Marx's Ideas About Freedom: An Exposition and Commentary

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Long embedded in the history and tradition of democracy, the idea of freedom has played a conspicuous role, particularly, in modern human history. In the case of the rise of liberal democracy in the 20th century, the idea of freedom shaped up nationalist discourse and empowered dissident movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It has also penetrated in the consciousness and inspired liberationist movements in non-western Eastern Europe, Soviet Union and China. The student movements that swept the world in the late 1960s were in part also sparked by the quest for freedom. Indeed one could argue with David Harvey that freedom is fundamental and a central value of human civilization.

What is of import and relevant in contemporary public discourse is that the idea of freedom has acquired attention and appropriation from different sectors of the society, may it be cultural, political, economic or even military, as in the case of former US President George W. Bush. Thus, there are fundamental questions that could be asked: What is freedom? Whose freedom? To whose end does freedom serve?

This paper attempts to contribute to this discussion, with the intent to view the subject matter differently. In this project, I intend to offer a Marxian perspective. Although I will largely elucidate and comment on Marx's ideas about freedom, the larger intent of the project is to contribute to the discussion and to offer ways in which to think and enact freedom for contemporary times.

INTRODUCTION

The ideas of Karl Marx have been explored in various ways: ideas such as capital, surplus value, historical and dialectical materialism, class struggle, mode of production, and many others. In this paper, I will examine Marx's idea of freedom. By this

I mean his theory of what it is to be free and his account of the social conditions in which this freedom is developed and realized. What is freedom? What are the conditions of freedom? What constitutes freedom as such? And as a corollary, in what sense is man free?

My approach here is to consider these questions from a specific exposition and understanding of Marx's anthropology and political philosophy. This reflection is, therefore, organic as it endeavors to illustrate the idea of freedom, and at the same time, offers an exposition of the basic categories of Marxian anthropology and political philosophy. The outline of this paper is as follows: [1] it discusses the themes of Marx's ideas, in light of his understanding of man[1]; [2] the sphere of existence in which man exists. In this paper, it is my contention that Marx's idea of freedom could be best understood in light of his anthropology (man as such and his relation to nature) and political philosophy (the social conditions of his existence).[2] The intent here is to provide not categorical answers, but rather, a series of suggestive modes in order to, hopefully, offer new possibilities of theoretical engagement of Marxian ideas in time of global capitalism.

In light of this, the paper revisits a recent political issue in the Philippines, the decision of the Commission of Elections (of the Philippines) to disqualify LADLAD's (a political party composed of mainly gay and lesbians) application for recognition as an official party-list in the May 2010 election. Albeit cursorily, this paper suggests how this study could provoke a thinking that attempts to respond to what Giorgio Agamben calls "a bloody mystification of a new planetary order."[3]

Species-being: Marx's anthropology

Throughout the corpus of Marx, the understanding of man is often assumed. Marx does not, for whatever reasons, discuss the theme systematically. As one scholar points out: "It would be inaccurate to describe Marx as having a unified or formal scientific theory of human nature; rather he made a series of related theoretical assumptions."[4] Marx approached the subject of man from a number of different directions.[5] Three interrelated premises, however, appear to me to be useful repositories in which to group his various assumptions.

1. Man is viewed as part of nature; that is, he is in relation with nature.[6]
2. Man is seen as possessing a network of species characteristics

distinguishing him from the rest of creation. Man is unlike animals because, for example, of his religion.

3. Man is a social being; he interacts with the external nature.

Relation to nature

According to Marx, man could be characterized by his relation to nature. On the one hand, man is part of nature; he lives on nature. In such a condition, Marx describes:

> Man lives on nature—means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.[7]

For Marx, it is in this sense that man is like other creatures. Like plants and animals, he is furnished with "natural powers of life as impulses"[8]; that is, he interacts and needs an object outside of himself in order to survive and satisfy his natural need. As an example, Marx cites hunger in man as a natural need requiring an external object for its satisfaction. This is what makes man part of the system of nature; as he notes: any being that does not have a need for "things external to it is not a natural being and therefore plays no part in the 'system of nature."[9]

For Marx, such relation (of man to nature) is characterized by his interaction of it as an object. Nature is the object of man's impulses of life—the object of his need as a natural and sensuous being. And it is an essential object "indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers."[10]

Man's existence, in other words, necessitates a continuous exchange with nature. Marx referred to this relationship as one that makes nature man's "*inorganic body*—both inasmuch as nature is [1] his direct means of life, and [2] the material, the object, and the instrument of his life-activity."[11] Heyer suggests that this inorganic body is "used as a metaphor to indicate continuity between man's obvious organic body and the earthly world that gives sustenance to it."[12] This, however, I suggest, can be best seen as a relationship instead of continuum.[13] That is, nature, as the inorganic body of man, gives sustenance to man's organic body.[14]

On the other hand, man is a living natural being. That is to say, man is a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being full of natural vigour. And like all other natural beings, he is also a "suffering,

conditioned and limited creature."[15] For Marx, this is because man expresses his life in real and sensuous objects. He interacts not in the imaginary world but in the material world. So, man becomes only in relation to the external condition around him; depending then on the environment, he may die, suffer, survive, live or enjoy his life. But because of his capabilities to produce and create in order to survive, although limited as a creature, man can nonetheless change his circumstances.[16] In other words, as a natural living being, man has the physical capacity to create and produce products that would meet his needs in order to survive.

Man's species nature

For Marx, although man is a species-being [*Gattungswesen*], he possesses "various species traits that set him apart from other organisms."[17] Man is different from animals. He stresses this difference between animal and man in the following way:

> In creating an *objective world* by his practical activity, in *working-up* inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as its own essential being, or that treats itself as a species being. Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, whilst man produces the whole of body, whilst man freely confronts his product. An animal forms things in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object.[18]

Man, in other words, has consciousness that allows him to produce and appropriate his products accordingly. Such notion was further developed in *The German Ideology*; here, Marx posits two distinguishable characteristics of man: one is his consciousness ("Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity"[19]); and the other is his ability to produce his means of subsistence.

For Marx, the latter, however, is a matter of greater importance; because this does not only distinguish man in relation to the natural world, but also, importantly, it provides a theoretical account on how man becomes a producer.

Like all other species, the life of man involves before everything

else, eating and drinking, a habitation, and clothing; the ability to produce, the "production of the means to satisfy these needs"[20]—the first historical act, is uniquely his own. Such is the primary characteristic of man. In the natural world, only men can produce their own subsistence and the means for it. For Marx, as soon as they "begin to *produce* their means of subsistence,"[21] they begin to distinguish themselves from animals. And it is in this sense that unlike the animals, man has a sense of history and can anticipate the future. He can consciously and willfully create and produce for a manifold of purposes, and especially produce his needs independently.[22] Walliman suggests that Marx's position here disagrees with Adam Smith. For Adam Smith, "human beings by nature, prefer rest (*Ruhe*) to work, while Marx postulates that the individual, by nature, tends also to engage in work."[23] In Marx, labor and the ability to labor constitute the very nature of man. Indeed one could say that when man ceases to possess his ability to produce his own labor to exist, he also ceases to be a man as such.

In short, while the need for external objects is a common denominator between man and the rest of nature, the manner in which these objects are transformed and appropriated reveals the uniqueness of human species. They have the ability to reflect upon themselves and their relation to the natural world and appropriate the environment for their existence.

For Marx, it is through the process of conscious appropriation of external objects in order to produce his own subsistence and appropriating these products of his own production that man not only becomes distinguishable from other species but also becomes an individual. That is, when he produces his subsistence, he encounters and interacts with other individuals and the natural world. He becomes socially and historically related with other individual beings. Consciousness, therefore, for Marx, is a product of species interaction and configuration of such interaction.

A social being

According to Marx, man is not only a living natural being; he is also a social being. His relation to other men and the world also constitutes the very essence of his being. As Walliman suggests, while Marx accepts the natural essence of man, he clearly recognizes that it is not sufficient to account for and "understand other aspects of human nature."[24] Marx describes the essence of man in the following manner:

the *human* essence of nature exists only for *social* man; for only here does nature exist for him as a *bond* with *man*—as his existence for the other and the other's existence for him—as the life-element of the human world; only here does nature exist as the *foundation* of his own *human existence*. Only here what is to him his *natural* existence become his *human* existence, and nature become man for him.[25]

From this definition, we can see clearly that for Marx, man is not an isolated being; and he is different from the animals because he does not remain in his natural existence. He becomes an individual in history. Indeed this is what makes him distinct from the other creatures.

In *The Grundrisse*, Marx argues that "human beings become individuals only through the process of history[26]; that is, the nature of man changes or is organically-coated with social character in a socio-historical relation where he produces his own subsistence and interacts with other men. When man enters into production and exchange, Marx posits that the herd-like existence is dissolved and becomes superfluous.[27] Herein man becomes an individual social being.

In Marxian literature, the sociality of man could be described as having two distinctive characteristics: first, communal, and second, socio-historic. That is, insofar as he is a social being, man is part of a community; and his relation to it is determined or shaped up by socio-historical variables.

Markus suggests that this characterization of man as a social being means that the individual and the social group reciprocally presuppose each other. He writes:

It means on the one hand that the individual cannot become a truly human being and cannot live a human life, unless he maintains contacts and has intercourse with other men[; on the other hand], the individual is a human being only through, and due to, the fact that he appropriates, incorporates into his life and activity (to a larger or lesser extent) abilities, wants, forms of behaviour, ideas etc. which were created and objectified by other individuals of earlier generations or those contemporary to him. So the human individual in its concrete personality is even in itself, taken in isolation a product of social intercourse and history.[28]

In *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx puts the subject matter unequivocally: the essence of man is an "ensemble of the social relations."[29] For Marx, it is through this social relation within an intersubjective interaction that human personality evolves "in a constant dialogue between man and world, between subjective activity and objective social reality."[30]

For Marx, this social character of man, that is, the relation of man to his social world and other as he appropriates them, constitutes necessarily the essence of man.

In such a relation, Marx adds, man exists under particular conditions of life. For him, such conditions could be first described as the "the sensuous world," made of the "total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it,"[31] under a certain historical epoch. And second, the sensuous world made men what and who they are, but at the same time, men produced this world—"*just as* society itself produces *man as man*, so is society *produced* by him."[32] Thus as a social being, man actively interacts with other beings and appropriates resources with which he is furnished by the historical circumstances and by his society. In short, the sociality of man in this world represents not only a certain form of relations but also a particular trait under certain socio-historical circumstances.

In sum, Marx understands man, generally, as a natural and social being. By natural he means that man is part of nature, that is, his being plays a part in the system of nature. As we have noted above, this can be primarily characterized as man's condition in relation to nature. By social, he means that man interacts with and undertakes his activity in relation to individuals and social institutions. In other words, in Marx, we find that the nature of man has two aspects: the one is socially and historically contingent and the other is the universal or to be more specific, species-wide characteristic; thus, it is neither relative nor historical.[33]

Man as an Estranged Species

To elucidate and illustrate this point further, it is important to consider how Marx understands man's existence in a concrete historical situation. As it is then (in his time) and now (our time), this historical situation is the epoch of capitalism. Fundamental in Marx's understanding of man is that, in a capitalist society, man is an estranged being. This is the condition that man finds himself in, as this is also his condition of existence. By this Marx means that man is not a free-conscious producer; his labour is involuntary. Under this historical epoch and socio-economic reality, man is neither living a species-life nor living as a species-being; he is, in other words, estranged.

In *Estrangement: Marx's Conception of Human Nature and the Division of Labor*, Isidor Walliman offers a helpful discussion on the

notion of estrangement in Marx's theory.[34] He argues that this is fundamental to Marx's thought and thus to the structure of his social theory. According to this view, estrangement is directly derived from the two concepts of human nature, that is, man has a general and particular nature. The general is considered as his biological nature. The particular is considered as his historical nature. So for example, man is said to be "estranged if, contrary to his nature, he is prevented from subjecting his labor power, as well as the product of his labor, to his own will."[35] Walliman suggests that such estrangement "results when man is prevented from living according to his human nature, that is, general human nature."[36]

Moreover, in this framework, the notion of an involuntary division of labor is necessarily central. In a capitalist society, for example, man is under the condition of involuntary division of labor; that is, man is not a free participant in his own creative production: his labor and its products. Walliman explains that in this state, man is "estranged because both his labor power and the product of his labor are subject to an alien will, that is, because man is subject to an involuntary division of labor, a division that he controls neither at his place of work nor in the society at large"[37]

In other words, under a capitalist state, man does not live according to his nature. For he must sell his labor, and so, his own product of labor ceases to be an object of his own will and consciousness. The product becomes the object of a will that is alien to him. As a result of this process of production, man becomes a worker and is incessantly forced to sell his labor and products in order to survive, so that he becomes estranged. Furthermore, the relationship between the worker and his product becomes one in which "worker is dominated by his very own product. This condition goes against the individual's nature, since human beings have the capability to appropriate their own product as well as subject it to their will. The political economy under capitalism forcibly prevents the worker from doing this. Such a political economy is based on processes, although manmade, that result in man not living according to his human nature."[38]

For Marx, this condition is "unnatural, for *by nature* the human producer has the faculty to freely and consciously confront the product of his labor and subject it to his will. The capitalist mode of production prevents the producer from subjecting his product of labor to his will as he has by nature the faculty to do."[39]

Indeed we could posit that in Marx's anthropology, there is an ontological and historical characteristic of the nature of man. Now let

us examine how his theory of society could give us a clue on the way in which freedom is understood and developed.

THE SPHERE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE: MARX'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Before substantially demonstrating what Marx's ideas about freedom are, we must also examine how the sphere in which man exists informs not only the ways in which man is understood but also the very conditions in which freedom is or could be realized.

In this section, I will elucidate how Marx understands the sphere in which man exists; in so doing, I will attempt to illustrate how this is central in giving us a broader and, in fact, a more nuanced and solid account to his anthropology. I hope to show as well that such is an essential aspect not only of his anthropology, but also of his social theory and thus, of his ideas about freedom.

Marx posits that the first premise of all human history is "the existence of living human individuals"; thus, the first fact to be "established is the physical organisation of these individuals."[40]

Thus I will proceed here to discuss what Marx posits as the physical organizations or the sphere in which man interacts and exists. Of importance here is how Marx conceives or characterizes the material base where man actually and physically exists in relation to man himself.

Marx understands contemporary life, following Hegel, as distinguishable into two separate spheres, viz. civil society and the political state. The two spheres, for him, however, are unlike how Hegel understands them to be. "Civil society was not an outgrowth of the state, as in Hegel's view; rather, the state was an outgrowth of civil society."[41]

This difference is crucial.[42] We can identify at least three reasons. First, this explains why for Marx, social transformation lies not primarily in the changing of political forms of governance but rather on the change of mode of production. The political is a by-product of economic change in civil society, not the other way around. Second, this establishes the concrete basis of his social analysis of social relations. Man interacts—as the first historical moment—with other men in the civil society. Man as a political being, in other words, is only a secondary character in history.[43] Third, this clarifies why for Marx, the state serves only the interest of those who control the means

of production in the civil society.

For this paper, this difference is important in order to account for and describe civil society vis-à-vis character of man under certain socio-historical conditions in Marxian terms.

First let us briefly describe civil society. For Marx, civil society is the primary sphere of man's being, the "true source and theatre of all history."[44] This is the material existence of man as he is and is where certain economic and social relations are developed and reproduced,[45] and thus, here the actual organizations of men are established.[46]

In modern history, civil society[47] "embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite state of the development of productive forces."[48] It is here where real social relations among men exist. Unlike the political state, civil society is the concrete. Marx describes the political state in relation to civil society as "spiritual as is heaven in relation to earth."[49] In other words, for him, it is only on earth, in the civil society, that the present problem and its solution thus lie—in practical, material life.

Moreover, for Marx, civil society is, importantly, posited in historical terms; that is, it is within human historical process. Civil society has a history; it has its own origin and development.

In *The Grundrisse*, Marx suggests that the origin of civil society could be traced in the eighteenth century when the social relations made men "a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity"; it is a historical epoch that produces the isolated individual; the individual became independent from the greater whole, that is, he disappears as a dependent, not belonging, to his family and clan.

Civil society, in other words, originated in this historical period when social arrangements made man individuate himself; that is, when he involves himself in production and exchange, and sees others as a means toward this end.[50] Furthermore, the rise of the bourgeois man can also be traced from this period; as a corollary, the class of bourgeois men, that is, the "modern Capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage-labour."[51]

What this historical period was able to produce, in short, is a kind of society that has a new kind of social relationship, a social relationship that is based on men's economic productive activities; and an existence of classes, which is bound up and produced by the historical phase in the development of production of men, according to their relation to the means of production.[52]

So then it must be asked: how does Marx characterize man's existence in civil society? As a member of civil society, man regards

himself as a private individual. He "treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers."[53] For Marx, it is precisely for this reason that he becomes an egoistical man. He becomes what he is not, that is, a non species-being. He is withdrawn into himself and separated from the community. His communal essence is dissolved; the "only bond between men is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic persons."[54] As a private individual person, he lives a life that is real but selfish, isolated, and full of conflicting interests. He sees other men as a threat to his own security, rights, and property. Thus, he becomes estranged. Here he becomes a "partial being"—or the bourgeois man.[55]

It is in civil society, in short, that man actually and concretely exists. Hence, Marx can say that the being of man is "not his life as a citizen of the state but rather his economic life in civil society."[56]

Indeed this is relevant and central in understanding Marx's ideas about freedom. It provides a material account as to the conditions where freedom could or could not be realized, and the ways in which to describe the conditions in which freedom could be materialized in concrete social relations.

MARX'S IDEAS ABOUT FREEDOM

As already indicated earlier, Marx does not directly discuss the concept of freedom. Such can only be discerned by examining closely his theory in anthropology and political philosophy.[57] Indeed it is my contention that these are the two central aspects in Marx's theory which could help shed some light into a Marxian concept of freedom. Now that the aforementioned are laid-out and elucidated, we can now shed some light on his notion of freedom.

Is freedom a freedom from estrangement?

There are several fragmentary comments throughout his writings about freedom, but there is no clear discussion as to what this means and its relation to his philosophical work. We are left to surmise.

In his earlier writings, Marx writes, for example, about freedom in different contexts: first as part of his dissertation, and second as an article in defense of press freedom. These are brief and unelaborated discussions; but these, nonetheless, give us a glimpse into how he

thinks about the idea of freedom in general.

In his dissertation, Marx regards Epicurean freedom as a "flight from the world, an attempt by the mind to withdraw to a place of refuge."[58] In what seems to be indicative of his future ideas about human freedom, he considers this form of freedom as escapism. Thus he disagrees with Epicurus' conception of freedom, "not to the belief in the freedom of the spirit, but to the idea that this freedom can be attained by turning one's back on the world, that it is a matter of independence and not of creativity."[59]

As a journalist, Marx also, although briefly, expresses what he thinks about freedom. We read from his article how he values and defends the freedom of the press. He writes: a free press is an "indispensable condition of a state fulfilling its own nature"[60]; it enables public life as such and allows the government to hear its own voice.

In these earlier writings are indeed accounts that indicate, at the very least, how and why Marx cherishes freedom, what it represents, and its importance in the structure of human life. It is worthy to take note, however, that his later writings do not develop, for whatever reason, this theme explicitly. It is rather mostly presupposed throughout his works. In his *Das Kapital*, for example, one could only read an allusion to freedom in relation to man's condition under capitalist society.

The question then begs us: how can we then give an account to Marx's idea of freedom? In the discussion above, I have emphasized the material and historical existence of man in a capitalist society in the start of eighteenth century, and which Marx characterized as estranged. Could it then be the case that freedom is a freedom from estrangement?

In his study, Walliman indeed carefully argues that Marx used the term "estrangement" to refer to the loss of *human freedom* that results from an involuntary division of labor. From this theoretical perspective, one could indeed see that freedom in Marx's theory of estrangement is the ability of the individual that allows him to exercise his productive powers; that is, he is free, without constraint from an alien will, to realize his individual self, to express his different potentialities as a species-being. Thus when his nature is defined by participation in an involuntary division of labor, man is estranged from his natural nature; he loses his freedom.

In Marx's theory of estrangement, therefore, freedom is not possible in a capitalist society. Does this mean, consequently, that all

men in a capitalist society are not free? According to this view, the answer is yes. Both the worker and the capitalist are under an external condition that negates their potentialities as species-beings.[61]

Simply put, there is no freedom in a capitalist society where man is estranged from himself. He has no freedom unless the involuntary division of labor is abolished; or to put it differently, he is free only "if he can live free from the coercion of other men."[62] Moreover, it can be deduced from this account that the abolition of external structures of domination seems to be not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition to attain the cherished goal: freedom of the human species.

While Walliman's proposal indeed sheds some light into the ways in which freedom could be understood, particularly from Marx's theory of estrangement, I contend here that this is insufficient insofar as this does not describe and account for the character of freedom as such. It is not enough to adequately describe Marx's ideas about freedom, for in this account, freedom only implies absence of external constraint. I suggest here that by taking his more nuanced understanding of anthropology, on the one hand, and his political philosophy, on the other, one could discern clearly and substantively the character of freedom in Marx's theory.

I will clarify this point in the succeeding section.

Freedom constitutes the structure of human life

In Marx's theoretical framework, freedom can be conceived only in light of how man is understood. That is, freedom constitutes the structure of the life of the species-being, and thus, by definition it is universal insofar as this is constitutive of the life of all species-being.

The first procedure that we must follow in order to elucidate this point, however, is to posit the dimensions of human life, that is, the life of the species-being vis-à-vis the historical being. To review, man is both a natural and a historical being. Each being has its own distinctive characteristics. On the one hand, the natural nature of man is constant throughout history, thus, universal. Through the process of production, particularly in the period of, and his entry to, wage labor, the natural becomes the historical man. On the other hand, the historical nature of man changes, depending on his location within social relations and his relation to the means of production in a particular historical epoch.

Marx suggests that, in his natural state, man is free. He is free to enter and be part of a social relation. Through his own action, he

exercises his creative and productive activity. The products he create and produce are his own, for subsistence and flourishing. Nobody owns his labour. As a producer, he is endowed with creative and productive labour. Understood within his conception of history, exercise of such capacity is a "process of self-development of the human species."[63] In short, man is free; freedom constitutes who he is.

The historical nature of man, on the other hand, is not free. For Marx, man is a 'free conscious producer' but insofar as he is not able to express himself freely in productive activity in a capitalist society, he is not free. He is estranged from himself (that is, his natural self). He owns neither his labour-power nor the products he produces. His actions become involuntary. *He has to produce not because he wants, but he is required to*. His capacity to produce his own subsistence does not anymore lie in his hands but in the hands of those who give him wages in order for him to live. An external object now determines what he is capable of: what his subsistence is and how he produces it. The voluntary nature of his labour and action becomes involuntary; hence, he is estranged from his natural self. Understood in this manner, he is not free.

In sum, according to this philosophical anthropological view of man, freedom constitutes his very character; and clearly, for Marx, this serves as the primary variable in determining the nature of man in history (i.e., man could be described as historical man as such because of the absence of freedom from his life; he is *estranged* from himself). Indeed while Marx's anthropology shed light on his notion of freedom, it is equally true as well that his freedom could also be used to understand further his anthropology; for it could be used to differentiate the two dimension or characteristics of human nature.

Within this theoretical framework, freedom could be understood as a universal concept posited in Marx's understanding of man as a species-being. As I have discussed above, man as a species-being is the natural being; and as such, his nature and character is universal insofar as this is also shared with the rest of the species.[64] It is in this sense that freedom is neither a particular nor parochial concept but a universal one.

While this formulation may be described or assumed, accurately as the ontological character of freedom, it is, however, not sufficient to characterize freedom in Marxian terms. It must still be posited in material terms. Thus, it must be asked: *How does such freedom manifest itself in concrete social relations?*

It must be recalled first that for Marx, man is necessarily in a social

relation. We must, therefore, proceed to extrapolate the understanding of freedom in the context of his sociality. Within the structure of human life in the civil society, freedom could be understood in two ways: first, there is positive freedom, and second, negative freedom.[65]

In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx discusses his politico-philosophical understanding of freedom vis-à-vis man. Here he posits man in his existence in civil society, what it means to be free in such relation, and, therefore, what constitutes positive or negative freedom.[66]

For Marx, the bond that forges between and among men or the relation of men in civil society presupposes the egoistic and isolated individual. He is a social being as opposed to a species-being. In such a state, therefore, his liberty as a right of man is "not founded upon the *relations between man and man*, but rather upon *the separation of man from man*. It is the right of such separation. The right of the circumscribed individual, withdrawn into himself."[67]

Of importance here is the relations of men; it is my contention that we could deduce the character of freedom from such relation. Thus, it must be also asked: *What characterizes such relation?*

In civil society, liberty is "the right to do everything which does not harm others. The limits within which each individual can act without harming others are determined by law, just as the boundary between two fields is marked by a stake. It is a question of the liberty of man regarded as an isolated monad, withdrawn into himself."[68] Man, in short, sees himself in this sphere as not in relation to others. Rather, he is primarily and first an individual being. Hence, he is free to dispose his will but only in so far as he is exercising his right to self-interest. So what binds man with others in this state?

For Marx, the "only bond between men is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic persons."[69] The natural connectedness as universal species-being is dissolved. Here it is replaced with a law (to be more precise, the property law) the only mediating force that binds them. What they now follow are not natural laws, but rather the law of the land.[70] They become subjects to a social relation that governs them as such. Their actions, exercise of production, and creativity must become in accord with the fundamental demands and requirements of that which binds them—for Marx, the law in a capitalist society is wage labour; and this binds the individuals in such society.[71] What characterizes the civil state, in short, is the historical relation between men; and thus, in a capitalist society, the relation is understood as between wage labourers and the capitalists.

Consequently, because man sees himself as an independent individual, he treats others as limiting his freedom; that is, preventing him from fully realizing his own individuality. Other men are not the realization, but rather the limitation of his liberty. They limit and hinder his self-realization, that is, his ability to dispose his self-interest vested wills.

The only compelling power that restrains him from destroying others in order to promote his own interests (or, self-realization in history) is the law of the society, composed of egoistic men.[72] In short, a man-made apparatus governs men; their life is laid with 'anthropological nature' that estranged him from 'himself'.

Viewed as such, freedom is understood as freedom from interference of others and doing what one pleases as long as it does not do harm to others. And because what holds this relation is an artifact of the egoistic and isolated man, this could be described as negative freedom; but only because such freedom creates or produces estrangement or alienation.

The positive form of freedom, on the other hand, is a freedom that is viewed from a sociality position, that is, with other people, in human community, and not in isolation. For Marx, such freedom is realized through and with other men, "when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*."[73]

Positive freedom, in other words, is experienced and expressed in a relation where man sees in other man the realization of his being in them. Self-realization is the realization of man with others. The basis of positive freedom, therefore, is a societal conception that regards man not as an individual, but that he is in relation with others. It is founded upon the relations between man and man. Thus, man leads to see in other men the *realization*, not limitation, of his own freedom.[74]

Such a conception leads us to another view of freedom; that is, freedom is in the process of realization. Freedom, in this sense, does not neither exist as *a priori* (as an ontological structure of life) nor as an experience in the moment (in the present social condition). Rather, it is realized in the process of restoration of the human world, that is, the human relationship in relation to oneself as a species-being and to the universality of species-life.

In short, the way in which freedom manifests concretely in the society depends on the way species-being arrange themselves accordingly. It is contingent, not *a priori*. And in contrast to liberal democratic tradition, Marxian freedom is not the realization of

individuality (i.e., right and freedom); rather it is the realization of the well-being of the species-being. Indeed freedom is not about an exercise of independence but rather a matter of creative expression of man's potentials as such in relation to others. Moreover, it is not a static notion, but rather a process: its nature and character expand as its material condition changes. And contrary to an externally or even internally-constraint definition of freedom,[75] freedom, in this sense, is understood as the ability or capacity *to respond* to historical changes; and *the exercise of human creativity* in the material world.[76]

As I have—hopefully—illustrated throughout this study, freedom in Marx's social theory is more nuanced than mostly assumed. In contrast to reductionist claim, [1] it could only be properly and substantially described and characterized by taking into consideration his anthropology, political philosophy, and theory of estrangement; [2] freedom is an ontological dimension of the structure of human life, manifested and realized in relation to the development of man and his relation to others; [3] freedom could only be realized (and understood) in the sphere of human existence; [4] and freedom is always in the process of realization as the material condition changes in history. In short, these characteristics are the fundamental elements in framing and thinking about freedom in Marx's theory.

FREEDOM AND PHILIPPINE DEMOCRACY: A BRIEF REFLECTION

In his politico-philosophical reflections and genealogical studies, Giorgio Agamben demonstrates how an intellectual work could help in the transformation of the nihilistic tendencies and the anthropological machine of modernity that slowly destroys the earth and the lives therein.

Such project is not only admirable, but also, urgent; one that is needed in contemporary times (both in the academia and society). Another thinker whose work intensifies the importance of the ethico-political in intellectual work is that of Jacques Derrida. His work on *deconstruction* has gained notoriety for its endless play of meanings and words, but he has substantially illustrated that such intellectual project is indeed in the name and in the service of, what may be called justice.

Indeed my claim here is that by (re)considering the Marxian notion of freedom, we could glimpse not only his theory but also how

his ideas could in fact provoke us to think of another possibility that could possibly give us a better option at ordering human lives and making them flourish—certainly one that is different from today's. My attempt here is modest and experimental.

Below are few cursory comments, as a way to conclude, as to how such insight from the study could offer hints (of possibilities) that could help promote a more democratic life of the Filipino people. I believe what is at stake here is not just the quality, but also the possibility of life as such. Indeed, the creation and promotion of freedom could guarantee that more life will be made more possible and to flourish—from farmers to women and other sexual minorities in the society. As Marx points out, where positive freedom is actualized, possibilities where human beings could exercise their own creativity and appropriate one's labor abound.

Even on the immediate surface, the issue of freedom is relevant most especially today in the history of Philippine democracy. We only have to recall, for example, the juridical action of the Commission on Election (of the Republic of the Philippines) in the recent national elections. When it dismissed the petition of LadLad Party to be recognized as a legitimate sectoral party, the Commission ignores the fundamental value of human civilization and the democratic principles. In fact, one could argue that its decision violated basic human rights. Instead of upholding these democractic principles and human values, the Commission chose to defend and sustain dubious moral and pseudo religious principles. In this particular juridical decision, the Commission on Election undermines a core democratic impulse, as it curtails human's capacity to creative and meaningful existence and further minimizes human's agency to determine one's labor and existence.

Interestingly, in contrast to such fascist and totalitarian ideology of the Commission, the logic of Marx's notion of freedom seems to oddly support democracy. Although due to the limit of this study, I could only suggest at this important connection between freedom and democracy to Marx; one could clearly intuit here the relevance of the insights of Marx on freedom as constitutive of our humanity and in the very democratic foundation of progress and development of human civilization—a point that Amartya Sen has also demonstrated, although in an oblique way, in his study.[77]

Perhaps this is a possible critical insight for Philippine democracy, which as some political pundits have noted, is still practically at an early state and needs a breath of democratic air. Freedom must be

ensured, promoted, and granted to all stakeholders and citizens of the state if democracy (and life!) is to flourish. To be sure, freedom must be concretely expressed in the civic and political life through the promotion and protection of the fundamental human rights of those who are marginalized and those who belong to the minority if humanity is to revert to what Giorgio Agamben casts a "bloody mystification of the new planetary order." The issue of freedom in a democratic state is the primary politico-juridical issue that the Commission of Election misses, and that from a juridico-political perspective, must be reconsidered in the name of Philippine democracy. For what is at stake here is not a certain kind of moralism or religious conviction but the flourishing of human life that democracy bequeaths. As Marx points out, only a positive notion of freedom, that is, a freedom-to-be-with, can ensure such reality to come.

Indeed Philippine democracy could learn from the mistakes of Western democracy. The individualism that Western democracy has nurtured in modern times has proven to be destructive and unsustainable. It has created an anthropological machine that slowly devours human life. In modern history, for example, the freedom of Americans has become the nightmare of the Iraqis and the rest of the third world countries. And as recent global events has shown us, democracy could only flourish when human rights and freedom are ontologically understood, epistemologically grounded, and ethically exercised, as always in relation with others—the positive freedom of Marx. To put it culturally and contextually: Philippine democracy could flourish if it draws its life from the spirit of *bayanihan* system, that is, one of communality and mutuality.

It is not implausible, therefore, although in a very interesting way, to claim that a kernel in Marx's theory contributes to the thinking and enacting a kind of Philippine democracy that is true to its essence—which Jacques Derrida also describes as fellowship of friends.

END NOTES

[1] Throughout this paper, I use the generic "man" rather than a more inclusive alternative. Because this study is devoted to engaging Marx's ideas, use of the inclusive pronoun would misleadingly create an impression that Marx held more gender-sensitive views about women than he actually did.

[2] Here I follow the argument made by Ding Xueliang on Marx's theory on man's full development. See his *A Survey of Marx's Theory on Marx's Full Development*, ed. Institute of

Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1983). In this paper, I utilize his theory in order to suggest that Marx's critique and study of capitalism is due to his primary concern on the estrangement and deprivation of man to fully become and realize his potentials—in short, I am employing a more humanist reading of Marx.

[3] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 12. Present-day democracy is, according to Agamben, "at the very moment in which it seemed to have finally triumphed over adversaries and reached its greatest heights, proved itself incapable of saving *zoe*, to whose happiness it had dedicated all its efforts, from unprecedented ruin" (10). Responding thus to what he believes as "bloody mystification of the new planetary order," he writes, "it became clear that one cannot…accept as a guarantee any of the notions that the social sciences (from jurisprudence to anthropology) thought they had defined or presupposed as evident, and that many of these notions demanded—in the urgency of catastrophe—to be revised without reserve" (12). By examining, and thereafter using Marx's idea of freedom, I hope to illustrate that modern capitalist-democratic notion of freedom actually helps in the ruin of *zoe*.

[4] Paul Heyer, *Nature, Human Nature, and Society: Marx, Darwin, Biology, and the Human Sciences* (Westport, Connecticut; London, England: Greenwood Press, 1982), 71.

[5] In general, Marx's understanding of man could be classified both as philosophical and biological; the philosophic and biological nature, however, are finely intertwined and fully interdependent that is almost impossible to argue one over the other. For a more biologically-oriented discussion of man, see, for example, Paul Heyer, *Nature, Human Nature, and Society: Marx, Darwin, Biology, and the Human Sciences* (Westport, Connecticut; London, England: Greenwood Press, 1982). For a philosophical discussion of man, see, for example, Joseph Bien, *History, Revolution and Human Nature: Marx's Philosophical Anthropology* (Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner Publishing Co., 1984).

[6] Here I agree that generally speaking "Marx takes in his analyses man as a natural-biological being as a datum and he is not concerned with the process of anthropogenesis leading to the formation of homo sapiens as a biological species." See George Markus, *Marxism and Anthropology: The concept of 'human essence' in the philosophy of Marx*. Trans. E. de Laczay and G. Markus (Netherlands: Van Gorcum Assen, 1978), 3.

[7] *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in Robert Tucker, ed., *Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 75. The Reader is used throughout; title and page numbers are cited accordingly.

[8] Ibid., 114.

[9] Heyer, 83.

[10] Economic and Philosophic Manuscripst of 1844, 115.

[11] Ibid., 75.

[12] Heyer, 77.

[13] In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844*, Marx illustrates more clearly how man is in

relation to nature. For example, "A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a *natural* being, and plays no part in the system of nature. A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being. A being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its *objects*; i.e., it is not ***objectively related***. Its be-ing is not objective" (116; bold italics mine).

[14] It is not immediately clear, however at this juncture, if, for Marx, man is at once both part and not part of nature as such.

[15] *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripst of 1844*, 115.

[16] See, for example, his *Theses on Feuerbach*. Man has indeed the capacity to change his circumstances; in Marx's theory, there are varying degrees of capacity of/in man in each historical epoch. Under the capitalist system, for example, he does not have the capacity to change his relation to the means of production; but certainly, he has the capacity to survive in such circumstances.

[17] Heyer, 80.

[18] Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, 76.

[19] Ibid., 76.

[20] Ibid., 75.

[21] *The German Ideology*, 150.

[22] As Walliman points out, Marx does not claim that his method and conceptuality is new; in fact, Marx acknowledges that as early as Aristotle, such understanding of man (that is in relation to animals) is already recognized. See Isidor Walliman, *Estragement: Marx's Conception of Human Nature and the Division of Labor* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981).

[23] Wallliman, 13.

[24] Ibid., 16.

[25] *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 85.

[26] *The Grundrisse*, 262.

[27] For Marx, the chief means of this individuation [*Vereinzelung*] happens where production and exchange (of commodities) takes place. Thus he argues: "[Exchange] makes the herd-like existence superfluous and dissolves it." Ibid., 263.

[28] Markus, 16.

[29] *Thesis on Feuerbach VI*, 145.

[30] Markus, 23.

[31] *The German Ideology*, 171.

[32] *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 85.

[33] Walliman, for example, argues this same thesis by suggesting that Marx was against the utility of theory by Jeremy Bentham; "Against Jeremy Bentham, Marx argues…that general human nature cannot be defined from the utility theory, since what is useful is historically relative and general human nature is in no way relative" (14).

[34] In this paper, I adopt the term estrangement rather alienation. For an insightful treatment on this topic, see Isidor Wallimann, *Estrangement: Marx's Conception of Human Nature and the Division of Labor*. Foreword by Gunter W. Remmling (Westport, Connecticut; London, England: Greenwood Press, 1983).

[35] Walliman, 147. Here he suggests that estrangement is qualitative and not a quantitative phenomenon. Man is either estranged or not. The basis for such a claim should only be based on man's relation to his labor power and the product of his labor. Thus he writes: "the only society Marx advocated was one free from estrangement—free from any domination of man by man" (154).

[36] Walliman, 165.

[37] Ibid., 149-50.

[38] Ibid., 32.

[39] Ibid., 31.

[40] Ibid., 149.

[41] Tucker, xxiv. See also Marx's Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. This paper, however, does not proceed to discuss the significance and implication of this difference. What is raised here is only to suggest the place of the civil society in Marx's political philosophy, especially its relation to his understanding of man.

[42] Thus it is here that the influence of Hegel must be taken into consideration and how Marx transforms Hegelian philosophy into a materialist philosophy is significant.

[43] Here we could also invoke the influence of Aristotle. However, it must be clearly delineated that for Marx, man is first a species-being—as opposed to a political being (Aristotle)—who enters and interacts with other species as a producer of his own subsistence.

[44] *The German Ideology*, 163.

[45] For further discussion on how Marx elaborates and uses such theoretical framework to criticize other thinkers that uses 'old Hegelian junk' i.e., M. Proudhon, see *Society and Economy in History*.

[46] In the political state, he is a citizen. Man is distinct from citizen; for Marx, man is a member of the civil society. For more discussion on this distinction, see *On the Jewish Question*, 41-44.

[47] *Bürgeliche Gesellschaft* can also mean "bourgeois society." See *The German Ideology*. In *The Grundrisse*, Marx defines bourgeois society as "the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production"

[48] *The German Ideology*, 163.

[49] *On the Jewish Question*, 34.

[50] Marx traces this historical development particularly in later works, i.e., *The Grundrisse, Das Capital*.

[51] *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, footnote.

[52] Such claim (the existence of class), Marx claims, is his own; something that which is new that he proves. See his *Class Struggle and Mode of Production*.

[53] *On the Jewish Question*, 34.

[54] Ibid., 43.

[55] See *On the Jewish Question*.

[56] Tucker, xxiv. And as Tucker suggests, the life of man and his condition in the civil society becomes the fundamental basis for his theoretical investigation and construction.

[57] The structure of his discussion of these themes, I suggest, are implicitly dialectical, e.g. in anthropology: natural vs. social, and in political philosophy: state vs. civil. But it remains to be seen, however, if this is true to his notions of freedom, given the way in which I have structured this discussion. Provisionally, however, I suggest that freedom is also dialectical in character, that is, it could be expressed in, e.g. universal and particular. The former is what Marx is advocating for.

[58] Kolakowski, 86.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid. 100.

[61] As Marx writes in *Alienation and Social Classes*: "The **possessing class** and the **proletarian class** represent 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 possesses in it the *appearance* of a human existence. The latter, however, feels destroyed in this alienation, seeing in its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence" (bold emphasis mine) (133).

[62] Walliman, 112.

[63] Tucker, xxiv.

[64] Here man is understood more in light of the developmental theory of man, that is, in light of the historical and material conditions—thus as opposed to the more utopian idea of man (that is, there is a "lost" nature of man that needs to be recovered). Man's natural character while it essentially remains, changes and develops as it copes with the changing environment, both historically and physically. As such, his potentials and capacities as a species-being not only adopts and but also expand and develop in order to survive and support its subsistence. See Ding Xueliang's *A Survey of Marx's Theory on Marx's Full Development*.

[65] This proposition could also be read in Walliman's *Estrangement: Marx's Conception of Human Nature and the Division of Labor*. I employ such structure in order to offer a kind of dialectical discussion over the subject matter—which I believe is a properly Marxian strategy.

[66] The right of private property (its origin and development) is an important and related theme; in this paper, however, I will limit my interpretation to the nature of the relation of man in the civil society. An exploration of Marx's view of human rights must be reserved for a later study.

[67] *On the Jewish Question*, 42 (*italics mine*).

[68] Ibid., 42.

[69] Ibid., 43.

[70] Such effectively made them exposed and predisposed to the force and violence of law. Thus, for Marx, security is the "supreme social concept of civil society" (*On the Jewish Question*, 43).

[71] By its very nature, wage labour, for Marx, dehumanizes man.

[72] A judicial force maintains the relation of men. In Marx's schema, this is a political apparatus meant to protect the order of civil society. Such is why, for him, state is an outgrowth of civil society—contrary to Hegel. The political state is only a by-product of the structure of civil society; thus, it serves to only protect and promote vested interests within the civil structure.

[73] *On the Jewish Question*, 46.

[74] Placed within the trajectory of his theory, this claim clarifies the historic tasks of the proletariats to bring about the dialectical consciousness that liberate humanity from inhuman living conditions. See also his *Alienation and Social Classes*.

[75] For example, based on Marx's theory of estrangement or the psychoanalytical and philosophical account.

[76] It is for this reason that for Marx, workers are still able to organize themselves despite or in spite of the 'absence' of freedom under the capitalist society. And they are able to imagine or think about, i.e., a different kind of society (and this is, for Marx, the exercise of human creativity).

This view, however, because of the limitation of this study, must still be further examined and elaborated; there are, at least, two identifiable dimensions in light of this discussion: one, how Marx understands consciousness, and two, what and how the notion of freedom is understood in the communist state (i.e., is it still a creative expression?)

[77] A point also convincingly pointed out by Nobel-prize economist Amartya Sen: the more we create freedom, the more development is made possible. See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1999).

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