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Between Virtuous Trust and Distrust: A Model of Political Ideologies in Times of Challenged Political Parties

Abstract: The analytical model of political ideologies offered in this article describes the connection between rising levels of distrust towards societal institutions in modern democracies and how such developments has challenged traditional and long-standing political parties in the Western world, such as the Danish political party Radikale Venstre [the Danish Social-Liberal Party]. Through use of a tripartite model of trust developed by Arman Teymouri Niknam during his interpretation of Mary Wollstonecraft's attitudes towards trust brought together with different aspects of Axel Honneth's social-philosophical framework, Teymouri Niknam and Leif Hemming Pedersen show how distrust may be able to act as a progressive tool in the creation of a more just, diverse and equal future and also how a virtuous and healthy form of democracy is an ideal that can be challenging to realise in practice. Teymouri Niknam and Hemming Pedersen are thus able to point to the ways in which a healthy democracy needs a balance of virtuous trust and distrust in order to achieve a good amount of both stability and progress, thus pointing to a difficult balancing act that many traditional political parties find themselves struggling with especially at this point in time in many contemporary democracies.

Keywords: trust; distrust; political ideologies; Mary Wollstonecraft; Axel Honneth; Radikale Venstre

1 Introduction

Traditional political parties in many contexts around the world, but especially in Europe, seem to be in trouble – with declining levels of both party membership, traditional social bases, voter turnout for elections and party system stability

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(Liddiard 2018; Mair 2013). Over the last couple of decades, the traditional parties have had to navigate a political landscape where conventional debates and ideological positions on economic redistribution have taken new shapes in times of globalizing capitalism as well as being complemented and sometimes complicated as the 20th century rise of the politics of recognition (Taylor 1994) has been accentuated by a range of political actors across the political spectrum, with debates over so-called 'identity politics' and 'wokeism' becoming increasingly common in political life in recent years. Within this context, the situation is often articulated as a matter of declining trust in politicians and traditional parties as a (central) part of declining trust in various societal institutions and society more broadly (Arneil 2006; Hosking 2019). The distrust towards established institutions and government/governance in a broad sense finds a manifest expression in the distrust towards the parties and politicians as (perceived) representatives for the established order, and these traditional actors face fierce competition from new ideological challengers that build their platforms on either embracing or resenting the identity politics as well as the economic circumstances of global capitalism that the traditional actors try to navigate within and around (Vries and Hobolt 2020).

This paper strives to understand and describe this problem for traditional political parties of building and representing (trust in) democratic institutions vis-à-vis attuning to and representing attitudes of distrust. While distrust on both a personal and political-societal level is often thought of as a source for withdrawal, resentment, polarisation and agony, it may as well initiate broader, positive changes in human relationships and pave the way for a more just and egalitarian society. Formations of distrust created by experiences of disrespect and unfair treatment have been a driving force for social and political change throughout history as people have struggled against existing hierarchical orders and power relations by organising in more or less formal social movements (Honneth 1995; Honneth 2007). The industrial workers' movement, the suffragette fight for women's right to vote, and the civil rights movement are examples of such successful struggles boosted by high levels of political and social distrust, where feelings of injustice have led to diverse forms of resistance and protest propelled by, and manifested in, a fundamental attitude of distrust towards established hegemonies (Arneil 2006). Distrust has thus often appeared as a constructive force that has led to new or expanded rights and broader social inclusion via legal and cultural transformation initiated by minority or underprivileged communities (e.g. Arneil 2006; Niknam 2019). The crisis of trust surrounding politics and in society is therefore not merely a tale of society's looming downfall as trust and distrust represent multi-faceted phenomena that through their interplay ideally are able to create the grounds for a society that is both more progressive and harmonious. Tying this together with a contemporary political landscape marked to a great

degree by debates and conflicts around identity, as mentioned above, i.e. the rise of 'identity politics', we believe that stronger analytical attention must be given to the weakened ability of traditional political parties in handling the transformative forces of distrust in their workings and in establishing a sound balance between trust and distrust in their political agendas.

These current political circumstances are addressed and analysed in this article via establishing an analytical model of (traditional) political ideologies (and, by extension, political parties) and their relationships with different attitudes of trust towards democratic social institutions by bringing together the social-philosophical frameworks of Arman Teymouri Niknam (2019) and Axel Honneth (2014). We then exemplify and operationalise the potential of this model in a discussion of the centrist Danish political party Radikale Venstre (the Danish Social Liberal Party, lit. 'Radical Left'), which we introduce below. In this analytical example, we discuss the party's standpoints in different political controversies as examples of the difficulties traditional political parties can experience in interpreting and incorporating fundamental attitudes of distrust and balancing trust with distrust in the establishment of political ideas with a broad social appeal and as engines of both social harmony and social change, respectively.

2 From Wollstonecraftian Trust to Honneth's Notion of Social Freedom: Building a Model of Political Ideologies and (dis)Trust

This theoretical section will present a tentative model for understanding how attitudes of trust relate to political ideologies, which we will then operationalise in a subsequent analytical example on the case of Radikale Venstre, as mentioned above. Our point of departure is a tripartite model of trust developed by Arman Teymouri Niknam (2019) in his interpretation of Mary Wollstonecraft's attitudes towards trust, which we will outline in the following subsection and then bring together with different aspects of Axel Honneth's (1995, 2014) social-philosophical framework in a further subsection, where we will also introduce our specific model via an illustrative figure.

2.1 A Tripartite Model of Wollstonecraftian Trust

The three dimensions or attitudes of trust that we operate with is what Niknam (2019) has termed *open trust*, *virtuous trust* and *distrust*, which he has developed as part of

his analysis of trust in the works of the proto-feminist author and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), an early advocate of women's rights in late eighteenth-century England. Wollstonecraft wrote most of her works in the 1790s as Europe was facing a time of great upheaval following the French revolution in 1789. Distrust is visible on various levels in her writings and bears on both the personal and the political. In Wollstonecraft's last, unfinished novel *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria*, the main character Maria realises that her "extreme credulity" hindered her in gaining an understanding of her husband's true, vicious character (Wollstonecraft 1989, vol. 1, 137). The novel portrays how Maria chooses to act on her sense of distrust towards her husband, George Venables, after having realised that he is an unfaithful libertine, who merely wants to be with her to gain access to her rich uncle's wealth (Niknam 2019). In return, her husband puts her in a mental asylum from where Maria tries to escape to become reunited with her daughter. Distrust, risk, and freedom intertwine in this novel in the sense that distrust has the *potential* to lead women to risk their ordered lives for the *hope* of gaining an ideal state of freedom in their lives. Remarkably, distrust in Wollstonecraft's work informs a progressive way of thinking about how people, especially women, should *act* as rational beings in the world.

While Wollstonecraft valued benevolence and relationships built upon a deep sense of trust, her writings also enabled women to strive for independence and greater freedoms in society through an emphasis on distrust. For example, in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* from 1792, Wollstonecraft writes about how a warm-hearted young woman can be misled by her own "sincere, affectionate heart" and turned into the plaything of men (Wollstonecraft 1989, vol. 5, 140). Being duped into fulfilling the needs of men through licentious behaviour is in this sense connected to a lack of distrust. This seems also to have been the case with Wollstonecraft's criticism in *Rights of Woman* of the "negative virtues" which her contemporaries expect of women, such as "patience, docility, good-humour, and flexibility," all virtues "incompatible with any vigorous exertion of the intellect" (Wollstonecraft, vol. 5, 127). By contrast, Wollstonecraft's model woman and mother is independent in the sense that she, instead of being solely "adorned to delight man," and, as a result thereof, "take things on trust," rather is able to discern the true value of her own worth and have a degree of knowledge that enables her to properly assess her surroundings (Wollstonecraft, vol. 5, 122). Such a woman will live a virtuous life and earn her husband's genuine respect as his equal and friend, not as someone who "with feminine softness" has to "caress a man" that only treats her tyrannically (Wollstonecraft, vol. 5, 157). Wollstonecraft thus endorses a personal form of distrust in *Rights of Woman* that aims at empowering women in order to prevent them from being duped into fulfilling the needs of men through licentious behaviour. One may argue that such distrust is not merely a personal form of distrust, but that

Wollstonecraft in *Rights of Woman*, on a broader level, is calling for women in society to be distrustful of men's intentions:

> [T]ill women are led to exercise their understandings, they should not be satirized for their attachment to rakes; or even for being rakes at heart, when it appears to be the inevitable consequence of their education. They who live to please – must find their enjoyments, their happiness, in pleasure! … Supposing, however, for a moment, that women were, in some future revolution of time, to become, what I sincerely wish them to be, even love would require more serious dignity, and be purified in its own fires; and virtue, giving true delicacy to their affections, they would turn with disgust from a rake (Wollstonecraft, vol. 5, 188–89).

Wollstonecraft's point here is that as long as society fails to offer women proper opportunities and education, it should not mock women for their desire to be attached to wealthy and profligate men. Indeed, women can easily become profligate themselves as this "appears to be the inevitable consequence of their education". Wollstonecraft was thus offering a poignant criticism of the education offered to women of her time and blaming society for women's improper behaviour. If women were better educated, they would "turn with disgust from a rake". In other words, if women were better educated, they would be much more cautious in engaging in immoral behaviour and a crucial amount of distrust would make them critical of engaging with libertine men.

Ultimately, Wollstonecraft treats trust in others as both a blessing and a possible curse. This split is visible in her divergent attitudes towards trust, from the gradually increasing focus on distrust in her writings, to the opening, especially in her fiction, towards an innocent-like, open trust, as well as the ideal, grounded in a virtuous form of trust, of cultivating deep and equal relationships influenced and formed by the use of reason. Niknam explains the tripartite model of trust in the following way:

> In her [Mary Wollstonecraft's] work, distrust forms a means of empowering women to become more independent; virtuous trust is part of a striving towards experiencing genuine forms of equal and trusting relationships strengthened by reason; and open trust is a mode of trusting which is rather immediate and linked to a natural human desire of doing good and experiencing love (Niknam 2019, 812).

Virtuous trust relates to a predominantly Western idea of trust as something that: ideally becomes deep between the persons involved (through an almost complete trust in the other); includes a degree of intimacy and an openness of one's feelings to the other; is based on people's use of their reason; and, via its emphasis on reason, is upheld by the idea that the other person is as capable as oneself of being upright or (morally) virtuous. This ideal is difficult to realise in practice, which makes virtuous trust fragile, as is certainly the case in Wollstonecraft's writings (Niknam 2019).

The features of virtuous trust in Wollstonecraft's fiction to a great extent parallel ideas by Anthony Giddens about trust in modern times. Giddens notes how the development of modernity from a Western perspective brought forward ideals about the need for a deep sense of trust between partners. This ideal involves that partners become intimates and try to open themselves up to each other. Such a paradigm includes efforts of making one's interiority and feelings explicit and, perhaps surprisingly, this focus on intimacy and openness involves a heightened sense of vulnerability, ultimately turning trust into a very fragile enterprise (Giddens 1990, 114–44).

According to Giddens (1990, 142), it is simply not true that people in modern times increasingly live in a 'world of strangers'. Nowadays one can board a plane from Copenhagen and arrive in Los Angeles some hours later, and for Giddens (1990, 17–21, 112–14) possibilities such as this reveal how the categories of time and space has become separated in modernity. The fixed bound between time and space started to dismantle from the late eighteenth century with the invention of the mechanical clock as the clock made it possible to pen down time in a much more exact manner (Giddens 1990, 17). Moreover, 'space' has increasingly been torn away from 'place' as we nowadays can reside in London and instantly communicate with people in faraway foreign countries. As Giddens (1990, 18–19) observes, "[i]n conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly *phastasmoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them". Giddens claims that this state of affairs has broken up and transformed the pre-modern sense of familiarity in one's local community. Through his broad sociological analysis, Giddens (1990, 118) reminds us that most traditional cultures (with the partial exception of some larger cities in agrarian states) had a clear divide between insiders and outsiders or strangers, while modern social activity is characterised by "wide arenas of nonhostile interaction with anonymous others". People continue to act in a local environment, but their local environment is highly shaped by their immediate access to ideas from around the globe and by their ability to communicate with people in distant places. In this manner, modernity does not mean a loss of community; we still have "a strong psychological need to find others to trust." and, according to Giddens (1990, 120–21), such trust is exercised in relations characterised by a need of intimacy. In our age ontological security is sought through relationships characterised by intimacy. Giddens claims that such intimacy was not at all as central to relationships in pre-modern times:

> Day-to-day contacts with others in pre-modern settings were based upon a familiarity stemming in part from the nature of the place. Yet contacts with familiar others probably rarely facilitated the level of intimacy we associate with personal and sexual relations today. (…) In relations of intimacy of the modern type, trust is always ambivalent, and the possibility of severance is more

or less ever present. Personal ties can be ruptured, and ties of intimacy returned to the sphere of impersonal contacts—in the broken love affair, the intimate suddenly becomes again a stranger. The demand of 'opening oneself up' to the other which personal trust relations now presume, the injunction to hide nothing from the other, mix reassurance and deep anxiety (Giddens 1990, 142–43).

Giddens' notion about the transformation of intimacy seems to suggest that the separation between time and space has caused changed patterns in the social structures of societies, which in turn has led to the development of an individual need to experience a deep kind of intimacy and trust with specific others. The deep form of trust in modernity described by Giddens is thus a consequence, not a cause, of the changed patterns in the social structure of societies. Such trust has to be continually worked upon in order to thrive and is cultivated by openness and warmth, yet it is also these attributes of trust in modernity, together with the changes in the social landscape, that have made trust into something fundamentally vulnerable. Both Giddens' notion of trust in modernity and the virtuous form of trust found in Wollstonecraft's fiction represent the risky striving towards a deep sense of trust based on openness and intimacy.

Wollstonecraft's children stories from 1788 – *Original Stories from Real Life* – contains virtuous trust at its zenith. This is very clear when Mrs Trueman in one of the stories—in order to explain the importance of virtue to the two children Mary and Caroline—account for her relationship to her husband:

> Mr Trueman has a taste for the fine arts; and I wish in everything to be his companion. His conversation has improved my judgement, and the affection an intimate knowledge of his virtues has inspired, increases the love which I feel for the whole human race. He lives retired from the world; to amuse him after the business of the day is over, and my babes asleep, I sing to him. A desire to please, and the pleasure I read in his eyes, give to my music energy and tenderness. When he is ruffled by worldly cares, I try to smooth his wrinkled brow, and think mine a voice of melody, when it has had that effect (Wollstonecraft, vol. 4, 435).

Mr and Mrs Trueman share an ideal marriage founded on constant affection and virtue. As in Socrates' depiction of two male lovers in Plato's *Symposium* (a work Wollstonecraft was familiar with, and whose ideas highly influenced her ideals about human and divine love (Taylor 2003, 16)), Mr and Mrs Trueman's love inspires them to become human beings who are aiming for genuine knowledge and goodness, as is also symbolically hinted at in their names. In *Original Stories*, such goodness is portrayed as nothing less than striving for a love of "the whole human race". Wollstonecraft's children's stories clearly appear as an allegory of the value of human virtue and goodness. Nothing seems to be able to threaten the deep sense of trust between Mr and Mrs Trueman, quite unlike the fragile attempts to cultivate virtuous trust in the rest of Wollstonecraft's fiction.

While the use of reason and a sense of moral betterment is central for virtuous trust, open trust, on the other hand, is a concept which enables us to grasp a form of trust that arises rather spontaneously and first and foremost is connected to a (spontaneous) expression of innate goodness. In Wollstonecraft unfinished novel *The Wrongs of Woman,* the meeting between the warder Jemima and the main character Maria involves precisely such a depiction of open trust (Niknam 2019). Jemima is clearly sceptical of Maria's intentions during their first meetings at the mental asylum where Maria has been put after wanting to divorce her husband. Nonetheless, the two women develop a strong friendship, which Barbara Taylor (2003, 244) has described as a "partnership … rooted in mutual sympathy and congruent interests". At a fairly early point in the story, the narrator describes how Maria "failed immediately to rouse a lively sense of injustice in the mind of her guard, because it had been sophisticated into misanthropy," after having told Jemima the story about her "confinement on false pretences," and yet Maria still "touched her [Jemima's] heart" (Wollstonecraft, vol. 1, 88). Jemima's sense of compassion for Maria then leads her to help the struggling female patient by delivering books and writing material to her. Niknam (2019, 809–10) has previously shown that when comparing the meeting between Maria and Jemima to Danish thinker and theologian K. E. Løgstrup's sense of trust, it becomes evident that Jemima's assistance to Maria is neither driven by ulterior motives nor driven by a desire to help because to do otherwise would be a neglect in any moral sense. Jemima helps because she has gained a sudden sense of trust towards Maria, including a faith in Maria telling the truth about her confinement. There are some striking similarities between Løgstrup's view of trust (particularly unfolded in Løgstrup 1956/2007 and Løgstrup 1968/2007) and the trust that evolves in the encounter between Jemima and Maria; they both involve a sense of trust that, as it were, have taken the will by surprise. Robert Stern (2017, 290–91) describes how trust for Løgstrup is different than practices or norms "like driving on the left, marriage, or even property" since these "practises or norms are brought into being by us in a contractual or quasi-contractual manner, and are thus goods that we introduce into the world and over which we have control". Understood in this sense, "trust is not of our own making", but is something given with the nature of human life as such, and thus a "good for which we are not ourselves responsible, and for which we can therefore claim no credit" (Stern 2017, 291). Likewise, the trust that arises between Jemima and Maria is based on Jemima's spontaneous, almost unconscious, desire, to help Maria. As someone comparable to the Good Samaritan, Jemima offers her help.

In relation to distrust, Matthew Carey explains that whilst the terms 'mistrust' and 'distrust' are very close in meaning, "distrust is more likely to be based on a specific past experience, whereas mistrust describes a general sense of the unreliability of a person or thing" (Carey 2017, 7–8). 'Distrust' is hence more associated with

reflection and with a more concrete form of evaluation than 'mistrust,' which tends to describe an atmosphere with a general lack of trust in a given setting. Edna Ullmann-Margalit understands the phenomenon of trusting as involving three main factors: I have good reason to fully trust you with respect to some matter when I believe that 1) You intend to behave or act in this matter so as to promote my interests and my general wellbeing. 2) You intend to promote my interests qua my interests (whether or not they coincide with your interests). 3) With respect to the matter at hand, you have the competence to behave or act so as to promote my interests. Ullmann-Margalit is aware that these three factors are often not applicable in practise, but she sees them as a useful model for understanding what is at stake in trust. Concerning distrust, she notes that "I have good reason to fully distrust you when I believe that you intend to behave or act so as to harm my interests, with respect to a given matter, in virtue of their being my interests and that you have the competence to thus harm my interests" (Ullmann-Margalit 2004, 67). Distrust may thus be described as a psychological phenomenon that concerns an outward, negative attitude and assessment of other people and their intentions towards oneself or one's group (see also: Baier 1986). Moreover, research has highlighted that distrust may form a healthy "antiexploitation trait" that counterbalances the harmful strategies of others or enables people to anticipate and overcome potential aggression from others (Reimann, Oliver, and Cook 2017).

In general, distrust, open trust, and virtuous trust are interrelated and difficult to disentangle completely. In this sense, these three main forms of trust should not merely be viewed as opposites that stand in tension to each other. While the three terms do not represent the same thing, they influence each other and are thus interwoven: For example, one cannot become virtuous if one is too credulous and child-like. One needs to be able to distrust others to become a virtuous person, who is able to develop genuine and virtuous relationships. Nonetheless, a relationship between two persons inhabited by virtuous trust is still a relationship almost completely devoid of mistrust. Moreover, Wollstonecraft's vision of an ideal society where people help each other through a sense of universal benevolence, as outlined in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* from 1790, is also a society full of virtuous trust. Such a society can indeed be compared to Immanuel Kant's idea about a kingdom of ends, that is, an ideal society founded upon virtue and respect for the (Kantian) categorical imperative by all of its members (Kant 1991 [1785]).

2.2 Honneth and the Social Foundations of Democratic Life

While the outlined concepts of trust are established mainly to describe interpersonal and social-political relations in Wollstonecraft's authorship, we argue that they can

be extended to explain the attitudes that certain modern political ideologies hold towards so-called social institutions of social freedom as these are conceptualized by social philosopher Axel Honneth in his work *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*. In this book, Honneth (2014) reinterprets Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* to develop what he calls 'a theory of justice as social analysis'. Honneth argues that contemporary political philosophy has been decoupled from an analysis of society, which means that conceptions of justice – i.e., how to assess the moral legitimacy of social orders – are generated "in isolation from the norms [Sittlichkeit] that prevail in given practices and institutions, and are then 'applied' secondarily to social reality" (Honneth 2014, 1). In contrast, Honneth follows Hegel to suggest that these institutionalized ethical norms must constitute the starting point for a theory of justice. In this way, Honneth's theory of justice *as* social analysis wants to move beyond "the traditional division of labor assumed by traditional conceptions of justice between the social sciences and normative theory, between empirical disciplines and philosophical analysis" (Honneth 2014, 5).

Thus, using an approach that he terms 'normative reconstruction', Honneth contends that there is a specific ethical value or idea of justice which more than any other has shaped the formation of (Western-European) democratic societies: "Of all the ethical values prevailing and competing for dominance in modern society, only one has been capable of leaving a truly lasting impression on our institutional order: freedom, i.e., the autonomy of the individual" (Honneth 2014, 15). In Honneth's Hegelian interpretation, freedom is thus "the point of justice" (Honneth 2014, 18). However, Honneth distinguishes between *possibilities* of freedom and *the reality* of freedom in his outline of three different dominating models or ideas of freedom throughout the history of ideas. Accordingly, Honneth regards the two models that he terms *negative freedom* and *reflexive freedom* as possibilities of freedom, while the idea of so-called *social freedom* is described as the reality or realisation of freedom. Therefore, while Honneth describes how the historical institutionalization of negative freedom into legally guaranteed rights and the institutionalization of reflexive freedom into the moral autonomy of the individual have been pivotal to modern conceptions of freedom, he also argues that both of these models "feed of a social life-praxis that not only precedes them, but provides the basis for their right to exist in the first place" (Honneth 2014, 123), that is, social freedom. By social life-praxis, Honneth refers to social institutions and practices of *mutual recognition*, which he therefore regards as an integral part of the concept of freedom. Honneth calls these social institutions the 'We' of personal relationships, the market economy, and democratic will-formation, respectively. More specifically, he moderates Hegel's famous tripartite family–civil society–state model into what Honneth terms *the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships* (the institutions of friendship, intimate relationships, and families); *the institutional sphere of the market* (the

sphere of consumption and the labour market); as well as *the institutional sphere of the political public sphere* (the democratic public sphere and the democratic constitutional state).

In relation to our understanding of how trust relates to political ideologies, we first of all argue that Honneth's Hegelian concept of social freedom can also be described as an institutional manifestation of the attitude of trust which Niknam calls virtuous trust, which we have outlined above. Since Honneth describes the social institutions of freedom as basically practices of mutual recognition, this opens a related complex discussion on the relationship between trust and recognition (e.g. Brennan 2021; Petherbridge 2021; Procyshyn and Wenning 2019), which is not the focus of attention for this paper, however. We therefore propose, on a more general level, that the intricate theoretical and practical *relations* between the concepts and phenomena of trust and recognition are what constitute the social foundations of democratic life (the subtitle of Honneth's *Freedom's Right*), that is, social freedom – which Honneth expresses from a recognition-theoretical perspective and which Niknam expresses from a trust-theoretical perspective, whereof we place an emphasis on the latter as a matter of applicability within current scholarly discussions of political parties.

In a historical perspective, practices and institutions of social freedom have developed in a democratic direction on the basis of social struggles for recognition (Honneth 1995) that have taken place within – and sometimes outright against – these practices and institutions as concrete and symbolic representations of the social order of society. The individual and collective feelings of disrespect that ignites these struggles (Honneth 2007), manifest in attitudes of what Niknam terms distrust, as also described above, which is thus an important part of processes of social change. In Western societies (which Honneth and Niknam primarily deal with through their philosophical points of departure in Hegel and Wollstonecraft, respectively) different attitudes of distrust and the derived political struggles have been expressed through different political ideologies and – in a more limited sense – political parties. Some of these ideologies and parties have in the course of time become co-developers of and guarantors of modern democratic institutions, while others directly or indirectly are perpetually trying to undermine some or all democratic institutions. It is this context surrounding the expression of trust and distrust in a political setting that the suggested model below (see Figure 1) attempts to capture, in a way which is related to the research literature about classification of political ideologies (e.g., Ball, Dagger, and O'neill 2019; Eatwell and Wright 1999; Geoghegan and Wilford 2014; Vincent 2023).

The model is first and foremost a model of the political spectrum, where the horizontal axis resembles the traditional (economic) left-right scale. However, instead of incorporating a vertical axis of for instance authoritarian-democratic
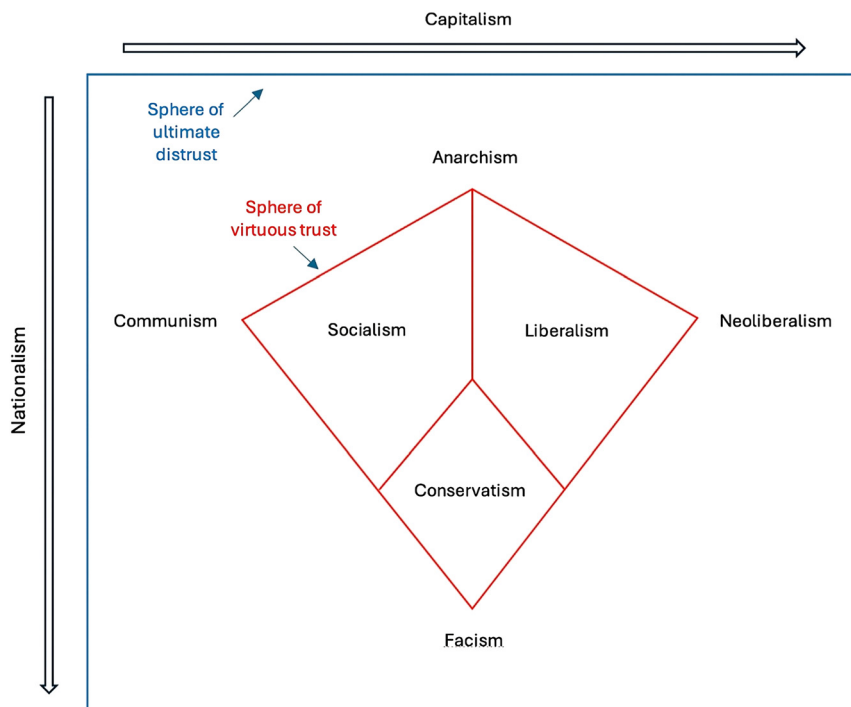
Figure 1: Model of political ideologies and spheres of trust.

(Eysenck 1957) or authoritarian-libertarian (e.g. Heywood 2017, 14–15) scale – which are a part of other influential models that generally seem to divide the political spectrum into "halfs" of anti-freedom and pro-freedom ideologies – we incorporate and moderate this distinction by illustrating it in terms of *spheres of virtuous trust and ultimate distrust* – and also propose a vertical axis that indicates level of nationalism, quintessential to both historical and present ideological conflicts (even though many textbooks on ideologies conceptualize nationalism as a distinct ideology). Thus, central to the illustration of the model is how the so-called "major ideologies" of socialism, liberalism, and conservatism (Alexander 2015) fall within what we call *the sphere of virtuous trust* (inside the red lines), which implies at least some degree of ideological support for all the democratic institutions described in Honneth's normative reconstruction of social freedom. Ideologies such as communism, neoliberalism, fascism, and anarchism, on the other hand, fall within *the sphere of ultimate distrust* and thus aim to undermine or do away with one or more of these social institutions.

The distance between the various ideologies in the model indicates ideological affinity or remoteness, which means that the red lines between some of the ultimate distrust ideologies represent both an antagonistic ideological relationship, but also, conversely, the common aspects of these ideologies. The model can therefore be used to position for instance political parties, movements, or other actors in an ideological space.

There are three things to clarify regarding the model. First of all, the model does not explicitly include ideologies such as ecologism, Islamism, feminism, which are typically included in textbooks about ideologies (e.g., Ball, Dagger, and O'neill 2019; Eatwell and Wright 1999; Geoghegan and Wilford 2014; Vincent 2023), since these ideologies in a certain sense aim to transcend political ideologies and on a party-political level often have been seen as single-issue or single-prism frameworks. This means that specific parties such as 'green' parties or Islamist parties in various contexts must be understood in terms of their relation to one or more of the ideologies included in our model to fully grasp the attitude of trust such actors represent and hold towards the (democratic) institutional spheres that underlies Honneth's idea of social freedom.

Secondly, and in continuation of the former point, since we interpret ideologies in terms of the attitude of trust they hold and represent in relation to Honneth's institutional spheres, the closer particular actors can be placed to the centre of the figure, the more they resemble the ideal society that can be derived from Honneth's – and to some extent Wollstonecraft's – thought, which arguably resemble a form of social-liberalism in line with enlightenment ideals (see Honneth 2017). Accordingly, the discernible enlightenment ideals or visions of democracy that we find in Wollstonecraft and Honneth can be understood as an endorsement of social justice through an expansion of civil and political rights and an emphasis on the need of economic redistribution in order to give all citizens the chance to flourish and thereby create a society founded upon mutual respect and recognition between its citizens.

Thirdly, as we interpret distrust as a central aspect of social change, the model should also be able to help illustrate the argument that acts or expressions of distrust involves ideological movement or ideological pressure, respectively. Distrust positions in society (e.g. in political movements) that draw on neo-liberalism, communism, anarchism, fascism, or a combination of these can put pressure on the sphere of virtuous trust, so that parties or positions within this sphere either seek towards or away from this pressure – and thus towards the sphere of distrust (although often not completely, as this would imply a fundamental ideological shift to a position of distrust that aims to break down or abolish one of the social institutions underlying the sphere of virtuous trust). At the same time, political parties or positions within

the sphere of virtuous trust can in their expressions or movements move towards distrust positions via internal dynamics, which will then bring the parties closer to the ultimate distrust ideologies to a greater or lesser extent. The point in this context, however, is that this 'internal' movement always takes place with the premise that such expressions of distrust does not aim at demolishing social institutions such as the family, the market, or the democratic public sphere, but to establish a critique that illustrates how "an institution we regard as 'ethical' could embody the values that serve as an overarching guideline for the reconstruction of ethical life in a better, more perfect or comprehensive way" (Honneth 2014, 9). This parallels Niknam's (2019) argument that the movement towards virtuous trust always carries elements of distrust within itself. Therefore, a central element of politics for established parties will, in line with this, still be to change society through critique of society or through opposition to certain developments in society, and that socialist, liberal or conversative parties therefore often will have an inbuilt tendency towards expressing distrust against ideas or tendencies of an unregulated market, state force or the abandonment of cultural traditions, respectively. Social-liberal parties that might be placed close to the centre of the model will therefore exhibit a mixture of all these distrust positions in their political functioning. Yet, all of these parties will generally strive to move dialectically from virtuous trust in and of the existing social institutions, through attitudes of distrust, to a refiguration of these institutions with an expanded realization of social freedom. Our model thus also illustrates why many established parties will often be analysed as – or criticized for being – system-preserving.

The benefit of interweaving Niknam's attitudes of trust together with Honneth's social-philosophical framework in an analysis of the contemporary political landscape is that this method offers an opportunity to describe the connection between growing distrust towards different societal institutions in modern democracies and the adjoining ideological and historical development of existing and new political parties (and movements) – and to describe how this development disturbs the existing figuration of social and political trust. To utilize the model, we will now turn to an analysis of the contemporary, critical, as well as difficult circumstances surrounding the Danish political party Radikale Venstre, which is a social-liberal party with a historical ideological position that largely aim to embody the ideals of virtuous trust and social freedom. However, the model may of course also serve to position other political parties and actors and to explain how their distrust movements within the political spectrum, due to external pressure or internal dynamics, destabilize the fragile circumstances of virtuous trust, for better or worse.

3 Analytical Example: Radikale Venstre in a Balancing Act

Radikale Venstre was founded in 1905, bringing together the struggles of especially smallholders in the countryside against social inequality with the struggles of intellectuals from the cultural radical movement against militarism and orthodox and uniform religious and social norms. In this way, the party incorporated both the practical and down-to-earth attitude of smallholders and the idealistic and broad-minded attitude of intellectuals that were propagating greater equality between the sexes, more personal freedom, and less religious influence in the workings of the state and in society in general. The intellectual politics of the founders of the party thus resembled and largely originated in (radical) Enlightenment ideals emphasising equality in society and secularism in the formation of the state.

As a party, Radikale Venstre has historically been against the uniformity of communism and fascism, against the social irresponsibility of fascism and neo-liberalism and against communism's and neo-liberalism's disregard for historical and cultural traditions. Radikale Venstre may thus be described as a political party in favour of diversity and social responsibility as well as a party which historically has stood for a dialectical preservation and development of cultural traditions. Ideally, it is a party that incorporates both the needs of the greater collective in society as well as the importance of individual rights and autonomy. In that sense, Radikale Venstre is a party which strives to balance the importance of progress with the need of maintaining an eye to traditions, and it is also a party which speaks strongly for both the rights of minority groups and the common good of society.

In recent times, Radikale Venstre has increasingly had difficulties in maintaining these balancing acts, particularly in terms of balancing trust in society's already established institutions and traditions with distrust towards established hegemonies and norms that hinder positive social change. Thus, in the most recent political development surrounding Radikale Venstre, the party has been accused – not just by political oppositions but also in wider public debates – of having two developmental tendencies, namely of moving towards economic neo-liberalism and of wavering in circumstances concerning identity politics. Such criticism, the difficulties experienced by the party because of this, and, noticeably, what this means in terms of trust and distrust, can perhaps best be illustrated through two controversial events within a Danish political context, which will be the focus of this section. In the following, we will highlight and describe these two events wherein the balancing act between virtuous trust and distrust has been difficult for the party to handle successfully,

making such events almost paradigmatic for the party's more recent difficulties within the Danish political landscape.

A very famous example – which came to define the party's image in the eyes of many as a proponent of neo-liberalism – was when the previous chairperson of the party, Margrethe Vestager, as a minister of Economic Affairs and the Interior in the centre-left government in 2012 defended an earlier reform of unemployment benefits enacted by her party in 2010. Back in 2010, Radikale Venstre had enacted a reform with cuts in benefit allowances together with the centre-right-wing government of that time, a reform which the centre-left government, now including Radikale Venstre, had not changed when they had taken over power in 2011. Defending this cut in allowances – which was about to leave thousands of unemployed out of the system of benefits – at a press conference during the party's annual meeting, Vestager had said the contentious words "That's just how it is" [in Danish: "Sådan er det jo"]. This phrase stands today as one of the most controversial and memorable statements in contemporary Danish politics, and both in the immediate wake of the statement, but also long time after, Margrethe Vestager and Radikale Venstre were accused by critics for being "both arrogant and out of step with reality".[1] Such a statement may be seen as an example of how a long-standing Western European political party with roots in the radical Enlightenment ideals that always has prided itself on being an undogmatic party that keeps a check on the influential political forces in society and acts socially responsibly almost has succumbed to a form of technocratic politics of necessity in its handling of the economy. The distrust towards hegemonical political power and the ensuing belief in people power that has been an important part of radical (Enlightenment) thought appears here to have been abandoned for a belief in the necessities of keeping economic cutbacks on track, no matter the consequences. At the same time, Radikale Venstre placed itself closer to a neo-liberal distrust position against the idea of the welfare state as a social safety net in an indirect sceptical stance against unemployed people's willingness to find a job while they are on benefit allowances. Politically, it is of course possible to agree or disagree with this position, but the important analytical point is how this moves the party away from an attitude of virtuous trust towards an attitude of distrust, which in turn again sparks attitudes of distrust towards the party.

Another rather recent example with Radikale Venstre concerns the way in which the party has handled developments within the field of progressive political feminism spurred by the MeToo# movement. When the MeToo movement first drew

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1 "'Sådan er det jo': Her er de markante citater om dagpenge" ["'That's just how it is': Here are the controversial statements on unemployment benefits"]. https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/saadan-er-det-jo-her-er-de-markante-citater-om-dagpenge. Danish Broadcasting Corporation news site, 19th October 2015.

attention and gained ground in 2017, it had difficulties in becoming influential in Denmark, a country where many people thought that questions of equality between the sexes had already been handled and settled through greater equality. However, at the end of summer 2020, tv host and actor Sofie Linde shared her personal experiences with sexistic behaviour at a TV award show which drew nationwide attention and created a second, and more successful, wave of MeToo in Denmark. As representatives of progressive values in the eyes of many, politicians from Radikale Venstre – with then party leader Morten Østergaard in the lead – realised that the party should embrace this distrust position and take a strong stand on the issue, which made him and the party frontrunners in the battle against sexism and old, gendered power hierarchies. Radikale Venstre therefore launched a big campaign against sexism and party leader Østergaard conducted a 24-hour digital live event against sexism in autumn 2020 together with then vice chairperson Sofie Carsten Nielsen. However, the problem with this political engagement against sexism was that it became known that Østergaard himself had behaved problematically towards women during his time in politics. Østergaard's downfall as party leader started when it became known in the media that a leading person within the party had offended politician and party member Lotte Rod through a form of sexually inappropriate behaviour by placing hands on her thigh. Rod had not provided the name of the offender as she declared she wished to change the culture within the party instead of focusing on a particular person. But nevertheless, a media storm broke loose as journalists and the public were curious to find out who the offender was. Østergaard tried to hush up the scandal by saying he had rebuked the responsible person.[2] When it became known that he was the person responsible for the earlier incident against Rod and that he had done similar things to other women, especially on festive occasions in Radikale Venstre, he had to step down as chairperson of the party and eventually forgo a political career. While one may think that this case merely deals with personal matters, it in fact showcases how an esteemed, traditional political party such as Radikale Venstre with progressive roots in the radical Enlightenment can find it extremely difficult to navigate on matters of gender and identity politics in today's challenging political landscape. For many Danes, the whole incident constituted an overreaction when Østergaard had to leave as chairperson or an amusing exemplification of double standards. At the same time, Østergaard's downfall illustrates the difficulties in genuinely – not least in practice – of representing a movement spurred by distrust towards established hegemonies in society, such as a movement against patriarchal power structures. Both the case with Vestager and the example

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2 See the news article: "Morten Østergaard slår nu fast: Intern krænker har fået en påtale" ["Morten Østergaard now makes clear: Internal sex offender has been rebuked"]. Danish newspaper Berlingske Tidende, 6th October 2020.

with Østergaard show the pressure that can arise when a contemporary political party comes closer to an ultimate distrust position in a way which creates counterreactions that in their own way may create new forms of distrust towards the party. The cases thereby illustrate the difficulties political parties may face in today's political landscape as they try to master the balance between tradition and progress, between trust and distrust.

4 Conclusion: The Crucial Role of Virtuous Trust in Healthy Democracies

Trust is often described as the binding glue or essential foundation of a democratic society, while (democratic) possibilities to express oneself and organise around distrust also constitute a transformative force, which may change society to the better by securing an expansion of individual and collective freedom and rights. In this way, the social foundation for democratic life may be described as a dialectic between trust and distrust, the end goal of which Arman Teymouri Niknam (2019) has described as *virtuous trust*, which – by being based on the aspiring ideals of the enlightenment – constitutes a longing "towards experiencing genuine forms of equal and trusting relationships strengthened by reason" (Niknam 2019). Such a conceptualisation of trust has been placed at the forefront of a political-philosophical analysis of political ideologies in this article, which contains the following main argument: The ideal of virtuous trust (which in Niknam 2019 is mostly discussed within interpersonal relationships) has in different and often indirect ways been the normative focal point for the political ideologies and, in continuation hereof, the political movements and parties which have formed Western democratic societies and especially welfare states like Denmark, characterised by high levels of individual freedom as well as high levels of interpersonal and political trust (Bjørnskov 2016). On the basis of this, we have brought Niknam's trust-theoretical framework together with philosopher Axel Honneth's writings on social freedom to establish a tentative model that places political ideologies on a spectrum depending on whether they fall within what we call the sphere of virtuous trust or the sphere of ultimate distrust. With this model, we argue that the so-called "major ideologies" of socialism, liberalism, and conservatism (Alexander 2015) as well as ideologies that combine these, such as social-liberalism, fall within the former because they embody ideological support for what Honneth conceptualizes as the institutional spheres of interpersonal relationships, the market, and the political public sphere, which contain the social institutions and practices that ideally realize the foundations for democratic life, that is, virtuous trust and thus social freedom. In contrast, ideologies such as

communism, neoliberalism, fascism, and anarchism fall within the latter sphere and thus aim to undermine or do away with one or more of these social institutions.

However, while the ultimate distrust ideologies can thus be characterised as anti-democratic to a greater or lesser extent, pressure from political actors that represent these ideologies or movement towards such distrust positions from actors that represent the sphere of virtuous trust is an important part of (positive) social change, although this necessarily destabilizes the already fragile circumstances of virtuous trust. As emphasised by Niknam and highlighted through the work of Giddens (1991), trust has become particularly fragile and unstable in modernity, making virtuous trust difficult to realise in practice. Such a fragile situation of trust might propel many citizens in modern democracies to look for ideological positions and political representation that criticize existing foundations of society. This mostly happens either out of a nostalgic longing for what is seen as a more ordered, homogenous and stable past or in a longing for a more just, diverse and equal future. These political movements can paradoxically end up contributing to undermining that sound combination of trust and distrust, which is a prerequisite of healthy democracies. This theoretical link between political ideologies and trust as a term may help explain how growing distrust within the Western world towards various societal institutions and between different groups in society is expressed not just through the establishment of new political and social movements, but also in the ideological direction which established political parties have headed towards. Thus, to illustrate the difficult balancing act of trust and distrust and the analytical potential of our model, we have provided an analytical example of the political party Radikale Venstre [the Danish Social Liberal Party], which historically has represented an ideological position that largely has aimed to embody the ideals of virtuous trust and social freedom. By outlining two controversial events from the party's recent history, we have sought to demonstrate how ideological repositioning can be understood and described as pressure from or movement towards distrust positions, thus showing both the hopeful progressive promises and actions related to distrust positions and the detrimental effects of precisely such positions of distrust.

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