowable, displays the order and continuity of a well-wrought play or a dialectical argument, and which therefore gives us good reasons for believing the resolution of this drama not only will not be meaningless but will not even be Tragic. The Tragic vision is given its due as a means of illuminating a certain aspect of our existence and a certain phase of both the evolution of a specific culture and the evolution of civilization in general. But it is enclosed within the higher perspective of the Comic nature of the whole." 1973: 130.
[629] Menke 1996: 35-38.

community or civilization in the historical process of Spirit's self-development, certain tragic conflicts will necessarily emerge.

For Hegel, tragedy is thus not an essential part of Being or human nature, but he *historicizes* it.[630] The consequence is that he can present tragedy as having played an important part in the *coming into being* of modernity but that modernity itself is *beyond* tragedy; the tragic conflicts of earlier stages can be overcome in a 'comic' reconciliation. Menke therefore speaks of Hegel's philosophy as an "anti-tragic metaphysics of reconciliation."[631]

Before turning to the question of how Hegel's tragi-comic philosophy of history informs Honneth's reflections on freedom, we can look at how the left-Hegelian tradition of Marx and Critical Theory has appropriated and transformed Hegel's perspective.

Like Hegel, Marx looked at history as a dramatic play. This is so even though he gave a materialistic-sociological twist to Hegel's story, whereby 'tragic' contradictions in the material reproduction of earlier societies will eventually lead to a 'comic' reconciliation in the communist society.[632] In Marx's story, there is no Hegelian Spirit anymore: the freedom at the end of history is for Marx a *purely human freedom*, not the fulfillment of *Geist*. Marx makes *man* the subject of history and rejects a cosmic subject of history. Nevertheless, the idea of the 'cunning of reason' is still present in Marx's narrative, but because of his 'anthropologizing' of Hegel, this is now based on the notion of a 'species being of man' (*Gattungswesen*). For Marx, the bourgeois and earlier political actors could not understand the significance of their actions in history resulting from the as yet unknown nature of man. But after the resolution of earlier contradictions, this nature will eventually become known to the proletariat, and *its* actions in history will therefore be for the first time self-conscious; the proletariat will understand the significance of the innovative transformations it brings about. The realization of a free society thus becomes a conscious act.[633]

However, after the failed revolution of 1848 – which should have been the 'comic' revolution of the proletariat – Marx revised the dramatic narrative of his philosophy of history by

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[630] Menke 1996: 41.
[631] Menke 1996: 23.
[632] Brunkhorst 2007: 194. Cf. White: "[Marx's] historical vision, like that of Hegel, oscillated between apprehensions of the Tragic outcome of every act of the historical drama and comprehensions of the Comic outcome of the process as a whole. For Marx, as for Hegel, humanity achieves the condition of a Comic reconciliation, with itself and with nature, *by means* of Tragic conflicts." 1973: 328.
[633] Taylor 1975: 419, 425. One can complicate the story by pointing to the different understanding of tragedy in Hegel and Marx: for Hegel tragedy is about the problem of *action* in the face of two equally legitimate but incommensurable principles; for Marx tragedy is about *not knowing* what you are doing. Or, in other words, Hegel's paradigmatic tragic figure is Antigone, for Marx it is Oedipus.

differentiating between *comedy* and *farce*.[634] As Marx famously opened the *Achtzehnte Brumaire*, published in 1852: "Hegel bemerkt irgendwo, daß alle großen weltgeschichtlichen Thatsachen und Personen sich so zu sagen zweimal ereignen. Er hat vergessen hinzufügen: das eine Mal als große Tragödie, das andre Mal als lumpige Farce."[635] Marx points here to the fact that the 'tragic', bourgeois Revolution of 1789 had been followed up by the 'farcical' social Revolution of 1848.

Marx's introduction of 'farce' within the dramatic vocabulary of history marked an important break with Hegel[636] and with the metaphysical optimism of speculative philosophies of history in general, both idealistic and materialistic.[637] After 1848, a 'comic' reconciliation, brought about by the proletariat, could not be simply presupposed anymore as the necessary outcome of history.

This prefigured the problem with which Critical Theory in the twentieth century would concern itself, namely the rethinking of the relation between *theory* and *practice*. This was based on the insight that, as Honneth puts it, "the working class does not automatically develop a revolutionary readiness to convert the critical content of theory into society-changing practices."[638] But although Critical Theorists would develop more complex accounts of the conditions for social emancipation, they still hold on to the idea of the possibility of a comic reconciliation.

One could argue that this is the central influence that moves down from Hegel, Marx, and Critical Theory to Honneth, namely the idea that modern society is *beyond* tragedy,[639] which has as its flipside the idea that a harmonious reconciliation between its different ideals and components is possible. Although 'conflict' and 'struggle' are central concepts in Honneth's work, just as they are in Hegel and Marx, these conflicts are never *tragic* conflicts between equally justified values.[640]

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634 Brunkhorst 2007: 208.

635 Marx 2007: 9.

636 Brunkhorst: "Mit der *Tragödie* und ihre *komödiantischen* Aufhebung schließt Marx an Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie an, aber die Erfahrung der *Farce* nötigt ihn, zu Hegel auf Distanz zu gehen." 2007: 191.

637 Brunkhorst: "Der *Achtzehnte Brumaire* ist das stillschweigende Eingeständnis, daß die Theorie der modernen Gesellschaft bei ihrem Versuch, die idealistische Geschichtsphilosophie materialistisch zu überbieten, gescheitert ist." 2007: 225.

638 Honneth 2009: 37.

639 As Taylor argues: "The claim to have grasped the rationality in history and politics thus carries with it the presumption that the major transformations are behind us. For if the owl of Minerva only flies at the coming of the dusk, then history can only be understood when its major transformations have been realized."1975: 426.

640 For a similar criticism, see Van den Brink: "Theorists who take […] the route that follows an allegedly objective intentional path through history, tend to judge the character of normative conflicts that occur along this historic path solely from the perspective of the ideal end states they anticipate. What is alarming about this strategy is that it puts a lid on the presumption of equal value, that is, it is not sufficiently open to the ideal end states that inspire the actions and beliefs of those who question the liberal route." 2000: 160.

As we have seen, Honneth focuses on conflicts concerning the legitimate application of specific recognition principles, which he thinks can be rationally evaluated and resolved with the help of the principles of *individualization* and *social inclusion*. Just as for the Enlightenment thinkers, for Honneth the central struggles in modern society are between reason (the progressive learning process toward the idea that individual freedom can only be realized through social cooperation) and unreason (social pathologies and misdevelopments that obstruct this learning process, which leads to atomistic conceptions of freedom), whereby tragic conflicts seem to play no role.

Indeed, if one looks at Honneth's work from the perspective of tragedy, it is remarkable how much effort he puts into purging his critical theory from any tragic conflict. As we have seen, his starting point is that the supreme value in modern societies is individual freedom,[641] and that its realization requires relations of recognition (or 'social freedom' or 'social cooperation'). It is within this 'monist' framework that Honneth builds up his critical theory, and he does not seem to allow any other value or principle to conflict with it. For example, he explains away the possible conflict between freedom and equality in a footnote,[642] and Nancy Fraser's dualistic notion of justice, consisting of recognition and redistribution, is dismissed.

More problematic is that Honneth also does not perceive any tragic conflicts *internally* to the ideal of freedom. In *Freedom's Right*, he follows the Hegelian framework where the different understandings of freedom – negative, reflexive, and social freedom – can form a harmonious whole, when given their proper place, but he does not discuss the possible tensions that may arise. For example, when he discusses 'reflexive freedom', Honneth mentions that it consists of the opposite ideals of autonomy and authenticity, but he does not pursue the possible tragic conflicts between them; authenticity does not have a systematic place in the rest of the book.[643] Elsewhere, Honneth says that struggles for cultural recognition can be reduced, when properly understood, to struggles for legal equality,[644] which conveniently blends out an entire field of possible tragic conflicts[645] such as the tension between individual and group emancipation.

Similarly, when discussing 'negative freedom', Honneth makes no mention of the republican ideal of freedom,[646] which consists of a negative ideal of freedom (freedom as non-

[641] Honneth 2011: 35.
[642] Honneth 2011: 35n1.
[643] For the tragic conflicts between autonomy and authenticity, see for example Menke 1996 and Van den Brink 2000.
[644] Fraser/Honneth 2003: 200-201.
[645] For these conflicts, see, e.g., Koselleck 2010: 192-198.
[646] E.g. Skinner 2002: Chapters 6 and 7.

domination) that is neither atomistic nor legalistic. Instead it is *social*, but not in Honneth's sense of a harmonization of interests, but in the sense that the law coerces individuals to serve the public interest and uphold the institutions of a free society, while at the same time leaving space for everybody to pursue their own interests. This results in a different picture of a free society that does not require a harmonization of interests and seems much more compatible with modern ethical pluralism, but Honneth does not discuss it.

Furthermore, the tragic conflicts between the different requirements of generality and identity or liberalism and democracy, which has haunted Western democracies from the beginning – as it has been historically reconstructed by Lefort, Rosanvallon, and the other thinkers in the political-historical camp – is absent in Honneth's work. This is perhaps the most problematic point because if one follows the perspective of Lefort and Rosanvallon, then the comical-historical promise of a harmonious, cooperative society appears no longer as a solution to the problem of freedom. Instead it appears as a pathological desire for a society-as-One that results from the frustrations and disillusions that accompany any attempt to institute a liberal-democratic society. In their view, as we have seen, the main precondition of freedom is the acknowledgement – based on the insights of the history of democratic politics – that the institution of a liberal-democratic society will lead necessarily to tragic conflicts, which should be dealt with *politically* and not be explained away by a situated ethics.

Whereas Taylor balances his critique of atomism with a critique of homogeneous unity, Honneth's critique of one-sided understandings of freedom moves him more and more into the trap of homogeneous unity, and one of the reasons for this, as I have tried to show here, is the influence of the tragi-comic conception of history on Honneth's work, a conception that sees tragic, incommensurable conflicts as being behind us, and that, in the end, reduces politics to a situated ethics.

5.5 Guizot on liberalism and democracy

If we now finally turn to the work of François Guizot (1787-1874) – a historian and statesman who had an important role during the Restauration (1814-1830) and the July-Monarchy (1830-1848)[647]

[647] As Rosanvallon complains in *Le moment Guizot*, the period between 1814 and 1848 is often treated in French political history as being merely a transition period between the fall of Napoleon and the emergence of universal suffrage, whereas in fact it is an extremely fruitful period to study when trying to understand modern democratic politics.

– we find yet another relation between a conception of history and a reflection on the preconditions of freedom. In Guizot's work we can find a combination of a *comparative* historical approach, which was typical in the work of nineteenth century liberals, and a Hegelian-like identification of a certain *principle* at work in history.[648] As we will see, however, the end-result is – unlike with Hegel – an affirmation of the primacy of politics over ethics.

In order to understand Guizot's *comparative* historical approach, we have to look at the general obsession of the French liberals at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the French Revolution. This obsession was caused by the fact that the Revolution had first been liberal and then turned illiberal. For the reactionaries and the neo-Jacobins this paradox was not interesting, since they completely rejected or completely endorsed the Revolution. The liberals, however, were concerned with this paradox since they endorsed the ideals and principles of 1789, but they rejected 1793; they wanted to 'end the Revolution' and translate the principles of 1789 into free institutions and a stable political order.[649]

In trying to figure out how to do this, many liberals compared the history of France to those of other countries.[650] They were especially interested in England and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which had seen the establishment of a durable parliamentary regime. By comparing the English and French Revolution they hoped to find answers to the question about how to create institutions in France that could guarantee individual freedom.[651] Like other liberals, Guizot also wrote histories of England and France – which brought him recognition as one of the leading historians of his time – in which he argued that both countries showed a peculiar mix of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.[652] However, England had managed, unlike France, to mix these elements after the Glorious Revolution in such a way that the result had been individual liberty and durable representative institutions. Guizot therefore argued that this was also the path for France to take, and he thought that this required especially a rethinking of the role of the *aristocracy* in post-Revolutionary France.[653] More specifically, Guizot considered the major task to be the

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[648] Pierre Manent highlights that many liberals described these principlies at work in history in *religious* terms; for example Tocqueville's depiction of the movement towards the 'equality of conditions' as the unstoppable force of Providence. This return to a religious vocabulary marks yet another change with Enlightenment liberalism. 1987: 178.
[649] Furet 1985: 125.
[650] Furet 1985: 125.
[651] The first major study that compared France and England in this way was Madame de Stäel's *Considerations sur la Révolution française*. Furet 1985: 125-126.
[652] E.g. Guizot 1838: 370-376.
[653] Furet 1985: 127, 129-130.

“rebuilding [of] a political aristocracy from the debris of the aristocracy of blood and on the basis of democracy.”[654]

We have to remember here that the ideal of the sovereignty of the people was uniformly rejected by everyone in the first decades of the nineteenth century, since it was made responsible for the Terror and the despotism of Napoleon. For many liberals, the sovereignty of the people was rejected for the same reason as the absolute sovereign was rejected, namely because there were no limits to its power.[655] Instead, they argued that the solution had to be found in *representative* government, which required the rethinking of the relation between liberalism and democracy.

Guizot’s suggestion was that the bourgeoisie, who had been an unpolitical class until then – as we have seen above in Koselleck’s analysis of the Enlightenment – should be politicized and turned into a new political elite that was no longer based on blood but on ‘capacity’. Guizot was thus not nostalgic for the old aristocracy; instead he looked toward a new, *meritocratic* and *mobile* aristocracy that would be accepted and recognized by all and which could form the basis of a new representative government that combined liberalism and democracy in a new, stable way.[656]

Guizot thus analyzed the situation of French politics differently than Tocqueville, whose innovative move within the comparative historical framework of nineteenth century liberals was to compare France not only to England but also to America.[657] This shift of perspective was informed by Tocqueville’s different evaluation of aristocracy and democracy, arguing that democracy can be the only principle of modern societies, including France, and that – since America was a relatively ‘pure’ democracy without aristocratic elements – this was the perfect test-case to find out if freedom is at all possible in modern democratic societies.[658]

Despite these different interpretations, Guizot and Tocqueville – like many nineteenth century liberals – thus shared a comparative historical approach to reflect on the preconditions of

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[654] Furet 1985: 130.
[655] Cf. Guizot 1838: 396-398. Rosanvallon 2000: 106.
[656] The fact that Guizot wanted to help the bourgeoisie into the seat of power explains why he often pops up negatively in the work of Marx; for example in the second sentence of the *Communist Manifesto*: “Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa – das Gespenst des Kommunismus. Alle Mächte des alten Europa haben sich zu einer heiligen Hetzjagd gegen dies Gespenst verbündet, der Papst und der Zar, Metternich und Guizot, französische Radikale und deutsche Polizisten.”
[657] For the influence of Guizot on Tocqueville, see, e.g., Furet 1985; 1978: 214-220. Tocqueville attended Guizot’s lectures at the Collège de France in 1829 and 1830. Cf. Craiutu 1999: 460.
[658] As Tocqueville said: “I am persuaded that all who attempt, in the ages upon which we are entering, to base freedom upon aristocratic privilege will fail; [the question was] not how to reconstruct aristocratic society, but how to make liberty proceed out of that democratic state of society in which God has placed us.” Quoted in White 1973: 207.

freedom and thereby avoided abstract speculation.[659] At the same time, however, they were concerned with the identification of long-term patterns in history, which was very similar to the Hegelian concern with identifying a certain *principle* at work in history.[660] Guizot called the principle that he saw at work in history '*civilization*', which consisted of two developments: the centralization of power, and liberty (in the sense of 'free inquiry' (*libre examen*).[661] On the one hand, there was the process of the formation of nation-states leading to centralization and unity; on the other hand, there was the process of the liberation of the human spirit – whereby Guizot emphasized the importance of the Reformation – leading to freedom and equality. These two movements were in some ways contradictory, as Guizot realized: "[T]he one [liberty as free inquiry] being the defeat of absolute power in the spiritual order, the other [centralization of power] its victory in the temporal order."[662] The resolution of this contradiction, Guizot argued, lay in *representative government*, which could realize a synthesis of centralization and liberty.[663]

Within this historical process of 'civilization', Guizot presented the *bourgeoisie* (or 'middle classes') to be the central social agent because its interests and needs were identical with 'civilization'.[664] And indeed, this was Guizot's aim all along: in order to contribute to the politicization of the bourgeoisie, Guizot tried to provide them with a history in order to make them self-conscious as a class, to give them confidence in the future, and to make it possible for them to recognize themselves without shame or fear in the events of 1789.[665]

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[659] Cf. Lamberti: "[I]l n'y a aucun gout, chez [Tocqueville], pour la spéculation pure; devant une question, quelle qu'elle soit, il commence par procéder à une enquete selon la méthode comparative. Plutot que méditer sur l'essence de la liberté, il compare inlassablement la liberté américaine et la liberté française" 1986: 150.

[660] As Rosanvallon writes, Guizot has "une vision de l'histoire qui n'est plus celle de Condorcet mais plutot celle de Hegel. Il saisit l'histoire sur un mode objectif et conceptuel: elle réalise des idées et des principes." 1985a: 192. Concerning the relation between Guizot and Hegel, Rosanvallon argues that Guizot was influenced by Hegel's ideas even though his knowledge of Hegel was second-hand, i.e., mediated through the interpretation of Victor Cousin, who introduced Hegel's philosophy in France in the 1820s (1985a: 50, 192, 280). Cousin gave a vulgar interpretation of Hegel that was aimed at defending the constitutional monarchy against the autocratic ambitions of Charles X. Hegel was thus initially used in France by the opposition, but with the regime-change in 1830 Cousin became the official philosopher of the July Monarchy. Cf. Espanger/Werner 1987.

[661] Rosanvallon 1985a: 195.

[662] Guizot 1985: 270.

[663] Guizot's idea that centralization and freedom can go together is unusual in the liberal tradition where – starting with Montesquieu – the centralization of power is often identified with despotism and *de-centralization* as a condition of liberty.

[664] Rosanvallon 1985a: 192-193.

[665] Rosanvallon 1985a: 185, 195. Guizot was thus a pioneer in thinking of society in terms of 'classes'. As Friedrich Engels would later admit, bourgeois historians like Guizot, Mignet, and Thierry invented the concept of class conflict. Marx, who had read Guizot, took the idea of class conflict from him but added the idea of the *end* of class conflict, which cannot be found in Guizot. Cf. Rosanvallon 1985b: 35.

Guizot was thus much more positive about the possibilities of freedom than Tocqueville, who identified similar 'principles' to be at work in history, namely *centralization*[666] (in the political realm) and the *equality of conditions* (in the social realm), but who was much more pessimistic about the possibilities for the realization of freedom as he feared a 'tutelary state' and 'soft despotism'. However, just as we saw above with Marx, the revolution of 1848 presented a crucial turning point that crushed Guizot's optimism and was an event that ended his political career and forced him to flee to England. There he wrote his *Democracy in France* (1849), which was characterized by a bitter conservatism, blaming democracy for everything that was wrong with France.[667] As Claude Lefort comments, whereas Guizot had at first been positive about the reconciliation of centralized power and freedom, "after 1849 the antagonism [between power and freedom] revealed the tragic essence of history."[668] The representative democracy that Guizot had envisioned as the embodiment of 'civilization' in the end did not succeed in solving the tensions between liberalism and democracy.

Nevertheless, although we can find some Hegelian elements in Guizot's thinking about history, in the end his approach (and also the one by Tocqueville) is different in the sense that it does not subsume history and politics to ethics and morality. This can be illustrated first of all by looking at the nature of Guizot's liberalism. Guizot was part of the so-called 'doctrinary liberals',[669] who defended a liberalism that was different from the Enlightenment liberalism of the eighteenth century. As Rosanvallon reminds us, the French tradition of liberalism differs in this respect from the one in England. Whereas the English tradition was relatively homogeneous and coherent – which can be explained by the fact that the thinking of Locke, Hume, Smith, Mill, etc., had its common soil in the institutional context after 1688 – the French tradition is characterized by a radical rupture caused by the French Revolution.[670] French liberals in the nineteenth century, such

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[666] Tocqueville's famous thesis of the continuity between the Old Regime and the French Revolution – namely the continuity of centralization – was already formulated by Guizot, although Tocqueville deplored this development whereas Guizot characterized it as the process of 'civilization'. Rosanvallon 1985b: 34.
[667] As Guizot writes: "Plus j'y pense, plus je demeure convaincu que son [i.e. France's] grand mal, le mal qui est au fond de tous ses maux, qui mine et détruit ses gouvernments et ses libertés, sa dignité et son bonheur, c'est le mal que j'attaque, l'idolâtrie démocratique." 1849: 2.
[668] Lefort 1992: 119.
[669] As Frank Ankersmit explains, the name 'doctrinary liberals' is misleading: "Unlike what their name suggests, the doctrinary liberals were anything but doctrinarians. They owed this misleading label, in all likelihood, to the school of the Père de la Doctrine de l'Oratoire, where the unofficial leader of the group, Pierre Paul Royer-Collard (1763-1845) was educated." 1996: 130.
[670] Rosanvallon 1985a: 14-15.

as Guizot and the doctrinary liberals, rejected the abstract moral systems of the liberal thinkers of the eighteenth century and blamed it for the failings of the French Revolution.[671]

Instead, they tried to close the gap between theory and practice, first of all, by *historicizing* political philosophy.[672] However, as Frank Ankersmit has shown, they did this in a different way than Hegel or Marx. As he says, Hegel and Marx were critical of the Enlightenment and their understanding of a timeless Reason, but in the end they simply *historicized* Enlightenment Reason, whereby History became the source of incontrovertible truths. Ankersmit opposes this to the French situation:

> For the doctrinary liberals, however, history was not a source of incontrovertible truth but rather like Oedipus's Sphinx – we must be able to solve her riddles, but even if we succeed in that supremely difficult task, this merely means that we shall not be devoured by the Sphinx of History. For the Germans knowledge of history was a sufficient condition of political success; for the doctrinary liberals it was merely a necessary condition […].[673]

In the end, Guizot and the doctrinary liberals were thus closer to Machiavelli and Guicciardini in not underestimating the fickle powers of Fortuna.

Secondly, Guizot tried to connect his political thinking to a study of society,[674] just as Tocqueville would later study democracy not as a political regime but as a form of society. Indeed, as Rosanvallon says, the emergence of sociology in the nineteenth century can be understood as

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[671] Guizot makes the distinction between the 'philosophical' spirit of the eighteenth century and the 'political' spirit of the nineteenth century. Cf. Rosanvallon 1985b: 16-17. As Ankersmit says: "The doctrinary liberals shared (...) a profound dislike of the perky moral and political systems that were constructed by the *terribles simplificateurs* of the Enlightenment; (...) they were deeply aware of the complexity of social and political reality, and that this awareness ought to restrain the ambitions of political action." 1996: 130.

[672] Cf. Ankersmit: "The main and lasting contribution of the doctrinaire liberals has been the transformation of the still very abstract and strongly contractualist liberalism of the late eighteenth century to a thoroughly historicized liberalism, reminding the politician of the fact that he should always take into account the historical context within which he has to take his decisions." 2008: 22.

[673] Ankersmit 1996: 133. Ankersmit speaks of the "crucial difference between the Faustian German attitude toward history and the 'existentialist' or Machiavellian one of the doctrinary liberals". (Ibidem).

[674] Rosanvallon 1985a: 18, 96, 255. As Guizot writes: "C'est par l'étude des institutions politiques que la plupart des écrivains, érudits, historiens ou publicistes, ont cherché à connaître l'état de la société, le degré ou le genre de sa civilisation. Il eut été plus sage d'étudier la société elle-même pour connaître et comprendre ses institutions politiques. Avant de devenir cause, les institutions sont effet; la société les produit avant d'en être modifiée." Quoted in: Craiutu 1999: 492.

the result of the disappointments related to the abstract political philosophy of earlier centuries.[675] But again, this concern with 'the social' in Guizot and Tocqueville differed from people like Comte or Marx for whom there was a primacy of the social over the political, whereas Guizot and Tocqueville still affirmed the primacy of politics. For example, Tocqueville's account of modern democratic societies as being characterized by the movement toward an 'equality of conditions' was not accompanied by the deterministic idea that this society would necessarily lead to a specific political regime, but he emphasized that it could either lead to liberty or servitude, depending on human political action.

When comparing Tocqueville and Marx, Raymond Aron therefore concludes that Tocqueville had a conception of history that was *probabilistic*:

> [Tocqueville] does not announce an irresistible movement towards a certain regime, be it positivist (Comte) or socialist (Marx). He does say that certain movements will prolong themselves, and that certain institutions are dead (landed aristocracy) or inevitable (equality of conditions), but there is no adequate way of determining the political regime from the democratic state of society. The political regime may be despotic or liberal; multiple circumstances, traditions, and living men determine which of the two alternatives will carry the day.[676]

In other words: even if one can determine certain long-term processes at work in society, the realization of freedom in the end comes down to politics.[677]

In sum, the nineteenth century saw many attempts to close the gap in Enlightenment political philosophy between theory and practice by *situating* philosophical thinking and connecting it to the insights of history and sociology. However, one can distinguish very generally

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[675] Rosanvallon: "La naissance de la sociologie peut être appréhendée comme une réponse à ce qui est perçu comme la faillite de la philosophie politique classique (du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle)." 1985a: 96.
[676] Aron 1978: 146. Cf.: "[Tocqueville] differed from so-called classic sociologists like Comte and Marx in his rejection of vast syntheses intended to forecast history. He did not believe that past history is governed by inexorable laws or that future events are predetermined. Tocqueville, like Montesquieu, wanted to make history intelligible, but he did not want to do away with it. And in the last analysis, sociologists of the Comtian and Marxian type are always inclined to do away with history; for when we seek to know history in advance, we deprive it of its own dimension, which is action; and, when we say action, we are also saying unpredictability." Aron 1965: 231.
[677] One could also point here to the fact that the central 'teleological principle' that Tocqueville identified, namely the 'equality of conditions', was something he personally experienced as a tragedy, even if he acknowledged that, from the perspective of God, it was perhaps a good thing (Tocqueville 1986: 453). This is very different from Enlightenment philosophers or Hegel and Marx, whose private morality happened to coincide with the endpoint of world history.

between two different ways in which this was done: either in approaches such as those by Guizot and Tocqueville that still affirmed the autonomy of politics – remaining closer to the 'tragic' intuitions of Machiavelli and Guicciardini – or in approaches such as those by Hegel and Marx, which subordinated politics to a historically and sociologically situated ethics and which held on to the 'comic' intuitions of the Enlightenment. In this way, one could argue that the opposition between the political-historical and social-ethical camp in modern philosophy emerged out of these two different attempts to situate political philosophy in the nineteenth century.

Rosanvallon is clearly influenced by the French political-historical tradition, which moved from Guizot and Tocqueville down to Aron and Lefort. Aron has called this the tradition of 'French political sociology', which he defines as "a school of sociologists who are not very dogmatic, who are essentially preoccupied with politics, who do not disregard the social infrastructure but stress the autonomy of the political order, and who are liberals."[678] What Rosanvallon takes from this tradition, and especially from Guizot, is the concern with the rethinking of the relation between liberalism and democracy, not by developing abstract systems, but by connecting political philosophy to history and sociology in a non-dogmatic way, by acknowledging tragic incommensurability and indeterminacy in modern democracies, and by staying close to the complexities of everyday political life.

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[678] Aron 1965: 259.

Chapter 6: Giving form to a democratic society

A returning discussion in critical philosophy in the twentieth century has been about the relation between 'formal' and 'real' freedom. On one side, there were Western Marxists (operating in the social-ethical camp) who lived in capitalistic, democratic societies in which formal freedoms were for the most part guaranteed, but who often belittled the importance of these formal rights and pleaded instead for 'real' freedom in a classless society. On the other side, there were those in the political-historical camp who did not tire to point out that the people who actually lived in societies in which formal rights were abolished in favor of a supposedly 'real' freedom, such as the Soviet-Union, were first and foremost struggling to recover these formal rights.[679]

This tension between formal subjective rights and 'real' freedom also presented itself in a more nuanced way in our discussion of Rosanvallon and Honneth. As we have seen, Honneth's concern with the social preconditions of individual freedom led him to an affirmation of the importance of formal subjective rights in order to secure negative freedom, but he warned that if we absolutize a rights-centered conception of freedom this will lead to atomistic pathologies and that we have to complement it with the realization of forms of reciprocal recognition and social freedom, an ideal that he connects to social organicism. Rosanvallon's concern with the preconditions of 'doing politics' led him to a defense of formal democracy as guaranteeing the indeterminacy of the democratic social order and to a complete rejection of organicism. Instead, he focused on the permanent tension between generality and identity: between realizing a juridical fiction of generality (which is accompanied by a de-substantialization of the social, leading to atomism) and complementing this with a permanent political process of representation-as-figuration, which can provide reference points for real identification. Both Honneth and Rosanvallon thus endorse formal democracy as a precondition of a free society, and both acknowledge the problem of atomism, but they differ on how to overcome it; either through *recognition* (Honneth) or *representation* (Rosanvallon).

In this chapter I want to explore the reasons for this different understanding of how to overcome atomism and give form to a democratic society. I will start by looking closer at the different approach to atomism in the work of Rosanvallon and Honneth, whereby I will analyze

[679] As Aron asks: "Must one say that, by an irony of history, the governed are seeking formal freedoms there where the philosophy of real freedom rules? And that, on the other hand, formal freedoms are being belittled in favor of real freedoms there where the former are guaranteed […]?" 1978: 160-161.

the difference between Rosanvallon's focus on struggles about representation, which basically are struggles about how to give form to a democratic society, and Honneth's focus on struggles for recognition whereby the form of society is already given (§6.1). This difference will then be further explained by looking at the different role that *universal suffrage* plays in the work of Honneth and Rosanvallon, whereby the tension between political equality and organicism will be central (§6.2, §6.3). After that, I will look at their different understanding of pathologies on the one hand, and the relation between representations and social reality on the other hand: whereas in Honneth's story a pathology emerges when there is a gap between representations and social reality, in Rosanvallon's story a pathology emerges when there is *no gap* between representations and social reality (§6.4). This will finally lead me to the question about how modern democracies relate to the different ideals of the Enlightenment and Romanticism (§6.5).

6.1 Two approaches to the problem of atomism

In order to understand the differences between Rosanvallon and Honneth concerning their understanding of the problem of atomism, I want to start by looking at Rosanvallon's understanding of 'the political'. In 2001 Rosanvallon took up a chair for 'modern and contemporary history of the political' at the Collège de France and in his inaugural lecture he described his method as 'a conceptual history of the political.'[680] So what is meant here with 'the political'? The notion of 'the political' as opposed to 'politics' (in German 'das Politische' vs. 'Politik'; in French 'le politique' vs. 'la politique') was introduced by Carl Schmitt and was later used in different ways by Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur, Claude Lefort, and others.[681] Since Rosanvallon's understanding is mainly influenced by Lefort's understanding of the political, I want to focus on that.

As we have seen in chapter 1, Lefort is critical of the way in which the political sciences treat politics as a specific sub-system of society alongside others (economic, juridical, etc.). Although Lefort does not deny that one can indeed distinguish a field of politics from other fields in modern society, he argues that this hides a more fundamental question: how does society become differentiated in the first place? That is, how does a democratic society of individuals acquire its form? As Lefort says, to ask this question means "breaking with the viewpoint of political science, because political science emerges from the suppression of this question" and further that in its

[680] Rosanvallon first presented his method as a "histoire intellectuelle du politique" (1992: 22), then as a "histoire philosophique du politique" (1998: 469; 2000: 36), and finally as a "histoire conceptuelle du politique" (2003).
[681] For an overview of the different usages, see Marchart 2007: Chapter 2.

desire to objectify, political science forgets "that no elements, no elementary structures, no entities (classes or segments of classes), no economic or technical determinations, and no dimensions of social space exists until they have been given form."[682]

This issue of how society as a whole gets instituted and acquires its form is what Lefort refers to when he speaks of 'the political', and he thinks that we can analyze this issue by comparing different *forms of society* through the analysis of the different representations at the *place of power*. As we have seen, Lefort's approach led to the insight that in *premodern* forms of society the place of power was occupied by a king, who was represented as a mediator between the invisible, transcendent source and the visible social order and who derived his legitimacy from his attempt to perpetuate the natural or divine order as wanted by the transcendent source. The social order was determined by a transcendent source that was presented as being inaccessible to humans. In *democratic* forms of society, Lefort says, the place of power became represented as *empty*, thus recognizing its own indeterminacy, and thereby making possible a permanent debate about how to institute and give form to a democratic society. This was different from a *totalitarian* form of society whereby the place of power is represented as once again *embodied*, either by the Party or the Leader, which is accompanied by a representation of society-as-One, a denial of internal social division, and the complete determination of the social order by those in power. So 'the political' – or the way in which a society as a whole is instituted and gets its form – is thus very differently experienced in a premodern, democratic, or totalitarian form of society: either as a permanent political process or as something given; either as indeterminacy or as determinacy.

Rosanvallon takes over Lefort's notion of 'the political' when studying democracy,[683] but he tries to make it more concrete by reconstructing the actual historical struggles (mainly in France) over how to institute and give form to a democratic society from the French Revolution to today. Since these struggles revolve around central concepts such as 'state', 'universal suffrage', 'representation', 'sovereignty', 'citizenship', 'legitimacy', and 'equality', Rosanvallon takes the struggles over these concepts as his guideline, whereby he weaves together a *history of ideas* (i.e., the struggles over the meaning of these concepts) with a *social history* (i.e., the different attempts to institutionalize and give form to these concepts in social reality).[684] Taken together, these

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[682] Quoted in Marchart 2007: 90.
[683] Rosanvallon 2006a: 36.
[684] Cf. Rosanvallon 1992: 22-23.

‘conceptual histories of the political’ provide a complex and dynamic picture of how people have actually struggled to give form to a democratic society.[685]

As we have seen, Rosanvallon’s approach is accompanied by a certain understanding of atomism and how to overcome it, namely by giving form to the people-in-social-reality through a permanent political process of representation-as-figuration. The form of society (including its differentiations and divisions) is thus not something that is given, as something that can be known from a privileged position, but it is something that has to be continuously constructed through a political process of elaboration and interpretation.

Rosanvallon’s approach to atomism is different from Honneth’s account, which is the result of their different starting points; either starting from the preconditions of doing politics, or from the preconditions of individual freedom. By starting from the social preconditions of individual freedom, Honneth can himself give form to modern society from a privileged position. He attempted this first by anthropologizing Hegel (in *The Struggle for Recognition*), which resulted in the differentiation between love, respect, and social esteem and then by sociologizing Hegel (in *Freedom’s Right*), which resulted in the differentiation between the spheres of personal relations, the market-economy, and democratic will-formation. The social preconditions of individual freedom thus provide Honneth with a privileged position from which he is able to ‘read’ the central differentiations of modern societies, and from there he focuses on the specific struggles for recognition *within* these spheres; that is, struggles over the interpretation of the norms at work in the spheres of love, respect, and social esteem, or those in the spheres of personal relations, market-economy, and democratic will-formation.

In this way, one could say that Honneth – just like the political scientists – suppresses the question of ‘the political’: that is, he neglects the question about how societies as a whole are instituted and get their form (as Lefort has explored) as well as neglecting the complex history of how people have struggled to give form to a democratic society, whereby the issue of representation is central (as Rosanvallon has reconstructed). The result of this difference between Honneth’s focus

[685] For a similar approach, see Ido de Haan’s reconstruction of Dutch politics in the nineteenth century from the perspective of ‘politiek als vormenstrijd’ 2003: 10. Rosanvallon’s concern with ‘the political’ is not accompanied by a belittlement of the importance of everyday ‘politics’, as it is sometimes the case in Schmittian and agonistic accounts, who understand the distinction between ‘the political’ and ‘politics’ in a similar way to Heidegger’s distinction between ‘ontological’ and ‘ontic’, giving primacy to the former. Rosanvallon does not search for deeper foundations, but he simply wants to better understand the persistent problems that occur when trying to institute a democratic society and how one can deal with these problems, and he thinks that one cannot reach an understanding of this by abstracting from the complexities of everyday ‘politics’. Cf. Palonen 2009.

on struggles for recognition within a clearly differentiated framework of modern society and Rosanvallon's focus on 'form-giving'-struggles (or struggles about representation), is that their solution to the problem of atomism is very different. In Honneth, one can find a straightforward solution: to create the social conditions in which reciprocal recognition and social freedom can be realized in the complementary spheres of modern society. In Rosanvallon there is no clear-cut solution other than securing the preconditions for the permanent political process of representation-as-figuration.

One could thus say that in Honneth's account atomism should be overcome in a *determinate* social order based on a *privileged position*, namely the *preconditions of individual freedom*, whereas in Rosanvallon's account atomism should be overcome in an *indeterminate* social order, which secures *perspectivism* and the *preconditions of doing politics*. In the following I want to further analyze this different understanding of how form is given to a democratic society by looking at the different evaluation of universal suffrage in the work of Honneth and Rosanvallon.

6.2 The tension between organicism and political equality: The case of universal suffrage

When Hegelian-inspired philosophers in the social-ethical camp – such as Honneth or Taylor – reflect on the preconditions of freedom they usually do not give a central place to universal suffrage. This is not surprising since Hegel himself was not very enthusiastic about it. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel dismisses direct universal suffrage because it leads to "abstract and atomistic conceptions."[686] In Hegel's view, citizens should participate in political decision-making as *concrete* individuals, that is, as socially mediated persons, which for Hegel means as a member of the estate, corporation, or social sphere to which the individual belongs[687] – and not as *abstract* individuals, which can only lead to "opinion and arbitrariness."[688] Only when the interests and opinions in civil society are mediated by associations, corporations, and estates do they acquire a rational form that can be meaningfully represented. In Hegel's picture, representation can thus only

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[686] Hegel (1981): §311, §303. This was a very common opinion in the nineteenth century, shared by many intellectuals, for example Proudhon, who also opposes the 'atomism' of elections with the image of society as a living organism. Rosanvallon 1998: 80.

[687] Cf. Taylor: "Hegel's insistence that men not enter the political arena directly but through their associations, corporations etc., in a more organic fashion […]" 1975: 447 "Men must relate to the polity not as individuals, but through their membership in the articulated components of society." 1975: 446.

[688] Hegel (1981): §311.

be rational when representatives represent social spheres and not abstract individuals.[689] As he explains:

> To hold that every single person should share in deliberating and deciding on political matters of general concern on the ground that all individuals are members of the state, that its concerns are their concerns, and that it is their right that what is done should be done with their knowledge and volition, is tantamount to a proposal to put the democratic element without any rational form into the organism of the state, although it is only in virtue of the possession of such a form that the state is an organism at all.[690]

This quote reveals that Hegel's critique of democracy and universal suffrage rests on an organic conception of the state. Against the dominant way of thinking about the state in terms of a *social contract* – where the state is understood as the product of a collection of individual wills that sign a contract – Hegel understands the state as the articulation and completion of a *Sittlichkeit* that already has been realized, although in limited ways, in society. In Hegel's picture, the state is thus not external to social life, but it completes the imperfect *Sittlichkeit* that is already at work in society. The task of the state is to harmonize the different interests and one-sided forms of *Sittlichkeit* in society into an organic whole.[691] Hegel's understanding of the state thus differs both from the libertarian picture, where the state is understood to be limiting freedom in civil society and therefore should be minimized, and also from the Marxist idea that the state should in the end be abolished in order to overcome the alienating dualism between civil society and the state, or in other words between the *bourgeois* and *citoyen*. For Hegel, as he says, "the true actuality of freedom is the *organism* [of the state]".[692]

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[689] As Hegel says: "Wenn die Abgeordneten als *Repräsentanten* betrachtet werden, so hat dies einen organisch vernünftigen Sinn nur dann, daß sie nicht *Repräsentanten* als von *Einzelnen*, von einer Menge seien, sondern *Repräsentanten* einer der westenlichen *Sphären* der Gesellschaft, Repräsentanten ihrer großen Interessen. Das Repräsentieren hat damit auch nicht mehr die Bedeutung, dass Einer an *der Stelle eines Anderen* sei, sondern das Interesse selbst ist in seinem Repräsentanten *wirklich gegenwärtig*." (1981): §311.

[690] Hegel (1981): §308, English quotation in Taylor 1975: 446. Given Hegel's critical comments on the ideal of direct and total participation of citizens, it is not surprising that – in his account of the succession of different political regimes in his *Philosophy of History* – he does not consider democracy but the constitutional monarchy to be the desired endpoint in which an organic whole can be realized. 1986: 65.

[691] Wolff 2004: 306-307.

[692] Quoted in Neuhouser 2000: 307n8. This picture of Hegel can be complicated by pointing out, as Arvi Särkelä does, that one can also find other conceptions of social life in Hegel's work: "Es wurde jedoch oben schon erwähnt, dass Hegel oft von Vertretern der organismischen Konzeption in Anspruch genommen wird. Der Grund dafür ist, dass die

What concerns me here is the tension in Hegel's argumentation between *political equality* and his *organicism*. In Hegel's picture, we should reject direct universal suffrage because its abstract and atomistic character undermines the realization of a rational, organic whole. However, this argument presupposes that there is – in Lefort's terms – a 'privileged position' from which one can rationally determine how a society should be differentiated into specific groups or 'organs' so that it can function as a rational, organic whole. For Hegel, this privileged position was *Geist*, whose "content is the Idea which produces a differentiated world out of itself."[693] As we have seen in the chapter on Taylor, Hegel showed in his *Philosophy of Right* how the Idea dictates a certain structure of society in which the moments of *immediate unity*, *separation*, and *mediated unity* all reach compatible expression, which resulted in Hegel's articulation of the state into 'estates' (*Stände*) and into levels of society (family, civil society, state).[694]

Because of the belief in a privileged position from which the social order can be rationally differentiated and determined, the issue of political equality – understood as the possibility of each individual to question and contest *any* given social order – does not have a central place in Hegel's story. But if one understands political equality as dependent on the rejection of any idea of a foundation or privileged position from which to determine the social order, as it is common in the political-historical camp, then the evaluation of universal suffrage and of voting as an abstract individual also changes. We can see this for example in Max Weber's article 'Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland' in which he praises voting exactly because at that moment the citizen is *not* determined by his social being. As Palonen summarizes Weber's position: "For Weber, the political point of voting lies in the possibility of the citizen to transcend her social 'being' by her own 'doing', that is, to act independently of her socio-economic position as an individual and equal citizen among others."[695] Voting as an abstract individual is praised here because it is accompanied

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Idee des 'Staatsorganismus' tatsächlich maßgebend für sein spätes pathologiediagnostisches Vokabular in der Rechtsphilosophie ist. So wenig das aber heißen muss, dass Hegel kein alternatives Vokabular in seinem Frühwerk (die *Phänomenologie des Geistes* einbeschlossen) hätte anregen können, so ist auch keineswegs zwingend, dass seine Konzeption des Staates im Besonderen als sein letztes Wort bezüglich des Sozialen im Allgemeinen, das ja den eigentümlichen Gegenstand der Sozialphilosophie bildet, gelten muss. Tatsächlich wird sich zeigen, dass eine naturalistische und prozessualistische Konzeption des sozialen Lebens wesentlich für Hegels Argument über das Soziale in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes* ist." 2016: 116.

[693] Taylor 1979: 80.

[694] Taylor 1979: 80.

[695] Palonen 2004: 123.

by the freedom of deliberation and the chance to alter one's own previous views.[696] What is denounced by Hegel as atomism is in Weber's account praised as political equality.

One can thus speak of a tension between organicism and political equality, and I think that this tension is also not adequately addressed in Honneth's attempt in *Freedom's Right* to rehabilitate Hegel's ideas for a democratic theory.[697] Although Honneth does not denounce universal suffrage, and although he rejects Hegel's monist conception of the state in favor of a conception of the political sphere based on public deliberation and democratic will-formation,[698] at the same time Honneth by and large starts from Hegel's differentiation of modern society, which he connects to the ideal of social organicism. In this way, he rehabilitates the idea that the question of how to differentiate and give form to modern democratic societies can be settled from a privileged position, which in this case is based on the social preconditions of individual freedom; and it is *within* this specific differentiated framework that people can exercise their negative, reflexive, and social freedom. This is different from seeing the form of a democratic society *as such* as something that cannot be settled from a privileged position and instead seeing it as a political question that has to be permanently negotiated, and whereby each citizen *as an abstract individual* has the equal possibility to question *any* given social order.

Honneth's unwillingness to discuss the problematic relation between organicism/social freedom and political equality is illustrated, for example, in his recent book *The Idea of Socialism*. There he argues that if we want to revitalize socialism today we should reconnect the ideal of freedom to the ideal of solidarity (which goes well together with organicism), and he downplays the importance of the ideal of equality in the socialist tradition (since political equality does *not* go well together with organicism).[699] Also in *Freedom's Right*, Honneth explains away the possible tension between freedom and equality in a footnote.[700] Another indication is the absence in Honneth's work of Tocqueville, who, unlike Hegel, put the tension between freedom and equality at the center of his analysis of modern societies. It is interesting in this regard to see that Taylor *does* use Tocqueville's insights to criticize Hegel for not foreseeing the problems related to equality.[701] Although Taylor agrees with Hegel that meaningful differentiation is needed for the

[696] Palonen: 2008: 38.
[697] For a discussion of the relation between equality and freedom in Honneth's work, see, e.g., Deranty 2016: 55-65.
[698] Honneth 2011: 471.
[699] Cf. Honneth 2015: 30-31, 42.
[700] Honneth 2011: 35n1.
[701] Taylor 1979:111ff, 117-118.

realization of freedom in modern societies, he argues that Hegel's solution is no longer viable today – not only because it was based on the metaphysical idea that society should be differentiated according to the Idea – but also because Hegel did not foresee the strong force of homogenization in modern societies, which problematizes the realization of social differentiation.

However, Taylor in the end also gives in to a certain organicist ideal, namely in the form of a religious idea of complementarity, and he also does not give a central place to the right to vote when discussing the ideal of freedom. In this way, one could argue that the work of Honneth and Taylor is symptomatic of the inability in the socialist (Honneth) and religious (Taylor) tradition to completely break with organicism.

6.3 The emancipation of the citizen as individual

In the work of Rosanvallon we find a more positive evaluation of universal suffrage that addresses the tension between organicism and political equality. In his book *Le Sacre du citoyen* (1992) – which historically reconstructs the institution of universal suffrage in France from the French Revolution to today – Rosanvallon starts by distancing himself from the Marxist story that universal suffrage was a sham revolution because it merely introduced a purely 'formal' freedom and equality, whereas socialism is more radical because it tries to institute 'real' freedom and equality.[702] For Rosanvallon, this does not do justice to the radical rupture that universal suffrage achieved, namely that – unlike socialism – *it broke with all organic conceptions of society*.

As Rosanvallon says, whereas socialism continued the Christian picture of restoring a harmonious, organic society that had been destroyed by sin/capitalism, universal suffrage breaks with all organic conceptions of society and can only be understood within a framework that is radically atomistic and individualistic.[703] The central difference, according to Rosanvallon, is that Christianity and socialism want to realize a *society of brothers* in which individuals have their place within a organically differentiated society, whereas universal suffrage breaks with organicism and contributes to the realization of political equality, that is, of a *society of equals*. This does not mean that a 'society of equals' is not concerned with solidarity or the quality of the social bond, but it

[702] Marx criticized, in Rosanvallon's words, "l'*abstraction* d'une société civile gouvernée par le suffrage universel et lui oppose le communism fondé sur des rapports sociaux reels." 1992: 20.
[703] As Sophia Näsström writes: "It is therefore not a coincidence that universal suffrage for a long time was resisted not only by conservatives and liberals, but also by socialists. The struggle against universal suffrage was not due to class conflict alone. It was [in the words of Lefort] 'provoked by the idea of a society which had now to accept that which cannot be represented.'" 2006: 333.

means that it does not want to base this on a determined social order based on Christian or socialist values where everybody has their place.

Rosanvallon thinks that universal suffrage is accompanied by a radical shift in our 'social imaginary'[704] toward an understanding of equality that is both *immaterial* and *radical*. It is *immaterial* because the principle of 'one man, one vote' neglects the qualitative differences between people, namely those concerning knowledge and power; Rosanvallon describes the individual at the moment of voting, with Robert Musil in mind, as a *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*.[705] It is *radical* because the political equality that accompanies the right to vote cannot be understood in terms of distributive justice or commutative justice – whereby a social bond based on a differentiated whole or common good *is already presupposed* – but it is, in a way, a 'constructive' right that is concerned with the *construction* of the social bond and the definition of its norms.[706] In this sense, Rosanvallon says, the right to vote *produces society itself*.[707] In this way, it achieves the complete and definitive break with organicism and initiates the political age of the individual.[708]

Rosanvallon tries to further argue for the idea that universal suffrage was more radical than it is usually assumed by criticizing T.H. Marshall's famous three stages and three forms of the realization of citizenship: the affirmation of civil rights in the eighteenth century (construction of the liberal state), political rights in the nineteenth century (universal suffrage), and social rights in the twentieth century (installation of the welfare state). Rosanvallon criticizes this typological scheme because, first of all, although it can illuminate the American and English case, it is less useful for the German case (where the welfare state in a sense preceded universal suffrage and the liberal state) and the French case (where all three moments coincided during the French Revolution[709]).

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[704] Rosanvallon 1992: 17.
[705] Rosanvallon 1992:446.
[706] This is why for Rosanvallon 'formal' equality is in a sense more radical than 'real' equality; 'formal' equality is not simply an unfinished version of equality that is then realized in 'real' equality; 'formal' equality is about an essential equality between individuals (on a more anthropological level), whereas 'real' equality is paradoxically more limited in that it is more strictly in the order of the social and the economic. 1998: 49n1.
[707] Rosanvallon 1992: 113.
[708] Rosanvallon 1992: 15. Lefort writes: "Nothing […] makes the paradox of democracy more palpable than the institution of universal suffrage. It is at the very moment when popular sovereignty is assumed to manifest itself, when the people is assumed to actualize itself by expressing its will, that social interdependence breaks down and that the citizen is abstracted from all the networks in which his social life develops and becomes a mere statistic. Number replaces substance." Quoted in: Näsström 2006: 333.
[709] However, although the ideal of political equality in terms of the right to vote was present during the Revolution, the notion of 'universal suffrage' was never used. See Rosanvallon 1992: 136.

But what is even more problematic for Rosanvallon is that Marshall presents a chronological picture that is based merely on an *institutional history* and does not consider its relation to the *history of ideas*. As Rosanvallon argues, if one looks at the relation between ideas and institutional reality, then one could say that although the welfare state indeed emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and flourished in the twentieth century, the *idea* of the welfare state and of the systematic problem of poverty existed at least since the eighteenth century. The socialist idea of *economic* equality was formulated well before the ideal of *political* equality entered the historical stage. Rosanvallon points here to the fact that many eighteenth century utopian writers could easily imagine the socialization of property and the leveling of fortune, but none of them put forward the idea that the votes of all men should weigh equally in political decisions.

With regard to universal suffrage the relation between ideas and institutional reality was the other way around: when it was institutionally realized in 1848, it took decades before it was recognized as a legitimate ideal; for a long time its existence was considered by many as merely the result of a historical accident. Although there was also a lot of resistance to socialism, this was not so much a philosophical or moral rejection of the ideal of reducing inequalities as such, Rosanvallon argues, but it was primarily about the *means* to realize it. By focusing merely on institutional history and neglecting the complex relation to the history of ideas, as Marshall does, the radicalness of universal suffrage for the modern 'social imaginary' is lost from view – at least according to Rosanvallon.[710]

Rosanvallon thus does not deny that universal suffrage is atomistic (Hegel) or merely formal (Marx), but he evaluates it differently: atomism and abstraction are the necessary price to pay for truly realizing political equality and the emancipation of the citizen-as-individual (*individu-citoyen*). The underlying idea here is, again, the positive evaluation of *indeterminacy*. Similar to Lefort, Rosanvallon defends the right to vote – together with the other institutions of 'formal' democracy – as important for breaking with social organicism, thereby securing the indeterminacy of the modern social order, and thus providing the preconditions of political freedom and equality.[711] In this picture, 'formal' democracy secures the possibility of the citizen-as-individual to question *any* determinate social order. Unlike Hegel and Marx, Rosanvallon and Lefort thus

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[710] Rosanvallon's account is supported by recent historical scholarship on the revolutions of 1848 that tries to resist the common downplaying of the importance of 1848 (compared to the revolutions of 1789 and 1917) by showing its influence and radicalness. Cf. De Haan 2003: 51-52.
[711] Cf. Lefort 1981: 172.

understand the emergence of 'formal' democracy to be the great, emancipating revolution of our time, and the resulting atomism should not be overcome with the help of a return to social organicism but through a permanent political process.[712]

This brings us to another, more theoretical, issue that can illuminate the different approach to atomism and the issue of giving form to democracy in the work of Honneth and Rosanvallon, namely the fact that they make an opposite connection between *pathologies*, on the one hand, and the relation between *representations* and *social reality* on the other.

6.4 Complicating the relation between representations and social reality

During the 1970s and 1980s there appeared many attempts to complicate the relation between representations and social reality, which can be explained by the simultaneous occurrence of the *crisis of Marxism* and the dominance of the *linguistic turn*.

One of the dominant understandings of the relation between representations and social reality in critical philosophy in the twentieth century had been provided by Marxism and its theory of ideology. In Marxism the role of representations in social life is recognized, but especially in its 'vulgar' variants this is characterized by *determinism*, whereby representations are conceived to be merely reflections of social reality – an ideological superstructure determined by the economic base – and by *naturalism*, whereby social reality is conceived to be something that can be objectively known.[713]

Of course, there had existed critiques of this Marxist understanding of the relation between representations and reality before the 1970s; for example Max Weber's famous thesis in *The Protestant Ethic* about the influence of protestant ideals on the development of capitalist society and his argument that sometimes representations drive practices and not the other way around. In arguing this, Weber did not want to defend an idealist position, but instead he wanted to complicate the understanding of the relation between ideas and practices.[714] But it is especially during the crisis of Marxism in the 1970s that we can see a myriad of attempts to rehabilitate the constitutive role of representations in social life – a development that was stimulated by the so-called 'linguistic

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[712] Cf. Rosanvallon 1992: 17.
[713] This idea was further reinforced by the dominance of structuralism and systems theory in the 1950s and 1960s.
[714] As Weber says: "The following studies could, then, perhaps play a modest part in illustrating the manner in which 'ideas' become effective in history. […] However, it cannot, of course, be our purpose to replace a one-sided 'materialist' causal interpretation of culture and history with an equally one-sided spiritual one." Quoted in: Moyn 2014: 128n6.

turn' that stressed the constitutive role of language in human experience. This sometimes resulted in the opposite extreme of absolutizing the pole of representations, whereby there is 'nothing outside of the text' (Derrida) or whereby we can never step outside our vocabularies to see if they correspond to the world (Rorty). But in between these two extremes of 'vulgar' Marxism and the absolutization of the constitutive role of language, more fruitful approaches emerged.

There was, first of all, the re-discovery of earlier Marxist approaches that had given a more complex account of the role of representations in social life, such as the work of Castoriadis and Lefort on the 'symbolic' and 'imaginary' aspects of social and political life:[715] there were the attempts by Reinhart Koselleck (for example in his *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*) and the 'Cambridge School' (Pocock, Skinner) to rehabilitate the importance of concepts and rhetoric for understanding politics and political change; and there was Hayden White's 'narrativist turn' in theoretical history. It is not a coincidence that Rosanvallon, and others in the political-historical camp such as Ankersmit or Palonen, all draw from these thinkers, whereas Honneth does not.

The result has been, as I now want to show, that Rosanvallon and Honneth make an opposite connection between *pathologies*, on the one hand, and the relation between *representations* and *social reality* on the other. And I want to include Lefort and Taylor in discussing this difference, because they played a central role in complicating the relations between representations and social reality.

Starting with Lefort, one could say that his criticism of Marxism and its 'vulgar' understanding of representations as being simply determined by social reality did not have the aim of replacing this with an idealist position. As Lefort says: "To criticize Marx does not at all imply that we must assert the primacy of representations and fall back into the illusion, which he denounced, of an independent logic of ideas."[716] Instead, the goal for Lefort was to complicate the relation between representations and reality and to overcome determinism and naturalism. Just as phenomenology criticized a clear dualism between the subjective and the objective in order to

[715] Warren Breckman has called this the the 'symbolic turn' in post-Marxism. He writes: "In place of Marxism's ontological and epistemological *realism*, [Lefort and Castoriadis] turn toward the sphere of representation; contrary to Marx's belief that symbolic forms belong to the superstructure, they each adhere to the basic notion that the social world is constituted as a symbolic order." 2013:10. "The process whereby society shapes its shared existence through self-production and reproduction is indissolubly united with the process whereby that life is represented or interpreted. […] [S]ociety supposes the existence of a symbolic order and vice versa." 2013: 153.
[716] Quoted in Moyn 2014: 116-117.

better grasp human experience, Lefort tried to achieve a better understanding of social and political life by overcoming the clear separation between (subjective) representations and (objective) reality.

This perspective led Lefort to the insight that in 'corrupt' or totalitarian societies, political power pretends to know how to perfectly realize political ideals in society, thereby denying a gap between (political) representations and (social) reality and thus de-legitimating conflict and ending political freedom. However, in a 'healthy' or democratic society, political power acknowledges the permanent gap between representations and reality, since it institutionalizes permanent conflict about how to realize political ideals in society and thus guarantees political freedom.[717]

Rosanvallon also sees the acknowledgement of a necessary gap between political representations and social reality as a sign of 'health', whereas the attempt to once and for all bridge the gap is a sign of 'pathology'. For example, although the 'sovereignty of the people' is a central ideal in modern democracies, 'the people' does not correspond to a naturally given reality in modern society. A 'healthy' way to deal with this, in Rosanvallon's view, is to acknowledge that 'the people' is something that has to be formed and constructed in a permanent political process of interpretation, conflict, and negotiation, thus acknowledging that there will always be a gap between the political representation (sovereignty of the people) and social reality (plural, differentiated, divided people). A 'pathological' solution, as it has become common nowadays in the rhetoric of populist politicians, is to pretend to know who 'the people' are and what they want and to know how to truly represent them, thus denying that there is a necessary gap between political representation and social reality – which is usually accompanied by a de-legitimation of conflict, practices of exclusion, and thus the ending of politics.

In Taylor and Honneth we find a different idea of pathology that results from a gap between representations and reality caused by what Särkelä called a *Reflexionsblockade*: here the problem is a disconnection between the *implicit* norms or 'background understanding' of a social practice and the *explicit* articulation by social actors of these underlying norms. In Taylor's critique of naturalism the problem was that they presented their outlook, ideas, and practices as *neutral*, thereby being unable to reflexively affirm the normative ideals that implicitly informed their

[717] As Samuel Moyn writes, in Lefort's account, the central precondition of freedom is thus a form of society that acknowledges its own indeterminacy and internal divisions, a society that acknowledges the "necessary gap or difference between society and its self-representation."2006: 8. And: "The violence of totalitarianism, according to Lefort, flows from its attempt to make society in democracy forcibly coincide with its representation of itself as a collection of free and equal individuals – to transcend formal democracy in the name of a putative real democracy." 2006: 9.

practices. There was thus a gap between their *implicit background understanding* and their *explicit theories*. In Honneth, we found a similar understanding of social pathologies as a socially caused inability of social actors to reflexively grasp the underlying norms of social practices.[718]

It is clear that the political-historical accounts of Lefort and Rosanvallon and the social-ethical accounts of Taylor and Honneth operate on a different level. Lefort and Rosanvallon are concerned with the relation between state and society and how political power presents itself, which in the end is about the preconditions of 'doing politics': when political power acknowledges the permanent gap between political ideals and social reality, political freedom and equality are guaranteed. Honneth and Taylor are concerned with the relation between implicit norms and the explicit articulation of these norms, which in the end is about the social preconditions of individual freedom: they start from the norms and ideals that are already implicitly at work in social practices, and they consider the realization of freedom as being dependent on the ability of people to adequately grasp and articulate these implicit norms and ideals, thus closing the gap between representations and social reality, or theory and practice.

However, there is an important difference when it comes to Honneth and Taylor: Taylor operates within a phenomenological framework, which starts from the idea that we move against an implicit background understanding that can never be fully grasped or articulated, whereas Honneth operates in the left-Hegelian framework that starts from the idea that reason is at work in society and whose substance can be grasped by the critic with the help of an immanent reconstruction. Or, in other words, whereas Taylor complicates the understanding of representation and social reality by arguing that they can never coincide and that there will always be opaqueness and indeterminacy, in Honneth this embrace of opaqueness is absent. I want to explore this a bit further because it can further illuminate why Taylor in many ways is closer to Lefort and Rosanvallon than to Honneth.

Already in his Hegel-book, Taylor juxtaposes the insights of phenomenology to Hegel's understanding of the relation between representations and reality. Taylor rejects Hegel's idea "that the Absolute must finally come to complete explicit clarity in conceptual statement", or, differently

[718] Honneth argues that social pathologies operate on the level of social reproduction "auf der es um den reflexiven Zugang zu den primären Handlungs- und Normensystemen geht: Immer dann, wenn einige oder alle Gesellschaftsmitglieder aufgrund von gesellschaftlichen Ursachen nicht mehr dazu in der Lage sind, die Bedeutung dieser Praktiken und Normen angemessen zu verstehen, können wir von einer 'sozialen Pathologie' sprechen. […] [E]s handelt sich um Rationalitätsdefizite, die darin bestehen, daß Überzeugungen oder Praktiken einer ersten Stufe nicht mehr angemessen angeeignet und verwendet werden können." 2011: 157.

put, that “at the root of reality […] the subject ultimately finds clear, conceptual necessity”.[719] Taylor dismisses this view in favor of the phenomenological insight that “our explicit consciousness is […] surrounded by a horizon of the implicit, of unreflected life and experience, which it is trying to render faithfully but which can never be fully, adequately, definitively brought to light.”[720]

In his subsequent work Taylor combined this phenomenological idea of an implicit background understanding with a rehabilitation of the Romantic, ‘expressive-constitutive’ theories of language – which he finds in Hamann, Herder, Humboldt, and Heidegger and the late Wittgenstein – who all stress the *constitutive* or *world-disclosing* function of language as opposed to the merely *designative* function of language. With these two ideas of an implicit background understanding and the constitutive function of language Taylor tried to develop – similar to many others during the 1970s and 1980s – a more complex account of the relation between representations and social reality, and he would even start to use the notion of ‘social imaginary’[721] in his later work – a concept introduced by Cornelius Castoriadis in 1964 and which also plays a role in the work of Lefort and Rosanvallon.

Although Taylor, similar to Honneth, thus stresses the importance of finding a match between representations and reality (or between explicit theory and implicit background understanding) in order to realize a resonant world-relation, he at the same time acknowledges that this can never be fully achieved. This is not only because the background understanding can never be fully grasped and articulated but also because there is a continuous dynamic interaction between explicit theory and background understanding: new articulations can change practices, and changed practices can lead to new articulations.

Taylor thus shares with Lefort and Rosanvallon an affinity with Romantic notions such as indeterminacy, imaginary, and opaqueness – not as qualities that should or can be overcome – but as essential parts of human experience and democratic life. This similarity can be partly explained

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[719] Taylor 1975: 568-569.
[720] Taylor 1975: 569.
[721] As Taylor defines it: “By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.” 2004: 23. Cf.: “This approach [of studying the social imaginaries of modernity] is not the same as one that might focus on the ‘ideas’, as against the ‘institutions’, of modernity. The social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society.” 2004: 2.

by the common starting point of Lefort and Taylor in the tradition of phenomenology, and Merleau-Ponty in particular.[722]

Honneth, however, seems to show no interest in notions such as indeterminacy, imaginary, or opaqueness, and as Warren Breckman has shown, this is not a coincidence since the left-Hegelian tradition has always been very suspicious and critical of the Romantic fascination with the ambiguity of meaning and has tried to overcome this through de-symbolization and secularization and by focusing on reason.[723] As Breckman says, whereas the Romantic emphasis on 'the symbolic' is accompanied by the acknowledgement of a necessary gap between representations and reality – since the symbol has "the paradoxical power both to present or body forth *and* to accentuate the gap between the sign and the signified"[724] – the Hegelian focus on reason is accompanied by the ideal of transparency and of, in the end, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

As Breckman shows, this latter ideal also applies to Durkheim, who is also central in Honneth's work. Breckman says that, "Durkheim ultimately subordinated symbolic forms to a realist ontology, in which symbols are seen as representations of an anterior social reality."[725] He contrasts this to the sociology of Mauss: "[U]nlike Durkheim, Mauss did not locate the epistemological value of symbols in their capacity to 'represent' society, but rather in their capacity to *create* the order, relation, and bonds of society."[726]

So whereas Taylor, Lefort, and Rosanvallon endorse the Romantic ideals of indeterminacy, opaqueness, and imagination when trying to capture the experience of living in a democratic society, thus trying to complicate the relation between representations and social reality, Honneth is inspired by a tradition of thinkers that believes in the Enlightenment ideals of reason and transparency; here, one can know society and history, and representations and reality (or theory and practice) can in the end be reconciled.

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[722] In Rosanvallon this phenomenological influence is not apparent, apart from a positive reference to phenomenology in his inaugural lecture (2003: 28) and his repeated statement that he is not interested in developing models or theories of democracy but that he wants to contribute to a better understanding of the *experience* of living in a democratic society.

[723] As Breckman writes: "Marx followed the Left-Hegelians in associating human emancipation with the task of overcoming the otherness, heteronomy, and unmasterability implied by symbolic representation." 2013: 21. And: "The desymbolizing and secularizing line staked out by the Hegelian left and radicalized by Karl Marx won and came to exercise a dominant influence on the European left." 2013: 22.

[724] Breckman 2013: 34.

[725] Breckman 2013: 17.

[726] Breckman 2013: 17.

This different outlook provides yet another explanation for their different outlook concerning the possibilities of critique. This can be further pursued by looking, finally, at the question of how the modern ideal of democracy relates to the ideals of the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

6.5 Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic indeterminacy

In his analysis of the origins of continental parliamentary democracy, Frank Ankersmit evaluates how the Enlightenment and Romanticism have differently contributed to its emergence. As he argues, people ordinarily consider democracy as a product of the Enlightenment, and Ankersmit partly agrees with this assessment by listing four ways in which Enlightenment natural law has contributed to the emergence of democracy.[727] First, natural law metaphysics, with its habit of speaking of *the* citizen or *the* human individual, has contributed to the notion of the equality of all citizens that is central to democracy. Secondly, the rhetoric of social contract, whereby the emergence of the state is understood as a rational decision by the citizens in order to get out of the 'state of nature', implies that the state exists for the benefit of the citizen and not the other way round. Thirdly, the rhetoric of the state of nature also led to the idea that the state loses its legitimacy if it placed citizens in a situation worse than the state of nature, which can be reformulated in the state's obligation to respect certain civil rights under all circumstances. And finally, eighteenth century political theory and political practice introduced a conception of political representation without which democracy could never function.

However, Ankersmit laments the fact that the crucial influence of Romanticism on the emergence of continental democracies has often been lost from view – instead, political romanticism has a bad name, being associated with the excesses of nationalist pathos or utopian socialism. In order to rehabilitate the role that romanticism has played in realizing continental parliamentary democracies, Ankersmit turns to the argument in Carl Schmitt's *Politische Romantik* (1919) that liberal parliamentary democracy is not a product of the Enlightenment but of Romanticism.[728] As Ankersmit tells us, Schmitt understood the flaws that he recognized in democracy as the result of its Romantic origins. Unlike the clarity and lucidity of the Enlightenment – such as "the consistent rationalism of Hobbes's political theory, which was founded on clear and

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[727] Ankersmit 2002: 98.
[728] Ankersmit 1996: 128ff.

well-defined fixed principles"[729] – Romanticism, just as liberal parliamentary democracy, was for Schmitt characterized by vagueness, rootlessness, a rejection of any political foundation for politics, and a distaste for clear-cut definitions and principles.

As Ankersmit says, it is usually 'outsiders of democracy' like Schmitt or Tocqueville who are best in penetrating its essence, since it is exactly this curious lack of principles that Ankersmit thinks is central to democracies, although he disagrees with Schmitt's evaluation, arguing that this lack of principles is precisely democracy's strength and power.

Ankersmit tries to illuminate this, not by focusing on the political Romantics that Schmitt discusses in his book (i.e., the Germans Schlegel and Müller), but by looking at the French doctrinal liberals – which we already met in chapter 5 – whose political thinking was also situated within the Romantic period. As Ankersmit reminds us, the doctrinal liberals were faced with the complex situation of post-revolutionary France in which the opposite forces of tradition and revolution made it seemingly impossible to realize a stable political order. At first, this situation might appear similar to the situation Hobbes was facing during the religious wars, which was also a civil war between seemingly irreconcilable groups and principles. However, as Ankersmit says, the big difference is that Hobbes's solution of instituting an absolute state that would rise above the quarreling parties and guarantee peace was not an option anymore because it was now the *state itself* that had become the central issue of the conflict: "[T]he state itself now became involved in, and was pulled back into, the web of political forces existing in society all desperately trying to take possession of the state now that the absolute monarch had lost control of it."[730]

As Ankersmit argues, the reason why the doctrinal liberals were able to deal with this situation in a constructive way, and in this way could contribute "more than any group of theorists […] to the construction of parliamentary democracy as we find it on the European continent down to the present day",[731] was because they rejected the abstract moral and political systems of the Enlightenment. Instead, they started from the complexity of social and political reality and argued that this ought to restrain the ambitions of political action. As Ankersmit says: "They recognized that no […] point of view is possible from where we could see [political reality] within one all-encompassing survey and that therefore a firm and certain grip of political reality – that domain of

[729] Ankersmit 1996: 128.
[730] Ankersmit 1996: 128.
[731] Ankersmit 1996: 130.

the Goddess of Fortune – is forever unrealizable."[732] Again, we find here the central claim in the political-historical camp that there is no privileged position from which one can analyze and control the political order.

As Ankersmit argues, the doctrinary liberals also acknowledged the brokenness of the political order, faced as they were with the task of realizing a stable political regime in the midst of competing political forces that represented incommensurable principles (i.e., tradition and revolution, and later the even more destructive opposition between capital and labor). This led in the end to their striving for a *juste milieu* politics, whereby they tried to retain something in the new political matrix of each party in society, which, Ankersmit says, is the origin of continental parliamentary democracy and its coalition governments.

The 'Romanticism' of the doctrinary liberals can thus be understood as an attempt to 'situate' abstract Enlightenment thinking, an attempt that seems to be informed by similar political-historical insights that we found in Machiavelli and Guicciardini concerning tragic incommensurability, the autonomy of politics, and the importance of representations, perspectivism, and the imaginary. One could say that the attitude of compromise and 'principled unprincipledness' of the doctrinary liberals – who did not search for deep foundations but stayed at the complex surface of political life and tried to find practical ways for 'doing politics' and for canalizing radical conflict between different perspectives in society – is close to the attitude of Lefort, Rosanvallon, and (to a certain extent) Taylor.

Ankersmit's account of the attempt by the doctrinary liberals to situate Enlightenment thinking contrasts with more well-known attempts in the nineteenth century to situate Enlightenment thinking by turning to history and sociology, as we can find it for example in Hegel, Marx, or Durkheim, who hold on to the Enlightenment ideals of reason, transparency, a comic reconciliation, and the subordination of politics to a normative account of society (or *Sittlichkeit*) – of which Honneth is an offspring.

Recent political philosophy apparently shows a repetition of moves compared to the nineteenth century: after John Rawls rehabilitated the abstract moral approach of the Enlightenment, there soon emerged criticisms of his thinking, which were made either by communitarians in the social-ethical camp who focused on the social preconditions of individual freedom, or by agonistic thinkers that tried to rethink Rawls's approach by focusing rather

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[732] Ankersmit 1996: 130.

abstractly on ‘the political’. What has remained largely neglected, however, are those approaches in the political-historical camp, such as Rosanvallon’s, who try to situate political thinking not by starting from morality (Rawls and co.), from a situated ethics (communitarians and critical social theorists), or from an abstract model of the political (agonistic theorists). Instead, they stay at the surface of the historical complexity of social and political life and continue the line of thinking that moves from Machiavelli and Guicciardini to the doctrinary liberals down to more recent historically oriented political thinkers.

The reason for this neglect is probably that these thinkers do not provide clear normative principles or theories, which for many political philosophers in the moral and social-ethical camp is enough reason to neglect them, as was illustrated by Honneth’s irritation with democratic theories inspired by Lefort or Arendt.[733]

However, I agree with Ankersmit that this lack of normative principles is not necessarily a weakness but can be a strength when reflecting on the problem of freedom and democracy today. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in which the frustrations of living in a democratic society seem to have reached their boiling point, and in which feelings of social dissolution and the desire for homogeneous unity and the ending of politics reinforce each other, I think it is fruitful to start with Lefort and Rosanvallon from the historical study of the structural tensions in democratic societies that cause permanent frustration and try to find ways to constructively deal with these tensions and these frustrations without ending politics. This is perhaps a better route to take than to develop theories or models of democracy based on clear moral and ethical principles that promise a political society in which alienation and incommensurability are overcome, or, alternatively, in which conflict and struggle are essentialized in the way done by both Carl Schmitt and by contemporary agonistic approaches.

[733] Honneth 2011: 619n598.

Conclusion Part 3

In chapter 5 and 6 I have tried to analyze the different underlying methodological commitments of Lefort, Rosanvallon, and Taylor, on the one hand, and Honneth on the other hand, that could explain their different understanding of the interrelated issues of tragic incommensurability, the possibility of a privileged position, and suffering. As I tried to show in chapter 5, this can be traced back to the difference between tragic and comic conceptions of history in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and the different way in which philosophers in the nineteenth century tried to situate Enlightenment thinking by either going back to the Machiavellian insights concerning 'tragic' incommensurability, the autonomy of politics, and the importance of representations and perspectivism (like Guizot and Tocqueville, who would go on to inspire Lefort and Rosanvallon), or by holding on to the Enlightenment ideals of reason, transparency, and 'comic' reconciliation (like Hegel, Marx, or Durkheim, who would go on to inspire Honneth, whereby Taylor's appropriation of Herder and phenomenology has a foot in both camps).

In chapter 6, I have tried to further illustrate the consequences of these differences by discussing several issues connected to the question of how form is given to a democratic society, such as the difference between Rosanvallon's focus on 'the political' and Honneth's embrace of 'social organicism', their different evaluation of universal suffrage, and their different understanding of the relation between representations and social reality. This revealed that Rosanvallon, Lefort, and Taylor endorse Romantic, phenomenological, and Machiavellian notions such as indeterminacy, incommensurability, opaqueness, the imaginary, representations, and perspectives as central to democratic life. Further, it revealed that they reject the attempt to overcome this complexity and confusion once and for all by finding a privileged position based on reason from which one can determine a free social order, an attempt that can be found in Enlightenment thinkers and *mutatis mutandis* in the work of Hegel, Marx, and Critical Theory (including Honneth).

For Rosanvallon, Lefort, and Taylor, this search for a privileged position should be avoided because it ends the indeterminacy of a democratic society and thereby ends politics and freedom; instead, they say, we should secure the preconditions of a permanent political process in which we can search for compromises between the incommensurable components and the plurality of perspectives in modernity without the hope of ever finding solid ground beneath our feet.

Conclusion: Two ways of situating freedom

In this dissertation I have compared the different approaches in the social-ethical camp and the political-historical camp to the problem of freedom today revolving around the issues of atomism and homogeneous unity. It turned out that both camps try to overcome the abstract approach in the moral camp by *situating* political philosophy and thus *situate* freedom, but they understand this differently. In this final conclusion I want to summarize these differences, discuss how this leads to different accounts of the problems of atomism and homogeneous unity, and explain why I think the political-historical approach is the most fruitful for analyzing the problem of freedom today.

When reflecting on the preconditions of a free democratic society, it has been common in recent political philosophy to start either from Isaiah Berlin's distinction between 'negative' and 'positive' freedom, from the debates between liberals and communitarians, or from the struggles between Kantians and Hegelians; that is, the usual starting point is the conflict between what I have called the moral camp and the social-ethical camp. These conflicts are in the end about conflicting conceptions of the *individual*, whereby those in the social-ethical camp criticize the a-historical and a-sociological conception of the individual in the moral camp and praise themselves for having a *situated* account of the individual and for *situating* freedom.

In this dissertation I have tried to rehabilitate a third camp that is usually neglected in the normative discussions on freedom, namely the political-historical camp, whose reflection on freedom does not start from a normative account of the individual; instead it starts from historical analyses of societies in which politics is minimized or ended, most notably totalitarian societies, and from there they try to provide insights into the preconditions of political freedom and 'doing politics'. This approach is accompanied by a different understanding of 'situating' freedom, which can be illustrated if we turn to a passage in the work of Isaiah Berlin – not a passage from his famous essay on 'negative' and 'positive' liberty, but a passage in which he discusses the French Revolution. As Berlin writes there:

> The French Revolution was founded on the notion of timeless truths given to the faculty of reason with which all men are endowed. It was dedicated to the creation or restoration of a static and harmonious society, founded on unaltering principles, a dream of classical perfection, or, at least, the closest approximation to it feasible on earth.[734]

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[734] Berlin 1997b: 434.

For Berlin the French Revolution was thus the ultimate example of an attempt to realize a free society that *neglected all limits to what we can know and do*, whereby the Revolutionaries simply believed that men can create a free harmonious society from scratch, based on the timeless truths given to the faculty of reason.

Berlin then proceeds by summing up all the limits to human knowledge and action that the French Revolutionaries ignored in their attempt to realize a free society, namely:

> […] the precariousness of human institutions; the disturbing phenomenon of apparently irresistible change; the clash of irreconcilable values and ideas; the insufficiency of simple formulae; the complexity of men and societies; the poetry of action, destruction, heroism, war; the effectiveness of mobs and of great men; the crucial role played by chance; the feebleness of reason before the power of fanatically believed doctrines; the unpredictability of events; the part played in history by unintended consequences; the ignorance of the workings of the sunken two-thirds of the great human iceberg, of which only the visible portion had been studied by scientists and taken into account by the ideologists of the great Revolution.[735]

One could thus say that whereas those in the social-ethical camp try to situate freedom by reflecting on the social preconditions of freedom, the thinkers in the political-historical camp try to situate freedom by reflecting on the question of how to realize a free society in the face of the *limits* to what we can know, control, or reconcile, as Berlin lists them above.

This connection of freedom and human limits in the political-historical camp can be further illustrated by looking at two rare moments in which Machiavelli and Tocqueville talk abstractly about freedom, whereby they use a similar metaphor. After discussing the important role of Fortuna in human life, Machiavelli says in *The Prince* that, "None the less, so as not to rule out our free will, I believe that it is probably true that fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves."[736] Similarly, Tocqueville writes at the end of *Democracy in America* that, "Providence has created humanity neither entirely independent nor

[735] Berlin 1997b: 434.
[736] Machiavelli 1999: 79.

completely slave. It traces around each man, it is true, a fatal circle out of which he cannot go; but within its vast limits, man is powerful and free; so are peoples."[737]

This acknowledgement of the limits imposed by Fortuna (Machiavelli) and Providence (Tocqueville) should not be read as a pre-modern plea for fatalism and helplessness, quite the opposite. The point for Tocqueville is that in the face of the 'Providential' movement toward the 'equality of conditions' (which is unstoppable according to Tocqueville), we still have the political freedom to bend this movement either toward liberty or toward servitude. Similarly, Machiavelli continues the above quote by comparing Fortuna to:

> […] one of those violent rivers which, when they are enraged, flood the plains, tear down trees and buildings, wash soil from one place to deposit it in another. […] Yet although such is their nature, it does not follow that when they are flowing quietly one cannot take precautions, constructing dykes and embankments so that when the river is in flood they would keep to one channel or their impetus be less wild and dangerous. So it is with fortune. She shows her potency where there is no well-regulated power to resist her, and her impetus is felt where she knows there are no embankments and dykes built to restrain her.[738]

In both examples, the acknowledgement of human limits is not accompanied by a fatalistic attitude, but instead it elevates the importance of political action.[739] Both associate freedom with our ability to adequately respond – sometimes prudently, other times courageously or creatively – to the fickle stream of history. Crucial in this regard is that they think that there is no privileged position or deep foundation – based for example on morality or ethics – from which one can take these adequate decisions, but this ability requires that one stays at the complex surface and is sensitive to the possibilities opened up by contingency, events, and the new. One can find many different accounts in the political-historical camp of such an interrelation between freedom, action, politics, and contingency.[740] They all seem to agree that it is the search for a privileged position or

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[737] Tocqueville 1986: 455.
[738] Machiavelli 1999: 79.
[739] See also Manent's description of Aron, whose work is characterized by "une acceptation virile des limites dans lesquelles la vie humaine se meut et à l'intérieur desquelles elle doit trouver tout l'accomplissement dont elle est susceptible." 2013: 19.
[740] For an overview, see Palonen 1998, who discusses Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Weber, Schmitt, Plessner, Benjamin, Arendt, Sartre, Oakeshott, Connolly, and Beck. In general, Palonen makes the distinction between the 'machiavellian

deep foundation that usually ends the possibilities opened up by contingency, events, and the new – think of Weber's critique of bureaucracy or Arendt's critique of totalitarianism – thereby ending politics and political freedom.

It is this focus on the intertwinement of freedom, political action, and contingency that is perhaps the most alien to those in the moral and social-ethical camp,[741] and therefore, in my attempt to compare the social-ethical and political-historical camp I have focused on a different aspect that is central in the political-historical camp, namely the issue of *incommensurability*. For example, in Machiavelli we encountered the incommensurability between Christian and pagan morality and between the desire of the nobles to dominate and the desire of the people not to be dominated; in Tocqueville it is the incommensurability between the ideals of freedom and equality that is central; and also in Weber's 'war of the gods' or Berlin's 'Ionian fallacy' we find this idea of incommensurability. In each case, the idea is central that there is no privileged position or deep foundation from which to reconcile or overcome the tragic conflicts between different ideals and components of a modern democratic society and that we are better off by staying at the surface of everyday political life and trying to find workable compromises.

As we have seen, this issue of incommensurability was central in the comparison of the different critiques of atomism and homogeneous unity in the political-historical camp (Lefort and Rosanvallon) and the social-ethical camp (Taylor and Honneth). As we saw in chapters 1 and 2, both Lefort and Rosanvallon start from certain incommensurable tensions and ambiguities at the heart of modern democracies. Lefort showed how a democracy is based on the ideal of the sovereignty of the people, but at the same time democracy undermines this ideal by institutionalizing internal social division, resulting in a paradox of autonomy. Rosanvallon analyzed the problems resulting from the incommensurable tensions between generality and identity and between liberalism and democracy. Both argued that these incommensurable tensions lead to a permanent indeterminacy of the democratic order, which in turn leads to permanent frustration and disappointment, and they emphasized that we should not give in to the desire to find a privileged position or foundation from which to once and for all resolve these tensions – which

moment', whereby contingency is understood as a 'background' to politics, and the 'weberian moment', whereby contingency comes to be understood as 'operative' to politics.

[741] It is for example completely absent in Honneth's *Freedom's Right* when he discusses the different understandings of freedom in modernity.

would end politics and freedom – but to find ways to improve the quality of the political process, thus securing the preconditions of freedom as indeterminacy.

The analysis of democracy by Lefort and Rosanvallon also included an account of atomism and homogeneous unity, which they considered as permanent problems in a democratic society: since the institution of a democratic society is accompanied by a juridical fiction of generality that de-substantializes the social, a democratic society loses its natural form, which is the reason why the feeling of social dissolution and the desire to re-create unity are endemic in democracies. Lefort and Rosanvallon agree that there is a need to give form and substance to modern democratic societies in order to overcome atomism. However, they say that if we want to do this in such a way that homogeneous unity is avoided and freedom is secured, then we should reject the search for a privileged position or foundation from which the social order can be determined. Instead, they say that we should overcome atomism through a permanent political process of *representation* and ask how we can improve the quality of this process.

In Taylor and Honneth we found a different approach that started from the social preconditions of individual freedom, which led them to the diagnosis of atomism as a *social pathology* caused by a *Reflexionsblockade*, although they understood this in a slightly different way. In chapter 3 we saw how Taylor understands atomism as the result of the naturalization of a certain disengaged world-disclosure during the Enlightenment, which would become very influential in modernity. The solution to atomism for Taylor is therefore that these 'naturalist' thinkers start to articulate the normative ideals that inform their world-disclosure and acknowledge that this is just one normative account of human agency among others. For Taylor, this could then lead to a 'dialogue society' in which people with different normative self-interpretations and world-disclosures could confront their 'best accounts', without there being any privileged position or normative foundations from which to once and for all reconcile these positions. In this way, overcoming atomism for Taylor does not require a homogeneous ethical substance – as Taylor's critics often say – but it is supposed to lead to a dialogue society in which there is a permanent, meaningful confrontation between 'best accounts' whereby homogeneous unity is avoided.

Honneth's account was slightly different, as we saw in chapter 4. Honneth also understood atomism as the result of a *Reflexionsblockade*, that is, of an absolutization by social actors of one-sided understandings of freedom, such as negative or reflexive freedom, which obstructs their ability to reflexively grasp the full normative content of social practices, namely the ideal of social

freedom. Honneth connected this to the issue of 'discursive mechanisms' in society that can increase the moral quality of social integration: if individuals are integrated in such a way that they learn to dialogically define their interests, instead of monologically, then this will increase their ability to realize social freedom. However, what separated Honneth's account from Taylor's was that he presented the ideal of 'social freedom' as a privileged position or 'situated' foundation from which atomism could be overcome and from which the contours of a free society could be determined and whereby the issue of incommensurability and the danger of homogeneous unity did not play a role.

The comparison of the different critiques of atomism and homogeneous unity by Lefort, Rosanvallon, Taylor, and Honneth thus revealed that the issues of incommensurability and of the (im)possibility of a privileged position for critique does not neatly divide the social-ethical and political-historical camp. This is because there are also thinkers within the social-ethical camp, like Taylor, who share the commitments and intuitions of those in the political-historical camp.

In chapters 5 and 6 I tried to find an explanation for the fact that Lefort, Rosanvallon, and Taylor all emphasize the incommensurabilities in modern society and reject the search for a privileged position or foundation from which to resolve these incommensurabilities, whereas Honneth holds on to the possibility of reaching a privileged position for critique from which the contours of a free society can be sketched. As I tried to show, this can be explained by going back to the difference between tragic conceptions of history during the Renaissance, such as those by Machiavelli and Guicciardini – who stressed tragic incommensurability and who subordinated morality and ethics to politics and history – and comic conceptions of history during the Enlightenment in the form of utopian philosophies of history, which emphasized the possibility of reconciliation and subordinated politics and history to morality and ethics.

After the failure of the French Revolution, the nineteenth century saw different attempts to situate Enlightenment political philosophy and connect it to the insights of history and sociology, but some did this by returning to the 'tragic' insights of Machiavelli and Guicciardini – such as Guizot and Tocqueville – while others, such as Hegel and Marx, kept holding on to the 'comic' intuitions of the Enlightenment. In this way, there emerged a separation between the political-historical and social-ethical camp, which was based on the different ways of how they tried to situate Enlightenment political philosophy.

If one follows this story, then the difference between the social-ethical camp and the moral camp largely dissolves, since in the end both think that there is a privileged position or situated foundation from which to determine the contours of a free society: here politics and history are subordinated to morality or a situated ethics, and the only forces that stand in the way of a free society are the forces of 'unreason'. One could thus complicate the self-understanding of the social-ethical camp as 'situating' the moral camp because from the perspective of the political-historical camp one can go a step further in trying to situate political philosophy by completely giving up the search for a privileged position or situated foundation, and by embracing perspectivism and stay at the complex surface of historical and political life.

In chapter 6 I then analyzed some of the consequences of this different assessment of incommensurability and the (im)possibility of a privileged position for the question of how form is given to a democratic society. I did this by focusing especially on Rosanvallon and Honneth: I compared Rosanvallon's focus on 'the political' with Honneth's embrace of 'social organicism', their different evaluation of universal suffrage, and their different understanding of the relation between representations and social reality. Here, it turned out that the fact that Rosanvallon, Lefort, and Taylor consider notions such as 'indeterminacy', 'imaginary', 'opacity', and 'the symbolic' as crucial for understanding the modern experience of living in a democracy is connected to their embrace of Romanticism and phenomenology; two movements that also, in their own way, reject the search in Enlightenment philosophy and modern epistemology for deep foundations and instead stay at the complex surface of everyday human experience. I then connected this to Frank Ankersmit's rehabilitation of Romanticism as having played a central role in the development of (continental) parliamentary democracy.

In this way, by analyzing the problem of atomism and homogeneous unity through a focus on the issues of incommensurability and the (im)possibility of a privileged position for critique, I ended up defending unusual thinkers and movements that are usually not connected to freedom and democracy, such as undemocratic thinkers like Machiavelli and Guizot, or the movements of phenomenology and Romanticism. The reason is that these thinkers and movements all operate *at the surface of everyday life* where we experience incommensurabilities, ambiguities, contradictions, and aporias and where we are confronted with different perspectives, representations, and imaginaries – as opposed to the transparent, rational world of Cartesian and

Enlightenment thinkers who search for deep foundations, a world that is continued, *mutatis mutandis*, by the left-Hegelian tradition.

My claim is that such a political-historical 'surface'-approach to the issues of freedom and democracy can be fruitful today, as we live in a time that seems to be dominated by the opposite movements of technocracy and populism, with both pretending to occupy a privileged position; either the privileged position of the expert or the privileged position of the politician who 'truly' represents the people. Faced with this situation where the technocratic and populist desire to 'end politics' is dominant, I think that it is less fruitful to reflect on the preconditions of freedom by starting from morality and ethics – thereby erecting yet another privileged position. Instead, it is more promising to start from a reflection on the preconditions of doing politics and to provide analyses that stay at the complex surface of our social and political world and in doing so try to add new original perspectives on the functioning and dysfunctioning of our political machinery and open up new ways for thinking and acting. The analysis by Lefort and Rosanvallon of the problem of representation is just one example of what this could look like.

However, my aim here has not been to absolutize the political-historical approach as the only legitimate approach to the problem of freedom and to end the dialogue with the social-ethical camp. For example, as we saw above, there are many thinkers in the social-ethical camp (Taylor, Celikates, Särkelä, Menke) who also reject a privileged position when exercising critique, and it would be interesting to establish a more extensive dialogue with these thinkers. Further, when it comes to the critique of capitalism – which is very urgent today and which has been largely absent in this dissertation – a dialogue would be fruitful. I agree with people like Lefort that we should keep the defense of democracy and the critique of capitalism separated so that we remain aware of the difference between forms of necessary suffering that are part of living in a free democratic society (which is the specialty of the political-historical camp) and forms of unnecessary suffering that are the result of capitalism (which is the specialty of the social-ethical camp), and this could create opportunities for a dialogue in order to combine the best of both camps.

In the end, my aim has not been to absolutize the political-historical camp, but instead, in the spirit of the political-historical camp, my aim has been to *add a new perspective* from which the problem of freedom can be viewed, which hopefully will be confronted or complemented by other perspectives.

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Samenvatting

Deze dissertatie probeert een bijdrage te leveren aan het debat over hoe we het ideaal van vrijheid kunnen verwerkelijken. Over deze vraag lijkt vandaag de dag een nieuwe strijd te zijn losgebarsten. Na een lange periode waarin globalisering, de markt, open grenzen, en de-regulering werden bejubeld, zien we nu populistische en nationalistische tegenbewegingen die juist het sluiten van grenzen en het herstellen van identiteit en veiligheid centraal stellen. De centrale scheidslijn in westerse democratieen lijkt niet meer die tussen klassiek 'links' en 'rechts', maar – zoals de Brexit en de recente presidentsverkiezingen in Amerika (Trump vs Clinton) en Frankrijk (Macron vs Le Pen) hebben laten zien – tussen 'open' en 'gesloten'.

Deze posities van 'open' en 'gesloten' lijken gepaard te gaan met een verschillend ideaal van vrijheid: het propageren van globalisering en de markt gaat vaak hand in hand met een ideaal van *individuele autonomie* dat de nadruk legt op individuele rechten, eigen verantwoordelijkheid, en entrepeneurschap. Populisme en nationalisme gaan daarentegen vaak gepaard met de belofte om *collectieve autonomie* te herstellen, wat doorgaans geprobeerd wordt door de eenheid van 'het volk' op een negatieve manier te herstellen, namelijk door het identificeren van de vijanden van 'het volk', zoals elites, immigranten, of andere minderheden in de samenleving.

Je zou dus kunnen zeggen dat zowel de 'open' als 'gesloten' posities gepaard gaan met problematische interpretaties van de idealen van individuele en collectieve vrijheid: het bejubelen van globalisering en de markt leidt vaak tot een 'atomistisch' beeld van de samenleving, waarbij zelfstandige individuen competitief handelen in vrije markten, en waarbij geen recht wordt gedaan aan de sociale, politieke en culturele voorwaarden van individuele vrijheid. Bij burgers kan dit leiden tot gevoelens van sociale fragmentatie, politieke machteloosheid en identiteitscrisis. Populistische en nationalistische bewegingen kunnen vervolgens inspelen op deze gevoelens door te beloven om volkssoevereiniteit, gemeenschap en identiteit te herstellen, maar ze doen dit door te streven naar een 'homogene eenheid' die de vrijheid van minderheden bedreigt.

Deze problematische wisselwerking tussen *atomisme* en *homogene eenheid* is niet een nieuw fenomeen, maar kenmerkt moderne samenlevingen sinds dag één, en herhaalt zich steeds weer in verschillende gedaantes. Dit roept de vraag op of we ook een middenweg kunnen vinden waarbij de idealen van individuele en collectieve vrijheid op een meer gebalanceerde en minder eenzijdige manier verwerkelijkt kunnen worden.

Deze dissertatie probeert een antwoord te vinden op deze vraag door zich te wenden tot de hedendaagse politieke filosofie. Deze lijkt te zijn verdeeld in drie 'kampen': het morele kamp, het sociaal-ethische kamp, en het politiek-historische kamp. Elk van deze kampen houdt zich bezig met een specifiek probleem. In het morele kamp houdt men zich bezig met vragen rondom *legitimiteit* en *rechtvaardigheid*. Geinspireerd door natuurrechtsfilosofen en Kant proberen deze hedendaagse filosofen legitieme morele principes en rechtvaardigheidstheorieën te construeren. In het sociaal-ethische kamp probeert men de *sociale voorwaarden van individuele vrijheid* in kaart te brengen, wat vaak gebeurt door 'sociale pathologieën' te identificeren die verhinderen dat individuen zichzelf kunnen verwerkelijken. Geinspireerd door de filosofieën van Aristotel, Hegel, Marx, Durkheim, of Dewey proberen deze denkers de sociale pathologieën van vandaag de dag te analyseren, zoals vervreemding, anomie, fragmentatie, of atomisme.

In het politiek-historische kamp probeert men tot slot de *voorwaarden van politiek* te identificeren, wat gebeurt door historische situaties te bestuderen waarin de politiek ondergeschikt is gemaakt aan de moraal, de ethiek, de economie, of een ideologie, wat kan leiden tot een minimalisering of een beëindiging van de politiek. Het is niet verrassend dat we hier alle critici van totalitarisme vinden, aangezien dit misschien wel het ultieme historische voorbeeld is van het beëindigen van politiek. In het politiek-historische kamp vindt men inspiratie bij denkers zoals Machiavelli, Tocqueville, Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, Claude Lefort, en Reinhart Koselleck die allemaal de (politieke) *geschiedenis* als hun leidraad nemen, en niet de moraal of de ethiek.

In deze drie kampen kan men verschillende theorieën over vrijheid vinden, en aangezien het probleem van vrijheid vandaag de dag draait om de problematische relatie tussen atomisme en homogene eenheid, is het vooral de relatie tussen het sociaal-ethische kamp en het politiek-historische kamp dat interessant zou kunnen zijn. In het sociaal-ethische kamp vinden we namelijk alle critici van atomisme en in het politiek-historische kamp alle critici van (totalitaire) homogene eenheid. Als we een middenweg willen vinden tussen atomisme en homogene eenheid dan lijkt de confrontatie tussen deze twee kampen een goed startpunt.

Echter, het is precies deze confrontatie die ontbreekt in hedendaagse filosofische debatten. Wanneer het probleem van vrijheid door filosofen wordt behandeld dan is het vaak de relatie tussen het morele en sociaal-ethische kamp dat centraal staat, zoals in de discussies tussen voorstanders van negatieve en positieve vrijheid, tussen liberalen en communitaristen, of tussen Kantianen en

Hegelianen. In deze dissertatie wordt daarentegen geprobeerd om een dialoog te creëren tussen het sociaal-ethische en politiek-historische kamp in de overtuiging dat een confrontatie tussen de critici van atomisme en de critici van homogene eenheid kan bijdragen aan een beter begrip van hoe we het ideaal van vrijheid vandaag de dag kunnen verwerkelijken.

De dissertatie bestaat uit drie delen: in het eerste deel bespreek ik het begrip van vrijheid van Claude Lefort (hoofdstuk 1) en Pierre Rosanvallon (hoofdstuk 2), die allebei deel uitmaken van het politiek-historische kamp. Hun reflectie op vrijheid vangt aan met de vraag wat de *voorwaarden van politiek* zijn en dit leidt tot een begrip van vrijheid dat ik *vrijheid als onbepaaldheid* noem. In het tweede deel van de dissertatie bespreek ik de theorieën van vrijheid van Charles Taylor (hoofdstuk 3) en Axel Honneth (hoofdstuk 4) die allebei werkzaam zijn in het sociaal-ethische kamp. Hun reflectie op vrijheid begint bij de vraag wat de *sociale voorwaarden voor individuele vrijheid* zijn en dit brengt hen tot een begrip van vrijheid dat ik *vrijheid als complementariteit* noem. In het uiteenzetten van hun verschillende ideeën over vrijheid neem ik hun verschillende kritieken van 'atomisme' en 'homogene eenheid' als uitgangspunt.

In deze vier hoofdstukken van de dissertatie wordt duidelijk dat alle vier de filosofen het probleem van atomisme erkennen, maar dat ze het anders benaderen, en er verschillende oplossingen voor zoeken. Lefort en Rosanvallon beschouwen atomisme als iets dat niet voorkomen kan worden, maar dat noodzakelijkerwijs gepaard gaat met de institutie van een democratische samenleving, waarbij de premoderne organische samenleving wordt getransformeerd tot een samenleving van individuen. Om opnieuw vorm en substantie aan de samenleving te geven moet volgens Lefort en Rosanvallon niet worden gestreefd naar het herstellen van een organische samenleving, maar er is een permanent politiek proces van *representatie* nodig. Taylor en Honneth zien atomisme daarentegen als een sociale pathologie die individuen verhindert om zichzelf te realiseren, en zij zien wederzijdse *erkenning* als de oplossing voor atomisme, wat gepaard gaat met een verlangen naar een organische, complementaire samenleving. Het gevolg is dat zij, in hun kritiek op atomisme, te weinig weerstand lijken te bieden aan het probleem van homogene eenheid.

Er wordt vervolgens beargumenteerd dat deze verschillen tussen het politiek-historische kamp (Lefort en Rosanvallon) en het sociaal-ethische kamp (Taylor en Honneth) verklaard kunnen worden door twee belangrijke onenigheden wat betreft de *mogelijkheden van kritiek*: dit betreft enerzijds de vraag of er in de moderniteit nog een 'bevoorrechte positie' voor kritiek mogelijk en wenselijk is, en anderzijds de vraag of de verschillende idealen en componenten van een vrije

democratische samenleving kunnen worden verzoend of niet. De filosofen in het sociaal-ethische kamp gaan uit van de mogelijkheid van een bevoorrechte positie voor kritiek gebaseerd op een sociaal gesitueerde ethiek, en ze gaan eveneens uit van de mogelijkheid van verzoening. De filosofen in het politiek-historische kamp verwerpen daarentegen beide aannames op basis van de inzichten van de politieke geschiedenis, en omarmen een kritisch perspectivisme, waarbij permanente politiek en het vinden van werkbare compromissen tussen onverzoenbare posities en idealen het hoogst haalbare is.

In het derde deel van de dissertatie worden deze verschillende opvattingen verder uitgediept. In hoofdstuk 5 wordt geïllustreerd hoe de theorieën over vrijheid in beide kampen gepaard gaan met verschillende geschiedfilosofische opvattingen. Hierbij wordt gebruik gemaakt van een onderscheid van Hayden White tussen 'tragische' en 'komische' opvattingen van de geschiedenis: hoewel beide opvattingen een centrale rol aan conflict geven, daar leiden deze conflicten in 'komische' opvattingen van de geschiedenis uiteindelijk tot een harmonieuze verzoening, terwijl in 'tragische' opvattingen altijd sprake zal blijven van onverzoenbaarheid. Ook hebben 'komische' opvattingen de neiging om politiek en geschiedenis ondergeschikt te maken aan de moraal en de ethiek, terwijl 'tragische' opvattingen de moraal en de ethiek ondergeschikt maken aan politiek en geschiedenis.

Via een historische reconstructie wordt aangetoond hoe de opvattingen van vrijheid in de Renaissance (Machiavelli en Guicciardini) gepaard gingen met 'tragische' opvattingen van de geschiedenis; hoe in de Verlichting vrijheid werd gekoppeld aan 'komische' opvattingen in de vorm van utopische geschiedsfilosofieën; en hoe in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw verschillende filosofen probeerden om het abstracte vrijheidsdenken van de Verlichting te 'situeren' door het te verbinden met de concrete inzichten van de nieuwe sociologische en historische disciplines. In deze laatste fase kan men een verschil maken tussen degenen die het Verlichtingsdenken situeren door terug te grijpen op de 'tragische' inzichten van de Renaissance (zoals Guizot en Tocqueville), en degenen die vasthouden aan de 'komische' opvattingen van de Verlichting en deze slechts historiseren (zoals Hegel en Marx). Deze verschillende benaderingen in de 19^{e} eeuw hebben bijgedragen aan de splitsing tussen een politiek-historisch kamp en een sociaal-ethisch kamp in de moderne filosofie, die doorwerkt in de verschillende opvattingen over de voorwaarden van vrijheid en de mogelijkheden van kritiek in het werk van Lefort, Rosanvallon, Taylor en Honneth.

In hoofdstuk 6 wordt vervolgens nader ingegaan op de verschillende manier waarop in beide kampen het proces wordt begrepen waarin vorm wordt gegeven aan een democratische samenleving. Hierbij wordt met name ingegaan op de verschillen tussen Rosanvallon en Honneth. Allereerst wordt gekeken hoe Rosanvallon en Honneth een verschillend begrip van het probleem van atomisme hebben en er ook een verschillende oplossing voor zoeken – ofwel met behulp van representatie (Rosanvallon) ofwel erkenning (Honneth) – en hoe dit gepaard gaat met verschillende ideeën over hoe een democratische samenleving vorm krijgt. Daarna wordt gekeken hoe beiden een verschillende evaluatie geven van algemeen kiesrecht: terwijl voor Hegelianen zoals Honneth het kiesrecht als relatief onbelangrijk wordt beschouwd bij het verwerkelijken van de vrijheid aangezien zij streven naar een intersubjectieve, complementaire vrijheid, daar is het voor Rosanvallon een belangrijke verworvenheid omdat het breekt met sociaal organicisme en daardoor een emancipatie van de burger-als-individu bewerkstelligt.

Ook wordt gekeken hoe Honneth en Rosanvallon een ander begrip hebben van sociale pathologieën enerzijds en de relatie tussen representaties en sociale realiteit anderzijds: terwijl voor Honneth een sociale pathologie ontstaat als er een kloof is tussen representaties en sociale realiteit (of tussen theorie en praktijk) daar ziet Rosanvallon een pathologie juist als het gevolg van het *dichten* van de kloof tussen representaties en sociale realiteit. Tot slot wordt gekeken hoe de idealen van de Verlichting en de Romantiek een verschillende invloed hebben gehad op het ontstaan van de democratie, en hoe dit heeft doorgewerkt in de verschillende manier waarop Honneth en Rosanvallon het proces begrijpen waarin een democratische samenleving vorm krijgt.

Aan de hand van deze bespiegelingen over de onderliggende verschillen tussen het politiek-historische en sociaal-ethische kamp wordt tot slot beargumenteerd dat een rehabilitatie van het politiek-historische kamp gewenst is als we de problemen rondom de verwerkelijking van vrijheid vandaag de dag beter willen begrijpen. In een tijd die gedomineerd wordt door zowel technocaten als populisten, die beiden pretenderen een 'bevoorrechte positie' in te nemen – ofwel die van de expert, ofwel die van de politicus die het volk 'werkelijk' representeert – en daarmee de voorwaarden van politiek ondermijnen, is het belangrijk om ons opnieuw te richten op de vraag hoe de *voorwaarden van politiek* kunnen worden gewaarborgd. Hierbij is het de politieke geschiedenis, en niet de moraal of the ethiek, die ons de meest bruikbare inzichten kan leveren.

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Curriculum Vitae

Hans Arentshorst werd geboren op 14 december 1982 te Noordwijk. Aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam behaalde hij de bachelor Literatuurwetenschap, de bachelor Wijsbegeerte (*cum laude*) en de master Wijsbegeerte van een bepaald wetenschapsgebied (*cum laude*). Van 2013 tot 2018 deed hij promotieonderzoek in de sociale en politieke filosofie aan de Universiteit Utrecht en de Universiteit van Jyväskylä (Finland).

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