

'Marx underestimates the significance of the liberal and liberal democratic preoccupation with how to secure freedom of criticism and action, i.e. choice and diversity, in the face of centralised state power'. Explain and discuss.

In order to come to any kind of valuable conclusion about whether this statement is true, and to what extent justified, one needs to analyse and evaluate the two of the most influential models of democracy - the Liberal tradition and the Marxist tradition.

In the works of Karl Marx (1818-83) and Friedrich Engels (1820-95) the key issues are the massive social and political inequalities, which, according to them, eliminate any possibility of liberal notion of free market economy, and of neutral liberal state to appear in a real world. In particular, Marx's critique of the liberal thought is based on completely different view of the individual (which forms the basis for liberal theory), of the link between economical and political sphere, of the 'neutrality' of state, and, most importantly, of the significance of inequalities in wealth in relation to inequalities in political rights. But before turning to the reasons and sources of Marx's critique, I will briefly analyse the ideas of the few most remarkable representatives of liberal thought, from the birth of liberalism and its transition to liberal democracy. After that, the basis for the Marx's critique will be explored, and in particular, the arguments about where he believes that those theorists went wrong. The alternative view of democracy and political and social organisation made by Marx will be explained next, in order to finally reach the conclusion about whether his underestimation of the liberal and liberal democratic effort (to achieve realisation of freedom of criticism and action in spite of the existence of the centralised state power), is justified.

The early liberal theory was introduced by the works of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704), who concentrated on freeing the polity from religious control, and the civil society from political interference. Their attempt was to find a way to balance the strong state, required to guard citizens and their rights on one hand, and social freedom of individuals and their pursuit of interests in competitive relations on the other.

Hobbes believed that individuals are self interested, but that this does not necessarily lead to conflict or war. Therefore, he search for the appropriate conditions which will found the basis for trust among them, as well as security and peace for all. He concluded that what is required is an agreement between people that will ensure that their lives will be somehow regulated. Although this argument supports liberty in a sense that it is concerned with appropriate conditions for the expression of human nature, as well as with freedom and equality of individuals, it is rather difficult to speak about liberty under such extreme state power that in fact constrains it by not allowing those individuals to be independent (Hobbes, 1651). This is one of the points that Marx criticises, and to which I shall return later.

Locke began with the argument that people were originally in the state of nature, (meaning in a state of liberty, freedom and equality), but restrained by the duty to God and the law of nature. In order to preserve this original state (which each individual can, and indeed should enjoy), there should be a separation of powers, and a constitutional government. Political activity of the citizens is essential, since the consent of individuals needs to be made by majority decisions of the people's

representatives (Locke, 1690). This means that government, which must protect the rights, and ensure the liberties of its citizens, must be restricted in scope. Political power as such should then be treated as a matter of trust, in a sense that citizens should believe in their government, believe that it will act according to their own interests. If it however fails to do so, then a new form of government should be established.

To continue with liberal theorists, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) proposed the institutionalised separation of powers within the state. In order to prevent the abuse of power, the society needs aristocracy to maintain balance between the monarchy and the people. The executive, legislative, and judiciary powers must be distinguished. Montesquieu's notion of liberty rests upon the conditions of everyone having the right to act in any way the law permits (Montesquieu, 1748) He did not tackle the question of what happens if those laws themselves may be rigorous and tyrannical. It is important that he dedicated a large part of his work to the analysis of how can institutions be created so that ambitions of individuals to place their own interests above those of others, are transformed into effective government. Still, Montesquieu forgot to deal with parallel creation of the mechanism for the protection of the private sphere. At this point I will introduce Marx's critique on the work of the theorists analysed so far, as well as that of a liberal democrat John Stuart Mill.

As I mentioned before, the combination of liberty of citizens and a strong state power, which all liberal and liberal democratic thinkers tend to achieve in one way or another, Marx sees as impossible to attain. The most of his critique here will concentrate on the theory of John Stuart Mill (1806-73). Mill emphasised the importance of representative government which will allow free development of individuality. He claimed that government should interfere with individual liberties only when an act of individuals in some way harms other (or others). The individual is sovereign, capable of making his own decisions, as long as given the right to choose. Any political system that undermines the desirability as well as the capability of individuals to create their own destiny, violates human dignity and threatens social justice. He was therefore preoccupied with the establishment of a system that will ensure freedom of action as well as of criticism, but with the existence of a strong state which will interfere when someone is harmed. The only way this may be simultaneously achieved is by establishing a representative government, restricted by laissez-faire conditions in economic relations (Mill, 1859).

Following his concern about how to make the best outcome by reorganising social and political structures, Mill argued that all adults should have a vote, since it is very important for people to participate in politics, but those who have the most knowledge and skill, should have more votes than those with less. Marx accused this view for giving a privileged position to a non-working class. But Mill believed in two major situations that represent danger for the society. Firstly, there is a danger that educated and high skill individuals will be outvoted by the ignorant ones, which make up the majority of the society. This system is wrong to adopt because governing requires skilled employees and expertise. Secondly, he emphasises that there is a danger arising from the tendency of people to do everything. In this way efficiency can easily get undermined.

The system of representative democracy that he suggests, would provide protection, together with a liberty of thought and action. It is worth noting that he was the first to claim that women should participate in politics on equal basis with men. His work was very significant for the originality of this idea of political equality among sexes, as well as for stressing the importance of equal justice and the extent of individual liberty in all fields of life. Furthermore, he proposed the exact kind of

political system which he thought would both propel the participation in political life and therefore education in general, and secure and safeguard the freedom and harmony in lives off all the individuals. However, he failed to specify in what spheres of life should the state intervention as such, be justified. Also, Mill characterised inequalities of income, wealth and power as the main factors to prevent the development of society, but on the other hand, he supported political and social inequality by giving privileges to those with more skill and knowledge. This forms a strong basis for Marx's critique, as it ignores the inability of the majority to devote themselves to education. Those of the working class might not even have the opportunity or proper conditions to acquire the needed skills, as they have to sell their labour capacity and work overtime in order to survive, Marx would argue.

To continue with Marx's critique, it needs to be mentioned that one of the main points in liberal theory - the notion of individual - Marx strongly rejects. He claims that it is wrong to analyse individuals separately, because their nature and behaviour can be understood only in the context of society. Social classes influence both individuals' behaviour and their feelings about themselves as well as about others. They only exist in interaction with others, and their nature is a social and historical product (*The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*).

Another significant point of the critique is made on liberal belief that political and economic sphere are two separate issues. From Hobbes to J.S.Mill, all the theorists analysed above sought the ways to restrict the role, or power of the state, and to move it as further away as possible from the sphere of market and economy. In particular, John S. Mill was very concerned with how to secure laissez-faire economic conditions, and at the same time the existence of a strong state which would defend the property and liberty of citizens. Marx argued that the state can not but influence the economic field, because it is the main actor in maintenance of the class divisions within the society, divisions of interests between the classes. He explains this by emphasising all the detrimental consequences that capital system of production may cause, which are examined below.

According to Marx, social formations are capitalist because they are characterised by the production of surplus value. The system is such, that it creates a distance of the means of production from the vast majority of the society, falling into the hands of the few. This forces the majority to sell their labour capacity to the owners of the means of production, i.e. of capital (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp.120-31). What workers produce has far more value than what they receive for their work (wage), and therefore, the surplus value is formed, which goes directly to those with capital. Capitalist mode of production, according to Marx, is one of the stages in historical development, which, by the struggle of the subordinate, propertyless class needs to be overcome (*The Communist Manifesto*, pg.127). Marx believed that this is exactly what was going to happen, and that a new political and economic order - communism will bring realization of the equality and liberty. If not, Marx thought, inequalities are sustained, division of classes repeatedly reproduced over generations, and the power of state continues to support the dominant class.

This belief, that the state, however limited in scope, always supports the dominant class, needs some further analysis. Whereas liberal and liberal democratic traditions supported the idea that the state, when properly organised, can represent the public as a whole, and promote individuals' interests, Marx and Engels found this idea rather illusory. It would be possible only if there were neither classes nor exploitative relations, nor differences in interests. But they do exist, and moreover, they define economic and political life. Under such circumstances, if the state treats everyone in the same way, and protects people's right to possess property, then it will inevitably sustain the privileged

position of those with capital. The whole apparatus of government tends to reproduce exploitation of wage-labour by capital.

John S. Mill's idea of negative liberty in a sense that people are free when they are not influenced while in a pursuit of their own goals, rests upon the assumption that freedom is entirely a matter of actions. It simply argues that citizens are free to the extent that they are able to act in a certain way. Marx emphasises this assumption as one of the main weaknesses of liberal democratic tradition, suggesting that it is not only the ability to act that makes one free, as enjoying a certain status, of independence is essential for one's freedom to be true. People do not have to be coerced in order to be unfree. The danger and possibility of coercion is enough for their freedom to be restrained. And in capitalist societies, where the majority of people live and work under this relation of dependence upon those who own capital, this majority is not free. In contrast to some other liberal views, treating politics as a matter of trust, like Locke proposed, in Marx opinion has no basis, since government not only does not act in a way to bring equality and liberty to its citizens, but it also serves the interest of already more powerful class. This is because the state itself directly depends on the economic, social and political power of the upper class. He believed that if the property is redistributed so that there is no surplus value, there would be no need for the protection of citizens' estate, and this would bring to 'the end of politics'. This is why, according to Marx, the old system must collapse to gradually make the societies more equal.

Marx's critique of liberal and liberal democratic thought is most clearly a strong one. However, liberal traditions gave some most significant ideas for changes in those times, and furthermore, represent the most widely accepted set of views in the world today. With liberal thought, for the first time in political world, notion of sovereign individual as a matter of priority, and as capable of creating his/her own destiny, was introduced. Although none of the theorists, except for J.S. Mill, was preoccupied with including women in the political life, (and many of them did not even specify who was to count as sovereign individual or even a citizen) it still was a significant discovery, for it brought a fundamental change in the way people think. It made people think of freedom as being free from interference, and as a matter of rights. Therefore, it can be argued that representative democracy has developed over time into a more clear and more settled set of ideas of today's political organisation, still maintaining the foundation of the old times.

However, to what extent the continuous racial, and national discrimination as well as injustice take place all over the world repeatedly, making the ideas of true democracy remain only in theory, is an issue that Marx would probably be very much concerned with if he lived today. History, as well as present time, have shown that the political equality in a sense of having the right to vote and to choose the government representatives does not help eliminate economic inequalities. Moreover, the inequalities continue to expand, and the gap between the rich and the poor is ever widening.

In spite of its significance, Marx's theory has a number of weaknesses, such as ignoring the possibility that people may, even without differences in property possession, engage into conflicts, and violate the rights of others, as well as that not all the inequalities among them are the consequences of class divisions. Marx recognised the significance of the role of elections of representatives, as well as of the possibility of removing those delegates, who show not to respect the public interests and wants, but this, in his opinion, was not sufficient. He saw the only solution in the end of politics and class divisions. This would bring an end to any basis for dispute, or debate about public matters whatsoever. There would be no groups or parties that would promote political views of the people either. Furthermore, if a Commune structure would gain almost limitless power,

there would be no guarantee that the elected ones would not abuse that power. If no institution is there to check their actions, who can secure that their actions will not be primarily concentrated on their own interests? This is why John M. Stuart's emphasis on the danger of an overgrown society, as explained above, should not be underestimated.

If the liberal or liberal democratic thought indeed managed to create a form of government that will act neutrally, but at the same time that will adopt some form of redistributive policies, perhaps its argument would be closer to freedom and equality, and there would not be such solid grounds for criticism. But being neutral and acting redistributively are two most contradicting terms, that can not be combined. It seems to me that this looks very much like today's active debate among economists whether the appropriate policy to adopt should have for a central concern equality of efficiency, one eliminating the possibility of the other to occur.

Both models have produced different, or even opposite ideas, but this does not necessarily mean that one should be accepted instead of the other. Rather, it is a continuous search for the way to combine the strengths of the two, avoiding as much as possible their weaknesses, that is needed for the analysis of the proper political and social organisation. Depending on a personal opinion, cultural and environmental influences, one might like one model better than another, but it would be wrong to say that either one should be ignored, as both were fighting for human rights, equality, and liberty.

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