

# From the Realm of Freedom to Institution Building

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**Abstract:** Marx's articles on freedom and necessity have aroused great interest and substantive debate, especially in volume III of *Das Kapital*. It is worth noting that fundamental questions of revolutionary change are at the core of these debates. For Marx, systemic contradictions in any given mode of production were bound to lead to revolutionary shifts. Within capitalism, for example, the contradictions between the productive forces and the relations of production develop to the point where the proletariat becomes aware of their alienated existence and subsequently overthrows the exploiting ruling class.

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## 1. Introduction

First, the operational terms need to be defined more accurately. For Marx, the realm of necessity is relatively simple. The sphere of material production includes those activities required for individual and collective viability<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, whatever the overall mode of production, human beings are always subject to the demands of biological reproduction. Of course, with technological advances, coupled with more efficient and effective production methods, males and females should theoretically be given more freedom from the exigencies of natural conditions. In other words, with the strengthening of social organization, humans transcend the limitations imposed by nature. No longer subject to the blind forces of the physical world, people began to exercise more direct control over their reproduction. Under capitalism, however, strange things happen<sup>[2]</sup>.

On the one hand, productivity has reached an unprecedented level of development, which means it should be providing humanized labor. However, people are free from the physical limitations of nature but still trapped in a situation of unfreedom. Why is that? The answer is that the seemingly blind market forces have replaced the physical forces of nature, leading to a state of alienation. People living in capitalist societies are excluded from developing a sense of non-alienation<sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary that, through collective self-determination, people can exercise complete and conscious control over their economic activities<sup>[4]</sup>.

Marx then distinguishes between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. In the context of labor productivity, surplus value, and the length of the working day broadly, the realm of freedom begins where labor

determined by necessity and external expediency cease <sup>[5]</sup>. This also shows that the Marxist view of history reflects his materialist view. True freedom seems to be achieved only when the primary conditions of life, food, water, and shelter, are satisfied. Just as the savage struggled with nature to satisfy his needs, and sustain his life, so does the civilized person too. Regardless of the form of society and mode of production in which civilized people live, human beings are bound by biological constraints. The necessary conditions for social reproduction will always limit any mode of production. Of course, these conditions change with social organization and technology changes. As demand expands, so does the production capacity to meet it. Freedom does not exist in a capitalist system of pure economic growth because individual and social needs also change. Under this capitalist production system, wealth accumulates faster and more widely than at any other time in human history. However, countless males, females, and children still live in poverty despite all this affluence. In other words, it is impossible to achieve freedom solely from the increase in productivity <sup>[6]</sup>.

Finally, Marx provided part of the answer. He holds that freedom can only exist among socialized people and associated producers in the realm of necessity. Freedom controls a man's metabolism with nature rationally, placing it under their collective control and doing so with the least effort and under conditions best appropriate for human nature <sup>[7]</sup>. At this point, Marx assumes that in a communist society, society is the existence of collective organizations. No longer constrained by unseen forces, freedom can exist within the limits of necessity. However, this is not true freedom, for man is still forced to work to reproduce life. In other words, the field of necessity is always the field of necessity production. The proper sphere of freedom and the development of human power is the goal to be exceeded. The field of freedom can flourish when it is based on the field of necessity and continues to develop and transcend it. What constitutes this utopian realm of freedom beyond necessary production, and more precisely, why does communism alone seem to hold any promise of being free from endless toil and unfreedom? In a system that can be decided collectively, both males and females are not constrained and can develop their abilities <sup>[8]</sup>. At the same time, he or she can exercise and develop specific abilities related to this nature through conscious activities. This ability is liberating because it is carried out according to the actor's goals. In short, the realm of necessity is collective determination and true freedom in the realm of individual self-actualization <sup>[9]</sup>.

## 2. Institution building

If there are people, there are institutions. Institutions have always accompanied human existence. Institutions are the product of human interaction. Marx believed that "the existing institutions are only the product of the interaction that has existed so far between individuals." Similarly, the thinking of institutional issues has been throughout human history. Society wants to use institutions to regulate, guide, and shape the behavior of its members. Therefore, the search for a system considered good has become the goal of social scientists. From the perspective of Marxism, the "good" system can guarantee and promote free development for everyone. The free development of everyone is the ideal of Marxism and system construction <sup>[10]</sup>.

Marx was unwaveringly critical of the capitalist system, arguing that all relations that make a man a thing to be insulted, enslaved, abandoned, and despised must be overturned. There are some reasons for criticizing the capitalist system. First, from the perspective of moral evaluation, the capitalist system leads to human alienation. Second, from the historical evaluation, capitalism has no historical rationality <sup>[11]</sup>. Under capitalism, the productive forces have developed so dramatically that the bourgeoisie has created more productive forces than all previous generations in less than a hundred years of class rule. In sharp contrast, the more wealth a worker produces, the greater the impact and scale of that production, and the poorer he becomes. The more

goods workers create, the cheaper those goods become. The increase in the value of the world of things is proportional to the decrease in the value of the world of people. Therefore, Marx thought that the capitalist system was a system that could not guarantee their enslaved people maintain a life of being enslaved and thus concluded that the capitalist system would inevitably disappear<sup>[12]</sup>.

Marx wanted a system that would enable the free development of everyone. In *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx pointed out that humans are the highest essence of humans. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx argued that communism was the positive sublation of private property, the self-alienation of humans, and therefore the natural possession of the essence of humans through and for humans<sup>[13]</sup>. Therefore, it is a person's humane return to themselves, as well as to society. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx emphasized that in place of the old bourgeois society, with its class and class antagonism, there would be a union in which the free development of each was a condition for the free development of all. In *Das Kapital*, Marx reaffirmed this view, arguing that communist society is a social form based on the basic principle of every individual's comprehensive and accessible development. In conclusion, Marx believed that the system should guarantee and promote the free development of everyone and realize the liberation, development, freedom, independent activities, and unrestrained personality of people, which is consistent throughout Marx's thought<sup>[14]</sup>.

The free development of each person is an essential measure of the evaluation of social and system development. From the perspective of historical materialism, the evaluation of social development mainly includes the standards of productive forces and human beings. The criterion of productivity is regarded as one of the evaluation criteria of social development because the development of productivity is the basis of realizing various indicators of social development. Whether it is political, economic, cultural, or other activities, the development of productive forces is the premise of all these activities. To be able to make history, people must be able to live. The history of industry and the existence that industry has produced is an open book about man's power<sup>[1]</sup>. The outward manifestation of productivity is material abundance, namely economic growth. In a certain period, rapid economic growth is the main sign of productivity development. The development of productive forces is external performance, and its internal root is human development. The criterion of human development is taken as one of the evaluation criteria of social development because human beings are the purpose of social development. Human development is the measure of social development. All social development achievements, including those of productive forces, must be finally implemented in human development. The development of productive forces also implies the development of human beings. The development of productive forces cannot be talked about in isolation from economic growth. However, on the other hand, economic growth cannot be equated with the development of productive forces. The development of productive forces should be manifested as the qualitative improvement of economic growth rather than merely quantitative growth<sup>[15]</sup>.

In *The Complete Works of Marx and Engels (XXXI): Manu*, Marx believes that social development goes through three stages in turn: personal dependency, material dependency, and free individuality. Correspondingly, the replacement of institutional forms also goes through three stages. In the personal dependence stage, the system is directly provided by the ruler. The essential feature of the social system is the dependent relationship between people of ruling and obedience<sup>[16]</sup>. In this stage, the ruler directly controls the governed, and the relationship between the governed and the ruler is one of attachment and dependency. Individuals have no independence, and others or an authoritarian state controls their rights. Individual rights are objectively challenging to advocate for by individuals themselves, and individuals even have no consciousness to maintain their rights subjectively. In the personal independence based on the material dependency stage,

the capital owners provide the system. The essential characteristic of the social system is to protect property rights, but not people's rights. In this stage, people no longer succumb to restriction, domination, and control from others, and the market principle becomes the dominant principle. Under the market principle, both sides of the transaction seem to achieve personality independence, equal status, and personal freedom. However, the protection of individual rights by the system is a hoax. People no longer yield to others but to "things." In the free individuality stage, the system results from the free association of individuals. The essential feature of the social system is free individuality, whose main content is protecting the rights of free people. Under such a system, society forms a system of general social material changes, comprehensive relationships, multifaceted needs, and comprehensive capabilities. True freedom, equality, and human rights will be realized for everyone<sup>[17]</sup>.

Admittedly, the evaluation of system construction should adhere to productivity and human standards. At the same time, the system construction should adhere to the unity of goal principle and progressive principle<sup>[18]</sup>. Ensuring everyone's free development is the goal of system construction. Nevertheless, this goal will be achieved gradually. Since ancient Greece, thinkers have been searching for an ultimate, eternal, universal "good" system to regulate the diversity of life, which gives great hope<sup>[19]</sup>. However, it also abstracts the rich social history of humanity. Marx believed that the system is a by-product of the development level of productive social forces. As the development level of productive social forces increases, the social system will be more reasonable, civilized, and harmonious. The system cannot be talked about abstractly without the development level of productive forces<sup>[20]</sup>. The appropriate system should be determined according to the development level of productive forces. Based on the current development level of productive forces, it should construct a system that guarantees and promotes free development for everyone.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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