

Honneth's Reconstructive Method and Theory of Social Justice

Ployjai Pintobtang Ph.D.¹

อ.ดร. พลอยใจ ปิ่นตบแต่ง

[Received: 25/04/2566 Revised: 16/05/2566 Accepted: 10/07/2566]

บทคัดย่อ

ทฤษฎีว่าด้วยความยุติธรรมและเสรีภาพของรอลส์อาจกล่าวได้ว่าเป็นหนึ่งในผลงานทางปรัชญาการเมืองที่สำคัญที่สุดของศตวรรษที่ยี่สิบซึ่งมีคุณูปการต่อการพัฒนาการของเสรีนิยมทางการเมืองในปัจจุบัน อย่างไรก็ตาม ทั้งความท้าทายจากโลกแห่งความเป็นจริงและการถกเถียงเชิงทฤษฎีล้วนตั้งคำถามต่างๆต่อทฤษฎีดังกล่าว ด้วยเหตุนี้ มีทฤษฎีทางเลือกต่างๆมากมายถูกนำเสนอและท่ามกลางตัวเลือกเหล่านั้น ทฤษฎีของฮอนเน็ทในหนังสือ *Freedom's Right* เป็นหนึ่งในทางเลือกที่ทั้งครอบคลุมและมีพลังในการอธิบายมากที่สุด บทความชิ้นนี้ทั้งอธิบายและวิจารณ์ทฤษฎีว่าด้วยความยุติธรรมของฮอนเน็ทโดยเปรียบเทียบกับแนวทางการศึกษาแบบคอนสตรัคทีฟของรอลส์ บทความนี้เสนอว่า แนวทางการศึกษาของฮอนเน็ทมีข้อเสียเปรียบต่างๆอันนำไปสู่ความล้มเหลวในการพยายามเป็นทฤษฎีทางเลือกที่จะมาแทนที่ทฤษฎีแบบเสรีนิยมของรอลส์

คำสำคัญ: ทฤษฎีความยุติธรรม ฮอนเน็ท รอลส์, ทฤษฎีการเมือง

Abstract

Rawls's theory of justice and liberty is arguably one of the most important works in political philosophy of the twentieth century which contributes to the formation of contemporary political liberalism. However, real world challenges as well as theoretical debates increasingly questions Rawlsian theory of liberty.² Alternative theories of liberty are proposed and among the most comprehensive and compelling is Axel Honneth's *Freedom's Right*. This article aims to both explain and evaluate Honneth's theory of justice and contrast it with the Rawlsian constructivist method. In so doing, it reveals disadvantages of Honneth's reconstructive method and its failure to replace the Rawlsian liberal counterpart.

Keywords: theory of justice, Honneth, Rawls, Political Theory

¹ Department of History, Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University

Rawls' theory of liberty is arguably one of the most important works in political philosophy of the twentieth century which contributes to the formation of contemporary political liberalism. However, real world challenges as well as theoretical debates increasingly questions Rawlsian theory of liberty.³ Alternative theories of liberty are proposed and among the most comprehensive and compelling is Axel Honneth's *Freedom's Right*. This article aims to both explain and evaluate Honneth's theory of justice and contrast it with the Rawlsian constructivist method. In so doing, it reveals disadvantages of Honneth's reconstructive method and its failure to replace the Rawlsian liberal counterpart.

1.The Overview of Honneth's Reconstructive Method

"Justice must entail granting all members of society the opportunity to participate in institutions of recognition. This means that certain normatively substantive and thus 'ethical' institutions requiring legal security, state authority and civil support shift to the centre of our idea of social justice. (Honneth, 2014, p. 61)"

In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth attempts to reconstruct Hegel's basic ideas in *Philosophy of Right* and to "develop the principles of social justice by means of an analysis of society (Honneth, 2014, p.7)" ,namely the reconstructive method in contrast to Kantian-Rawlsian constructivist theory of justice that does not take into account social reality and therefore, risks imposing abstract theory upon social reality inappropriately. Following Hegel's model in *Philosophy of Right*, Honneth employs freedom, the pre-eminent ideal of modern western society, as the point of reference to both delineate and evaluate existing institutions and practices and see how they promote or obstruct the realization of freedom and consequently, social justice. To achieve this goal, Honneth evaluates other theories of justice that are based on negative freedom (like that of Hobbes and Nozick) and reflexive freedom (like that of Kant and Rawls) and demonstrate how those kinds of freedom are inadequate as a foundation for a theory of justice. He then begins to reconstruct the three "spheres of actions" namely family, market economy, and democracy, then identifies practices and institutions that enable the realization of social freedom as, the normative foundation of western modern society.

1.1 Recht

I will begin with the etymology of the word "Recht" used in the title of the book in order to avoid any meaning being lost in translation. The original German title of Honneth's book is "Das Recht der Freiheit". The original title is *Das Recht der Freiheit: Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit*. The English translation of the title is *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of*

³ See, for example, Sinnott, G. (2020). Constitutional Law and the Limits of Rawlsian Liberty . *Legal Theory*, 26(2), 124-155. doi:10.1017/S1352325220000178. The article probes the applicability of Rawl's theory in the realm of civic liberty.

Democratic Life. The word “Recht” has meanings and connotations beyond the English word “right”. Recht stems from Old High German reht from Proto-Germanic rehtaz (“right, straight”), (an adjective also used substantively as a noun), from Proto-Indo-European h₃regtós (WordSense.eu). It means 1. The noun “right” as in the moral or legal entitlement to have or to do something (Oxford Online Dictionary) 2. Law. Recht is also very closely linked to Gerechtigkeit or justice. One of the variations of the verbal form of Recht is rechten which means to argue or to justify one’s point and gerechete is the past participle form of the word. Gerecht is an adjective which means fair, just, suitable, lawful or right. In German, when we put “ge-“ in front of a verb (then change the Endung in agreement with the subject) it usually has a similar effect to when we put –ed at the end of an English word; it is either transformed into a passive form or changes the tense of the verb. Gerecht, therefore, can arguably mean a quality of something that has been “right-ed” and Gerechtigket (justice) is a nominal form of it. The point I am trying to make here by giving a brief etymological background of the word Recht is that in the original text, *Freedom’s Right* is very close to Freedom’s Justice since we can say that, in German, justice is nothing but “right-ed-ness”.

2. Honneth’s Critique of Negative Freedom

Moving on to the other part of the book’s title which is *Freiheit* or freedom, in the next part of the essay I will discuss three kinds of freedom namely negative freedom, reflexive freedom and finally, social freedom in an attempt to specify how each contributes to a distinctive theory of justice. As Honneth himself also begins *Freedom’s Right* by giving historical background to these kinds of freedom, I shall follow his model but I will limit myself only to Hobbes, as the representative of negative freedom thinkers and Rawls as a representative of reflexive freedom thinkers and their theories of justice. At the end of this part, I will identify advantages and disadvantages of Honneth’s novel Hegelian theory of social justice in light of the mainstream Kantian-Rawlsian reflexive freedom theories including their methodological differences between the reconstructivist methodology of Honneth and Rawls’ constructivism.

The minimalist theory of negative freedom of Hobbes is inspired by his fascination with the Galilean “New Science” of the seventeenth century that falsifies Aristotelian physics. Although a humanist by training, Hobbes’s interest in theories of motion and their application in ballistics motivated him to formulate a new political theory that could finally move forward beyond Aristotle (Tuck, 2002, pp. 17-20). Theories of motion are to Hobbes the condition of human nature; theoretical and foundational, then Hobbes’s state theory is parallel with ballistics; i.e. the application of the theoretical state of nature to social reality. Despite the fact that we might not be at all convinced with his self-claimed “scientific method”, it is worth knowing the relationship between Hobbes’s negative freedom and the theories of motion. In an atomistic society, individuals can move independently from one another as long as they do not interfere with, or harm, other individuals and therefore “Any political and legal order derived in this

manner can only count on the approval of its subjects to the extent that it succeeds in fulfilling each of their individual expectations (Honneth, 2014, p.27)".

Honneth, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on the relationship between Hobbes's political theory and its historical, political context of the religious civil war and his intention to formulate a political theory that minimizes every kind of civil association which he despises as a source of disturbances and instability that inevitably leads to civil war that is not unlike his theoretical state of nature. In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth claims that Hobbesian negative freedom granted by the sovereign of the state only covers the individual's right to pursue their own egoistic aims, provided that they do not undermines the security of the state or harm other individuals. Honneth concludes that the rights derived from negative freedom "extends neither to the formulation of law nor to any interaction with fellow legal subjects...such a purely negative definition of freedom seamlessly passes over into the negativism of the resulting conception of justice (Honneth, 2014, p. 28)". Honneth finishes by demonstrating how negative freedom is an inadequate account of self-determination and only lets "the causality of an inner nature...guides the subject action and choices 'behind its back' (Honneth, p. 28)". In other words, acting by impulses without being able to resist or self-determine is undesirably passive and is not a satisfying model of freedom.

Honneth believes that in Hobbes political theory, it is political stability at all cost that is the most important goal; its normative content is hollow and freedom in a positive sense is seen as extravagant and does not relate to the concept of justice in any way. For Honneth, Hobbes' model does not provide any normative point of reference that has been drawn from values or ideals existing such as freedom in a certain society in a certain period in history. And for this reason, it is impossible to formulate a relevant theory of justice. Therefore, "The Greatest Liberty of Subjects, depentn on the Silence of the Law (Tuck, 2002, p. 152)"; you are as free as the sovereign does not prohibit you to be in the name of your own safety. Justice is defined in a minimalist way as the performance of every covenant (Tuck , 2002, p.100). The first covenant that the subjects make with one another to give all the political power to the sovereign is always the most essential one and is prioritized before any forms of freedom. For Hobbes, it is the excess of freedom that causes chaos and consequently deprives us of the conditions of justice. Too much freedom is seen as a greater threat to justice than the deprivation of freedom in Hobbes's political theory. In conclusion, negative freedom is, therefore, the way of thinking about freedom that sacrifices the best namely self-actualization and autonomy, in order to avoid the worst which is the return to the fictional state of nature or the condition of war. For Honneth, this leads to "the negativism" of the conception of justice. When freedom is posited as a threat to justice, the political system is designated as a tool to minimize instability by way of over-controlling. When freedom is defined crudely as the absence of external impediment without taking into account the inner-life, governing people is not different from taming animals. To shift the focus from the external impediments to the to the subject's relationship-to-self is the way to give the subject the capacity to act truly freely and not out of necessity i.e.

only in response to animalistic impulses such as fear. This then, gives a theory of justice a normative content and foundation that is not merely an outcome of a strategic way of maintaining security. This is when reflexive freedom comes into the picture.

3. Honneth's Reflexive Freedom

In Honneth's *Freedom's Right*, he offers two strands of reflexive freedom which are the model of moral autonomy like that of Emmanuel Kant and John Rawls, and the model of self-realization like that of John Steward Mill. In this research, however, I am going to limit myself only to the model of moral autonomy as it is the model that John Rawls; the most prominent justice theorist who employs the constructive methodology that Honneth intends to attack. John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* offers us a theory of justice based on the Kantian tradition of reflexive freedom. In this research, I will focus merely on the relationship between the tradition of reflexive freedom and Rawls' account of justice. In order to do so, I will attempt to understand Rawls' foundational concept of the Original Position which is central to his theory of justice.

3.1 Honneth and Rawls

The Original Position is a theoretical situation in which we ignore both our own, and other people's positions in the society when thinking about justice to avoid bias. In the attempt to be fair when distributing social goods, we do not take into account the differences everyone is born with. The relation between this way of thinking about justice as fairness and reflexive freedom is that, subjects do not merely think about others as impediments of their freedom but think of them as members in the society where people cooperate in not merely surviving but in having a good life together. This is the result of having what Kant calls moral autonomy, to be able to self-legislate and to act beyond our inclinations. This going beyond one's individual interest is also reflected in the formation of universal law in which Kant explains how it is closely linked to reflexive freedom. Paul Guyer succinctly explains this development in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: "Since I have robbed the will of every inducement that might arise for it as a consequence of obeying any particular law as such, and this alone must serve the will as its principle. That is to say, I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law. Here bare conformity to universal law as such (without having as its base any law prescribing particular actions) is what serves the will as its principle and must so serve it (Guyer, 1998, p. 35)"

Without the crude criteria of pure self-interest, the standard of one's maxim would shift to the quality of the maxim to be universally good. In Rawls' *Theory of Justice*, the Original Position shares some qualities with Kant's universal principle because the subjects think from the perspective of an impartial theoretical person while disregarding the differences they are born

with. Rawls, however, moves beyond the realm of individual morality and attempts to formulate a procedure in distributing social goods that reflects Kant's idea of people being free and equal, a procedure that guarantees justice. For Honneth, the strand of moral autonomy in reflexive freedom inevitably leads to a procedural conception of justice without any content and becomes problematic because: "the concrete definition of justice is the outcome of the procedure of collective self-determination...the idea of moral autonomy necessitates a procedural conception of justice that serves a social system based on cooperation or democratic deliberation." In other words, Honneth criticizes Kant's approach to make freedom its own moral foundation. This is because "the substance of this system is not determined in advance, because for conceptual reasons the theory cannot anticipate decisions that autonomous subjects must make on their own (Honneth, 2014, p. 37)". For Honneth, the model of moral autonomy in reflexive freedom is still inadequate for democratic deliberation as a social system because it is essentially hollow.

Above all, Honneth criticizes reflexive freedom and its model of moral autonomy and self-realization because it neglects existing social conditions. For Honneth, social conditions that promote the realization of freedom need to be interpreted. Honneth argues that, for reflexive freedom "social circumstances only come into play once the exercise of freedom has already been defined, they are then added externally, as elements of social justice, but not as an inherent aspect of the exercise of freedom (Honneth, p. 40)". For a complete conception of freedom, Honneth argues that social conditions have to be included in the process of self-reflection from the beginning because true freedom cannot be realized without taking into account the social conditions essential for its own realization, and this is when he calls for "an institutional expansion of the concept of freedom (Honneth, 2014, p. 40)" which is the third kind of freedom-- social freedom. At this point, it becomes clear how the methodological difference between Rawls and Honneth affect their ways of thinking about justice. Therefore, in this concluding paragraph of this part, I shall attempt to analyze Honneth's original reconstructive method as his formulation of theory of social justice in contrast with Rawls' constructive method. There are two points in this methodological difference that I would like to discuss because they directly raise questions about the content of justice and how to achieve it. The first point is what Rutger Claassen calls "the emptiness objection". Honneth accuses the constructive method of being restricted to formal principles and focusing merely on the rational normative construction of the theory of justice without considering the possibility of its realization. The second point concerns the concept of person in the Original Position versus Honneth's anthropological approach. In Rutger Claassen's article "Social Freedom and the Demands of Justice: A Study of Honneth's *Recht Der Freiheit*", he identifies Honneth's first objection to the constructive method as "the emptiness objection" in which Honneth accuses the Kantian-Rawlsian constructive model of justice of being empty of any normative content hence, its detachment from social reality which ultimately makes it irrelevant. Claassen responds to Honneth as follows::

“The question is not whether to include empirical reality into one’s theory, but how to do so. Of course, the step of applying a principle is a separate step (a matter of practical judgment); no constructivist would deny that content is added at the stage of application. But nothing forces the constructivist to accept social scientific standards at this stage (Claassen, 2014)”

For Claassen, (and possibly Rawls too), it is reasonable to focus on the procedure and leave the content empty because, in the constructivist point of view, historical and social reality are not proper ingredients in formulating a theory of justice. “Historical and social reality” simply implies a selection process which also so readily allows itself to be a mechanism of exclusion. History is not in any way immutable and relying on historical “fact” to ground a theory of justice is therefore extremely dangerous.

However, from the reconstructive point of view, what is novel and valuable in the reconstructive method is not only the inclusion of social analysis itself but the fact that it provides a new foundation for justice namely the idea of recognition. In *Freedom’s Right*, Honneth argues that it is not adequate to see others as free and equal (as in the autonomy model) but the subjects are to “recognize the need to supplement their respective aims, thus seeing their own aims in the other, merely reflexive freedom becomes intersubjective freedom (Honneth, p. 45) and this is what Hegel calls “being with oneself in the other (Honneth, 2014, p. 44)”. Responses to the constructivist approach will be further scrutinized in the next part in which I will move on to the problematic concept of person in Rawls’s Original Position versus Honneth’s more anthropological approach.

It is worth seeing the problem of the concept of person in light of the debate between the liberals and the communitarian. Honneth’s insistence on the intersubjective approach to the concept of person enables us to categorize him as an opponent of the Rawlsian liberal model of self as antecedently individuated (Mulhall and Swift, p. 73). This wider debate allows us to see how the conceptual difference of person parallels with their methodological difference.

The reconstructive method’s argument that, despite how rational and well-constructed a theory of justice might be, in order to be realized, it has to be implemented in social reality and that is when the problem will arise since that theory completely disregards the social reality and is foreign to it. This can be refuted with the fact that a free-standing constructive model of theory of justice has the advantage over the reconstructive one in that it is at least, methodologically more reliable. When dealing with a concept that is essentially a public concern like the concept of justice, it is necessary to provide a tool for everyone to systematically to question it. The reconstructive method has a fixed point of reference in the idea of freedom and attempts to find its potential in the existing social reality and therefore, risks engaging itself in the conundrum of defining one of the most controversial terms such as reality. This ultimately leads to justice as a topic of discussion becoming more abstract and more difficult to be systematically questioned. Meanwhile, the constructive theory of justice is

more tangible in that it allows itself to be criticized according to the standards of logic and soundness and in terms of applicability.

While the first question of the problem of application concerns mostly about the questions of efficiency and applicability, the second question about the concept of the person goes deeper into the metaphysical foundation of the two methodologies of constructivism and reconstructivism. I am going to define this issue by putting forward the argument which has already been proposed in Mulhall and Swift's *Liberals and Communitarians*. Sandel's critique of Rawls that the disembodied self, standing in a purely voluntary relation to its ends, is an incoherent way to understand how people relate to their values and purposes; we are constituted as the people we are by those ends that give our life its meaning hence our identities (Mulhall and Swift, p. 199).

This argument concerns the fundamental difference between the liberal and the communitarian way of seeing how a theoretical political community comes into being. In response to this argument, Rawls insists on the difference between the public and the private and between a political and an associational. Mulhall and Swift interpret Rawls's response as an argument for the involuntary nature of the political; our public identity as citizens is unique because as a citizen, we can regard ourselves as independent from, and capable of revising on reasonable grounds, our conception of the good (Mulhall and Swift, p. 201). This ambiguous response reveals one flaw in Rawls's theory of justice; it relies so much on people's rationality and their ability to "theorize away from social reality". In the tradition of procedural justice, the ability to radically self-determine is a compulsory requirement.

3. The alternative is Honneth's reconstructive method which emphasizes the intersubjective theory of self-formation. In the Hegelian tradition of intersubjective theory, the boundaries not only between subjects but also between subjects and objective social reality and the concept of social freedom become blurred. Everything seems to be the pre-condition of everything. The interconnectedness nature of the intersubjective theory gives us the advantage of being able to think beyond the framework of self-interest. However, at the same time, it raises another, arguably more severe, problem of measurement and responsibility. As I have mentioned earlier, when it comes to the concept of justice which is inherently a public issue, it is important to have the language that allows everyone to enter into the public sphere and debate over different issues and be able to know whose responsibility it is that concerns this and that problem. The intersubjective theory that attempts to reconstruct the concept of a person makes it more complicated to identify both the problem and those who are responsible for it because, as I have mentioned, "everything is precondition of everything". It is necessary to reformulate the grammar of public debate to fit with the intersubjective theory. The precept that you cannot think analytically about concepts without taking into account social

reality sounds self-evident at first glance. Nevertheless, it also requires people to think radically different than what we usually do; by grasping concepts as if it is a thing and build our arguments from there. It is a real challenge, although not entirely impossible. Therefore, the next part of the research is going to focus on Honneth's theory of justice and his concept of social freedom in the sphere of democracy. In my opinion, it is the most appropriate sphere to examine Honneth's theory of justice and the reconstructive method at work. Honneth's Justice in the Democratic Sphere

In the last part of this research, I am going to focus on Honneth's "" democratic sphere in the last chapter of *Freedom's Right* titled "the We of Democratic Will-Formation" and, finally, I evaluate the reconstructive method and identify its advantages and disadvantages in comparison with the Rawlsian constructive method.

Departing from the Hegelian model in *Philosophy of Right*, Honneth begins by identifying how social institutions are the embodiment of social freedom in the democratic sphere. The institution of the public sphere is "a social sphere in which citizens form generally acceptable beliefs through deliberative discussion, beliefs that form the principles to be obeyed by the legislature in accordance with the rule of law (Honneth, 2014, p. 254)". In the same way that negative, reflexive and social freedom are dependent on one another, Honneth insists, contrary to the proceduralists, that the deliberative decision process is "bounded (Honneth, 2014, p. 254)" by the realization of freedom in the other two spheres of family and market, hence "the necessity for supporting social freedom in the two other spheres (Honneth, 2014, p. 255)".

In the first section of "the Democratic Public Sphere", Honneth reconstructs the history of the emergence of the public sphere in modern Western society to support his argument that it is social freedom, not individual freedom that is the normative ideal of modern democratic society. Supported by the history of social struggle for political rights, Honneth argues that the democratic public sphere's dependence on communicative practices reveals the flaw of the model of democratic society based on individual freedom. He indicates the distinctive nature of political freedom that is essentially positive, unlike the liberal rights to freedom which are essentially negative. The social movements for political right in the nineteenth century; from the workers' movement to the movement for female suffrage, illustrate how "political rights enable subjects to do what they could not do alone and in a stance of individual retreat (Honneth, 2014, p. 259)."

Honneth then moves on to identify the pathologies of social freedom. He uses examples of the aggressive sentiment of public opinion during the Franco-Prussian War, German radical völkish nationalism, and the current "entertainment journalism" that does not fulfill its duty as a media. Lastly, he criticizes the online community whose "price for the boundlessness and placelessness

of the web-based public is that there are almost no demands on rationality (Honneth, 2014, p. 301)". He ends this section by emphasizing the inadequacy of constitutional patriotism as an explanation for what unites the society. This is because it cannot motivate citizens to participate in the process of democratic deliberation. The democratic sphere is different from the other two spheres (family and market) in that "Whereas we always seek involvement in the other two spheres of social freedom, because our 'natural' desires or objective constraints of survival compel us to, we must first resolve to engage in the sphere of democratic will-formation (Honneth, 2014, p. 278)".

The social phenomenon of "apathy" is what Honneth regards as the worst form of social pathology. His last appeal to the concept of solidarity as a social glue with an emotional aspect that appropriately transcends national borders in Western Europe offers the missing piece in the concept of freedom as he concludes his five-year project by contending that, "there remains little more than the hope that on the basis of the historical consciousness, we will see the development of a European culture of shared attentiveness and broadened solidarity (Honneth, 2014, p. 335)".

4. Critique of Honneth's Normative Reconstructive Method

In this last part of my essay, I shall argue how Honneth's normative reconstructive method, as a tool to formulate a new theory of justice based on the concept of social freedom, might not be a superior alternative to the constructivist theory of freedom.. There are two points that I would like to make in order to support my argument; First, the relationship between historical fact and the underlying normative ideal is problematic. Second, there is an inconsistency in Honneth's reconstructive methodology.

Honneth's "reconstruction" of the history of modern Western public sphere is extensive and in-depth. Nevertheless, by making the role of the study of history merely a tool to identify one "normative ideal" of the modern society seems to be inappropriate for many reasons. First of all, it is limiting and, ironically, becomes merely "instrumental" in the Frankfurt School thinkers' usage of the term. Instead of treating history as competing narratives, taking for granted one narrative as a fact is rather dangerous. For example, it is in the last part of the book that Honneth appeals to the solidarity of the Western European countries beyond the nation-state borders. However, it is worth pointing out that he could only do so convincingly because previously he has chosen not to give the weight to the inimical elements in relationships among European countries. In fact, it could also be argued in the opposite way that, historically, the Western European nation-state system arose from numerous military conflicts throughout its history.. Furthermore, Honneth's employment of the shared Western European intellectual heritage as the basis of freedom inevitably risks exclusion of some citizens. Now more than ever, it is important to consider the various religious, historical and cultural backgrounds of the people that inhabit Western Europe. Multiple cases of racial and religious tensions prove how Europe can no longer define itself only within European border without taking into account

citizens with different backgrounds. The problem with *Freedom's Right* and its reconstructive method is that Honneth only provides a long series of self-claimed historical facts that fit his argument for the concept of social freedom.

Secondly, reconstructivism as a method seems novel and ground-breaking. Nevertheless, in order for it to become an acceptable methodology in the field of social science, Honneth has to be more specific on what criteria one should employ in judging what is the ultimate normative foundation of a given society. It seems that this reconstructive method only can work as a tool for analysis only in Western European developed modern society. Honneth himself might argue that this is because he would like to insist that the concept of a Kantian-Rawlsian free-standing, universal constructive method is ineffective. Nevertheless, as I have mentioned, mere European history, let alone if it is true or not, is no longer adequate for the understanding of European society and its normative ideal.

In summary, after a close scrutiny of Honneth's highly original theory of justice as a revision of the Hegelian normative reconstructivist methodology especially in the third democratic sphere of social freedom, I have come to the conclusion that despite a theoretically more well-grounded concept of social freedom, it does not seem to be qualified as a replacement for the Rawlsian liberal concept of reflexive freedom and its free-standing constructive theory of justice. Honneth's decision to employ historical "facts" to formulate a theory of justice that takes into account social reality in the hope of making his theory of justice relevant in social reality backfires. Instead of making his theory of justice more approachable, the intersubjective alternative that he proposes further complicates the concept of justice and therefore pushes it further away from the public concern without giving any real advantages over the dominant liberal concept of reflexive freedom and its theory of justice. Moreover, the reconstructive method that employ European history as its foundation, fails to incorporate the fast-changing reality of the increasing number of European citizens with different religious and cultural backgrounds. If reconstructive method decides to do so, it will lose its characteristic region-focused and would ultimately have to recourse to the constructive method.

Reference

"A Review of Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life." Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (2014). Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Web. 28 Dec. 2014. <<http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/53335-freedom-s-right-the-social-foundations-of-democratic-life/>>.

Claassen, R. (2014), Social Freedom and the Demands of Justice: A Study of Honneth's Recht Der Freiheit. *Constellations*, 21: 67–82. doi: 10.1111/1467-8675.12068

Freeman, Samuel, "Original Position", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/original-position/>>.

Guyer, P., Ebsco Publishing (Firm, & Netlibrary, I. (1998). *Kant's Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals : critical essays*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Axel Honneth. (2014). *Freedom's right : the social foundations of democratic life*. Columbia University Press.

Mulhall, S., & Swift, A. (1996). *Liberals and communitarians*. Blackwell.

Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press.

Tuck, R. (2002). *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction*. OUP Oxford.