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Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life (New Directions in Critical Theory)

By Axel Honneth



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Theories of justice often fixate on purely normative, abstract principles unrelated to real-world situations. The philosopher and theorist Axel Honneth addresses this disconnect, and constructs a theory of justice derived from the normative claims of Western liberal-democratic societies and anchored in morally legitimate laws and institutionally established practices.

Honneth's paradigm?which he terms "a democratic ethical life"?draws on the spirit of Hegel's Philosophy of Right and his own theory of recognition, demonstrating how concrete social spheres generate the tenets of individual freedom and a standard for what is just. Using social analysis to re-found a more grounded theory of justice, he argues that all crucial actions in Western civilization, whether in personal relationships, market-induced economic activities, or the public forum of politics, share one defining characteristic: they require the realization of a particular aspect of individual freedom. This fundamental truth informs the guiding principles of justice, enabling a wide-ranging reconsideration of its nature and application.



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Editorial Review

Review

Freedom's Right is a stunningly ambitious exploration of the ways in which major institutions of Western society promote freedom and at the same time present obstacles to its realization. Axel Honneth defends a compelling conception of social freedom grounded in mutual recognition, which he employs both to comprehend contemporary social reality and to reveal its deficiencies. Characterized by an extraordinary richness of detail, this book's aim is a provocative mix of reconciliation and critique. No social philosopher has attempted a project of this scope since Hegel composed the *Philosophy of Right* almost two hundred years ago.

(Frederick Neuhouser, Barnard College)

Breaking with the dominant style of contemporary political philosophy, Axel Honneth demonstrates how fruitful it can be to develop a theory of social justice not simply by appealing to common beliefs and intuitions but more fundamentally by understanding the characteristic institutions of modern society. *Freedom's Right* is a brilliant work by one of today's leading philosophers.

(Charles Larmore, Brown University)

Honneth has provided us with a central reference point for future debates on the nature of modernity, freedom, justice, and the social world.

(Arto Laitinen *Review of Politics*)

Review

This book is a major statement by the distinctive perspective of a pivotal figure in the Frankfurt School tradition. Axel Honneth's accounts of social freedom, normative reconstruction, and societal pathologies are sure to be points of reference within critical social theory for decades to come.

(Joel Anderson, Utrecht University)

About the Author

Axel Honneth is professor of philosophy at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University of Frankfurt and the Jack C. Weinstein Professor for the Humanities at Columbia University. His books include *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*; *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*; *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*; and *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*.

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