

Social Freedom and Real Utopias: Making 'Eroding Capitalism' a Theme in Axel Honneth's Theory of Socialism

Authors : Yotaro Natani

Abstract : In his recent works, Frankfurt School theorist Axel Honneth elucidates an intersubjective notion of social freedom and outlines a vision of socialism as the realization of social freedom in the family, market economy, and public sphere. These arguments are part of his broader project of defending the tradition of immanent critique and normative reconstruction. In contrast, American Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright spells out a vision of socialism in terms of building real utopias - democratic, egalitarian, alternative institutions- through the exercise of civil society's social power over the economy and state. Wright identifies 'eroding capitalism' as the framework for thinking about the strategic logics of gradually diminishing the dominance of capitalism. Both thinkers envision the transition toward socialism in terms of democratic experimentation; Honneth is more attentive to the immanent norms of social life, whereas Wright is better aware of the power of antagonistic structures. This paper attempts to synthesize the ideas of Honneth and Wright. It will show that Honneth's critique of capitalism suffers from certain ambiguities because he attributes normative legitimacy to existing institutions, resulting in arguments that do not problematize aspects of capitalist structures. This paper will argue that incorporating the notion of power and thematizing the erosion of capitalism as a long-term goal for socialist change will allow Honneth to think more precisely about the conditions for realizing social freedom, in a manner that is still consistent with the immanent critique tradition. Such reformulation will result in a concept of social freedom that is less static and rooted in functional teleology and more oriented toward creative agency and experimental democracy.

Keywords : Axel Honneth, immanent critique, real utopias, social freedom, socialism

Conference Title : ICPCTR 2020 : International Conference on Philosophy, Critical Theory and Rationality

Conference Location : Prague, Czechia

Conference Dates : July 09-10, 2020