

Review 3

Title: Freedom Rising. Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation. Christian Welzel, (2013). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 472 pp., ISBN 978-1-107-66483-8 (paperback).

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From Rio to Ankara, from Tunis to Cairo and recently the Maidan everywhere the people seem to fight for more Democracy but at least for freedom itself. Since 2010 one could get the feeling that freedom is on the rise at least from the viewpoint of a media consumer. Occupy movement, Arab Spring, riots against the reenthronement of Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Stuttgart 21 or the so called 'Wutbürger' in Germany are just some pieces to this picture and were awarded 'Person of the year' by Time Magazine in 2011. After 1989 the wind of change seems to be sweeping again autocrats out of their offices. But looking at data and the world outside one could get rather gloomy and talk about an autocratic rollback or at least a decrease in states than can be called democratic. Furthermore Russia is implementing a policy that looks like 19th century Realpolitik and not a bit like its 21st century equivalent in which 'softpower' has been the main component.

With this in mind the title of Christian Welzel's new book Freedom rising seems to be either a surprise or a positive statement in a bleak moment of world history. Empirical grounded in data from World Values Survey (WVS) and European Values Survey (EVS) it is neither. Welzel proves the increase of human empowerment through the quest for emancipation. Before we jump on his train of thought it has to be said that the main limitation of the book is the fact that the data from WVS and EVS are only covering 1981 to 2008 – five waves. Thus the financial crisis and a couple of the aforementioned developments are not included in the data.

The volume is the latest in the Cambridge University Press series of World Values Survey books. It can be read as a follow up to the 2005 published Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence by Ronald Inglehart and Welzel (p. xxiv). As a member of the World Values Survey Association and currently its second vice-president Welzel walks the path that was laid in the 1970s by Inglehart through his research concerning 'The Silent Revolution' and the founding of WVS. To him this book is dedicated and Welzel exclaims that despite the ongoing discussion and critic concerning postmaterialism theory and the WVS he 'remain[s] convinced [...] that the basic logic holds: fading existential pressures open people's minds, making them

prioritize freedom over security, autonomy over authority, diversity over uniformity, and creativity over discipline' (p. xxiii).

The main argument out of this there is a universal logic how the human mind copes with existential conditions, and this logic can be visualized as the 'utility ladder of freedoms'. The whole concept is depicted as a cycle that rest on existential conditions, psychological orientations and institutional regulations. If the first get better within society action resources, capabilities to exercise universal freedoms increase and the people value the utility of freedom. This leads to a motivation to exercise freedom constantly and through cycles of empowerment these become institutionalized (p. 44).

This process sounds a bit one directional it seems to be teleological and furthermore and derived mainly from Western experience. The data from WVS and EVS replicate a meta picture. Therefore it is impossible to incorporate recent events and small or regional occurrences could be boiled down to nothing in the results of a whole culture zone. But the author goes to great lengths to show that he is a) not Western biased b) that it is possible to measure empowerment the way he does all around the world (p. 189) and c) the cycle of empowerment has something like an evil twin: the cycle of disempowerment that uses the same mechanics to suppress the people (p. 53).

Welzel claims that his book makes seven contributions, that further the understanding of societal development: 1) explicating an evolutionary theory of emancipative values, 2) higher generalization by placing value change in a framework that focuses on human empowerment as the lead theme, 3) identification of emancipative values as the mindset that arises as human empowerment proceeds, 4) documentation of the emergence of emancipative values, 5) demonstration of the consequences of emancipative values, 6) a 'complete' theory that place human empowerment and emancipative values in the entire process of civilization and 7) the relationship of human empowerment and sustainability (pp. xxiv-xxv). Through the structure and his proceeding, described below, the Author is able to prove every single assumption with empirical data (pp. 393-398).

Split in four parts: a) understanding emancipative values, b) emancipative values as a civic force, c) democratic impulses of emancipative values and d) emancipative values in human civilization, the book goes through the above mentioned 'possible contributions' and presents the findings. The first part serves in the process as general and theoretical introduction. From there one the building of the analytical framework is described in detail. Which items out of the WVS questionnaires can be used to show the 'ladder'. Part b, c and d then present step by step the argument and reveal bits and pieces of the whole picture (p. 391). In his conclusion he covers some of the remaining questions (p. 399) and gives a broad and optimistic outlook that gives the impression that mankind has only seen the first wave of the silent revolution more is yet to come.

Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote in 1979 about the End of the great narratives and Francis Fukuyama predicted in 1992 The End of History, thus there is the feeling of deep multiple crises in the 21st Century in Western democracies. This cultural pessimistic view is shared in one or another aspect by current 'great' intellectuals. Just to name one German example, Peter Sloterdijk published 2011 an essay about 'stress and freedom' in which he postulates that western societies are only communities of worry ('Sorgengemeinschaften'). This non philosophical non empirical work projects the feeling that the West ('Abendland') is still or yet again on the verge of decline ('Untergang'). Thankfully

Christian Welzel and data from WVS and EVS shows that there is a mechanism – for example the utility ladder of freedom – which can enable every human being to vote how to conduct his life and give him or her, the right to speak their respective minds.

Every chapter starts with an outline of what is to come and at the end of every chapter key points are summarised and paired with further question. Throughout the book the main points are constantly repeated. There could be an argument that maybe two thirds of the pages would have to tell the same story but in my humble opinion only the careful unfolding prevented the possible of discarding the whole argument as either teleological or Western biased.

Summing up, the book can be called Welzel's opus magnum and it has to be viewed as one of the major works in the field of political science and sociology. In light of the development since 2008 the missing data 2009-2013 will help examine Welzel's findings but everything considered great deviations seem unlikely. Therefore it is not surprising that it has won the 'Alexander L. George Award' 2014 for the best publication of the previous year in the field of political psychology. The Award is handed out once a year by the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP). Scientist from all humanities will have to take a good long look at the book and try to evaluate Welzel's finding in their subjects. It could thus be quite useful to researchers, students and lecturers alike. Especially through the amount of data presented in the book, in the appendix online at www.cambridge.org/welzel and the likely comparable next waves of WVS.

Finally I would like to encourage politicians from around the world to abandon the (in)famous American idiom that 'Freedom is not free' because military power has nothing to do with empowerment of the people.