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Social freedom as ideology

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Abstract

This article explores objections made against ideal theorizing in political philosophy by two prominent contemporary critical theorists: Axel Honneth and Charles Mills. In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth situates his neo-Hegelian analysis of social freedom in opposition to contemporary political philosophy that has become 'decoupled from an analysis of society'. Across many works, Mills has argued that ideal theorizing in political theory is not only ineffectual, but more problematically, that it is ideological in nature and serves the interests of privileged groups. I suggest that whereas Honneth's objection to ideal theorizing hearkens back to Hegel's critique of Kant, Mills' objection that ideal theory is ideology hearkens back to Marx's critique of bourgeois political philosophy in general, and Hegel's political philosophy in particular. Against the background of these debates, I assess Honneth's theory of social freedom according to Mills' Marxian inspired ideology critique. I argue that while in some respects, Honneth's theory of social freedom is a defensible project, in other respects, Mills' critique remains instructive and allows us to see the ways in which aspects of Honneth's theory could serve ideological functions, and thus, is not entirely successful, either as a piece of critical theory or as an alternative to ideal theory.

Keywords

Axel Honneth, Charles Mills, critical theory, Hegel, ideal theory, ideology, Marx, nonideal theory, social freedom

This article explores objections made against ideal theorizing in political philosophy by two prominent contemporary critical theorists: Axel Honneth and Charles Mills. In his recent *Freedom's Right* (FR) (Honneth 2014), Honneth situates his neo-Hegelian analysis of social freedom as justice in stark opposition to contemporary political philosophy that has become 'decoupled from an analysis of society' and 'fixated on purely normative principles'. Across many works, Mills has argued that ideal theorizing in political theory is not only ineffectual, but more problematically, that it is ideological in nature and serves the interests of privileged groups. I suggest that whereas Honneth's objection

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to ideal theorizing hearkens back to Hegel's critique of Kant, Mills' objection that ideal theory is ideology hearkens back to Marx's critique of bourgeois political philosophy in general, and Hegel's political philosophy in particular. Against the background of these long-standing debates, we can raise the following question: Is Honneth's neo-Hegelian theory of social freedom a plausible alternative paradigm for political philosophy and is it subject to Mills' Marxian inspired ideology critique? I argue that while in some qualified respects, Honneth's theory of social freedom is a laudable and defensible project, in other respects, Mills' critique remains instructive and allows us to see the ways in which aspects of Honneth's theory could serve ideological functions, and thus, is not entirely successful, either as a piece of critical theory or as an alternative to ideal theory.

The article is divided into four sections. I begin by considering some preliminaries concerning the relation between the ideal/nonideal theory debate and the aims of critical theory more broadly. I outline Honneth's project as a challenge to ideal theory from the perspective of Hegel's critique of Kant and suggest that we can view Mills' challenge to ideal theory from the perspective of Marx's critique of Hegel. I divide Mills' method of ideology critique into a narrow and broader understanding and provide reasons why Honneth's FR project could be viewed as ideological according to the narrow understanding. Section II provides an outline of Mills' broader understanding of ideology that is the focus of the article, drawing primarily from his essay, '"Ideal Theory" as Ideology' (ITI).[1] Section III provides an analysis of Honneth's theory of social freedom as presented in FR to determine whether it can be viewed as ideological according to Mills' broader understanding. I consider whether Honneth's theory should be classified as what Mills calls an ideal-as-descriptive-model (IDM) or an ideal-as-idealized-model (IIM) and further assess Honneth's theory with respect to two dimensions of ideal theories identified by Mills: idealized social ontology and idealized social institutions. Honneth's theory is most problematic according to the dimension of ideal social institutions. Section IV takes up Honneth's own conception of ideology and suggests that the forms of social freedom presented in FR could be viewed as ideological even according to Honneth's own account. Throughout, I aim to demonstrate that Mills' model of ideology critique not only allows us to see the enduring importance of Marx's critique of Hegel, but further, the enduring importance of Marx's methods for critical theory and political philosophy more broadly.

I Critical theory and the ideal/nonideal debate: Hegel's critique of Kant and Marx's critique of Hegel

This section aims to frame the present discussion by answering two preliminary questions. First, what is the relationship between critical theory and the ideal/nonideal theory debate? Second, how can the critical theories of Honneth and Mills be situated within that context?

In contemporary political philosophy, the debate concerning ideal and nonideal theory stems primarily from a Rawlsian framework and its adopted terminology; however, one of the aims of this article is to suggest that the general philosophical issues at stake in that debate are far from new and have significant precedents within the history of

philosophy, particularly when viewed from the lens of the critical theory tradition.[2] Stated in a cursory way, the ideal/nonideal debate concerns the procedure, nature, and aims of theorizing in political philosophy. As the term suggests, ideal theory in political philosophy concerns an ideal of justice under perfect or near-perfect conditions, 'the principles of justice that would regulate a well-ordered society', where 'everyone is presumed to act justly and to do his [*sic*] part in upholding just institutions' (Rawls 1971, 8).[3] The nonideal part of political philosophy assumes partial compliance (not everyone acts justly or does their part upholding just institutions) and 'studies the principles that govern how we are to deal with injustice'. While these definitions of ideal and nonideal theory on their own seem rather uncontroversial, what is controversial is the *priority* given to ideal theory in connection with the decidedly nonideal conditions of society in which neither individual actions nor institutions can be presumed to be just. This priority of ideal theory can be understood in at least two ways. First, methodologically speaking, political philosophy must begin by outlining an ideal theory of justice before working out the various ways in which reality deviates from the ideal. Second, and more substantively, this is not simply a matter of best procedure; rather, 'until the ideal is identified, at least in outline – and that is all we should expect – nonideal theory lacks an objective, an aim, by reference to which its queries can be answered' (Rawls 1999, 90). This more substantive priority can be viewed as a claim about the priority of the *ought* over the *is* and their categorical separation: The ideal is not only the ultimate criterion by which we evaluate reality but, further, the ideal of what ought to be is something that can be formulated in complete or near-complete isolation from consideration of nonideal, actual circumstances that obtain in social reality.

Even from this admittedly sketchy formulation, we can see that critical theory will have a stake in this debate. At first glance, it looks like critical theory will side with nonideal theory and challenge the priority of ideal theory, both at the methodological and substantive levels. Indeed, in the classical formulations, critical theory describes itself in opposition to other types of social and political theorizing *methodologically* by describing itself as a type of social philosophy that both informs and is informed by empirical research,[4] and *substantively* by orienting itself with the negative aim of 'concern for the abolition of social injustice' (Horkheimer 2002, 242).[5] However, it might be more accurate to say that long before the division of labour instituted by the Rawlsian terminology of ideal and nonideal and inspired by a left-Hegelian philosophical framework, critical theory already saw a need to move beyond this dualistic approach to social and political theorizing and sought to integrate the ideal and nonideal dialectically. On the one side, critical theory contends that ideal theories are never as ideal as they purport to be: Philosophical theories and moral concepts concerning justice arise from specific times, places, and interests and are shaped historically thereby. The historical embeddedness of ideas suggests that ideals are always indexed to particular realities, whether or not this is explicitly acknowledged. As Marx writes: 'By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying' (Marx 2000, 257). Critique is therefore required to prevent distortion, misunderstanding and the covering over of prevailing injustices that lack adequate visibility or articulation. On the other side, nonideal realities are not normatively neutral or mute with respect to providing guidance towards their own transformation and the reduction or elimination of

particular injustices. Normative promises, learning processes, contradictions, failures, and crises are embedded within our actual institutions, practices, attitudes, and laws, which mean that nonideal reality can also guide the critical transformation of ideals that inform political theory and practice. Working from both perspectives – appreciating what is known in this tradition as the dialectics of immanence and transcendence – critical theory can be understood as a systematic ideology critique of the present that aims at both enlightenment and emancipation for historical agents.[6] As noted earlier, critical theory's methodological and substantive commitment to the entwinement of the historical and the normative in its analysis of social injustice is fundamentally founded upon a Hegelian–Marxian framework. I want to suggest that far from being an episode of interest merely to historians of ideas, this philosophical context remains highly instructive for understanding the stakes and terms of the ideal/nonideal debate. To further understand this context, I now turn to the critical theories of Honneth and Mills.

Given the landscape of contemporary political philosophy, it is not entirely surprising that Honneth begins FR by positioning his approach in opposition and as an alternative to ideal theory 'decoupled from an analysis of society' (FR 1). The key to Honneth's project – both here and in his earlier works – is a Hegelian critique of Kantianism, and we can approach this framework in two ways. First, and in a move that appears to ally him with political realists, Honneth objects that the normative principles operative in contemporary political philosophy are constructed in complete isolation from consideration of the actual institutions and practices they supposedly govern.[7] Ideal constructions of justice and its principles are obtained via idealization procedures that 'are then "applied" secondarily to social reality', turning political philosophy into a kind of applied ethics, rather than an investigation of the existing norms of social and political institutions.[8] Second, we can understand Honneth's Hegelian objection in terms of an institutional critique that defends the priority of what Hegel calls ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) over individualized, transcendental, and proceduralist accounts of moral reflection through which the principles of ideal theories are derived (*Moralität*). The thought here amounts to the following: Although individual moral reflection on authoritative norms (e.g. autonomy and equality) and the extent of their application constitutes an important part of how political agents adjudicate actions and institutional action contexts, this highly developed form of moral reasoning is dependent upon historically achieved institutions and practices for both its genesis and its continuing operation and authority.[9] Specifically, the capacity and authority of moral reflection is achieved through institutions and practices of mutual recognition in various social and political contexts – most importantly for Hegel and Honneth: personal relationships, markets and nation states – which means that the normativity of these institutions themselves cannot in turn be simply grounded on the principles derived from individual moral reflection.[10] Insofar as moral reflection is a result and achievement of the historically developing institutions of ethical life, the normativity of institutions of recognition has both developmental and conceptual priority over the principles derived from individual moral reflection. As Honneth suggests, 'recognition *within* institutions must precede the freedom of atomistic individuals and discursive subjects' (FR 59; my emphasis).

Although much of this is familiar terrain for those acquainted with Hegel's critique of Kant, Honneth also presents two distinctive ideas in FR that further develop his own

approach to critical theory: the method of normative reconstruction and the idea of social freedom.[11] Normative reconstruction sets out four methodological presuppositions for Honneth's investigation into the primary institutions of ethical life: first, that social reproduction depends upon shared universal ideals and values; second, a theory of justice must be developed on the basis of those values, and institutions and practices are deemed just to the extent that they are capable of realizing shared values; third, the institutions and practices that can be shown to actually realize general values are 'normatively reconstructed'; fourth, normative reconstruction should not simply affirm the existing institutions of ethical life, but must also criticize their failures in realizing the shared values that enable social reproduction (FR 3–10). Honneth's method of normative reconstruction has been subject to criticism from various perspectives, and FR does not present an independent defence of this method for critical theory apart from a short presentation of the four premises in the introduction of the book.[12] I would note, however, that nothing about the general thesis that ethical life has priority over individual moral reflection in a theory of justice entails *this* specific method of normative reconstruction, which means that one could accept key aspects of Hegel's critique of Kant and ideal theories without accepting Honneth's chosen method in FR.

For the purposes of this article, social freedom is the more important concept defended in FR, and it better captures what is at the core of Hegel's critique of Kant-inspired ideal theories. In contrast to negative freedom (freedom from external impediments and constraints; FR 21–28) and reflexive freedom (the self-relation of autonomous agents whose wills are guided by their own intentions; FR 29–41), social freedom denotes the relations of mutual recognition realized in the various spheres of action that make up ethical life. Social freedom is both a condition for negative and reflexive freedom, and represents a distinct form of freedom in which subjective aims and intentions find their full realization in the institutional contexts of objective reality. The key thought here is that individual freedom (autonomy, or what Honneth called in earlier works, a 'practical relation-to-self') requires objective conditions for its realization. At a general level, individual freedom requires mutual recognition, which 'refers to the reciprocal experience of seeing ourselves confirmed in the desires and aims of the other, because the other's existence represents a condition for fulfilling our own desires and aims' (FR 44–45). At a more specific level, individual freedom is realized within specific institutional action contexts in which subjects give and receive different forms of mutual recognition (e.g. love, respect, and esteem), which are the enabling conditions for the realization of individual aims. When Honneth contends that a theory of justice should be thought of as an analysis of society, he means that justice should be concerned with an analysis of the objective, institutional, recognition-based spheres of action and their accepted, operative norms through which individual autonomy becomes a reality. Social freedom is thus the nexus of necessary, intersubjective, institutional conditions that make individual freedom an objective reality.

Given that FR is clearly an attempt to rewrite Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* for the present, it is surprising that Honneth has not considered potential criticisms from a Marxian perspective, especially since Honneth works out of the tradition of critical theory.[13] This is pressing, not only because it speaks to the viability of such a project but, further, because other alternatives to ideal theories have been proposed from

Marxian perspectives that are quite prominent in the literature, which have the potential of undermining Honneth's Hegelian alternative as an approach in political philosophy (before it even began, insofar as much of this literature predates FR).[14] For many years and from a Marxian standpoint, Charles Mills has criticized ideal theory as an approach in political philosophy on the grounds that it serves an ideological rather than emancipatory function (ITI 170). For Mills, the problem with ideal theory is not simply that it abstracts from the social and institutional preconditions of the normative principles of a theory of justice; rather, the problem with ideal theory is that its idealizations often reflect the privileges and interests of dominant groups. These idealizations potentially both perpetuate dominant group privilege and obscure systematic forms of injustice and oppression experienced by non-dominant groups. This Marxian dimension of the critique of ideal theory is entirely missed in Honneth's Hegelian critique, in part because it originates from Marx's critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Although Honneth's Hegelian critique of ideal theory reveals the ways in which the principles of a theory of justice are parasitic upon institutionalized spheres of recognition, Marx's original critique of Hegel consisted in showing that the norms embedded in these institutionalized spheres – in particular, the state and civil society – reflected the interests of the revolutionary bourgeois class who forged these same institutions according to their aims. To be sure, the dispute between Hegel and Marx is far too complex to be settled here; for our purposes, what is important is that the embedding of norms in institutions of recognition does not inoculate them from the charge of ideology.[15]

Mills' approach to ideology critique has two dimensions, one narrow and one broad. On the narrower understanding, which takes up interpretive issues in Marx and Engels, Mills has defended a reading of ideology where it should be understood as referring primarily to the position of idealism and the prioritizing of the superstructural edifice of society as its key determining factor (mainly: the state and the juridical system, but also: religion and morality in the sense of what Hegel called *Moralität*) (Mills 1985, 2003).[16] On this narrower understanding, Kantian approaches to ideal theory would be ideological to the degree that they lead with principles that are derived from the superstructure disguised as a transcendental theory of individualized morality. The Hegelian approach would be ideological to the extent that it prioritizes the ideals of the superstructure over the functioning of the material base (roughly, natural and social reproduction in the family and civil society) as the essential determining factor of a theory of society.[17] On this score, the results are mixed, depending on whether one takes a conservative or revolutionary approach to Hegel, an issue that I will not address here. With respect to FR and Honneth's work more broadly, the results are also mixed. On this narrow understanding of ideology, Honneth has resources to claim that his theory is non-ideological on the following grounds: (1) his earlier theory of recognition emphasizes the moral struggle of those who are not or misrecognized within current institutional contexts over the dominant, superstructural interpretation of norms and practices (Honneth 1995, 2003, 2007a); (2) although Honneth's theory is still 'weakly' teleological, he, unlike Hegel, does not prioritize the state over and above the family and civil society or the market in his analysis of society (FR 254);[18] and (3) despite recognizing the normative advances of modernity that are tied to the idea of legal personhood and moral respect, Honneth emphasizes the limitations of these perspectives as well as

diagnoses prevalent social pathologies associated with abstract conceptions of legal and moral freedom (FR 81–94, 104–20).

However, two features of FR make Honneth potentially vulnerable to charges of ideology in the narrow sense. The first is Honneth's commitment to what he views as the arch-ethical value of modern societies, 'freedom, that is, the autonomy of the individual' (FR 15). This means that despite the fact that individual freedom has intersubjective and institutional preconditions, a theory of justice is nonetheless essentially related to and primarily oriented by an idea of the autonomy of individuals. Institutional action-spheres are therefore assessed according to the degree to which they are able to realize this arch-ethical value, in addition to the other values that may be specific to respective spheres (e.g. emotional development in families, mutual respect and solidarity in markets, publicity and reaching understanding in democracies). The question here concerns whether Honneth is able to find a non-ideological (here: non-idealist and non-superstructural) justification for autonomy as the arch-ethical value. Taking individual freedom as the highest value of society could be viewed as taking what is a product of capitalist exchange relations as a universal and unimpeachable value (idealism) and transforming the language of legal rights and personhood into a transcendental morality, albeit in a slightly different fashion than Kantian theories (superstructuralism).[19] (In 2015, Honneth has continued to defend individual freedom as the arch-value of modernity by enlisting Hegel's end of history thesis.)

The second feature of FR that makes it vulnerable to the narrow charge of ideology is the method of normative reconstruction itself. The key here is Honneth's insistence that 'the norms already underlying existing institutions' are the sufficient criteria for assessing the degree to which the same, relevant institutions can be said to realize individual freedom (Schaub 2015, 111). Institutions are thus evaluated according to existing ideals and present ideals are assumed to be correct or sufficient insofar as they are the products of a historical learning process. In addition to existing norms being deemed sufficient, existing institutions are expected to be capable of realizing such norms in principle, even if at present they fall short of realizing their full potential (what Honneth calls a 'misdevelopment'). This appears to be idealism in a fairly straightforward sense, insofar as relatively complete ideals – guided by the arch ideal of individual freedom – are the measure by which we assess reality. When institutions fail to realize existing norms, these are viewed as deviations or misdevelopments from the ideal, but never as a sign that an institution is itself contradictory or unfit for the realization of existing norms (let alone new norms or the reinterpretation of old ones). As has been noted by Schaub (2015), this seems to go against key tenets of critical theory, and I would also note, nonideal theory, insofar as it disables the thought that the transformation of ideals and reality go hand in hand.[20]

Although I think a lot more can be said on the score of the narrow understanding of ideology, the remainder of this article will focus on Mills' broader understanding of this term. The broader understanding of ideology takes us beyond strict Marxian terminology while retaining its core critique, which renders it more useful for political philosophy. Whereas Mills' narrow sense of ideology sheds doubt on the plausibility of Honneth's specific approach to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Mills' broader sense of ideology will reveal the FR project to be a highly flawed alternative to ideal theory from a variety of

perspectives: from the perspective of Honneth's own work on emancipatory struggles for recognition and ideology, from the perspective of a self-avowedly Marxian critical theory, and from the perspective of mainstream political philosophy where ideal theories have been consistently challenged from Marxian, feminist, and critical race perspectives.

II Mills on ideology: A broader understanding

In his essay, '"Ideal Theory" as Ideology', Mills presents a broader understanding of ideology in the context of criticizing ideal political theory as 'obfuscatory, and . . . in part *ideological*, in the pejorative sense of a set of group ideas that reflect, and contribute to perpetuating, illicit group privilege' (ITI 166).[21] To articulate this broader notion of ideology, Mills begins by distinguishing between two senses of ideal: ideal-as-normative and ideal-as-model. Ideal-as-normative concerns the values and ideals operative in any normative theorizing, regardless of the approach taken concerning the status of these ideals. Leaving aside this first sense of ideal, Mills focuses instead on what he calls *ideal-as-model* and distinguishes between a descriptive and idealizing approach. An IDM, as suggested by its name, provides a descriptive account of how something, P, actually works, an actual P's 'essential nature' and 'basic dynamic'. Even in descriptive modelling, certain abstractions will be made in order to capture what is essential, which means that any type of modelling will necessarily include certain abstractions.[22] An IIM, rather than trying to describe how an actual P works, presents an ideal P or an 'exemplar' of how P 'should work' (ITI 167). As Mills notes, the usefulness of producing an IIM cannot be determined a priori, but will depend upon its proximity to an IDM. If an actual P operates in a way that does not resemble the ideal P at all, clearly the IIM will be of limited explanatory and action-guiding value – the ideal will neither explain how an actual P works nor explain how we might transform an actual P into an ideal one. An IIM could be quite useful if the IDM closely resembles it, and we could even imagine a situation in which there is not much difference between an IDM and an IIM (Mills uses the example of a smooth, Teflon-coated plane suspended in a vacuum as being close to an ideal frictionless plane).

With respect to ideal models pertaining specifically to 'human interaction and moral theory', IIMs operate with both factual and moral idealizations. At the level of factual idealizations, human agents are attributed 'capacities significantly deviant from the norm', where 'degrees of rationality, self-knowledge, ability to make interpersonal cardinal utility comparisons and the like' do not in any way resemble the capacities of actual human beings (ITI 168). Morally, idealizations involve 'the modeling of what people should be like (character), how they should treat each other (right and good actions), and how society should be structured in its basic institutions (justice)'. In addition to these general factual and moral idealizations, Mills specifies six further dimensions of idealization that are operative in IIMs constructed by ideal moral and political theories (ITI 168–69):

1. idealized social ontology (in most modern and contemporary political philosophy, humans relate to one another as equal, atomistic individuals free of relations of domination, exploitation, coercion, and oppression);

2. idealized capacities of human agents who are unrealistic even for a privileged minority;
3. silence on oppression, historical and systemic/institutional;
4. ideal social institutions (e.g. the family, the economic structure, the legal system, etc.);
5. an idealized cognitive sphere (social transparency and minimal cognitive obstacles) and
6. strict compliance (see definition of ideal theory in section I).

Mills' charge is that ideal theories that construct IIMs along these dimensions, where IIMs do not sufficiently resemble IDMs, are problematic in at least two ways.

1. Ideal theories are at best 'unhelpful' and insufficiently action-guiding for the purposes of social and political transformation from the perspective of traditionally and systemically/institutionally oppressed groups (ITI 170).
2. Ideal theories are *ideological* to the extent that they are 'a distortional complex of ideas, values, norms, and beliefs that reflects the nonrepresentative interests and experiences of a small minority' (ITI 172). That is, ideal theories and their IIMs are ideological to the extent that they block/prevent/distort our understanding of society and the construction of appropriate IDMs, where this distortion serves at least in part to maintain the interests and experiences of privileged groups.

Mills' positive thesis, which is a defence of nonideal critical theory that does not eschew universalism, conceptualism, or realism, can be summed up in the following claim: 'the best way to bring about the ideal is by recognizing the nonideal' (ITI 182). Specifically, Mills proposes that nonideal critical theory is in a better position to develop 'nonidealized descriptive mapping concepts' (NDMCs) as part of theorizing IDMs that do not view them as simple deviations from IIMs (ITI 174–76). The importance of NDMCs lies in their ability to address the two problems with the above-mentioned ideal theories: Although they remain concepts (and hence, involve certain abstractions and generalizations like all acts of theorizing), NDMCs are more conceptually adequate with respect to a descriptive modelling of social reality.[23] This improved conceptual adequacy not only improves our understanding of social reality but also allows us to see the interests of privileged groups *as* privileged interests and, thereby, is more helpful and action-guiding with respect to social and political transformation from the perspective of oppressed and underprivileged groups. Examples of NDMCs are abundant, even if not necessarily in common currency for mainstream political philosophy. Mills cites class society/capitalism (and its corollaries: alienation, exploitation, and reification), patriarchy, and white supremacy as key concepts for nonideal theory, but we could also add disability, as well as other familiar concepts from critical theory such as negative dialectics/nonidentity and one-dimensionality (Adorno 1973; Marcuse 1964). The overall claim is that critical, nonideal theory that aims at enlightenment and emancipation is better served by developing IDMs (a critical theory of society) that capture the essential dynamics of social reality with the aid of NDMCs, rather than the construction of IIMs that can be both unhelpful and obfuscatory. The priority suggested by ideal theories is

thereby reversed: IDMs and their NDMCs are what give content to ideals like 'equality' and 'autonomy', without which such ideals are prone to becoming ideological in both the narrow and broad senses. In short, IDMs and NDMCs capture critical theory's 'dialectics of immanence and transcendence' that likewise challenge the prioritizing of the ideal over the nonideal. The question for us now is how to situate Honneth's FR project based on this broader notion of ideology.

III Ideal as model in *FR*

As I will discuss further in section IV, Honneth has faced charges of ideology before on account of his theory of recognition, and he has attempted to provide a response to these charges in the essay, 'Recognition as Ideology' (2007b). However, before turning to Honneth's approach to ideology, I want to first assess FR on the basis of the broader understanding of ideology put forward by Mills. In section I, Honneth was held to account according to the narrower understanding of ideology for the following reasons: (1) on the basis that Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* has been subject to a well-known and highly influential Marxian critique; (2) on the basis that Honneth himself has advocated for nonidealistic (materialist, naturalist, pragmatist) approaches to Hegel (Honneth 1995); and (3) on the very general basis that critical theory's methodological and substantive opposition to ideal theories has always been oriented by a Hegelian–Marxian framework, which automatically renders Marx's critique of Hegel relevant. Even according to the narrow understanding of ideology, we began to see some of the potential shortcomings of the FR project as an alternative to ideal theory in political philosophy. In this section, I believe the encounter between Honneth and Mills, and holding Honneth to account according to the broader understanding of ideology is warranted for three further reasons. First, Honneth pitches his FR project specifically as a preferred alternative to ideal theories in contemporary political philosophy, which means that even if he does not engage directly with other alternatives to ideal theory, it is fair to assess whether his project is indeed to be preferred in comparison with other prominent alternatives such as Mills'. Second, I believe that the broader understanding of ideology put forward by Mills is a clear and systematic statement of how critical theory (most notably in the first generation) has always situated itself as a distinctive approach to social and political theorizing. Mills' broader understanding of ideology distils the essential theoretical commitments of Marx for critical theory without (yet, or necessarily) requiring a commitment to specific details of Marx's theory, which are of course subject to much dispute. Finally, although I will not discuss this dimension further here, I believe that Mills and Honneth share common metatheoretical commitments that make an encounter between them appropriate. For example, and despite their differing approaches in opposing ideal theories, both Honneth and Mills are, in a qualified sense, 'pro-Enlightenment' and committed to its universal values (Mills 1997, 129), and both aim to combine the resources of conceptualism and realism to defend a 'moderate value realism' (Honneth 2007b, 333–34).[24] These common metatheoretical commitments make an exchange between them potentially productive and speak to their common aims within the critical theory tradition.

The first way to assess FR with respect to the broader understanding of ideology is to determine whether Honneth's model of social freedom presented therein qualifies as an IDM or an IIM. This first question is already not easy to answer. Given Honneth's Hegelianism and his emphasis on the existing norms of actual social institutions, it is clear that social freedom aims to be a model that describes how societies actually function and reproduce themselves. Although IDMs are of course descriptive, this does not mean that they are *merely* descriptive, insofar as describing how societies actually function and reproduce themselves includes accounting for the actually existing norms that guide such functioning and reproduction. This is just to clarify that IDMs are both descriptive and normative, and nothing about the fact that they are descriptive rather than idealizing precludes a robust normative discussion (Mills' own flagship IDM, the idea of the racial contract, is also both descriptive and normative (1997, 5)). I would suggest that whatever the ultimate shortcomings of Honneth's theory, it is clear that he intends for the model of social freedom to account for the essential nature and dynamic of basic modern institutions that are the primary sites of social reproduction – how they *actually* work and how they *actually* misdevelop. This also accounts for the high degree of historical and empirical detail provided in the chapter on social freedom, which takes up more than half the book. Although there is an affirmation of existing norms as authoritative, Honneth is interested in the actual historical development of personal relationships, markets, and democratic will-formation rather than their idealized forms, which would place social freedom in the category of an IDM.

What makes this categorization more difficult is the particular method of normative reconstruction in FR. Insofar as Honneth is interested in measuring reality by reference to existing shared values and ideals, his analysis and modelling of social institutions is, in a sense, ideal, because the actual is also normatively rational due to two factors. First, as mentioned earlier, existing norms are rational due to their being the result of historical learning processes. Despite the fact that 'we can no longer share Hegel's optimism that modern societies follow a continuous path of rational development', Honneth nonetheless defends a teleological account whereby present norms (especially individual freedom) are the 'outcome[s] of a centuries long learning process' (FR 2–3, 17).[25] These learning processes 'can only be reversed at the price of cognitive barbarism', which suggests that present norms are taken to be or at least are operationally close to, ideal (FR 17). Second, existing norms are rational and operationally ideal because subjects actively participate in and support their reproduction: 'The fact that subjects actively preserve and reproduce free institutions is theoretical evidence of their historical value' (FR 59).[26] Honneth's idealism here with respect to correlating the rationality of existing norms with agents' participation in institutions is optimistic to the extreme, despite his earlier dismissal of Hegel's optimism. Regarding agents' participation in markets, he suggests that if the economic market failed to uphold or deviated from accepted norms and values, 'subjects would no longer be willing to actively participate in the economy' (FR 190–91). Given Honneth's methodological approach that takes actual norms as rational and operationally ideal, there are grounds for claiming that the model of social freedom in FR can be categorized as an IIM. That is, in aligning the actual and the ideal as closely as he does, and arguably, forcing the reconciliation between them in favour of the ideal, the agents and institutions of social freedom start to look highly idealized and

increasingly unrecognizable as a model of actual social reality. To follow out the example quoted earlier, the modelling of the action-sphere of the economy looks like this: Agents committed to rational, moral norms of mutual respect and solidarity (acting as consumers and labourers) are fully able to abstain from participating in the economy, should the economy that is already governed by those same moral norms start to misdevelop or fail to realize individual/social freedom in some way.[27] This model of the functioning of the economy is surely ideal rather than descriptive.[28]

I want to now turn to the six dimensions presented by Mills that for him represent the keystones of ideological idealizations, focusing in particular on 1 (idealized social ontology) and 4 (idealized social institutions), which are the most relevant from the perspective of Honneth's neo-Hegelian project.

Idealized social ontology

Mills contends (rightly) that any theory that 'deals with the normative . . . cannot avoid *some* characterization of the human beings who make up the society, and whose interactions with one another are its subject' (ITI 168) (Mills 2005). The tendency of most modern and contemporary ideal political theories is to 'assume the abstract and undifferentiated equal atomic individuals of classical liberalism'. Here, it appears that Honneth will have ample resources to defend his theory as non-ideological, insofar as the very idea of social freedom and the theory of recognition that undergirds it, is presented as a non-idealized alternative to the prevalent tendencies described by Mills. I want to suggest that the concept of recognition can be an important NDMC in Mills' sense but that the FR account can be read as an idealizing version of recognition that was not a necessary part of Honneth's earlier work on this subject (or a necessary part of recognition theories that do not strictly follow Honneth's framework).

Honneth's social ontology of recognition has always been decidedly nonideal insofar as it characterizes human beings as fundamentally needy and dependent on others for both their physical and their psychological well-being. Never assuming an idealized, autonomous rational agent as the subject of justice, Honneth instead presents a developmental model that allows us to see how subjects *might* achieve autonomy (more specifically, basic self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem) within interpersonal relationships and institutional complexes. The corollary to this developmental account of recognitively achieved self-relations was that they are not only prone to failures and 'specific vulnerabilities' (abuse, rape, and physical denigration; the denial of rights and exclusionary practices; denigration of ways of life and insult), but that these negative experiences of disrespect (*Mißachtung*) are the impetus for political resistance and protest, opening up the space for the reinterpretation of norms, the articulation of new norms, and the transformation of institutions in which disrespect is prevalent (Honneth 1995, 131).[29] Far from assuming an idealized core self that can be untouched by others, recognition for Honneth is so deeply constitutive of who we are that 'the experience of being disrespected carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse' (1995, 131–32). At the level of social ontology, Honneth's theory of normative and institutional change is nonideal insofar

as it is guided by the negative experiences of disrespect that push for a renegotiation and reinterpretation of both norms and social reality. Recognition can therefore be an appropriate NDMC to the degree that it provides a nonideal social ontology that allows us to understand both social dependency and power, making visible the experiences of those mis- or unrecognized by existing norms and institutions.

Although Honneth's theory of recognition has immense critical potential, his early appropriation of Hegel's theory of recognition was consistently criticized for being selective and for ignoring what is generally viewed as Hegel's most radical text, and the text most influential for Marx, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He has since amended his view and corrected for this oversight.[30] Honneth (2008, 147) also responded to charges made against his theory of recognition for 'employing an overly optimistic anthropology', which would clearly have consequences for assessing the degree to which his theory is idealizing in an ideological sense. Without wanting to rehash these debates here, I would suggest that recognition theory remains one of the best options for a non-idealizing social ontology that has been highly instructive for Marxian critiques, feminist critiques, and critical race perspectives (de Beauvoir 2009; Fanon 2004; Quante 2011). Although there is much room for debate concerning its details, it nonetheless addresses Mills' worries concerning idealized social ontologies and allows us to bring 'relations of structural domination, exploitation, coercion, and oppression' into view, and certainly to a much higher degree than liberal or individualistic social ontologies (ITI 168). However, there is one significant methodological difference that distinguishes the FR account from more critical approaches to recognition, which lies in part in a methodological difference between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Whereas the *Phenomenology* sets up models (in the sense of IDMs) that allow us to see the failures of recognition at work in specific configurations and institutions (including modern ones organized around the French Revolution that are Honneth's central concerns), the *Philosophy of Right* tries to establish the sufficiency and rationality of modern recognition institutions to demonstrate that they do in fact enable an unprecedented degree of individual and social freedom (arguably, universal freedom for each and all). In the *Phenomenology*, failures and crises are not understood in terms of misdevelopments of existing norms, but as inherent to social orders and their self-interpretation of existing norms, which ultimately push 'spirit' to develop new social orders and new interpretations of norms. Without necessarily needing to choose between these two models – we can surely do both, and each can correct for shortcomings in the other – Honneth in FR decides exclusively in favour of the modelling of the *Philosophy of Right*, arguably to the detriment of the critical potential of his recognition theory. This is why although FR *does* identify misdevelopments and dysfunctions of present institutions (as did Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* for his own time), Honneth nonetheless assumes and defends the inherent rationality of these institutions, which brings us to the problem of idealized social institutions.

Idealized social institutions

FR takes up three modern spheres of action that Honneth takes to be the primary institutional sites for the rational reproduction of social freedom: friendships, intimate

relationships, and families; consumer and labour markets; the democratic public sphere and the constitutional state. Although Mills does not elaborate much concerning his worry about idealized, ideological accounts of social institutions, here is what he does say: 'Fundamental social institutions such as the family, the economic structure, the legal system, will therefore be conceptualized in IIM terms, with little or no sense of how their actual workings may systematically disadvantage women, the poor, and racial minorities' (ITI 169). As far as operational principles go, avoiding an idealizing account of social institutions seems appropriate for any theory of justice, let alone critical theory: We analyze society with a view to the least advantaged group.[31] Insofar as the groups identified by Mills remain significantly disadvantaged as a matter of historical and empirical fact, our IDMs should at least reasonably reflect (be conceptually adequate to) these realities and inequalities. Recall also that the helpfulness of IIMs is not determined a priori but depends upon the distance between it and an IDM. Insofar as an IIM does not even come close to resembling any reasonable IDM or the actual experiences of the most disadvantaged groups, the IIM becomes unhelpful and potentially ideological.

Here, I think a case could be made that Honneth's analysis of the primary social institutions in FR is found deeply wanting, at least as a piece of critical theory.[32] In his analysis of each particular action-sphere, the overarching question appears to be something like this: what, according to existing, accepted norms, is the ideal actuality of a particular institution (its 'normative promise') that makes it a rational site for the reproduction of social freedom? By ideal actuality, I mean the following: under actual, real, non-hypothetical conditions that take historical development into account, what is the best-case scenario for agents participating in these institutions that make them both rational and productive of social freedom? The social freedoms described by Honneth, and potentially experienced by agents, are not logical or formal possibilities, but what Hegel would call a *real* possibilities – sufficient real conditions exist for their actualization. This is easily granted. Honneth has no patience for hypothetical conditions or hypothetical action-spheres, and it is to the credit of his theory that he pays great attention to historical and empirical details. In presenting social institutions as ideal actualities or presenting the most rational versions of the real possibilities of modern institutions, I think Honneth for the most part gets the best case scenarios right. For example, given the advances made with respect to gender equality, it is a real possibility that '[i]n the intimacy of love, being with ourselves in the other therefore means recovering the natural neediness of our own self in physical interaction, without fear of being humiliated or hurt' (FR 151). This is an ideal actuality of what love is in the best case scenario, which makes the action-sphere of intimate relationships, and maybe even marriage, a rational institution of social freedom that may deserve our collective endorsement. Given the existence of these ideal actualities, we also have grounds for claiming instances of misdevelopment where nonideal actualities are present alongside or overlap with the ideal ones (e.g. overworked labourers who have little time and energy to commit to or work on intimate relationships).

The problem with presenting these ideal actualities – the best case scenarios – as the justification of present institutions as rational sites of social freedom is the following: It may allow us to overlook the fact that for disadvantaged groups, or even for a majority of members of society, these ideal actualities realized by participation in the relevant

institutions are not in fact available as a real possibility or at least are highly unlikely. In short, and for many, normative promises are always broken, unrealized, or false promises. Now Honneth would likely respond that he is not only aware of this (hence his documenting of misdevelopments) but that it is precisely through understanding the rational potential of existing institutions that we might come to see how to reform them such that ideal actualities are more widely available to all. There may indeed be some truth to this response. This approach, however, also has the danger of blinding us to the fact that the 'actual workings [of institutions] may systematically disadvantage' particular groups; that is, the same norms, promises, and institutions that produce ideal actualities for some may be systematically disabling for others. The key here is that these forms of systematic disadvantages (for particular groups or for a majority) would not merely be contingent (i.e. a situation where, for empirical and easily remediable reasons, such disadvantages could be corrected according to existing rules), but rather, a necessary feature of an institution's rational and even optimal functioning. As feminists have argued for many decades, it was not through understanding the rationality of the family structure that allowed for changes in the direction of justice and equality within the family to the degree that this has been achieved, but the rigorous and insistent documenting of the actual inequalities and injustices that prevailed within the family and the articulation of a new set of concepts (NDMCs) that helped us to understand and theorize that reality (e.g. patriarchy, marital rape, unpaid labour, etc.). It was not an understanding of the best case scenario that allowed for more justice within families (again, to the degree that this has occurred), but exactly the opposite: An understanding of worst-case scenarios that were in fact the daily reality for women for centuries. Rather than a misdevelopment, the rational and optimal functioning of families was perfectly compatible with, and arguably even productive of, the subordination of women. If feminists had simply focused on the rationality of existing norms without developing NDMCs, the systemic injustices suffered by women would have remained radically undertheorized.

We can also consider the other spheres of social freedom investigated by Honneth: markets and the democratic public sphere/constitutional state. In the case of markets, the ideal of moral economism, wherein the coordination of self-interested actors seeking material advantage can 'only succeed if the subjects involved antecedently recognize each other not only as legal parties to a contract, but also morally or ethically as members of a cooperative community' (FR 182), likely obscures rather than allows us to grasp the systematic disadvantage of consumers and labourers in the market economy. As Timo Jütten has suggested, 'it is misguided to speak of neoliberalism and financialization as misdevelopments in the sphere of the market economy at all. Rather, they seem to be the logical conclusion of the very idea of market mechanisms' (2015, 202).[33] Again, this suggests that the actual, rational working of an institution can be productive of systematic rather than contingent forms of injustice, which suggests that simply reconstructing an ideal actuality of an institution is of minimal use from the standpoint of critique. Finally, in the case of the democratic public sphere, the ideal of 'a social space 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' also likely obscures rather than allows us to grasp the ways in which the legal systems of constitutional states continue to produce systematic, non-contingent injustices for the

least advantaged groups of society, including migrants, the undocumented, the poor, and racial, ethnic, and religious minorities (FR 254). In each case, theorizing the ideal actualities and best case scenarios that allow us to understand the rationality of a particular institution is not primarily what pushes forward the improvement of actual conditions for disadvantaged groups. In fact, by focusing on ideal actualities, we produce models and concepts that lack conceptual adequacy when trying to understand nonideal realities that reflect the experiences of disadvantaged groups and even of the majority. In producing an account of ideal social institutions, Honneth's FR project can thus be viewed as potentially ideological on the broader understanding of ideology put forward by Mills.

IV Honneth on ideology: Material fulfilment

I want to now suggest that even on Honneth's own account of ideology, there are reasons to worry that FR's presentation of social freedom and its institutions are potentially ideological. The ideology charge is not new for Honneth, and he has attempted to answer it before, specifically in reference to his recognition theory. I argue that what are characterized as 'misdevelopments' of the various institutions analyzed in FR could in fact be viewed as evidence that forms of social freedom have taken on an ideological character, despite Honneth's efforts to insist otherwise.

Although earlier I suggested that Honneth presents an overly idealized account of social institutions, a large portion of his discussion of social freedom concerns what he calls misdevelopments, or instances where past or current realities deviate from the rational, normative kernel that make the institutions in question realizations of social freedom. For example, neo-liberal deregulations that have led to lower wages and decreased job security for a majority of workers are viewed as a misdevelopment of the rational norms embedded in moral economism (FR 245–46).[34] Honneth defines a misdevelopment as follows:

> The misdevelopment that we will encounter in our discussion of relational institutions *does not consist in systemically induced deviations* . . . but [are] rather anomalies whose sources must be sought elsewhere, not in the constitutive rules of the respective system of action. (FR 129; my emphasis)

This confirms what I argued in the previous section, namely, that Honneth's FR project *cannot* accommodate the thought that the actual (rational and even optimal) functioning of institutions can itself produce systematic disadvantage. Here, it is clear that Honneth views such injustices and disadvantages as 'anomalies', merely contingent happenings that are not directly attributable to the constitutive rules of institutions themselves (in the case of capitalism, this just seems patently and alarmingly false, a fact that is now acknowledged even by centrists).

Honneth's conception of misdevelopment and his staunch insistence on their anomalous character is surprising given his own account of ideology. In an attempt to defend his recognition theory (and by extension, the account of social freedom) against

Althusserian and Foucaultian critiques, Honneth proposes a helpful account of ideology based on two distinctive features. First, Honneth suggests that

> ideological forms of recognition cannot simply represent irrational systems of beliefs; rather they must mobilize evaluative reasons possessing sufficient power to convince under given circumstances in order to motivate their addressees rationally to apply these reasons to themselves. (2007b, 340)

That is, even ideologies operate within 'a historical "space of reasons"', and are therefore subject to rejection or uptake on the basis of their ability to motivate subjects with reasons that agents take to be their own. Thus, in order for a type of recognition or institution of social freedom to qualify as something that can *be* ideological, it must be rational on account of three conditions: first, it must 'give positive expression to the value of a subject or a group of subjects;' second, it 'must be "credible" in the eyes of addressees' in that they in fact identify with the expressed value; and third, it must be 'contrastive in the sense of giving expression to a particular new value or special achievement' (2007b, 337–39). On this score, all the institutions of social freedom discussed in FR surely qualify as candidates that can be viewed as *potentially* ideological insofar as fulfil all of the conditions laid out here by Honneth.

The second feature of ideologies attempts to address the tricky question of how exactly we can distinguish between 'justified and unjustified forms of social recognition', or forms that enable social freedom and forms that are ideological (2007b, 340). To answer this question, Honneth suggests that in addition to providing a rational, credible normative promise, recognition requires fulfilment in material, non-symbolic terms (2007b, 345). That is, if there is a notable 'discrepancy between evaluative promises and material fulfillment', then practices of recognition are revealed to be irrational and ideological on the very simple basis that they cannot fulfil their promises in material terms (2007b, 328). In the terms I employed earlier, this seems fairly straightforward: Ideal actualities or best-case scenarios are not materially fulfilled realities, not only for disadvantaged groups, but in some cases, like the market, for the majority. Honneth himself employs two examples to spell out his case, that of advertisements and '"creative" entrepreneurs' (2007b, 342–44). In both cases, the evaluative promises of advertisements and the interpellation of wage labourers as creative entrepreneurs (in advertising: the promise of substantial change in life practices, happiness and satisfaction; in becoming an 'entrepreneur:' increased individual self-fulfilment and autonomy) cannot on any reasonable measure claim material fulfilment. Insofar as an 'abyss' opens up between promise and material fulfilment, Honneth contends that his examples are in fact instances of ideological recognition (2007b, 346). Although he warns off a self-certain hermeneutics of suspicion on this basis, he nonetheless argues that the criterion of material fulfilment is an important and useful test with respect to assessing whether or not a form of social freedom can be viewed as ideological. With respect to our assessment of FR, I would suggest the following: Honneth's own criteria for ideology here are preferable to his conception of misdevelopment from the perspective of a nonideal critical theory. The question of material fulfilment, particularly with respect to disadvantaged groups, is a much more helpful criterion for assessing whether and the degree

to which a form of social freedom is or has become ideology. Rather than presenting the deviations from ideal actualities as anomalous misdevelopments, which operates with a conservative bias, Honneth would be better off framing his analysis of social institutions with the following question in mind: to what extent can the normative promises of institutions of social freedom find material fulfilment for their addressees, particularly from the perspective of the most disadvantaged groups in society? If FR had instead been framed according to this line of questioning, Honneth's analysis of social institutions would produce highly different normative results, ones that would find plenty of rational grounds for claiming that current forms of social freedom are in fact ideological and unjust.

V Conclusion

In this article, I have employed Mills' Marxian model of ideology critique in order to argue that Honneth's *FR* is problematic both as a piece of critical theory and as a preferred alternative to prominent ideal theories in contemporary political philosophy. I suggested that we have reasons for preferring Mills' Marxian approach, which is particularly attuned to developing concepts and explanatory models that map the non-ideal realities overwhelmingly affecting disadvantaged groups. Specifically, I have defended three claims. First, I argued that Hegel's critique of Kant and Marx's critique of Hegel provide an important historical and conceptual background for the ideal/non-ideal debate and critical theory's relation to it. Second, I argued that on both a narrow and broader understanding of ideology, and according to Honneth's own concept of ideology, the modelling of social freedom in *FR* can be viewed as ideological. Third and finally, and in light of the above-mentioned arguments, I suggested that a Marxian understanding of ideology critique remains the best model for critical theory moving forward (a thought that was evident to critical theory's first generation) and as the best model when viewed as an alternative to ideal theorizing in political philosophy. Marx's method remains as relevant today as ever, particularly if critical theory is to have any hope of developing concepts and models that can capture what is undoubtedly one of the key struggles of our time: The critique of capitalism from the perspective of those groups who, both historically and at present, suffer most from its proper functioning.

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Notes

1. See also Mills (2017) for a more recent approach that connects the resources of Marxian ideology critique to debates in epistemic injustice, especially as it pertains to racist ideologies.
2. Although I use the terms ideal and nonideal theories (especially in relation to the aims and methods of critical theory), in this article, I will not be concerned with presenting or evaluating Rawls' position or the scholarship on this debate in Rawls. For an overview of this debate, see Stemplowska and Swift (2012) and Valentini (2012); for a defence of Rawls, see Simmons

(2010); for a critique of Rawls and Simmons' defence thereof, see Schaub (2014). A closely related though not identical debate is that between ideal theory (or political moralism) and political realism. See Geuss (2008), Rossi and Sleat (2014) and Williams (2005), for a general overview that also stresses the importance of historical precedents of realism in political philosophy. Sleat (2016) argues that the approaches of nonideal political theory and political realism need to be kept distinct: whereas the former constitutes an immanent, methodological dispute *within* liberal political theory, political realism presents an entirely distinct view of the political that is fundamentally at odds with many assumptions of liberal theory. Critical theory does not fit easily into either of these camps, although some of the characteristic complaints from both camps are familiar territory for critical theorists. As the title of my article suggests, here I am primarily interested in the intersection of critical theory and nonideal political theory as it pertains specifically to ideology critique. Although political realists such as Geuss also emphasize the role of ideology critique in political theory (Williams also refers to a '*critical theory principle*', 2005, 6), the critical theory of Honneth and Mills discussed here share more normative and moral assumptions with nonideal political theory than with political realism, which justifies my orientation here.

3. See also Rawls (1971, 8–9, 245–46, 351), Rawls (1993, 284–85), Rawls (1999, 89–90) and Rawls (2001, 13).
4. Horkheimer writes that the false opposition and separation between philosophy and social scientific research can be overcome 'to the extent that philosophy – as a theoretical undertaking oriented to the general, the "essential" – is capable of giving particular studies animating impulses, and at the same time remains open enough to let itself by influenced and changed by these concrete studies' (1993, 9).
5. 'This negative formulation, if we wish to express it abstractly, is the materialist content of the idealist concept of reason' (Horkheimer 2002, 242). In contemporary political philosophy, Sen (2006, 2009) has defended the negativist thought that injustice can be both identified and redressed without reference to a perfect ideal of justice. Margalit (1998) also defends a negativist approach to political philosophy. For other programmatic statements concerning the methods and aims of critical theory, see Fraser (2003) and Honneth (2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2009).
6. See Cooke (2006), Fraser (2003), Geuss (1981), Honneth (2003), and Ng (2015). On the dialectical relation between justice and injustice, see Forst (2007). For a programmatic statement of the methods and aims of nonideal theory that shares much in common with critical theory, see Anderson (2010, 3–7, 21–22). Anderson presents three basic reasons to prefer nonideal theory as an approach to political philosophy, all of which could be derived from Marx: (1) the need to begin from real rather than ideal human beings; (2) revolutionary critique, in which the transformation of the world and the transformation of our ideas and concepts go together; (3) the problem of ideology, where ideals can present a distorted view of reality that prevents us from acknowledging or understanding, and therefore, being able to address, particular forms of injustice. See also Anderson (2017, xx–xxiii), for her more recent discussion of ideology, ideals, and models.
7. Although it is beyond the aim of this article, I would suggest that this alliance between Honneth and political realists (and arguably critical theory and political realists, despite the often mentioned and obvious connections) is in fact quite tenuous. See Cooke (2012) who also

discusses Honneth's affinities and divergences with realism; and Menke (2010) on Geuss' realism and critical theory (especially Adorno's).

8. Mills also makes the 'applied ethics' objection (ITI 178).
9. See Claassen (2014) for a critique of Honneth's neo-Hegelian reconstructionism on the grounds that it fails to undermine neo-Kantian constructivist arguments in ethical and political theorizing, and therefore, that it fails to provide a plausible alternative to ideal theories. Claassen also argues that Honneth's method of normative reconstruction is in fact parasitic upon constructivist arguments on pain of falling prey to relativism.
10. See Honneth's discussion of this vicious circle in *Freedom's Right* (FR 55).
11. The idea of social freedom is developed in Neuhouser (2000).
12. For a critique from a Kantian constructivist perspective, see Claassen (2014); from a Hegelian perspective that contests Honneth's omission of a consideration of Hegel's theoretical philosophy, see Pippin (2014); from the perspective of critical theory on the grounds that normative reconstruction excludes normative revolutions and radical critique from its purview, see Schaub (2015); from a feminist perspective that challenges his teleological notion of historical progress, see McNay (2015); from a post- and decolonial perspective that contests normative reconstruction's reliance on a Eurocentric conception of historical progress, see Allen (2016). See also Honneth (2015) for a rejoinder to Schaub and McNay.
13. See also Honneth (2000) for his earlier attempt at 'reactualizing' Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. On the first page of FR, Honneth quickly dismisses the left-Hegelian approach to the *Philosophy of Right* by claiming that 'revolutionary ideals had died out' (FR 1). Honneth (2017) attempts to renew the idea of socialism via the notion of social freedom.
14. See Schaub (2015) who argues that even when remaining within the confines of Honneth's own corpus, FR could be viewed as a step backwards compared with Honneth's middle period from the perspective of critical theory.
15. Honneth consistently criticizes the Marxian position for its totalizing critique of bourgeois rights that misses its normative potential, arguing that Marx misunderstands the modern functional differentiation of society into distinct social spheres (see his most recent discussion in Honneth 2017). I would suggest that this is a misreading of Marx's critique of Hegel; Marx not only acknowledges the normative developments of the bourgeois revolution, he also clearly grasps the modern differentiation between the state and civil society but also suggests that these spheres necessarily come into conflict, conflicts that bourgeois rights discourse will have difficulty resolving due to their very form. Habermas, for example, also acknowledges the normative developments of modern rights discourse, but his colonization thesis can be read as an updated version of Marx's reading of Hegel on the conflict between civil society and the state (see Habermas 1987). Two recent discussions that also speak in favour of Marx's understanding of the relation between civil society and the state from very different perspectives are Menke (2015) and Stiglitz (2012).
16. Note that even on this narrow understanding, Mills opposes the crude and selective reading of the base/superstructure relation in which Marx is presented as an economic, technological determinist (see Mills 2003, 37–57). This means that a materialist (nonideal) perspective that challenges the *prioritizing* of the ideal need not deny the importance of normative ideals understood in a materialist sense.
17. On Mills' understanding of the relation between base and superstructure, material and ideal, see Mills (2003, esp. 42).

18. Actually, this is undecided. Honneth also provides two reasons why democratic will-formation has priority over the family and the market (FR 331–32), but also continues to suggest that there is a necessary relation between all three spheres (FR 332). More recently, Honneth (2017, 97) suggests that the sphere of democratic action is '*prima inter pares*' and that the democratic public sphere consisting of citizens has the 'role of supervising the functioning of the entire organic structure'. This latest formulation suggests that there is a prioritizing of the state or democratic will formation over the other spheres of action, which would render his theory ideological according to the narrow understanding.
19. Honneth defends individual freedom as the arch-ethical value of modernity in two ways: by appealing to historical fact (FR16–17) and appealing to a teleological perspective of modernity's moral learning process (FR 17–18). See Allen (2016) who argues that the second appeal reduces to the first and that the first amounts to an unjustifiably Eurocentric view on the historical 'facts'. Another potential problem is circularity (a circularity that Honneth objects to in other places, see note 8): Recognition is the precondition for individual freedom, but individual freedom is the arch-ethical value that governs the relations of recognition and is the basis on which such relations are assessed.
20. Honneth of course has his own critique of the Marxian view which challenges its descriptive plausibility, its inability to account for the normative progress of modernity and its overemphasis of the category of social labour. See Deranty (2013) for an overview of the debate between Marxian and Honnethian positions, as well as how they might be reconciled. Deranty focuses primarily on Honneth's theory of recognition as a point of reconciliation.
21. Mills credits his nonidealizing approach to the feminist theory of O'Neill (1987, 1993) as well as to Marx and classical left theory. Mills' seminal work, *The Racial Contract* (1997), also credits feminist theory for his approach, specifically Pateman (1988) and also Okin (1989).
22. See the recent discussion of idealizations and ideals in the work of Appiah (2017).
23. Mills writes of nonidealized descriptive mapping concepts: 'These are all global, high-level concepts, undeniable abstractions. But they map accurately (at least arguably) crucial realities that differentiate the statuses of the human beings within the systems they describe; so while they *abstract*, they do not *idealize*' (ITI 175).
24. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a defence of Mills' metatheoretical commitments, but for a thorough accounting of Mills' commitment to conceptualism and realism that puts him in conversation with McDowell, see Congdon (2015). The point of contact with McDowell is helpful insofar as Honneth also enlists McDowell in order to defend 'moderate value realism'.
25. 'This methodological procedure is also marked by Hegel's teleological notion that the present always stands on the forefront of a historical process in which rational freedom is gradually realized' (FR 59).
26. See the critique of this point in Schaub (2015, 116–17).
27. Honneth does try to account for why misdevelopments in the market sphere have not been met with sufficient collective resistance or outrage. See FR (247 ff).
28. For an incisive critique of Honneth's treatment of the market, see Jütten (2015). See also Honneth (2015, 2017) for his most recent treatment of markets.
29. See also Honneth (2003).
30. See Honneth (2012) for his attempt to correct for this oversight.

31. In Adorno's famous words: 'The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth' (1973, 17–18). In Honneth's terms, disrespect and misrecognition are the impetus for social struggle and transformation. As is well-known, Rawls also defends attention to the least advantaged on Kantian grounds.
32. I emphasize the critical theory dimension here not for doctrinal purposes, but for the purposes of holding critical theory up to the standards that even ideal theories of justice accept (i.e. attention to the disadvantaged). I also emphasize this dimension here because I think Honneth's account, particularly of intimate relationships and families, is laudable on other grounds, for example, phenomenological ones.
33. See Honneth (2015), for his response to Jütten's criticisms.
34. For an attempt to document all the various misdevelopments that Honneth discusses in the spheres of social freedom as well as a criticism of Honneth's account, see Freyenhagen (2015, 147–48). See also Honneth (2015) for his response to Freyenhagen's criticisms.

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