

CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ON THE ETHICAL
BASIS OF MARX'S SOCIAL THEORY

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CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ON THE ETHICAL
BASIS OF MARX'S SOCIAL THEORY

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Thesis Abstract

Zeynep Savaş, “Contemporary Debates on the Ethical Basis of Marx’s Social Theory”

The central aim of this thesis is to present contemporary debates on the relation of Marx’s social theory and morality. In the introduction part, two major parties involved in the controversy are exposed. Allen Wood is taken to be the representative of the party which holds that Marx did not have a place for moral considerations in his theory, and Norman Geras is taken to be the representative of the opposing party which holds that Marx’s social theory is based on a moral foundation which incorporates certain transhistorical principles of morality. The immanent critique advocated by Sean Sayers is suggested as a way out of the seemingly paradoxical situation ascribed to Marx’s theory. Carrying the issue in question to a specific dimension, the second and third chapters aim to discuss the subject within the axis of Marx’s critique of capitalism. The second chapter focuses on whether Marx’s critique of capitalism is based on a notion of justice. After examining different approaches regarding the issue, it is argued that Marx’s critique is not primarily based on the idea of distributive justice, which calls for a fair distribution in the first place. Sharing the contention that Marx’s condemnation of capitalism primordially stems from some values other than justice, focus of the third chapter is determined as Marx’s understanding of freedom. Thus, the third chapter examines the status of the idea of freedom upon which, as it is argued in this work, Marx’s critique of capitalism is fundamentally based. Contrary to the conviction of those thinkers, who conceive freedom as the primary value appreciated by Marx, but render it a non-moral good, it is argued that the notion of freedom can be best understood from an ethical perspective incorporated in Marx’s social theory.

Tez Özeti

Zeynep Savaş, “Marx’ın Sosyal Teorisinin Etik Temelleri Üzerine Çağdaş Tartışmalar”

Bu tezin temel amacı Marx’ın sosyal teorisiyle ahlak arasındaki ilişki üzerine çağdaş tartışmaları göstermektir. Giriş bölümünde, konuyla ilgili zıt görüşleri savunan iki temel grubun görüşlerine yer verilmektedir. İlk gruba örnek olarak, Marx’ın teorisinde ahlaki düşüncelere yer olmadığını savunan Allen Wood, ikinci gruba örnek olarak da Marx’ın belirli tarih-ötesi ahlak prensiplerini temel almak koşuluyla teorisini ahlaki bir temele dayandırdığını savunan Norman Geras alınmıştır. Sean Sayers’ın içkin eleştirisinin Marx’ın teorisine atfedilen bu görünürdeki problemleri çözmek amacıyla kullanılabileceği önerilmiştir. Soruyu belirli bir boyuta taşıyarak, ikinci ve üçüncü bölümler konuyu Marx’ın kapitalizm eleştirisi ekseninde tartışmayı hedeflemektedir. İkinci bölüm Marx’ın kapitalizm eleştirisini bir adalet nosyonuna dayandırıp dayandırmadığına odaklanmaktadır. Farklı görüşlere yer verdikten sonra, Marx’ın eleştirisinin temel olarak, ilk elde adil bir paylaşımı şart koşan adalet ilkesi temelinde tartışılmadığını iddia etmektedir. Marx’ın kapitalizmi mahkum etmesinde asıl olarak adaletten başka değerler olduğu görüşünü paylaşarak, üçüncü bölümün odak noktası olan Marx’ın özgürlük anlayışına gelinir. Böylece üçüncü bölüm, bu çalışmada savunulduğu üzere, Marx’ın kapitalizm eleştirisinin temelini oluşturduğu düşünülen özgürlük fikrinin statüsünü sorgular. Marx’ın temelde önem verdiği değer olarak özgürlüğü kabul edip bunun ahlaki bir içeriği olmadığını söyleyen düşünürlerin aksine, Marx’ın özgürlük anlayışının, en iyi şekilde, onun sosyal teorisine yerleştirilmiş olan bir etik perspektiften anlaşılabilirliği savunulmaktadır.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The relation between Marx's theory and morality¹ has gained considerable attention particularly after 1970's², especially among the writings of English-speaking thinkers and social theorists such as Gerald A. Cohen, Norman Geras, Ziyad I. Husami, Gary Young, Jon Elster, Rodney G. Peffer, George Brenkert, Eugene Kamenka, Steven Lukes, Allen Wood, Robert Tucker, Bertell Ollman, Richard Miller, Allen Buchanan, Derek Allen.

Historically speaking, reasons that gave rise to the emergence of a debate between morality and Marx's theory are twofold. First of all, some of the crucial writings of Marx, in which the seeds of his ethical outlook are explicit, were published and translated into English nearly a hundred years later after they were first written.³ This means that Marxism has developed in the absence of such important works whose influences were always present, yet generally overlooked in Marx's later writings. After

¹ In what follows, I will use the terms morality and ethics interchangeably. The reason that I will use them interchangeably is that the debate in question is between the ones who argue that Marx did have a moral theory and/ or embrace an ethical perspective and those who argue the contrary thesis. Thus, as long as the debate is reduced to the mentioned dispute, the difference between these two terms can be disregarded. Still, I have to add that, if one is to defend the presence of a certain moral perspective in Marx's theory, to use the term ethics instead of morality is more appropriate and less confusing, since when Marx disdains ethical discourse he uses the term 'morality'. For a similar approach see Enrique Dussel's article "Four Draft of Capital" in which he speaks of Marx's ethics as "the praxis, relation and customs, etc. and the theory that "transcendentally" criticizes "morality"". Dussel, Available [online]: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~fmoseley/Dussel.pdf> . [May 30 2009].

² It has started to evolve an important literature on reinterpreting Marxian theory much earlier than late nineteenth century. It was especially through the workings of the thinkers centering around the Frankfurt School. However, the present work, aims to concentrate on a narrower scope, namely, contemporary debates on Marx and morality. For a brief historical summary, which dates back to beginnings of the nineteenth century, of the discussion on Marx's theory, see, Wilde, *Ethical Marxism and Its Radical Critic*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), introduction part.

³ Note that *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 was first published in 1932 and it was translated into English as late as 1959. Likewise, the *Grundrisse*, which is the preparatory work for *Capital*, is written in 1857-58, first published in 1939 – 41, and its English translation was available only in 1973. Again *German Ideology*, which is written in 1845-6 and published in 1932, is translated into English in 1964. Wilde, *Ethical Marxism and its Radical Critics*, p. 2.

the appearance of these translations, important textual evidences that could be used to account for Marx's moral perspective became available to the academics who are particularly interested in Marxist theory. Second, these scholars' interest with respect to the issue in question coincides with the "socialist" regimes which are in the claim of commitment to Marxism, such as the Stalinist regime in Soviet Union. If the totalitarian socialist regimes, which may be said to represent what is called 'scientific socialism'⁴, are to be judged as the wrong interpretations of Marx's project, then the moral perspective that Marx incorporated into his theory is to be made explicit. In the same line, Lawrence Wilde claims that the main reason that such an interest grew among some Marxist scholars seems to be the attempts of 'rescuing' Marx from the Althusserian interpretation.⁵ Althusser first talks about his anti-humanist interpretation of Marxist theory in his 1963 article "Marxism and Humanism", in which he argues that there is a "theoretical disparity between ... a scientific term (socialism) and an ideological one (humanism)."⁶

Let us be cautious that not all the mentioned thinkers above argue for a moral perspective in Marx. On the contrary, thinkers such as Wood, Tucker, Ollman. still argue against it for different reasons.

If we turn back to the relation between morality and Marx's theory we see that the central question concerning this debate was a simple one: whether underneath

⁴ This term refers to orthodox Marxism, which emphasizes the flow of the historical progress out of necessity as opposed to some ideals such as equality, justice, freedom etc.

⁵ Wilde, *Ethical Marxism and its Radical Critics*, p. 4.

⁶ Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism" in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London : Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 219-248. See also, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1964/marxism-humanism.htm> [May 30 2009].

Marx's social/political theory lies a moral foundation. For example, does he condemn capitalism for its being unjust? Or such a foundation cannot be a part of his theory, since morality is not a scientific field that could be constitutive of historical materialism, upon which Marx's grand project is built. That is, for example, he does not condemn capitalism for its injustice but for different reasons other than moral ones.

Opposing approaches derive their arguments from Marx's moral judgments about the existing social conditions and from his own statements on morality itself. Roughly put, while one camp (including Cohen, Geras, Young, Husami, Elster, and Peffer⁷) takes Marx's moral judgments to be the indicator of a moral stance lying as the foundation of his political theory, the other camp (including Wood, Tucker, Ollman, Miller) takes Marx's explicit statements on morality as clarifying his political theory, which, as they claim, is devoid of a moral *basis*⁸.

The basic idea behind the first group's approach, which is, no doubt, intuitive, is the fact that as we read through his works we see that Marx writes with such a strong moral outrage that one can reasonably think that he is condemning capitalist system for its injustice and immoral inner nature. His language, especially when he talks about exploitation, is full of adjectives such as 'robbery', 'usurpation', 'embezzlement', 'plunder', 'booty' all of which clearly seems to imply a moral critique. Following

⁷ Sure they have different interpretations, but for the same conclusion.

⁸ I used the word 'basis' deliberately, since the recognition of a moral language in Marx is hard to avoid; and Wood or the commentators he sides with are well aware of the abundance of the value-laden terms and words that Marx frequently uses. Wood, on the outset of his article "The Marxian Critique of Justice", explicitly concedes that while we read *Capital* or other writings of Marx, where he describes the capitalist mode of production, we feel that he is talking about an unjust social system. He writes: "Not only does capitalist society, as Marx describes it, strike us as unjust, but his own descriptions of it themselves seem to connote injustice" Wood, "The Marxian Critique of Justice", Vol. 1, No. 3, (Spring 1972), p. 241. However, the point is, for Wood and others in this camp, despite the apparent usage of a moral language in his writings, Marx does not *base* his critique of capitalism on morality and/or justice in any respect.

examples are given by Husami in his article “Marx on Distributive Justice” to illustrate this aspect of his language.⁹ He first quotes from the *Communist Manifesto*: he states that talking about the deficiencies of petty- bourgeois socialism, Marx also contends that it “laid bare ... the concentration of capital and land in a few hands ..., the misery of the proletariat ..., the crying inequalities in the distribution of wealth”. *The Holy Family* speaks of proletariat’s being dehumanized in terms of its life situation, which is the negation of human nature. There it is stated that proletariat class is forced into “creating wealth for others and misery for itself.” In the *Poverty of Philosophy*, we are informed that the bourgeois class is “indifferent ... to the sufferings of the proletarians who help them acquire wealth.” In *German Ideology* it is stated that, Husami underlines, the proletariat “has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages.” In *Grundrisse* Marx writes about the unequal appropriation of the goods as “the *theft of alien labor time* [that is, of surplus value or surplus labor], *on which the present wealth is based...*” Husami continues with *Capital*, vol. I, in which it is said that “the capitalist gets rich, not like the miser in proportion to his personal labor, and restricted consumption, but at the same time rate as he squeezes out the labor power of others, and enforces on the laborer abstinence from all life’s enjoyments.” Lastly Husami quotes from *Capital*, vol. II, which talks about the “coercion and monopolization of social development (including material and intellectual advantages) by one portion of society at the expense of the other.”

In opposition to the view briefly summarized, the other party’s arguments by making use of the passages where Marx explicitly states his views on morality, are

⁹ Z. I. Husami, “Marx on Distributive Justice”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn 1978), pp. 28-30.

claimed on the grounds that since Marx condemns morality as being illusory, mystifying or misleading, all of which are considered to be the characteristics of ideological world-views, he does not base his political theory in general and his critique of capitalism in particular on moral consideration. In other words, he does not condemn capitalism for its being unjust or an immoral system. On the contrary, they claim, Marx believed that capitalism was a just system, and it is a necessary stage that has to be completed through the course of history. This is why it is completely a just system when evaluated in accordance with the inner workings of the relations that prevail in this economic system. One among several of them where Marx criticizes the use of moral language both in theory and in practice, the following passage can be used to support the view proponents of this party hold. In the “Critique of the Gotha Programme” Marx declares:

I have dealt more at length with the ‘undiminished proceeds of labour’, on the one hand, and with ‘equal right’ and ‘fair distribution’, on the other, in order to show what a crime it is to attempt, on the one hand, to force on our Party again, as dogmas, ideas which in a certain period had some meaning but have now become obsolete verbal rubbish, while again, perverting, on the other, the realistic outlook, which it cost so much effort to instill into the Party but which has now taken root in it, by means of ideological nonsense about right and other trash so common among democrats and French socialists.¹⁰

When followed to its logical consequences, the dichotomy between these - mostly analytical - thinkers in terms of the debate on morality, in fact, implies a more foundational divergence between them. That is, while the first group of thinkers tends to claim Marx’s whole theory to be a normative project, which finds its expression in the idea that socialism *ought* to come, the second group of thinkers believes it to be a

¹⁰ Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme”, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 615.

descriptive project, which stands as the proof of the assertion that socialism *will* come.¹¹ Thus, while one group believes Marx's political theory is established upon a moral basis, which condemns capitalism for its being unjust and calls for a more just society, namely socialism, the other group by emphasizing historical materialism's being a scientific account of social phenomena, which tries to lay bare the laws and their structure that beget different social/political relations in the course of human history, tries to account for the progressive idea of human development that will eventually lead to a socialist society. In short, theorists from the first party opposes the idea that Marxism is a 'value-free' or 'ethically-neutral' social theory, which - rather than judging the existing social condition in moral terms- provides a scientific account of history alone.

The above mentioned controversy brings up a second discrepancy that leads to the division of Marx's social theory into seemingly paradoxical frameworks. That is, either we have to understand Marx's social theory as a scientific study of history, when applied to morality turns into a pure relativism because the ideological superstructure is then a mere reflection of the economic structure. In this sense, we are forced to accept it as an 'ethically-neutral' theory, which is free of the charges labeled as ideological illusions. Or we have to consider Marx's theory as a form of ethical outlook that criticizes capitalism on the basis of absolute moral principles of justice or equality, concepts that are heavily morally loaded.¹²

This kind of reading treats different aspects of Marx's view, e.g., its scientific outlook and its moral perspective, as if they are distinctly separate, logically independent

¹¹ Sean Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 112.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 112-115.

of each other. Again we are forced to pick up one of the following alternatives. Whether Marx's normative political judgments are founded on an "objectively valid" ground of a moral theory, or whether they are committed to a sort of moral relativism, if morality - as Marx claims - is considered to depend upon the interests of a certain class. That is, what can we say about the Marxist morality, if it solely concerns about the interests of the working class.

As Sayers argues, these are false dilemmas, that are better not to be committed in order to grasp as clear as possible the whole picture which is a proper candidate to explain Marx's understanding of historical materialism. A dialectical reading of Marx allows both parties ideas to be included in one single approach without the apprehension of embracing an unintended contradiction. That is, we can consider Marx's social theory as a scientific explanation of the existing conditions, which contains moral values at the same time. True, Marx regards one kind of morality, i.e., conventional morality as ideological, but he at the same develops a critical morality, which places itself against all ideological world-views. By means of questioning the conventional moral values and ideas, critical morality goes beyond what conventional morality as ideology, that is, as 'pure illusion' and/or 'false consciousness', serve in society.

Marx analyzes the existence and/or emergence of moral ideas, show their interdependence upon the historical/economic phenomena. However, this does not commit one to a deterministic reading of -what Marx calls- the "superstructure"; there is also a probabilistic reading of Marx's superstructure, which is the implication of the critical morality that he pursues. Moral values and ideas take shape within existing social phenomena, yet they also enjoy a capacity or power to change in what they take

shape. Critical morality precisely stands at the outset of this journey of changing the reality; in other words, it provides the proper base for such an attempt.

To account for the idea that Marx's social theory incorporates moral ideas as well, one does not have to commit to relativism or to absolutism. An immanent critique, which neither requires the application of some morally transcendent/ objective values in the theory nor reduces its entire analysis of the social phenomena to pure relativism, is also possible. As a proponent of this view, I share Sean Sayers' contention that it is precisely because of the contradictions within the existing conditions that the progressive history of mankind put further stage of the development as a relative but nonetheless real phenomenon¹³.

Immanent critique allows us to see the inner contradictions of capitalism as the normal course of progressive history. Sayers underlines that each stage is, in fact, characterized by its conflicts and contradictions. It is, actually, these contradictions which give rise to development. Each stage undergoes a necessary changing process that result in a higher stage compared to the previous one. It is higher in the sense that the possibilities human kind enjoys for its *self-realization* - the essential value Marx praises most all throughout his writing- becomes greater, since the material conditions of life in general are transformed/and improved in such a way. In Hegelian terms, this progressive development can be seen as the development of the dialectics between humankind and nature, which points to the process of rationalization. In a nutshell, "In the process, the

¹³ Immanent critique is not first suggested by Sayers. Herbert Marcuse has offered a similar view at the end of 1960's. For detailed account of his critique, see Marcuse "The Affirmative Character of Culture" in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Shapiro J. J. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 88-133. Here, I will mainly elaborate on Sayers' works as he particularly picks up the analytical Marxist thinkers as his opponents.

conditions for the emergence of the next stage gradually take shape within it. To the extent to which this occurs, present conditions cease to be progressive and become, instead, a fetter and a hindrance to the process of development.”¹⁴ Mankind does not invent problems without solutions. And thus the famous quotation: “mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since,...it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.”¹⁵

In this sense, moral judgments in Marx’s account of historical materialism can be seen to provide standards for the conviction that the next stage will be a higher one in the course of development rather than being only relative that represent the ideological views of the existing material conditions. Sayers quotes from Bradley to account for such an approach:

All morality is and must be ‘relative’, because the essence of realization is evolution through stages, and hence existence in some one stage is not final.... On the other hand, all morality is ‘absolute’ because in every stage the essence of man *is* realized, however imperfectly: and yet again the distinction of right in itself against relative morality is not banished, because, from the point of view of a higher stage, we can see that the lower stages failed to realize the truth completely enough ... yet... the morality of every stage is justified for that stage; and the demands for a code of right in itself, apart from any stage, is seen to be the asking for an impossibility.¹⁶

Thus, the idea of a communist society is advocated by Marx, according to this account, as the result of the conflicts and tendencies which are present in the capitalist society.

¹⁴ Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, p. 118.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, “Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

This explains the idea underneath the following quotation clearly: “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.”¹⁷

If we sum up what has been said up to now, we can say that there are mainly three different approaches concerning the relation between Marx’s philosophy and morality. Wood can be seen as the representative of the first group. He advocates that there is no space in Marx’s historical materialism for any normative principle(s) whatsoever. Though accepting that “no reader of Marx could possibly deny that he makes ‘value judgments’, about capitalism”; and that he “never attempts fastidiously to segregate his scientific analysis of capitalism from his angry condemnation of it”¹⁸, Wood believed that the explicit moral language prevailing in Marx’s writings cannot be attributed to any ethical criterion that Marx would wish to make use of in his analysis. Rather, Wood argued that they constitute the concrete descriptive content of his critique of capitalism. Capitalism for Marx, Wood contends, deserves to be condemned not because it is immoral or unjust but because it is an irrational economic system, whose abolition will necessarily come up in the course of history. Generally, Wood’s position can be said to represent what is called ‘scientific socialism’.

The opposing view basically claims that, although Marx has argued the opposite at times, he included certain ethical principles in the construction of his theory of historical materialism in general and in that of his critique of capitalism in particular.

¹⁷ Karl Marx, “German Ideology”, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006b), p. 187.

¹⁸ Allen Wood, “Marx Against Morality”, in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell Reference, 1993), p. 512.

The position is shared by many social theorists such as Geras, Cohen, Husami, Elster, and Buchanan though differing from each other in certain details. Geras's arguments can be seen as the direct opposite of what Wood suggests regarding the issue. Geras avers that Marx, albeit unknowingly, applies certain transhistorical values both in his analysis of history and in that of capitalism throughout his works; and it is these moral values which lie at the foundation of Marx's social/ political theory. Generally, Geras' position can be said to represent what is called 'ethical socialism'.

The third position was defended by Sayers, with whom I share certain arguments in explaining away the seemingly paradoxical position¹⁹ of Marx with regard to morality. Sayers states that there is no contradiction in seeing Marx's theory as a scientific account of social reality, which has an explicit normative perspective as well. He states that while Marx articulates the present conditions, he at the same time proposes a future. His postulation of the future as a communist society renders his analysis of the present conditions a condemnation of capitalism. This implies, Sayers suggests, that Marx's theory of historical materialism utilizes an immanent critique, which signifies that the criteria of the inefficiencies of one stage in the course of history are always posed by the next stage, which is itself in the process of formation. The immanent critique suggested by Sayers underlines that as capitalism gives way to the development of material goods of life and accordingly emergence of new needs; in conjunction with this process of development, it paves the way for itself to turn into an insufficient system in terms of its failing to satisfy those needs that itself created. Thus,

¹⁹ The seemingly contradiction is due to the fact that we are, following the arguments of opposing camps, drifted to choose either Marx's critique of capitalism to be an absolutist position, taking some transhistorical values as the standards of a just moral society or to a purely relative one, taking only the existing material conditions as the determining standards.

immanent critique implies that the criteria for the critique of capitalism (or any socio-economic system) are possible and/ or formed within capitalism (or that specific system) itself, that is, they are immanent in the system already.

In what follows, I will dig deeper into that stage, namely, capitalism, whose analysis occupies a major space in Marx's account of historical materialism. I will focus on the relation between capitalism and two particular extensions of the debate over morality, namely, justice and freedom.

The underlying assumption of the present work is that there is a continuum line of thinking in Marx's works, especially, concerning certain basic notions²⁰, such that while explicit elaborations on them occupy considerable space in his earlier writings, they, at the same time, constitute the implicit underlying framework of his later works. This in turn shows that we can detect the traces of an ethical theory throughout Marx's writings from his early works, which apparently embrace a more philosophical approach with regard to the analysis of social/ political phenomena, to his transitional and mature works, which explicitly grapple with serious economic and technical articulations concerning the analysis in question. Sayers' view of immanent critique, in fact,

²⁰ The most celebrated concept, in this respect, is that of alienation. The common idea is that while Marx elaborates on this concept in his more "philosophical" earlier writings, which heavily inherit Hegelian insights, the concept hardly occupies a space in his more "scientific" later works. Generally, the view is proposed to imply a discontinuity between early and later works of Marx, which in turn give rise to another deceptive question, i.e., which one is the "real" Marx, the author of the earlier writings or that of the later ones? This work does not share the presence of such a dichotomy. While it may be true that Marx did not mention the word 'alienation' much in his later works published after 1845, this does not mean that he also abandoned endorsing the notion itself. Brenkert, in his book *Marx'in Özgürlük Etiği*, states that the reason why Marx abandons using the word "alienation" is due to his being cautious for not sharing the language of moralistic radicals, who seem to "appropriate the word 'alienation'". As Marx rejects moral preaching of moralistic radicals as the motive that could be used for advocating the emancipatory movement of workers, it is understandable that he avoids using the word alienation. Furthermore, Brenkert makes it clear that although Marx used the term less frequent in his later works, "he continued to use both the concept and the word in his unpublished writings — as the *Grundrisse*, for example, has made clear." Brenkert, *Marx'in Özgürlük Etiği* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 1983) p.32.

corroborates this approach, i.e., pointing out a continuum between early and later writings of Marx. To arrive such a conclusion requires to see that there is no contradiction in regarding Marx's project as social theory, which allows to incorporate a normative attitude, while at the same time suggesting a scientific account of the social reality of human kind.

CHAPTER 2: MARX'S CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM: JUST OR UNJUST

The issue of the relation between justice and Marx's critique of capitalism is part of a longstanding debate. Actually, it centers around one basic question, which is whether Marx's critique of the present conditions, namely, capitalism, was justice-based or not. There are commentators who give a negative answer to this question. They claim that Marx did not criticize capitalist system because it is an unjust system, but some other reasons than justice played a significant role in shaping his condemnation of the system. As a general tendency, thinkers in this party are also apt to think that capitalism, in fact, is a just system.

While proponents of this party might be said to share the above mentioned - contention that Marx in effect evaluates capitalism to be a just system, however, they differ in their explanation of the characteristics of the basis of Marx's critique. More explicitly, while some refer to certain moral values, most importantly freedom, to interpret the foundations of Marx's critique; others consider the same notions central in Marx's account though devoid of a moral perspective.

On the other hand, commentators who give an affirmative answer to the above-mentioned question claim that Marx did condemn capitalism on the basis of an idea of justice, yet they differ from each other in proposing as to what criteria Marx's condemnation has taken shape. In this regard, we can state three claims that put forward different criteria that Marx is said to utilize as the standard of his critique. These are i) the claim that Marx condemns capitalism making use of its own standards of justice ii) the claim that Marx condemns capitalism making use of relative, namely, communist

standards of justice; and iii) the claim that Marx condemns capitalism making use of certain transhistorical standards of justice²¹, respectively.

In the present chapter, I will begin the examination of the relation between justice and Marx's critique of capitalism by exposing first the position which holds that Marx thinks of capitalism as a just system and that he does not condemn it on the basis of justice. Then, I will try to lay bare the arguments of the opposing view, which, in general, advocated that Marx thinks of capitalism as an unjust system and that he does condemn it on the basis of justice. Lastly, I will try to state my own views on the issue, which will bring us to the subject of the third chapter.

Before going into the details of both camps' arguments, it would be better to expose the theoretical background of capitalist exploitation as analyzed by Marx²². In fact, it is this analysis of exploitation that actually provides the textual ground for different interpretations that rest in controversy.

In *Capital*, Marx talks about two faces of wage relation in a capitalistic mode of production. The first one is the *sphere of circulation* in which equivalent values are exchanged, that is, wages in exchange of labor-power. In this initial stage, workers sell their labor-power, to the capitalist, and are paid a wage, which is the equivalent of the value they sell. Marx speaks of this process as a just one, since what is sold by the

²¹ My classification sides with that of Ferda Keskin's in his article, "Çağdaş Marksizmde Adalet Tartışmaları", *Felsefe Tartışmaları*, Sayı 34, (2005), p.5. Concerning the debate, other classifications that group different positions have been made. For others see Brenkert, *Marx'ın Özgürlük Etiği*, pp. 182-198, Lukes, *Marksizm ve Ahlak* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 73-86.

²² Below I present a very brief explanation of Marx's theory of exploitation. For an inclusive one, see Peffer, *Marxism Morality and Social Justice*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 137-165. Also for different approaches on the same issue, see Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx*, "Exploitation", (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 79-101; and Wood, *Karl Marx*, "Capitalist Exploitation", (Routledge: New York 2004), pp. 242-263.

worker gets its full equivalent in value as her wage. The second sphere is the *sphere of production* where the relationship between the worker and the capitalist becomes more unpleasant. Here, since workers are compelled to work longer than the time necessary to reproduce the value of their own labor-power, they produce surplus value, which is unpaid and appropriated as profit by the capitalist. In other words, “labor-power in operation creates a value greater than the value labor-power itself embodies and is sold for.”(Geras, 1985) Referring to this sphere we cannot talk about the equivalence of exchange, since some of the total value that is produced by the worker remains unpaid. That is why while in the *sphere of circulation*, which is seen as a contractual relation between equals, we may talk about the freedom of the worker to work for the capitalist or not, in the *sphere of production*, we cannot talk about freedom at all on behalf of the worker, since she is forced to work for longer hours, at the end of which the surplus value produced by her is appropriated by someone else.

With a view to account for their positions, thinkers who argue that Marx believed capitalism to be a just system refer more to what Marx said about the first stage, which he presents as the just face of the wage relation. Commentators, who advocate that Marx condemned capitalism because it is an unjust system, dig into the second stage, which may be taken to emphasize the unjust face of the relation. What is important, however, is that Marx speaks of these two faces as *complementary* and *necessary* which are explicative of one type of wage relation that prevails in and reveals the typical exploitative relation of the capitalist economy. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that to limit one’s explanation to the second stage, that is, reducing exploitation merely to

unpaid labor, is a limited approach since it overlooks other aspects of exploitive relations in general.²³

First Position: Capitalism as a Just System

One of the most celebrated proponents of this view is Allen Wood. Wood declares that the Marxian vision of communist society goes beyond all the moral and juridical concepts including rights, law, justice etc., which always appear as different forms of ideologies that can be subjected to the abuses of states and/ or usually serve to the purposes of the dominating class. As such they indicate the stultification of people, a phenomenon which Marx refers to as 'false consciousness'. Since Marx rejects any form of ideology, Wood asserts, the omission of the concept of justice together with other forms of ideologies from his theory is not a surprise.

If Marx speaks about the juridical concepts, Wood claims, as representing the ideologies of a specific mode of production, then we expect that capitalism has also its own standards for determining what is just and what is not on the basis of its mode of production. The capitalist understanding of justice manifests itself as the exchange of equivalents. This means that any transaction that complies with this rule, that is, what are exchanged are equal values of different commodities, then capitalism appears completely to be just according to its own standards. Wood contends that Marx believes

²³ More on the different aspects of exploitation will be said in the third chapter. For now, I will be content to state that I share Mehmet Tabak's position which he exposes in his article "Marxian Consideration on Morality, Justice and Rights". Tabak asserts that to explain exploitation as "the mere transfer of surplus", results in missing the fundamental critique that Marx directs on capitalist relations. Tabak, "Marxian Consideration on Morality Justice and Rights ", *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (October 2003), p. 525. His critique requires the examination of the phenomenon of alienation as well, since it is always confronted, though at different levels depending on the form of exploitation, whenever there is a relation based on one party's exploiting the other.

that to subscribe other standards of justice to condemn capitalism is anachronistic, since it conflicts with historical materialism.

Hence, Wood points out, Marx's use of the concepts of justice and injustice differs from those of the traditional creed, according to which justice is taken to be the highest merit that all social institutions would want to possess.²⁴ This explains why Marx argues against those socialist moralists who appeal to the concept of justice in their account of the working class movement. Marx thinks that they falsely consider justice as an objective value whose application can hold transhistorically for any type of society that existed in the past and could exist in the future.

Overall, there are two basic arguments that lie at the foundation of the view that Marx refuses to incorporate the concept of justice in his critique of capitalism. These came to be known as 'Wood-Tucker Thesis' in the literature. The first claim is that justice at the very base is a concept of the bourgeoisie and when capitalism is evaluated in terms of that concept; it completely appears as a just system. Second states that in a future communist society, the material conditions will give rise to such abundance that to talk about a concept like justice, which was previously meaningful in previous material conditions in which scarcity and egoism prevail, will be unnecessary, that is, the very material conditions, giving rise to concepts like justice, morality, right etc., will disappear.

The first argument is derived from the passages where Marx actually talks about the inner workings of capitalism as if it were a just system; just, in the sense that it

²⁴ Allen Wood, "The Marxian Critique of Justice", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (Spring 1972), p. 245.

works according to the rules that inhere in capitalism. In accordance with these rules, Marx declares that once the labor is produced it is no longer worker's commodity but the capitalist's, since s/he pays for it, and the surplus value that is appropriated by the capitalist is seen as "a piece of good luck for the buyer, but by no means an injustice towards the seller."²⁵ The contention that the laborer gets the value of her commodity is stated by Marx in *Capital*, vol. I as follows:

The fact that this particular commodity, labor-power, possesses the peculiar use-value of supplying labor, and therefore of creating value, cannot affect the general law of commodity production. If, therefore, the amount of value advanced in wages is not merely found again in the product, but augmented by a surplus-value, this is not because the seller has been defrauded, for he has really received the value of his commodity; it is due solely to the fact that this commodity has been used up by the buyer.²⁶

This is why Marx was explicitly against utopian socialists, who, as Marx claims, prefer to make use of universal moral values in their defense of the socialist movement. The most commonly used quotation, on behalf of Wood's camp, is seen in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* where Marx opposes the idea of a 'fair distribution'. There Marx states:

What is "a fair distribution"? Do not the bourgeois assert that the present-day distribution is "fair"? And is it not, in fact, the only "fair" distribution on the basis of the present-day mode of production? Are economic relations regulated by legal conceptions or do not, on the contrary, legal relations arise from

²⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* vol. 1. (hereafter *Capital*), trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1976), p. 301.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 731.

economic ones? Have not also the socialist sectarians the most varied notions about “fair” distribution?²⁷

In addition to these explicit enunciations on wage relations’ being just, proponents of this group draw our attention to the fact that Marx contends that the moral or juridical concepts and/ or values are always subordinate to the material conditions. They emerge as a result of the corresponding economic relations; and this makes them relative and internal to the specific material conditions of the epoch. This is the idea that lay behind the passages, Wood affirms, where Marx treats moral norms and values as he treats religion and metaphysics, that is, he includes them in his understanding of ideology, which is condemned as being ‘illusory’, ‘mystifying’ and/or misleading. In *German Ideology* he states “morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence.”²⁸

Wood stresses that standards of justice, which do change in accordance with the changing modes of production, can be valid for, and be applied only to the corresponding economic system. Wood claims in his article “Marx on Right and Justice: A Reply to Husami”:

...as Marx interprets it, the justice of capitalist transactions consists merely in their being essentially capitalist, in the correspondence of capitalist appropriation and distribution to those standards of justice which serve the system itself.²⁹

²⁷ Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme”, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978a), p. 528.

²⁸ Karl Marx, “German Ideology”, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006b), p.180.

²⁹ Allen Wood, “Marx on Rights and Justice: A Reply to Husami”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3, (Spring 1979), p. 269.

The other well-known passage from Marx's writings is particularly germane here. In the same article Wood quotes from Marx:

The justice of transactions which go on between agents of production rests on the fact that these transactions arise as natural consequence from the relations of production. The juridical [*rechtlich*] forms in which these economic transactions appear as voluntary actions of the participants, as the expressions of their common will and as contracts that can be enforced by the state against a single party, cannot, being mere forms, determine this content. They only express it. This content is just whenever it corresponds to the mode of production, is adequate to it. It is unjust whenever it contradicts it.³⁰

With the second basic argument, Wood tries to account for the idea that Marx's vision of communist society is a form of society that is beyond justice, where the notion of distribution will be otiose, let alone that of the 'fair distribution'. In such a kind of postulation, i.e., a classless and stateless society, there will not be any need for notions related with morality and right. Marx does not advocate, Wood avers, communism because it provides a more just system of distribution, but because it will provide individuals with the opportunity of *self-realization*. For Marx, Wood claims, amelioration of the conditions of the proletariat is not the final stage to be arrived. On the contrary, this would help to institutionalize the capitalist mode of production. What is envisaged, actually, is the abolition of all the productive relations and the social and/or ideological extensions that these productive forces give rise to in a capitalist system. In *Value, Price and Profit* he declares, "Instead of the *conservative* motto, "A fair day's

³⁰ Wood "Marx on Rights and Justice: A Reply to Husami", p.270.

wage for a fair day's work!" they [the workers] ought to inscribe on their banner the *revolutionary* watchword, "*Abolition of the wages system!*"³¹

As to how this issue of distribution will be solved, in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* Marx talks about the disappearance of the conditions of scarcity in a communist society. However, before that stage, that is, the disappearance of scarcity, there is another stage that will necessarily take place, namely, socialism the first stage of communism, in which some kind of a principle of justice still operates. In this first stage, the *contribution principle* will work out as an equal standard of distribution, which Marx admits explicitly, "stigmatized by a bourgeois limitation."³² According to this principle, every one will consume the amount that is proportional to his/her labor contribution to society, i.e., s/he will have back the amount s/he gives. Yet, this principle, Marx emphasizes, still applies a bourgeois understanding of right, since while it treats everyone as equals, in the sense that it applies the same principle to everyone, it results in fact, by way of overlooking the unequal conditions of individuals, in equal treatment of individuals. So he writes,

*It is, therefore, a right of inequality, in its content, like every right. Right by its very nature can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable only by an equal standard in so far as they are brought under an equal point of view, are taken from one definite side only, for instance, in the present case, are regarded only as workers and nothing more is seen in them, everything else being ignored.*³³

³¹ Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit*. Available [online]: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/ch03.htm> [April 15 2009].

³² Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme". In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978a), p.530.

³³ Ibid.

In the higher stage of communism, namely, full communism, the *needs principle* will be in order, which, as Wood claims, is not a principle of justice at all. Since in full communism the conditions of scarcity and egoism, which require a standard for a fair distribution will no longer exist, the principles of needs will not operate as a criterion of justice. Thus, there will be no need for any kind of right or moral value, since the material conditions that give rise to such social values or 'superstructure', will no longer exist likewise. We are familiar to Marx's postulation of the communist society where the *needs principle* will be in order:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe in its banners: from each according to his ability to each according to his needs!³⁴

However, Wood's insistence on the idea that *needs principle* goes beyond an appeal to any moral criterion is arguable. It is true that *needs principle* does not aim to operate as standard for an *equal* distribution among its members. Yet, being a general rule, it functions as a principle on the basis of a certain criterion. The criterion, that is, the standard for distribution, is people's needs which are expected to be different from each other. In a communist society, the point is the assumption that people's needs, which are not fulfilled in a capitalist society in accordance with the developments reached via capitalist mode of production, will not be a matter of equal satisfaction of them. The

³⁴ Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", p.531.

ultimate issue will be the satisfaction of needs which are desired to serve for the *self-realization* of human kind. As people's needs will differ from each other, they will receive whatever satisfies their needs in different measures. Thus, although the ultimate concern in *needs principle* is not a fair distribution, there is still a rule that operates as a principle of distribution. Besides, even Marx himself explicitly admits that their agenda was not primarily devoted to the demand of a fair distribution among the members of society, the concept of justice can have other interpretations such as 'productive justice', 'appropriative justice', 'political justice'³⁵, which are not directly related with distributive justice yet when considered as a whole, each of them could be constitutive of a system in which the needs principle will be in order. In the present work, then, while arguing that Marx's critique of capitalism was not based on justice, what is meant is specifically the distributive justice, which aims a fair distribution among its members in the first place.

Having stated Wood's position in general and a reasonable objection to his last argument, let us now look for the details of the second position, who claim that Marx condemns capitalism for its being an unjust system.

Second Position: Capitalism as an Unjust System

Roughly put, proponents of this view suggest that Marx condemned capitalism because it is a system which does injustice to individuals. They all agree that capitalism by way of rendering, loosely speaking, goods accessible to one group of people, namely,

³⁵ G. F. Demartino, *Global Economy, Global Justice: Theoretical Objections and Policy Alternatives to Neoliberalism* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Tabak, "Marxian Consideration on Morality, Justice and Rights". *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (October 2003) pp. 523-540.

capitalists, at the expense of another group of people, namely, workers, from the enjoyment of the same goods, involves injustice. As it is mentioned earlier, however, their account with regards to the criteria Marx embrace to criticize the system slightly differs. While some argue that capitalism is unjust because it falls short of providing what it promises, others claim that it is unjust because it falls short of providing what it already does not promise, -either evaluated according to the standards of more just systems which are socialism and communism, or evaluated according to standards of certain transhistorical and/ or transcultural values.

Capitalism Criticized According to Its Own Standards of Justice

Among the defenders of this position, Nancy Holstrom and Allan Buchanan can be named. Keskin, in his article “Çağdaş Marksizmde Adalet Tartışmaları”, asserts that Buchanan thinks that the capitalist understanding of justice appreciates values like freedom, equality etc.; and it bases the legitimacy of wage relation on the exchange of equals that take place according to the free (i.e., non-coerced and/ or voluntary) choices of the parties involved. However, capitalism does not provide equal chance to everyone in the transactions, since it prevents – as happened in the *sphere of production* particularly- the exchange of equals to be done out of free choices of the parties. Then, as an economic system capitalism turns out to be inadequate when evaluated in terms of its own standards, because it cannot provide the enjoyment of values that it actually appreciates.

Keskin quotes from Buchanan in which Buchanan aims to show that the attempts of the legitimization of the wage relation as exchange of equals is possible, as we have underlined earlier, only from a limited point of view, that is, it is possible only in the *sphere of circulation*:

When we go beyond the procedure, we see that, due to the severe inequalities between the conditions of the laborer and that of the capitalist, exchange is not free. Consequently, the freedom and the equality of the wage relation of labor is an illusion. When we take the ideals of freedom and equality seriously, apply them consistently, and refuse their arbitrary distribution, then capitalism's own standard provides the material for the critique of itself.³⁶

However, it seems that, as Keskin states, when the inner relations of capitalism are considered, it would be wrong to think of capitalism as it actually offers a free relation that can pertain to the wage relation of capitalist mode of production. Laborer is forced to sell her labor power, since she does not own the means of production. This signifies that there is an organic relation between private property and wage relations. Thus, unless the injustice of the private property of the means of production is shown, which would mean violation of the commitment of evaluating the system according to its own standards, Keskin affirms, the fact that labor is not *free* in the relation is not enough to hold that relation to be *unjust*.

³⁶ Ferda Keskin, "Çağdaş Marksizmde Adalet Tartışmaları", p.12. (translation is mine)

Capitalism Criticized According to Postcapitalist Standards

One of the most famous proponents of this approach is Jon Elster, who declared that Marx applies a *hierarchical theory of justice* in criticizing the capitalist system. By mentioning two different principles of distributive justice, which Marx talks about in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, he underlines that it is on the basis of these two principles that Marx talks about the injustice of capitalism. What Elster means is clear in the following quotation:

The contribution principle then appears as a Janus-like³⁷ notion. Looked at from one side, it serves as a criterion of justice that condemns capitalist exploitation as unjust. Looked at from the vintage point of fully developed communism, it is itself condemned as inadequate by the higher standard expressed in the needs principle. An able-bodied capitalist who receives an income without working represents an unjustified violation of the contribution principle – a violation, that is, which is not justified by the needs principle. By contrast, an invalid who receives welfare aid without contributing anything in return represents a violation of the contribution principle that *is* justified by the needs principle. Hence, Marx had a *hierarchical theory of justice*, by which the contribution principle provides a second-best criterion when the needs principle is not yet historically ripe for application. Capitalist exploitation is doubly unjust, since it obeys neither principle. The “equal right” of the first stage of communism, is also unjust, but less so, since only the needs principle is violated.³⁸

As it will be seen from the above quotation Elster argues that Marx utilizes external criteria, which are postcapitalist and precisely for that reason cannot essentially inhere in capitalism, to criticize the then existing mode of production.

³⁷ Janus is a Roman god that is identified with doors, gates, and all beginnings and that is depicted with two opposite faces (definition is from Merriam Webster Online).

³⁸ Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 229-230.

However, it can be further asked on exactly what basis Marx speaks of postcapitalist understanding of justice being a higher principle than that of the capitalist one. This point brings us to the following section, since Geras thinks that “as they are not [distributive principles of justice] ranked by him according to any extrinsic standard of value, it is a reasonable supposition that he simply sees some principles as fairer or more just than others intrinsically, on a trans-historical standard of justice.”³⁹

Capitalism Criticized According to the Transhistorical Standards

As mentioned earlier, this position, basically, makes use of the second stage of wage relations to support their claim of Marx’s critique of capitalism as an unjust system. They accept that the first stage of the wage relation consists of the exchange of equivalents, but once moved forward to the realm of production, they argue, we cannot talk about an actual exchange of equivalents, since the surplus value is appropriated - as unpaid labor- constantly by the capitalist. They underline the passages where Marx speaks of the exchange in general as ‘only illusory’, a ‘mere semblance’, an ‘appearance’, a ‘mere pretence’ etc. Geras who is one of the adherent proponents of this position quotes from *Capital* to illustrate Marx’s own contention that implies the involvement of an unjust stage of wage relations:

The exchange of equivalents, the original operation with which we started, is now turned round in such a way that there is only an apparent exchange, since, firstly, the capital which is exchanged for labor-power is itself merely a portion of the product of the labor of others which has been appropriated without an equivalent;

³⁹ Norman Geras, “The Controversy About Marx and Justice”, *New Left Review* Vol.1, No.150, March-April 1985), p. 58.

and, secondly, this capital must not only be replaced by its producer, the worker, but replaced together with an added surplus. The relation of exchange between capitalist and worker becomes a mere semblance belonging only to the process of circulation, it becomes a mere form, which is alien to the content of the transaction itself, and merely mystifies it. The constant sale and purchase of labor-power is the form; the content is the constant appropriation by the capitalist, without equivalent, of a portion of the labor of others which has already been objectified, and his repeated exchange of this labor for a greater quantity of the living labor of others.⁴⁰

In connection with the above quotation, Geras argues that, since in the process of production the worker is forced to sell her labor-power and the surplus labor she produced is taken by the capitalist, the freedom of the worker to have a contract with the capitalist in the process of circulation is only apparent. As Geras remarks of Marx, “capital . . . pumps out a certain specific quantum of surplus labor from the direct producers or workers, surplus labor that it receives without an equivalent and which by its very nature always remains forced labor, however much it might appear as the result of free contractual agreement.”⁴¹

Geras goes on to expose the other passages where Marx’s critiques, which I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, on capitalism’s exploitive relations gain particularly a moral aspect. The following passages are in order to confirm Geras’s approach: “Even if the latter uses a portion of that tribute to purchase the additional labor-power at its full price, so that equivalent is exchanged for equivalent, the whole thing still remains the age-old activity of the conqueror, who buys commodities from the conquered with the

⁴⁰ Geras, “The Controversy About Marx and Justice”, pp. 55-56.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.56.

money he has stolen from them.”⁴². Again about the annual surplus product, he speaks of it as the “embezzled from the English workers without any equivalent being given in return”⁴³; he continues, “all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the Soil.” He talks about “the booty pumped out of the workers” and “the total surplus-value extorted . . . the common booty” and “the loot of other people’s labor”. He speaks of the abolition of capitalist property as “the expropriation of a few usurpers.”

We see that Geras tries to account for the idea that though we can talk about two stages of wage relation in capitalism, one being assessed as just and the other unjust this relation, in the last analysis, can be evaluated as one of two alternatives. In his article “The Controversy about Marx and Justice” he says that this dialectic appearance of wage labor’s both as just and unjust in the last analysis is not reasonable, one cannot be one thing a something that it is not . Therefore, the passages which are exposed to support the opposite position are attributed to Marx’s “confusing views” on the subject. Finally, Geras states his proposal on the subject as follows: “Marx did think capitalism unjust but he did not think he thought so.”⁴⁴ A similar conclusion is derived by Cohen as well. Cohen believes that since Marx - even-occasionally- treats capitalism as robbery then he must be taken to treat capitalism as unjust. In his review of *Karl Marx* by Wood, Cohen announces that “the relationship between robbery and injustice is so close that anyone

⁴² Ibid., p. 57.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

who thinks capitalism is robbery must be treated as someone who thinks capitalism is unjust, even if he does not realize that he thinks it.”⁴⁵

We said that thinkers on Wood’s side do not object to the idea that Marx has a distinctively moral language throughout his writings. What they argue, unlike Geras, or say Cohen or Husami, is that these judgments cannot be interpreted as an indicator of a moral thesis upon which Marx elaborates his critique of capitalism. Thus, while Wood advocates that the postulation of a communist society is not considered to be a more just society than the previous one, Cohen argues the opposite, that is, communism is called for since it is supposed to provide a more just system than it supersedes.

Concerning the dispute over capitalism’s being just or unjust I personally believe that Marx’s critique was primarily based on values other than justice. I think, as we will see in the third chapter, what Marx was criticizing primarily is not the inequality among people but the unfreedom that they suffer within the existing material conditions of production. In this respect I may be thought of as sympathizing the view that Marx actually believed capitalism to be just. This is because I had earlier indicated that thinkers who share the view that Marx condemned capitalism based on values other than justice also shared the view that capitalism is a just system. However, I do not think the former view is necessarily committed to the latter one. In other words, the claim that Marx’s critique was not based on justice does not necessarily require adopting the view that Marx also believed it to be a just system. One can reasonably argue that the primary values that lie beneath Marx’s critique of capitalism was freedom and *self-realization*

⁴⁵ G. A. Cohen, Book Review: *Karl Marx* by A. Wood, *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 92, No. 367, (July 1983), p. 443.

more than equality and justice; while at the same time believing that Marx could have thought that capitalism is not a just system at all. That is, these two approaches are not mutually exclusive.

We have to accept that notwithstanding the existence of passages where Marx explicitly characterize the *sphere of circulation* as a just stage⁴⁶, which occurs as the exchange of equals; there exist passages - generally referring to the *sphere of production* - where he explicitly implies that the exchange between equals is only a seemingly one.⁴⁷ We even witness some ironic references where Marx explicitly ridicules capitalist understanding of justice. In *Capital* vol. I, he states:

Capitalist justice is truly to be wondered at! [⁴⁸] The owner, of land, of houses, the businessman, when expropriated by 'improvements' such as railroads, the building of new streets, etc., does not just receive full compensation. He must also be comforted, both according to human law and divine law, by receiving a substantial profit in return for his compulsory 'abstinence'. The worker, with his wife and child and chattels, is thrown out into the street, and, if he crowds in too large numbers near districts where the local authority insist on decency, he is prosecuted in the name of public health!⁴⁹

In this regard, when we look at Wood's first argument in which he declares that justice is a concept of the bourgeoisie and evaluated from its perspective capitalism stands as a totally just system, we see that it is not satisfactory. The basic reason for Wood to claim such a view is that capitalist understanding of justice requires the exchange of equal

⁴⁶ See the last quotation on page 10.

⁴⁷ See the quotation on page 19.

⁴⁸ Other translations for this sentence occur as "Admire this capitalistic justice!" Available [online]: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm> [15 April 2009].

⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital*, p. 815.

values of different commodities. He asserts that this condition is perfectly accomplished in capitalist wage relations as he persistently tries to account for the idea that the laborer is given the full equivalent, i.e., the wage she is given, of her labor power.

This is not the case, however, if one basic distinction, to the explanation of which Marx mainly dedicates his *Capital*, is taken into consideration. This distinction is between the ‘forms of appearance’ and ‘real relations’. I will not get into the details of Marx’s distinction, for this would require to go beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, it is necessary to indicate that Marx talks about ‘forms of appearances’ such as ‘value and price of labor’, ‘wage’, ‘capital’ etc., as the immediate appearances that veil the real essence of relations.⁵⁰ That is, for instance, there is no such thing as the value of labor, but the value of labor power.⁵¹ The ‘value and price of labor’ is just a form which pertains to the capitalist mode of production and conceals the essence of labor in general, by way of treating labor as a commodity, that is, as if it is a ‘bearer of value’. Labor itself, however, Marx emphasizes, cannot have a value; it is the “substance and the immanent measure of value.”⁵² In other words, labor does not have a value in its nature, but can be used as a measure to determine the value of other objects. In the capitalist mode of production, Marx underlines, it is the labor power that the worker sells to the capitalist as a commodity which has a certain *use value* (the ability to produce certain use values, i.e., commodities). However, commodities are sold and

⁵⁰ In fact, Marx criticizes vulgar economists for mistakenly taking granted these forms of appearances as representing the *natural* results of productive relations as opposed to *historical* results of them.

⁵¹ The distinction between labor power and labor according to Marx is as follows: while the former refers to the *ability* of worker to produce, the latter refers to actual activity of producing goods or services. The former is realized through the latter, that is, as Marx puts, “labour-power becomes a reality only by being expressed; it is activated only through labour.” Marx, *Capital*, p.274.

⁵² Marx, *Capital*, p. 677.

bought according to their *exchange values*⁵³ in the market. In capitalist production exchange value of a commodity is determined by the labor time socially necessary for its production. In the case of the labor power, then, the value of labor power is determined on the basis of the labor time socially necessary to keep the worker alive (to reproduce the labor power of the worker). What is necessary for the reproduction of the labor power is the daily means of the subsistence of the worker. In other words, the *exchange value* of labor power equals the quantity of labor (labor time) which is necessary to reproduce the means of subsistence that will keep the worker alive and work. However, what is important is that once this abstract notion of labor power (abstract in the sense that it is the potential power to produce), is objectified in the *sphere of production*, the quantity of the labor it produces always becomes greater than the quantity that determines the *exchange value* of itself. This means labor power's *use value* is always greater than its *exchange value*. And the gap between the two is surplus value, which is appropriated by the capitalist as unpaid labor. What Marx draws our attention to is that by the form of the 'value and price of labor' capitalist production creates an illusion that it actually pays for the value of labor. But, this can never be the case because first there is no such thing as the value of labor. Second-even if the capitalist pays for the value of labor power, it is never the full equivalent of it, for the simple reason that labor power is a peculiar power whose *use value* (the ability to produce other use values) will always be greater than its *exchange value* in a capitalist mode of production. As referring to the hiddenness of the real relations with respect to the issue in question, Marx states in

⁵³ Use value of an object is the potential of that object to satisfy a certain human need, which is determined and conditioned by its physical qualities. In other words use value refers to the usefulness of an object. Exchange-value refers to the exchangeability of one commodity with another in certain proportions. Exchange value of a commodity is determined by the labor time socially necessary for its production.

Capital that “wage-form thus extinguishes every trace of the division of the working day into necessary labour and surplus labour, into paid labour and unpaid labour. All labour appears as paid labour.”⁵⁴

Thus, we can say that due to the ‘forms of appearances’ concealing the essence of real relations in the market sphere, what appears as the exchange of equal values are not in essence equal. Of course, Wood was aware of this fact. But he still insisted that the capitalist’s appropriation of the surplus value is not unjust since this actually constitutes the nature of the capitalist production. It is in fact true that Marx sees the ‘forms of appearances’ as necessary and objective as ‘real relations’ are. Yet, we have to keep in mind that he takes them to be ‘illusory’, ‘misleading’ that veil what is real. Just because he takes them necessary it does not mean that he also takes them to be just. They are forms that are representative of the capitalist mode of production. And as such they seem to cause unequal exchange of values.

But now let us turn to our subject that whether Marx’s critique of capitalism was based on justice or not. I believe if we realize that Marx’s focal point in criticizing capitalist mode of production was not to draw our attention to the fact that there exists an unequal distribution of wages, but rather to underline that it rests on such a division of labor which necessarily results such an unequal distribution; then we can say that as long as a division of labor characteristic of capitalist mode of production is the case, then the corresponding distribution to this division is natural. Wood introduces an extra interpretation here, and seems to imply what is natural is what is just. And it is this extra idea that I think we do not have to commit ourselves to.

⁵⁴ Marx, *Capital*, p. 680.

In the next chapter where I will attempt to show how Marx criticizes capitalism on the basis of the value of freedom as *self-realization*.

CHAPTER 3: MARX'S CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM AS THE DOMAIN OF UNFREEDOM

After exposing different views regarding the dispute over capitalism i.e., whether it is doing injustice to people or not, it is now time to account for the idea that what is condemned about capitalism, according to Marx, is that it prevents people from realizing their freedom regardless of its being just or unjust as an economic system. Thus, this chapter is basically allocated to show that capitalism is condemned by Marx, since it ultimately subjects all classes of people i.e., capitalists as well as proletarians, to the conditions of unfreedom, which is expressed as their alienation in different ways and levels.

We had mentioned earlier that scholars, who share the view that at the foundation of Marx's critique of capitalism lie values other than justice, evaluate the roles of these values Marx attributes to them differently. While some commentators such as Wood, Ollman, Miller, etc., think that Marx's advocate of freedom and/ or *self-realization* does not stem from a normative standpoint, others such as Brenkert, Peffer, Lukes etc., infer that the manner Marx talks about these notions presents the ethical perspective which pertains to Marx's social theory as a whole.

Among those views, I find especially George Brenkert's approach more comprehensive than others. Brenkert elaborates this position in his *Marx's Ethics of Freedom*. We see that his interpretation complies with the general position held by Sayers introduced in the first chapter. Brenkert, like Sayers, holds that we can attribute to Marx's social/ political theory a moral perspective. And he suggests that the roots of

this moral perspective is to be found in Marx's view of freedom as *self-realization*.

While trying to lay bare the unique features of the concept of freedom as depicted by Marx, I hope, the kernel of Marx's condemnation of the present conditions will be seen clearer.

Freedom as a Moral or Non-moral Notion

Wood strongly advocates that historical materialism cannot incorporate an ethical perspective; or rather, that historical materialism does not need the presence of an ethical theory to achieve what it actually leads to, i.e., the emancipation of the proletariat. In his book *Karl Marx* Wood explicates in detail ideas upon which Marx builds his critique of capitalism. According to Wood Marx criticizes present material conditions because they incapacitate people, that is, people are being kept away from realizing their humanly potentials, needs and powers. He writes that "the way in which people under capitalism are placed in a condition of degrading servitude, not merely to other human beings, but even more basically to impersonal and inhuman forces of their own creation"⁵⁵ is the idea that stands as the most prominent and foundational subject matter to be found in Marx's analysis of capitalism.

Nevertheless he objects to the view that Marx's critiques stem from ethical concerns. Wood insists that we cannot find an ethical basis in Marx's condemnation of capitalist mode of production even if, he states, Marx thinks that capitalism is

⁵⁵ Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (Routledge: New York 2004), pp. 48-49.

responsible for the impoverishment and the misery of particularly one class, i.e., the proletariat. Wood, apparently shows an overt endeavor to separate an ethical perspective from historical materialism.

Here, it should be noted that Wood's interpretation of Marx's views on freedom shares similarities with that of the other camp⁵⁶, specifically when it comes to analyze how alienation comes about and to explicate how dehumanizing the working conditions workers are subject to in capitalism. That is, Wood, like Brenkert and Peffer, who ascribe an ethical perspective to Marx's social theory, believes that all the inhuman conditions people confront in capitalist society are due to the different forms of alienation. Sharing the mentioned scholars' position, Wood asserts that alienation appears as the consequence of the unfree conditions people are forced to work under in the capitalist production. Unfree conditions for a wage-laborer means that she does not have any control over her labor, which is the unique activity of human kind that, in essence, responsible for the uniqueness of human kind among other animals. Yet, as we already indicated, Wood's analyses differ from those of Brenkert's or Peffer's in that he avers that the emancipation of the working class from the unfree working conditions is not advocated from a moral perspective and that the conditions the proletariat suffers from are deemed as the natural/ necessary - though irrational- mechanisms of an economic system.

In brief, we can say that Wood's interpretation of Marx's understanding of morality can be extended to his interpretation of Marx's views on freedom in that he

⁵⁶ In fact, thinkers who stick up for the idea that Marx's critique of capitalism lies in his ideas of freedom, generally share similar views specifically on the elaboration of Marx's postulation of freedom as *self-realization/ self-actualization*.

does not attribute any moral considerations to Marx's advocate of human emancipation. As it is mentioned earlier, this is due to Wood's limited understanding of the concept of morality. He limits the application of morality to the field of duties and responsibilities, which he specifies as moral goods. According to Wood, "moral goods include such things as virtue, right, justice, the fulfillment of duty... Nonmoral goods, on the other hand, include such things as pleasure and happiness, things which we would regard as desirable and good for people to have even if no moral credit accrued from pursuing or possessing them."⁵⁷ Then, freedom, *self-realization*, community etc., values that occupy fundamental importance in Marx's theory, are included by Wood in the list of nonmoral goods. In Wood's interpretation, then, the advocate of these *nonmoral* goods preclude any ethical considerations in Marx's theory automatically. In this, Richard Miller seems to side with Wood. He ascribes a non-utilitarian consequentialist view to Marx; that is, he thinks that in Marx's account of communist society the basic aim is the maximization of nonmoral goods such as freedom, self-actualization and solidarity etc. The view he attributes to Marx is consequentialist in the sense that what matters is more the consequences than the means to achieve certain ends, and it is non-utilitarian in the sense that what is aimed is not to acquire specifically pleasure and/ or happiness but to promote values that are nonmoral in nature such as freedom, *self-realization*, human community etc.

However, I do not agree with Wood and Miller, since morality cannot be limited to the realm of duties and responsibilities or to the other 'moral' goods these thinkers would include in that list. Actually, Wood himself accepts that "there is a sense in which

⁵⁷ Wood, *Karl Marx*, pp. 128-129.

any far-reaching views about human well-being count as ‘moral’ views”⁵⁸. However, he thinks that there is a more proper and narrower sense of morality according to which we can distinguish between moral and nonmoral goods. In this sense, he argues, things we value or do because our conscience and/ or the ‘moral law’ tells us that we ought do so count as moral goods, whereas things we value or do just because they satisfy our wants, needs or desires count as nonmoral goods. This being the case, Wood concludes that values that have grounding significance in Marx’s account count as nonmoral goods, that is, their promotion are desired since they serve to satisfy, in the first place, our wants, needs, wills etc.

Marx’s vision of freedom as *self-realization*, which is the central value that Marx’s whole critique is based, is more than what Wood thinks of nonmoral goods. First of all, when Marx talks about freedom he does not reduce the conception entirely to the freedom of atomic individuals. Freedom as self- realization in Marx’s account means to satisfy our wants, needs, desires which grow historically; yet their satisfaction does not merely posit the satisfaction of individuals’ wants and needs severally but that of the community as a whole too. His postulation of freedom, which is manifested, by definition, in and through the relations among the individuals of a community can be seen in the following quotation from the *Manifesto*. Referring to the communist society Marx asserts that “[i]n place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class

⁵⁸ Wood, *Karl Marx*, pp. 128.

antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”⁵⁹

Arguing against Wood, Brenkert emphasizes that freedom is not valued because it only satisfies people’s needs and wants. According to Brenkert Marx thinks that, if they are not deluded, people would value and demand freedom, that there is a historical legitimacy in valuing freedom, and that we *should* work as much as possible to found a free society.⁶⁰ Tabak is also among those scholars who attribute a moral perspective to Marx. To underline the moral perspective in Marx’s depiction of freedom, he quotes from Dewey. He reasonably states that, if our ultimate goal is liberation of the mankind, then, “In any legitimate sense of ‘moral’ it is a moral end.”⁶¹

Ollman was another Marxist scholar whom I mentioned to side with Wood’s position. He, too, believes that the conditions under capitalism necessarily leads to the alienation of people in certain forms; and it is the consequences of this phenomenon Marx actually denounces. Since alienation stands as the hindrance that thwarts to actualize whatever potentials and powers people have, its overcoming is required necessary to reach the free society as portrayed by Marx. In his book *Alienation*, Ollman presents an incisive analysis that shows the identity relation of the division of labor and private property and how these two phenomena characteristic of capitalist production relate to the phenomenon of alienation, which refers to the unfree working and living conditions of man. Under capitalism, he writes, “the individual living is not a living of a

⁵⁹ Karl Marx, “Communist Manifesto”, *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006a), p. 262.

⁶⁰ G. G. Brenkert, Marx’ın Özgürlük Etiği, p. 39.

⁶¹ Tabak, “Marxian Consideration on Morality, Justice, and Rights”, p. 525.

species being and, again, that the work of this individual ‘has lost all semblance of life activity.’”⁶² Ollman’s interpretation with respect to the relation between division of labor and private property finds its source directly from Marx’s assertions from *Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx writes:

The *division of labour* is the economic expression of the *social character of labour* within the estrangement. Or, since *labour* is only an expression of human activity within alienation, of the manifestation of life as the alienation of life, the *division of labour*, too, is therefore nothing else but the *estranged, alienated* positing of human activity as a *real activity of the species* or as *activity of man as a species-being*. As for the *essence of the division of labour* – and of course the division of labour had to be conceived as a major driving force in the production of wealth as soon as *labour* was recognised as the *essence of private property* – i.e., as for the *estranged and alienated form of human activity as an activity of the species* – the political economists are very vague and self-contradictory about it.⁶³

Quoting from Marx, Ollman writes, “only when labor is grasped as the essence of private property, can the economic process as such be penetrated.”⁶⁴ The following quotation from Ollman presents a realistic summary of Marx’s analysis of capitalism: “The labor referred to is alienated labor, which in the process of alienation, gets transformed into capital, wages, money, etc. Since private property is the broader Relation most frequently used to convey these specific entities, the laws governing the

⁶² Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx’s Conception Of Man In Capitalist Society*, second ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 114.

⁶³ Available [online]: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm> [15 May 2009].

⁶⁴ Ollman, *Alienation: Marx’s Conception Of Man In Capitalist Society*, p. 165. Through the end of chapter two, we had mentioned about ‘the forms of appearances’ that hide ‘real relations’. Note that in the next quotation, Ollman refers to ‘the forms of appearances’ by the term ‘these specific entities’ and argues that they all emerge from private property. *Capital*, Ollman asserts, is dedicated to lay bare how this phenomenon beget all different ‘forms of appearances’ by way of an analysis particularly on the basis of the labor theory of value.

latter are said to 'arise from the nature of private property'. In short, 'private property' means what capitalism does."⁶⁵

While explicating the organic relation between the division of labor, private property and alienation, Ollman effectively accounts for the idea that the relation between these mentioned phenomena shows a continuation from *Manuscripts of 1844* through *Capital*. He points out that while in the *Manuscripts* the relation between the division of labor, private property, and alienated labor is presented explicitly, in *Capital*, by way of an economic analysis, concealed relationships under the dominance of private property are made visible.

However, Ollman, just like Wood, does not consider Marx's condemnation of capitalism and of the division of labor that originates from private property, as embracing an ethical outlook. He, prefer[s] to say that Marx did not have an ethical theory. He claims that an ethical inquiry requires to be objective in the sense that it should be neutral to the alternatives whatever the case in question brings for consideration. He argues that Marx never suspends his commitments and that his theory in general does not have a "basis for judgment which lies outside that which is to be judged."⁶⁶ We see that, like Wood, Ollman in his own way limits the scope of the ethical inquiry and conceives Marx's theory to fall outside of that scope. I do not agree with this. It should be noted that Ollman's argument contains references to issues which are the subject matter of metaethics. It involves problems that are disputed within the field of metaethics, such as what are the standards of an ethical inquiry, how are they

⁶⁵ Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception Of Man In Capitalist Society*, p. 165.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

determined and applied to the actual cases? These issues would matter to a philosopher who does ethics in the first place. But, we already know that Marx was not an ethical theorist. He obviously did not have a manner we expect to see in mainstream ethical theories, such as to judge from an “unbiased perspective” by placing oneself to an equal distance from different alternatives that will be evaluated. However, absence of such an attitude cannot be attributed to the absence of an ethical perspective. Marx’s social theory urges him to deal with moral issues necessarily. Even though his social analyses do not follow the typical (and so many times controversial) procedures of ethical inquires, his theory presents an ethical perspective particularly praising human dignity.

Ollman like Wood comes closer to other commentators in his interpretation of Marx’s understanding of freedom as *self-realization*. Since their explanation of Marx’s idea of freedom shares similarities with that of Brenkert’s, I will not go any deeper than this to explain in detail what they say about Marx’s freedom. As we have indicated earlier, their approaches start to diverge from that of Brenkert’s concerning a very basic point, that is, while Wood and Ollman think that Marx’s vision of freedom cannot be placed in a moral perspective, Brenkert in contrast interprets Marx’s vision of freedom to be the center of his ethics. From this point, then, I will discuss Brenkert’s interpretation of Marx’s understanding of freedom. But let us, first, start with determining some basic features of Marx’s understanding of freedom.

Marx's Freedom versus Liberal Notion of Freedom

The concept of freedom includes three basic components which are the agent, the purposes, and the constraints. As most of us are familiar, the concept welcomes rather a rich debate as to the interpretations of these terms. How the agents and purposes will be defined and/ or how the restrictions over the individual will be determined?

In our case, we need to know how Marx's understanding of freedom replies the above mentioned questions. Lukes seems to offer certain reasonable explanations. Lukes is not a Marxist scholar but he explicitly concedes that Marx had a very peculiar and demanding concept of freedom. In his book *Marxism and Morality*, Lukes elucidates certain characteristics of Marx's understanding of freedom, some of which seem to be well-directed. Though I do not agree with Lukes on certain critiques he directs on Marx⁶⁷, some of his interpretations concerning the issue in question are worth mentioning here. In terms of the freedom - diminishing constraints, for example, Lukes talks about three major features of them. Restrictions can be seen as 'external' (like handcuffs), 'positive' (prohibitions and taboos) and 'personal' (as when a dictator imprisons one) as opposed to 'internal' (like inhibitions), 'negative' (like a lack of money or knowledge) and 'impersonal' (as when one cannot find a job).⁶⁸

Lukes asserts that considering constraints merely as external, positive and personal, is to offer man a limited domain of freedom. What these kind of constrains

⁶⁷ For a conclusive critique on Lukes's *Marxism and Morality*, see Kate Soper's review. Soper, Book Review: *Marxism and Morality*, *New Left Review*, Vol. I, No. 163, (May-June 1987), pp. 101-113.

⁶⁸ For a more detailed explanation on the characteristics of constraints and also on agents and their purposes see Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, pp. 71- 8.

restrict, he argues, are the needs, wants or preferences of the individual who is seen as vulnerable in the face of probable interventions coming from outside sources. This means that so long as no external, positive or personal constraints are executed over the actions of individual, there are no obstacles that can prevent her from realizing her freedom. That is, she is, theoretically, free to go for the opportunities that are in the best interests of hers. The whole domain of freedom is *restricted*, in fact, within a very limited description of it, e.g., freedom as the negation of unfreedom. Lukes points out that this explains the tendency that the “liberals are often drawn to an ‘opportunity’ rather than an ‘exercise’ conception of freedom.”⁶⁹

Regarding the constraints that bring unfreedom to the individual, Lukes understandably tends to associate the first group of features, i.e., external, positive and personal, with the understanding of liberty advocated by liberal traditions, when it is seen, especially, to center around the works of utilitarian thinkers like Hobbes and Bentham. Though he underlines that there have been important attempts in liberal tradition (by Humboldt and Mill, for instance) to widen the narrow interpretation of liberal understanding of freedom, he thinks that it would not be mistaken to assert that the general liberal understanding of liberty roughly fits the picture depicted above. On the whole, Lukes indicates that much of the liberal tradition, by focusing profoundly on the absence of impediments/ coercion, supports “social and political arrangements that are neutral with regard to individual plans of life or conceptions of the good...”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, p. 76.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77. Attributing a value-neutral understanding of freedom to the liberal view has been criticized see Taylor, “What is Wrong with Negative Freedom”, in *Liberty*, ed. Miller, D. (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2006).

In contrast with the view explained above, Lukes concedes Marx's delineation of freedom to be much wider than that of the liberal strand. He rightfully argues that Marx espouses the view that constraints, which stand as impediments to 'real freedom', may be internal, negative and impersonal while accepting that they may also be external, positive, and personal. With this, Lukes tries to emphasize that, by attributing mentioned features to be the characteristics of constraints on freedom Marx draws our attention to the organic relation between economic and social conditions and the realization of freedom, since he contends that it is the present conditions themselves, which turn out to be the very constraints on freedom. In this respect, Marx argues, first, that some individual "handicaps", such as 'inhibition', may well be considered to be restrictions on the realization of freedom, though it is arguable how much of them stems from external causes. The point is that there may exist certain internal constraints that hold up the individual from the realization of his/her freedom. Secondly, constraints do not always appear positively in the form of prohibitions that are exerted by an authority, such as state, but may be experienced in a negative way, that is, as the lack of some goods - material or immaterial- such as, money or knowledge. And lastly, constraints on freedom in general may not always be the upshots of personal decisions of some people; rather they constitute the impersonal conditions themselves. In short, what Marx sees standing as the obstacles on the way of acquiring man's 'real freedom', are the present economic and/ or social conditions themselves, such as exploitation and commodity fetishism, that is, he conceives them as the *raison d'être* of man's unfreedom. Accordingly, he sees the possibility of 'real freedom' in the transformation of these conditions, and conceives of the efforts to overcome these conditions as liberating activities. In *Grundrisse* he states:

...overcoming obstacles is in itself a liberating activity- and that, further, the external aims become stripped of the semblance of merely, external urgencies, and become posited as aims which the individual himself posits- hence as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom.⁷¹

Evaluated as such, Marx would reject the liberal, i.e., bourgeois, understanding of freedom⁷² to the extent that they are consolidated in and maintained through the existing economic and social conditions. Freedom is not the absence of impediments, which refers to a more negative meaning, but rather it denotes the creation of the possibilities for their overcoming, which refers to a more positive meaning. In the following quotation we see how Marx ridicules those bourgeois categories one of which is the freedom of contract.

This sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, let us say of labour-power, are determined only by their own free will. Their contract is the final result in which their joint will finds a common legal expression. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to his own advantage. The only force bringing them together, and putting them in relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interests of each. Each pays

⁷¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. with a foreword by Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, Eng.; Baltimore: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1973), p.611.

⁷² It should be noted that Marx is often criticized for his complete rejection of liberal understanding of freedom, through which certain basic human rights of people are guaranteed under the protection of law. Critics argue that for example freedom of expression, thought, religion are fundamental rights that Marx had disregarded. However, there are other commentators who defend that Marx did not intend to reject these fundamental rights but objected to their abuse by the dominant ideology. With respect to the issue, Tabak rightfully reminds that “many of Marx’s emancipatory proposals are today called rights.” (Tabak, “Marxian Consideration on Morality, Justice, and Rights”, p. 524.)

heed to himself only, and no one worries about the others. And precisely for that reason, either in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an omniscient providence, they all work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal, and in the common interest.⁷³

In *Communist Manifesto*, Marx explicitly declares bourgeois interpretation of freedom as one of their targets to be abolished. He states that “The abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence, and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly aimed at.”⁷⁴ He criticizes certain socialist sects (he is referring to French Socialists) for mistakenly analyzing the state or police force as mere sources of “external compulsion”.

In the second volume of *German Ideology* Marx writes with Engels:

We learn further, quite by chance, that present-day society is based upon “external compulsion”. By “external compulsion” the true socialists do not understand the restrictive material conditions of life of given individuals. They see it only as the compulsion exercised by the *state*, in the form of bayonets, police and cannons, which far from being the foundation of society, are only a consequence of its structure.⁷⁵

Marx contends that, developing in accordance with the development of the capitalist mode of production organically, the capitalist relations on the societal level, presents illusory and/ or distorted needs and desires as real and their acquisition by individuals as the only way of the realization of freedom. The need for more money to buy certain

⁷³ Marx, *Capital*, p. 280.

⁷⁴ Karl Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978b), p. 485.

⁷⁵ Karl Marx, *German Ideology*. Available [online]: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch04b.htm> [7 May 2009].

goods is a force implemented by the inner nature of capitalism.⁷⁶ This is well embraced by the bourgeoisie, and again Marx's critique of it is apparent in the following quotation, which is written right after what is quoted above, in the *Manifesto*:

By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying... This talk about free selling and buying, and all the other "brave words" of our bourgeois about freedom in general, have a meaning, if any, only in contrast with restricted selling and buying, with the fettered traders of the Middle Ages, but have no meaning when opposed to the Communistic abolition of buying and selling, of the bourgeois conditions of production, and of the bourgeoisie itself.⁷⁷

Up to now we have approached the issue of freedom from the opposite side, that is, we interpreted the nature of conditions through which freedom can be hindered. Let us now turn our attention to the nature of freedom itself. As opposed to *negative freedom*, which may be roughly put as *free from* being restricted by state or others to satisfy one's desires; freedom Marx has in mind is *positive freedom*, which may be roughly put as being *free to* have the recourses and opportunities to become who you value to be.⁷⁸

Though Marx does not explicitly use these concepts, namely, positive freedom and negative freedom, as the reader shall see in what follows, freedom that Marx envisages

76 Note that immanent critique claims that while capitalism - in accordance with the advancement of its productive forces-, creates a realm of unfreedom for people in the course of its development, it also provides people with certain freedoms as it begins to form as a stage in the course of history. For a very clear explanation of how capitalism in fact offers certain realms of freedom as it originates, and that of unfreedoms as it develops, see Silier, *Özgürlük Yanılsaması*, (İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2006), pp. 130-140.

77 Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", p. 486.

78 Explanations for the concept of negative and positive freedom that are given here are very general. The issue enjoys rather a wide dispute specifically in political philosophy. For a detailed account of different interpretations on freedom, see MacCallum, *Liberty*, ed. Miller, D. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). Since my focus is not to account for the differences between the two, I will avoid the details. The point to emphasize is that as long as a distinction between these two senses of freedom is assumed Marx's idea of freedom qualifies more as what is traditionally thought of positive freedom than that of negative freedom.

as possible in a future communist society can only be characterized as positive in that its realization essentially calls for the free *activity* of man, whose being, in effect, is actualized necessarily through his/her non- alienated activities.

As it is implied above, bourgeois interpretation of freedom suggests that as long as one neither violates the laws nor harms others, she is free to live independently from the interference of any authority, be it state or any other institution. In theory such an approach gives the responsibility of determining one's life into his/her hands. This signifies another characteristics of freedom, namely, freedom as *self-determination*, which Marx appreciates in his interpretation of freedom. Although Marx too attributes foundational importance to the concept of *self-determination* concerning the issue of freedom, he elaborates on this concept in terms of the concept of *self-realization*, which is, in turn, explained by the concept of *self-objectification*. These three concepts have primordial significance to understand what Marx had in mind whenever he talks about freedom in general; and to see the foundations of his grand project which cries out for *human emancipation* in the long run.

Marx accepts that the exercise of freedom requires self-determination like bourgeois ideology would also suggest. However, he indicates that the path which leads to such a kind of determination is already blockaded within the present material conditions, since man's *self-realization* as *self-objectification*, through which one owns his/her labor as his/hers only, cannot be part of an economic system like capitalism. Capitalism, Marx explains, depending essentially upon the exploitation of surplus labor, which is necessarily created out of alienated labor, e.g., labor which does not belong to its producer neither potentially nor actually, derives its continuation precisely from the

conditions that cannot allow the free activity of man. Thus, since capitalist mode of production contradicts with *self-realization* understood as *self-objectification*, it cannot, by its very nature, provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for *self-determination* as well.

To distinguish between bourgeois understanding of freedom and that of Marx's clearly, I will briefly summarize the distinctions between two approaches using Brenkert's terms.

Brenkert adduces that while bourgeois freedom can be characterized as 'political', 'individual' and 'negative', Marx's notion of freedom appears as 'social', 'collective' and 'positive'. (Brenkert, 1983, p.123) Bourgeois ideology sees individuals' freedom rather as a political issue in the sense that as long as individuals abide by rules they have a right in general not to be interfered. Freedom understood merely as such qualifies as a negative one in that it bases people's freedom simply on the absence of restrictions any authority may implement on them. It is seen as if it is solely an individual issue which bothers individuals severally. In short, to bourgeois viewpoint, people are free to the extent that they are not coerced by state and/or by others.

On the other hand, besides it requires being free from restrictions, Marx's notion of freedom calls for a kind of living where people's relations with others becomes the precondition of one's activity of *self-objectification*. *Self-objectification* in Marx, as Brenkert defines, "signifies that man given his various desires, capacities and talents objectifies or creates himself in his relations and in the system of thought he constructs

by which he understands himself.”⁷⁹ The essential notion in *self-objectification* is labor to which Marx attributes a fundamental role that is rendered responsible for the uniqueness of human species. Freedom’s being social and collective in Marx implies that its realization is a matter of relations between man and man and between man and nature. Freedom as *self-realization* in Marx, by definition, means to live in such a way that one’s desires, abilities and talents, which constitute the ways in which one’s *self-objectification* can take place, are realized directly within his/her communal relations with other people.

There are several objections to Marx’s understanding of freedom since he seems not to dwell on the problematic applications of the *self-realization* thesis specifically when it is considered in its connection with the needs principle. One big problem is the determination of needs and their satisfaction. Though needs may be historically and economically conditioned, decision about “what constitutes a truly human consumption (about what we ought, as opposed to what we are able, to produce and consume, about the organization of work in the ‘good’ society, about the right use of its natural resources) are necessarily *political* in character...”⁸⁰ This means that even if the economic abundance will flourish in such a way that there will be no scarcity and egoism, the issue of deciding what needs are genuinely human is a highly complicated one. The critique seems to have a point in terms of its challenging the applicability of *needs principle*. It seems that additional political and moral modifications that are incorporated to the principle could help it work out in a more concrete way.

⁷⁹ Brenkert, *Marx’ın Özgürlük Etiği*. p. 127.

⁸⁰ Soper, Book Review: *Marxism and Morality*, p. 109.

With respect to Marx's idea of freedom as *self-realization*, Elster is one of the Marxist scholars who finds the notion unrealistic. In his book *Making Sense of Marx* he gives eight arguments to question the credibility of *self-realization* ideal⁸¹. Nilou Mobasser, as a proponent of *self-realization* thesis, deals with all of them severally in his article "Marx and Self-Realization". I will not mention, here, all the arguments raised by Elster, since many of them seems to rely on arguments that are reductio ad absurdum, as Mobasser rightfully clarifies. However, some of them at first seem plausible. Therefore, they are worth mentioning here.

In his fourth objection, Elster claims that in a future communist society working conditions may necessitate some repetitive and monotonous industrial tasks to be done under the supervision of others. These tasks may well be very boring; and it seems to contradict with the thesis of *self-realization*, which expresses the free and/or creative activity of human labor. This objection, Mobasser points out, links to another one raised by Elster, that is, do people realize, according to Marx, their freedom in work or outside of it? However, as Marx would argue *self-realization* requires both, that is, "free labor activity and freedom from labour activity."⁸² Though he makes a distinction between *realm of necessity* and *realm of freedom* in Capital vol. III, he adds that the possibility of the latter is dependent upon the former. The related passage is as follows:

Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers,

⁸¹ Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, pp. 522-525.

⁸² Tabak, "Marxian Consideration on Morality Justice and Rights ", p. 528.

rationaly regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, *however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis.*⁸³

To account for the togetherness of free labor and freedom from labor, Mobasser gives a timely quotation from Marx: “It is self evident that if labor-time is reduced to a normal length and, furthermore, labour is no longer performed for someone else, but for myself, and, at the same time, the social contradictions between master and men, etc., being abolished, it acquires a quite different, a *free character*, it becomes real social labour.”⁸⁴

Elster thinks that it is a romantic idea to imagine that all people would want to create instead of “preferring the passive enjoyment of consumption.”⁸⁵ However, as Mobasser indicates, “the distinction to be drawn here is not between activity and inactivity (work and idleness) but between activity determined by external necessities (things we do only because we have to for some reason or other) and activity determined by internal necessity (things we do because we want or need to)”⁸⁶

⁸³ Karl Marx, *Capital* vol. III, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978e), p. 441. (emphasis is mine)

⁸⁴ Nilou Mobasser, “Marx and Self-Realization”, *New Left Review*, Vol. I, No. 161, (January-February 1987), p. 123. (emphasis is mine)

⁸⁵ Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, p. 522.

⁸⁶ Mobasser, “Marx and Self-Realization”. p. 122.

Exploitation as Alienation

In chapter two I had claimed that to understand exploitation merely in terms of unpaid surplus value would mean to overlook one very important phenomenon, namely, alienation, that occupies a fundamental place in Marx's analysis of capitalist production. According to Marx alienation is the "lack of or inverted freedom."⁸⁷ This means that freedom as *self-realization* cannot be actualized as long as any form of alienation takes place in the process of objectification of man's labor, the activity which in essence accounts for man's uniqueness. Although in the course of developmental history the presence of this phenomenon appears as necessary, its abolishment is equally necessary, since to the extent alienation intensifies, its responsibility for annihilating people's dignity deepens. It may seem that this would bother only one group of people, namely, laborers, since the working conditions they are subject to in capitalist production are far more severe than that of capitalists. However, as it is mentioned earlier alienation not only concerns people who are exploited but also those who exploits. In *The Holy Family*, Marx says that capitalists and proletarians are equally alienated, but experience their alienation in different ways:

The possessing class and the proletarian class present one and the same human self-alienation. But the former feels satisfied and affirmed in this self-alienation, experiences the alienation as a sign of its *own power* and possess in it the *appearance* of a human existence. The latter, however, feels destroyed in this alienation, seeing in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence. To use Hegel's expression, this class is, within depravity, an *indignation* against this depravity, an indignation necessarily aroused by the contradiction between its

⁸⁷Tabak, "Marxian Consideration on Morality, Justice, and Rights", p. 524.

human *nature* and its life-situation, which is a blatant, outright and all-embracing denial of that very nature.⁸⁸

In origin, Marx's overt emphasis on alienation derives from his emphasis on man's peculiar activity of labor. 'Living labor', in effect, is that power which gives man his humanness. To the extent one is prevented from actualizing this activity in the way she wants, alienation comes into the picture. Marx asserts that in the process of "creating an *objective world* by his practical activity, in *working-up* inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being".⁸⁹ Marx attributes a fundamental role to man's labor. He states "The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species life*..."⁹⁰ After defining productive activity of man, or, say, labor, as being one of the essential characteristic of his nature, Marx also adds that this consciousness of man differentiates him from animal species, since he is free in his productive activity. He does not only produce in order to survive his physical needs but also uses his creative activity in the course of dominating over nature. Thus, Marx considers labor as a way through which man realizes himself, the main activity which is responsible for man's freedom. Yet, if labor loses its liberating characteristic and turns out to be an activity only necessary for the survival of its producer, meaning that it is not produced freely any more, as is the case in capitalist society, what we face is the phenomenon of alienation.

⁸⁸ Karl Marx, "The Holy Family", in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978c), pp. 133-134.

⁸⁹ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978d), p.76. (emphasis in the original)

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.76.

Despite the fact that alienation takes part in the capitalist mode of production as a necessary stage, this does not mean that it is a universal human condition which cannot be overcome. That is why Marx talks about it as a particular historical phenomenon which emerges from the economic relations of production, specifically from that of private property. However, as dialectic of history requires that man make use of this condition when passing to the stage of a classless society, which will mean the overcoming of alienation. Recall Sayers's immanent critique at that point: "alienation must be regarded as a historical *achievement*: as a stage in the process of self-development and self-realization, not as their mere opposite."⁹¹

Marx talks about four different types of alienation in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.⁹² The first form of alienation is the alienation of the worker from his product which does not belong to its producer but rather to the owner of the means of production. Second type comes as the alienation of the worker from his productive activity in which worker is estranged from the working process of him/herself. The third and the fourth ones are the natural results of the first two, which are the alienation of man from his species and the alienation of man from man, respectively. Parallel to the increase in the production of the worker, s/he is estranged more and more from the product s/he produces, from the work process by which s/he sustains her/his life and accordingly from her/himself and from her/his fellows as marked above. It is obvious that for Marx roots of alienation are to be looked for in the economic conditions and in the relations determined by the conditions of the present

⁹¹ Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, p.140.

⁹² Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", pp. 74 -78.

stage. Alienation as the necessary outcome of exploitation is seen as a transhistorical phenomenon, that is, it appears under different disguises through the course of history.

In *Capital* Marx writes:

Capital has not invented surplus-labour. Whenever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra-working time in order produce the means of the subsistence for the owners of the means of production, whether this appropriator be the Athenian nobleman, Etruscan-theocrat, civis Romanus, Norman baron, American slave-owner, Wallachian Boyard, modern landlord or capitalist.⁹³

Briefly, alienation for Marx does appear as an objective fact that arises from the material conditions of the economic relations when there is 'slave labor', 'serf labor' or 'wage labor'. However, it is in the highest level in accordance with the economic development that is reached through the capitalist mode of production. We should remark that material conditions (that cause alienation) seem to be objective to the extent that they determine the conditions of man in his life independently of his awareness, whereas they turn out to be subjective to the extent when they stimulate the consciousness of man and thereby enable him to transform these conditions for the sake of his *self-realization*, or, say, of his emancipation.

Overcoming Alienation as the Realization of Freedom

After having stated different aspects of alienation for Marx, now we can talk about the meaning of its overcoming as explained by Marx. We had earlier indicated that Marx

⁹³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, p.344.

claims that overcoming obstacles is itself a liberating activity. For Marx, man's freedom can be realized in terms of political and human emancipation at the same time. While human emancipation refers to the overcoming of alienation of man with regard to himself and to his species, political emancipation presents itself as the actualization of the emancipation acquired via human emancipation in the political realm.

A society in which there is no alienated labour is a society where freedom as *self-realization* can be a real possibility. Marx envisages that "...human beings will in principle be able to develop as individuals in a future communist society through objectification which will no longer lead to alienation."⁹⁴ Marx argues that getting rid of class antagonism, which is due to the alienated condition of him, means overcoming alienation, which will bring to the stage of history a free society, namely, communist society, where the abolition of private property is completed. In short, communist society "in surpassing alienation, qualifies as the "the real *appropriation* of *human* nature through and for man."⁹⁵

The disappearance of alienation is ultimately dependent upon the disappearance of the capitalist mode of production. The withering away of capitalist mode of production means the withering away of commodity production, which in turn means the withering away of division of labor as a result of the disappearance of the private ownership of the means of production. With respect to the outcomes of this process, Mandel writes:

⁹⁴ Tom Rockmore, *Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx*. (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p.62.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

All of this would bring about the slow transformation of the very nature of labor from a coercive necessity in order to get money, income and means of consumption into a voluntary occupation that people want to do because it covers their own internal needs and expresses their talents.⁹⁶

In a nutshell, we can say that Marx's final project was human emancipation by overcoming alienation, which aims to provide people with the material conditions that allow them to realize their freedom.

⁹⁶ Ernest Mandel, "The Causes of Alienation", in *The Marxist Theory of Alienation* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 30.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

I used to think that the relation between Marx and morality was clear and self-evident, that Marx's account of socialism is advocated in term of a moral perspective and that his critique of capitalism presents a conspicuous moral language. This language had seemed enough to me to account for the ethical considerations in Marx's theory. Yet, as I read and learned the details of the debate on the relation between Marx's theory and morality, I come to see the points of those who rejected a Marxian ethics. However, as my readings come to an end I turned back to my initial thought that Marx's social theory is to be interpreted from an ethical standpoint. But this time with certain corrections and alterations.

The debate concerning the relation between Marx's theory and morality seem to emerge from plausible reasons because we see that there are passages in which Marx condemns morality as being ideological as he thinks of other bourgeois values such as justice, equality, freedom etc. In a letter to Sorge in 1877, he complains about those who wanted to replace socialism's "materialistic basis" by modern mythology with its goddess of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.⁹⁷

However, evaluated from a general perspective it is realized that what Marx condemns as ideological is the morality of the dominating class, i.e., bourgeois. Lukes identifies this as the morality of *Recht*, and he claims that what Marx was against was the "morality of *Recht*" and Marx's social theory evidently contains a proposal for what Lukes call the "morality of *emancipation*".

⁹⁷ Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, p. 7.

Recht for Marx, Lukes rightfully notes, comprises the rights of man, the rights of a member of civil society. According to Marx, these are the rights of egoistic man, of man separated from other man and from the community. In his understanding, the right of man to liberty is not based on the association of man with man, but on the separation of man from man. Lukes quotes from *On The Jewish Question*: “It is the right of this separation, the right of the restricted individual, withdrawn into himself, its practical implication being the right to private property.”⁹⁸

The basis of such a society where the so-called rights of man are guaranteed is dependent upon the maintenance of a political community. However, in accordance with Marx’s rejection of a separation between civil and political spheres of life, the idea of human emancipation in Marx contrasts with the so-called rights of man advocated by bourgeois understanding. Human emancipation, for Marx, consists precisely in emancipation from *Recht*. For Marx it meant setting free from the constraints of the present material conditions, which culminates in the phenomenon of alienation; and that it calls for a free society where there will be social unity in which “the contradiction between the interests of the separate individual and the common interests of all individuals who have intercourse with one another has been abolished.”⁹⁹

Though I believe that we can attribute to Marx’s social theory an ethical perspective in terms of his proposal for human emancipation, as I underlined before some Marxist scholars claim that Marx’s call for human emancipation was nothing to do with morality. I mentioned names such as Wood, Tucker, Ollman who were against a Marxian ethics. It seemed that since they wanted to emphasize the scientific aspect of

⁹⁸ Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, p. 27.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Marx's social theory they deliberately avoid ascribing a moral basis to Marx. On the other hand, those found an ethical basis in Marx's account (I mentioned names like Geras, Cohen, Husami) attribute to his theory certain transhistorical and transcultural standards of moral principles though Marx explicitly denied applying any such absolute principles in his theory.

At this point, I agreed with Sayers, that is, this conflict was a false one. Marx's account of history, namely, historical materialism, could be seen as a social theory, which is a political outlook as well. In other words, Marxism as a social theory is both a scientific account of history and a form socialism, which incorporated a moral perspective in itself. Although Marx criticizes justice and rights as ideological notions and gives historical account of them, this does not mean that they are purely relative - as Wood claims – and thus incapable of providing a basis for criticism of the conditions. Marx wants to analyze and explicate the social significance of moral values/ ideas yet he does not aim altogether to reject them. Moral values appear as the theoretical reflections, the actual expressions of the needs, desires and interests of certain social classes. And they rightfully find conscious expressions in the developing class movement.

Accordingly, Marx does not base his theory on universal principles of morality, contrary to what Geras thinks. Sayers underlines that “Marxism does not involve a moral approach to history, but rather a historical approach to morality.”¹⁰⁰ However, again, this does not commit one to the view that whatever moral values appreciated by Marx are the direct implications of a purely relativistic worldview.

In the second chapter, I discussed the issue of morality on a specific dimension. I looked into the details of Marx's critique of capitalism in terms of the issue of justice.

¹⁰⁰ Sayers, *Marxism & Human Nature*, p. 116.

First, we have seen Wood's claim. He proposes that Marx's critique of capitalism was not based on the idea of justice. In fact, he insistently aimed to account for the view that Marx believed capitalism to be a just system. To account for the idea that Marx's critique was not based on justice, he proposed two arguments, which is now known as the Wood-Tucker Thesis. The first one is that justice is ultimately a concept of the bourgeois. Evaluated from this perspective capitalism stands as a perfectly just system. The second one is that the future society as Marx envisages will not need to appeal to those concepts such as rights, justice, equality, since the very material conditions that give rise to these notions in capitalism will no longer exist. In other words, material abundance will flourish to such extent that there will be no scarcity and egoism that require the application of certain principles for the maintenance of the society. I criticized Wood's approach since he overlooked the phenomenon of exploitation as unpaid labor. Although Marx did not base his critique on an idea of distributive justice to argue that Marx believed that the capitalist system, which essentially based upon the appropriation of surplus value, was a just system is flawed. Just because Marx considers capitalism to be a necessary stage in the course of history it does not follow that he also finds it to be a just system.

Next, I explained the views of those thinkers who consider Marx's condemnation of capitalist production to be a critique that is based on justice. I mentioned three different views according to the criteria that are claimed to be used in Marx's account. First one was capitalism criticized according to its own standards. Nancy Holstrom and Allen Buchanan were the names mentioned in this approach. Second one was capitalism criticized according to post capitalist standards. I mentioned Jon Elster as the representative of this view. And the third one was capitalism criticized according to

transhistorical standards. Geras and Cohen were the names that are mentioned mostly. I criticized all three approaches since they overlooked the phenomenon of exploitation as alienation. I believe that Marx did not establish his critique of capitalism by utilizing a principle of distributive justice. Considered in its entirety, Marx's condemnation of capitalism, or say, commodity production cannot be limited to the phenomenon of exploitation as unpaid labor. Unpaid labor necessarily emphasizes a flaw which implies an injustice in distribution. However, to evaluate Marx's critique merely from this perspective is to overlook the fundamental dimension, e.g., alienation, in exploitative relations.

Since I believe that what Marx condemns about capitalism was ultimately the unfree, alienating conditions that force people to live under, I came to see that his idea of freedom played the fundamental role in his critique. What Marx and Engels write in a pamphlet published in September 1847 seems to support my approach:

We are not among those communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or into a gigantic workhouse. There are some communists who, with an easy conscience, refuse to countenance personal liberty and would like to shuffle it out of the world because they consider that it is a hindrance to complete harmony. But we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality. We are convinced, and we intended to return to the matter in subsequent issues, that in no social order will personal freedom be so assured as in a society based upon communal ownership.¹⁰¹

With such an approach in the third chapter, I examined different views on Marx's idea of freedom. Apparently, views that are dedicated to elaborate on Marx's understanding

¹⁰¹ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Communist Journal of London*. Available [online]: <http://www.newsocialist.org/group/group01.html> [15 May 2009].

of freedom as *self-realization* showed similarities in terms of their explanation of Marx's freedom. What they differ concerning the issue in question was a more fundamental one. That is, while one camp considers Marx's idea of freedom to represent the ethical perspective in Marx, the other camp rejected it to be an element of an ethical consideration.

I conceive Marx's interpretation of freedom as the manifestation of an ethical perspective that tries to unite theory and practice in human life. In this context, Lukes' interpretation of Marx's theory as the morality of human emancipation which calls for the activity of liberation that aims to overcome the material conditions and moral values which prevent people from realizing their freedom may be seen to have a point.

This approach is in line with my contention that Marx's condemnation of capitalist production was ultimately directed on the phenomenon of alienation which subject people to the conditions of unfreedom. Freedom for Marx is a life style, the manifestation of human's species-being that could be actualized in and through our relations with outside world, including objects as well as other human beings. According to Marx, freedom represents the nature of our social relations. Social relations in a capitalist mode of production cannot allow the actualization of freedom that is proper to human beings. It is in a communist society, Marx anticipates, that the social relations we will enjoy could be the representative of our very freedom

His idea of freedom as *self-realization* is developed within this perspective. It is based on the themes of developing man's powers, potentialities, abilities on the one hand, and satisfying his needs, desires on the other. Man's dignity, his uniqueness is dependent upon the realization of these themes. To the extent that capitalism prevents people from

realizing their freedom, that is, it keeps people from developing their abilities, potentialities, satisfying their needs and desires, it appears as a hindrance to man's freedom; and in this way it constitutes the major object of Marx's criticism against capitalism. The precondition to actualize those mentioned aims that are proper to man's nature, is to overcome alienated labor, which is in turn possible with the abolition of private ownership of the means of production.

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