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СВОБОДА И МОРАЛЬ С ПОЗИЦИЙ ЭКОСОЦИАЛИЗМА

Аннотация: Цель статьи — проанализировать проблему свободы в контексте экологического кризиса, переживаемого человечеством. С позиций «классической» марксистской философии, границы свободы человека неизбежно обусловлены необходимостью взаимодействия с другими людьми в рамках социума. Однако недостатком данного подхода является то, что общество зачастую рассматривается в отрыве от той природной среды, в рамках которой оно функционирует. Предполагая, что экологическая проблема в принципе не может быть решена в рамках капиталистической экономики, авторы приходят к выводу о том, что экологический кризис во многом обусловлен аморальностью «рыночных» установок, когда природа рассматривается исключительно как средство максимизации прибыли. В качестве возможной альтернативы современному рыночному капитализму необходимо рассматривать экологически ориентированный социализм (экосоциализм), неотъемлемой частью которого являются моральные принципы заботы об окружающей

*среде и обо всём живом на нашей планете, устанавливающие
«естественные» рамки свободы человека.*

*Ключевые слова: экосоциализм; свобода; мораль; природная среда;
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FREEDOM AND MORALITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECOSOCIALISM

Abstract: The article aims to analyse the concept of freedom in the context of the current ecological crisis. From the perspective of the “classical” Marxist philosophy, the human freedom is inevitably limited by the boundaries established by a society. This notion, however, has its shortcomings, as a society is often considered as an independent whole not interrelated with the nature. While assuming that ecological problems cannot in principle be resolved within the frameworks of capitalist economy, we argue that this can be explained by the inherent immorality of “market” attitudes towards the nature, as under capitalism the natural environment is often considered merely as a means of maximizing profit. On the contrary, in terms of ecosocialism an inherent part of morality, which establishes the “natural” limits of human freedom, should be

responsibility to the environment and every living thing. We conclude that it is possible to achieve this goal without revolutionary violence, and the State could play a crucial role in these processes.

Keywords: ecosocialism; freedom; morality; natural environment; society

Introduction

In today's world the ecological crisis forces the humanity to search for the way out of the current situation. At the same time, as the pandemic of Covid-19 demonstrates, contemporary capitalist civilization fails in solving the global problems presenting a challenge to the very human existence. The unlimited accumulation of capital, commodification of everything, ruthless exploitation of labor and nature, and attendant brutal competition undermine the bases of a sustainable future, thereby putting the very survival of the human species at risk. As Michael Löwy (2018) argues, the capitalist system, which is driven at its core by the maximization of profit, regardless of social and ecological costs, is incompatible with a just and sustainable future (see also Magdoff and Foster 2011). Simultaneously, according to Yanis Varoufakis (2020), when pushed to describe a fully fledged alternative to contemporary capitalism, for many decades the left-wing scholars and politicians have oscillated between the ugly (a Soviet-like barracks socialism) and the tired (a social democracy that financialised globalisation has rendered infeasible). In this sense, ecosocialism offers a radical alternative that puts social and ecological well-being first. Attuned to the links between the exploitation of labor and the exploitation of the environment, ecosocialism stands against both reformist "market ecology" and "productivist socialism." In synthesizing the basic tenets of ecology and the Marxist critique of political economy, ecosocialism offers a radical alternative to an unsustainable status quo. Rejecting a capitalist definition of "progress" based on market growth and quantitative expansion (which, as Marx shows, is a destructive progress), it advocates policies founded on non-monetary criteria,

such as social needs, individual well-being, and ecological equilibrium. Ecosocialism puts forth a critique of both mainstream “market ecology,” which does not challenge the capitalist system, and “productivist socialism,” which ignores natural limits. The “actually existing socialisms” of the twentieth century, with their often environmentally oblivious bureaucracies, do not offer an attractive model for today’s ecosocialists. Rather, we must chart a new path forward, one that links with the myriad movements around the globe that share the conviction that a better world is not only possible, but also necessary. By embracing a new model of robustly democratic planning, society can take control of the means of production and its own destiny. As people increasingly realize how the economic and ecological crises intertwine, ecosocialism has been gaining adherents. Ecosocialism, as a movement, is relatively new, but some of its basic arguments date back to the writings of Marx and Engels. Now, intellectuals and activists are recovering this legacy and seeking a radical restructuring of the economy according to the principles of democratic ecological planning, putting human and planetary needs first and foremost. In general terms, a focus on authentic needs over consumerism can facilitate the elevation of “being” over “having,” and the achievement of a deeper sense of freedom for all.

Probably it is not so easy to find a word that, in terms of frequency of use and in real significance, could be compared with the word “freedom”. But, from the perspective of ecosocialism, the main problem is if it always used in the right sense.

The article aims to analyse the general essence of the concept of freedom, which should be preserved in all cases of its particular application in terms of ecosocialism. It starts with the critical account of the concept of freedom. Further, the special emphasis is put on the theoretical frameworks developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It is argued that in today’s world the Marxian approach to the analysis of human freedom conundrum could enhance searching

for the ways out of the current ecological crisis. It is concluded that a true human freedom is closely interlinked with responsibility for the natural environment.

Conceptual groundwork

When analysing a variety of definitions of freedom, one can notice the definitions proposed by Aristotle and Spinoza. In essence, they are similar, but Spinoza's definition has the character of universality, so it is worth citing: "A thing is called free that exists only by the necessity of its own nature and is determined to action by itself" (Spinoza, Ethics, p. I). It is clear from the definition that freedom is the unhindered implementation of one's own, internal necessity of independence from external necessities (factors) that have negative significance. Freedom is achieved through the use of positive necessities (conditions, factors), first of all, the reflection (or, at the level of a person, cognition) of internal and external needs. Cognition is an essential condition of human freedom, but not its essence. In its general meaning, the concept of freedom is ontological and has the character of universality. Understanding the general meaning of freedom is a necessary methodological prerequisite for the study of human freedom in terms of the current ecological crisis. The category of freedom covers all spheres of being, including the natural environment. At the lower stages of the movement of matter, it appears in the simplest form, poor in content. So, within the boundaries of the mechanical form of movement, it would be possible to talk about the free fall of the body, the flow of the river, the movement of the planet in its orbit, bearing in mind that these processes determined by their own laws, "internal needs", are carried out without external hindrances. The applicability of the concept of freedom to living nature, to the world of plants and animals is even more obvious. For example, a plant needs enough space for the normal, free development of the root system, it needs free access to sunlight. A bird is free in the wild and imprisoned if caught and caged.

The meaning of the concept of freedom in all these examples consists, of course, not in the knowledge of necessity, but in the independence of the internal necessity of the nature of the given subject of freedom from external necessities (forces), in the unhindered realization of this internal necessity. As applied to the human world, the concept of freedom in its general meaning remains the same, although it acquires a more complex content. The moment of cognition of necessity is included in the content of the concept of human freedom and should be included in its detailed definition, but it expresses not the essence of freedom, but a condition, a means of ensuring it. The same must be said about the practical use by a person of this or that external necessity determined, among others, by the natural environment. In this case, the freedom is positive for her or him, as opposed to negative, which poses a threat to her or his freedom. The criterion for their assessment is the general nature of human being.

The limits of freedom

From the point of view of Karl Marx, it is impossible to talk about a person “in general”, because she or he is a set of social relations, and it is always historical, therefore it is correct to speak only about a person of a particular era. However, today this affirmation can be regarded as a logical error, as there cannot be historical, universal human relations in the “totality of social relations” in general. As Marx states, if we want to know what is useful for a person, we need to understand what its general nature is. At the same time, he noted that the latter is modified in each historical era. In modern philosophy, the concept of “general human nature” is becoming more and more popular.

Human being by her or his general nature is a universal being, a microcosm. It includes all structural levels of world being - physical, chemical, biological and social - that are in synergy, i.e., in a close interaction. The meaning of a person’s freedom is determined by the corresponding necessity of her or his nature, that is, by some aspect, for example, the biological one

meaning, among other things, the interconnectedness with natural environment. In this sense, freedom is, first of all, a means, a condition for a person to achieve her or his goals - values, goods, to the possession of which she or he aspires. It is one of the human benefits, which serves as the goal of the activity necessary to ensure it. Simultaneously, it acts as one of the elements of a human life in general, because it is necessary not only in individual specific cases, but in each of them, in their entirety, throughout a person's life. Consequently, freedom in each individual case should not contradict the possibility of possessing freedom in any subsequent case, and therefore its (freedom) preservation in the future. If a specific manifestation of freedom does not satisfy this requirement, then this means that it is not complete freedom, as in some respect it turns out to be unfreedom. In a generalized form, the goal of all human activity is happiness in a broad sense, as the well-being of life, bringing satisfaction with it. It is impossible with living in harmony with the natural environment, as only in such a case a person could live a healthy life. A reasonable understanding of happiness cannot also be individualistic, as a human being is a social being, and her or his entire psychology can be filled with social content; the meaning of life is presented to them not only as something narrow-minded, but as socially significant which means, among other things, taking responsibility of natural environment. In the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle affirms that, talking about self-satisfaction, we do not mean something that would satisfy a person living exclusively for herself or himself. In other words, a totally isolated person cannot in principle be satisfied, as self-satisfaction inevitably means something that would satisfy her or his parents, children, husband or wife, friends, and, in a general meaning, compatriots, since by nature a person is a social being. She or he attached primary importance to the common good. In return, this is impossible without preserving a common natural environment.

Immanuel Kant intended to distinguish strictly between the concepts of morality and happiness, but could not hold this point of view consistently: he

admitted that if a person is virtuous, then she or he will not enjoy life, not realizing her or his honesty in every act, no matter how much happiness favored her or him in her or his physical condition. What difference does it make whether moral satisfaction is recognized as a component of happiness or as a condition of it, as Kant believed? Both are true.

Kant's ethics are organized around the notion of a "categorical imperative," which is a universal ethical principle stating that one should always respect the humanity in others, and that one should only act in accordance with rules that could hold for everyone. Kant argued that the moral law is a truth of reason, and hence that all rational creatures are bound by the same moral law. Thus in answer to the question, "What should I do?" Kant replies that we should act rationally, in accordance with a universal moral law.

Kant also argued that his ethical theory requires belief in free will, God, and the immortality of the soul. Although we cannot have knowledge of these things, reflection on the moral law leads to a justified belief in them, which amounts to a kind rational faith. Thus in answer to the question, "What may I hope?" Kant replies that we may hope that our souls are immortal and that there really is a God who designed the world in accordance with principles of justice. In this sense, the limits of human freedom are clearly determined by natural and social environment.

The limits of freedom

Of course, it does not follow that only those who have studied the ethical theory, for example, studied the Critique of Practical Reason by Immanuel Kant and learned the categorical imperative, are reasonably and morally capable of acting. A child is born with the makings of moral feelings inherent in human instincts, in "archetypes", "collective unconscious", which correspond to the laws of morality.

In the process of forming a child as a personality in the very first years of life, under the influence of family relationships, both real and expressed in moral forms of consciousness (in assessments and normative requirements), in her or his psyche, these inclinations are transformed into moral feelings and qualities, they are assimilated ideas of goodness, duty, philanthropy, justice, etc., the rules of moral behavior.

In this process, the synthesis of innate unconscious moral structures with the forms of moral consciousness developed in the history of mankind is carried out, a moral component of personality psychology is formed, which includes an intuitive “knowledge” of the laws of morality, which determines the content of conscience and moral feelings, among other things, to natural environment. This intuitive “knowledge” is enough for a person to be completely and even to the highest degree moral, and, as such, act in accordance with the conditions of nature, with the law of higher social expediency, which makes it possible to ensure her or his well-being in every action and on throughout his life, and, therefore, her or his true freedom.

Genuine freedom is possible under two basic conditions: on the one hand, a person must be moral and humane, and, on the other hand, the society of which she or he is a member should be based on the principles of justice. There is one more condition: she or he must be reasonable enough to be able to correctly solve the life problems facing her or him. This is understandable by itself, although in difficult cases it may not be so easy to implement. As for the first condition, it must be borne in mind that people are morally, as in any other, far from the same.

All people, excluding pathological cases, are endowed with moral abilities, but in terms of the degree of development and practical effectiveness, they can be very different. Some firmly adhere to moral principles, while others for personal gain, as they understand it, or under extreme conditions violate them. The majority of people in a normal situation are inclined to “legal”,

correct behavior in terms of morality and law, but much in this respect depends on the economic and political situation in society.

The behavior of individuals is determined in an extremely complex way: both innate psychological characteristics and lifetime influences, such as family, school, friends, possibly criminal elements, etc, play a part. As for the second condition, it is the main and decisive one. It all depends on what this system is in terms of its relations to natural environment.

Exploitation of people and exploitation of nature

Under the primitive communal system, the needs of members of society were provided equally, no one served as a means of one-sided use for others. In this respect, everyone was equally free, although in the sense of independence of individual behavior, the measure of freedom was still extremely small, as a society was closely tied with the nature. Individuals with negative inclinations were forced to submit to the general order, the power of the collective and its leader. For tens of thousands of years of the existence of primitive communism, morality was an effective regulator of behavior within the boundaries of the clan, tribe and the union of tribes. The transition to the class system and private property is associated with the moral decline clearly described by Friedrich Engels in his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* based on Lewis Henry Morgan's study of clan society. Under these circumstances, the general attributes of a human being, including morality, underwent significant deformations. The individualistic tendency in the psychology and behavior of people who started to feel their superiority over nature is becoming a decisive force. As a consequence, harmony in society was giving way to disharmony, or, in Thomas Hobbes' sense, the struggle of all against all. At the same time, equality is being replaced by inequality. In this sense, social equality cannot be understood only in a quantitative sense. It means an equal quality of life, equal satisfaction with it, based on equality of real

opportunities and, from this point of view, on an equal position in society. In this context, in a class society, deep qualitative inequality takes place. Equal cooperation and mutual assistance, inherent in the general nature of man, are replaced by the exploitation of some people by others, society, its upper stratum, governing bodies are cruel, inhuman in relation to the lower stratum, which leads to its spiritual and physical degeneration. The same is likely true in relation to the natural environment. Whereas in a classless society the nature was perceived as a force which established the boundaries of human freedom, in a class society the nature became an object of exploitation by the ruling class and its ruling stratum.

All this is also characteristic of capitalism, whose ideologists glorify it as a “free society”. In fact, under capitalism the majority of population, the working people who are exploited as a means of enriching the bourgeoisie, are not fully free in the economic and political sense. What is freedom in its understanding by the bourgeoisie? The ideology of liberalism idealizes and elevates market relations to the absolute. Freedom, from the point of view of liberalism, is a certain innate quality of the individual, the ability to make independent decisions based on one’s personal interest. Related to this is the understanding of democracy as the freedom of the individual, although in its essence democracy means something completely different, namely the power of the people, society as a whole, which, as is obvious, can limit the freedom of individuals to the extent necessary determined, among other things, by natural environment. In fact, under capitalism there is no absolute freedom. The limits of freedom are determined by laws, the violation of which entails punishment, which is not consistent with the principle of absolute freedom of the individual. It is inevitably limited by the interest of society which in reality are often understood as the interests of the ruling class. In this context, the main problem is whether these interests are in favor of the natural environment.

If everyone is declared as “the highest value”, then every desire is the “highest goal”. Yet, what should we do in the case when these goals contradict one another? From this point of view, there is no reasonable way to resolve this contradiction but the “war of all against all” which destroys the the natural environment. Ruthless, inhuman competition in which some win and others are defeated makes the nature merely a battlefield of the war for profit. Under such circumstances, no one can be truly free, as the implementation of one’s goals depends, among other things, on limited natural resources.

Human choice presupposes human needs and interests. To make an appropriate decision, the human will must be based on substantive prerequisites, namely on the understanding of the requirements of human nature, express the desires and aspirations of a person, be guided by her or his knowledge of herself or himself and the world in which she or he lives. It turns out that the will is dependent, causally conditioned. In this regard the crucial question is then of what is its freedom in relation to what (for what) and from what is it free?

Free will lies not in its supposedly unconditioned nature, but in the ability to ensure the realization of the necessity of human nature, human needs and interests, and, on the other hand, in the ability to understand external and internal forces that inevitably limit human freedom. Will is truly free if it encourages a person to act in order to achieve her or his true good by observing the law of the highest social expediency, reconciling personal and social, ensuring the harmony with the natural environment and, therefore, if it is guided by the requirements of morality.

Criticizing indeterminism, Ilya M. Sechenov noted that he puts the will “outside the laws of the Earth”. However, he came to the conclusion that there can be no free will. But with a correct understanding of freedom, its recognition does not contradict determinism, but, on the contrary, is fully consistent with it. For this, of course, it is necessary to correctly interpret the principle of determinism. In other words, it is necessary to take into account the dialectics of

the relationship between the general and the individual. Any concrete process is subject not only to general laws, but also has its own internal characteristics; it is not simply a consequence of external causes, but contains its own causality. This was initially pointed out by Epicurus who affirmed that an atom can deviate from the general direction of motion. Leibniz expressed the idea that there are no two absolutely identical things. This means that changes in each thing will depend on its own nature. In this sense, we can say about the will that it has its own nature, and, therefore, is able to act independently in relation to some external influences, that is, to be free from them.

Free will is a form of human freedom and a means of ensuring it. The will serves not by itself, but by the person whose will it is. The content of the will is determined by the needs inherent in human nature. As the governing instance, it expresses the incentive forces. But, at the same time, it should be independent of those of them that contradict the basic, general and main need, that is, the need to ensure the well-being of all forms of life and the natural environment in general. This independence also contains the meaning of free will, and, therefore, human freedom.

To be free in general, a person must have a reasonable will capable of overcoming the particular needs and desires that are harmful both for him personally and for other people, for society as a whole and for the nature. After all, it is clear that the harm she or he is doing will ricochet back to her or him.

Perhaps this permits us better understand the Marx's statement that in the future the free development of everyone will be a condition for the free development of everyone. In other words, the freedom of one should not be an obstacle to the freedom of others; moreover, it should contribute to the freedom of all. In return, such freedom is impossible without living in harmony with the nature. But this is possible only in a society where social harmony takes place.

On the contrary, the current liberal understanding of freedom as an unconditioned "absolute" is completely false. The freedom of a "market" person

is actually determined by the narrow framework of bourgeois, commodity-money relations. This “freedom” is thus a slavish dependence of a person on these relations, which forcibly alienate her or him from genuine human nature and the natural environment. As a consequence, a person becomes one-dimensional and perverted, hostile to other people and society as a whole, as well as to the natural environment.

The capitalist economy is a sphere of inhuman, immoral relations, and it necessarily deprives a person of a genuine freedom. The freedom itself turns out to be the freedom of a lonely beast, which has nothing to do with truly human freedom.

However, the individual cannot be understood as something that excludes the social which in many respects is determined by the natural environment. When imbued with social content, it is determined by society and can be “challenged” by it if it deviates from its interests and requirements related, for example, to the environmental protection. In this sense, the freedom of a person depends on the freedom of others. As a consequence, all individual freedoms must be coordinated with each other, and, therefore, obey the social laws that underlie their mutual agreement, namely the laws of morality and law.

A person is not born with a ready-made freedom, independent of the conditions of her or his life, “given” to her or him initially as a consequence of biological processes determined by the natural factors. But how can a human being make a choice without knowing what to choose from? To do this, one need to be aware of one’s personal interests and their interrelation with the interests of society. Without this awareness, there can be no free and meaningful choice. A person is born with certain needs, for the satisfaction of which appropriate conditions (for example, safe and clean natural environment) are necessary. Only if they are available, she or he is able to achieve her or his goals. As a result, a person becomes free objectively and, thanks to this, subjectively, that is, capable to make a free choice.

Depending on what this choice is, one can distinguish between two categories of people holding opposite positions. They can be called “pragmatists” and “idealists”. The first strive for material values, the second for spiritual and moral values. Some see their freedom of choice in acquiring material wealth and do not attach serious importance to the principles of morality. It results, among other things, in the actions directed towards the destruction of the natural environment. Others, without totally giving up material well-being, but most often without achieving it or deliberately sacrificing it, consider themselves free only insofar as they can follow the requirements of morality, live with a clear conscience, fulfill their social duty, be humane and fair, working to ensure the good of everyone, society, and all living things.

The content of freedom of choice is socially conditioned, but different people consider it in different ways. The “pragmatists” follow the need to ensure their individual interests in the conditions of the emergence and development of private property relations, thereby contributing to the progress of material production. The “idealists” follow the need to affirm the ideal of harmonious sociality, reflecting the properties of the general nature of a human being, the need for progressive forces to embody this ideal in life, when a historical opportunity arises for this. But these two types of choice, from the point of view of the general nature of human being and human morality, are by no means equivalent: the first is negative, and only the second is positive.

Representatives of the first group in the era of the emergence of private property are the leading force in this process, take possession of the means of production, namely land, livestock, water for irrigating the field, become slave owners, take power over society and natural resources into their own hands. This is the content of their freedom. But this freedom in social terms cannot be considered truly human. Using it, people become inhuman, and not only to the lower class, but also to the natural environment. Their social organization is

internally antagonistic and unstable, methods of violence and deceit play a crucial role in it. In terms of such a system of relations, freedom and well-being are not guaranteed to anyone; people at any level of the social ladder can be and indeed often do find themselves victims of violence and are physically eliminated. It is clear that there can be no reliable freedom of the individual, even in its most elementary form. Amoralism reaches its peak among the ruling class in bourgeois society, which causes a destruction of the natural environment. The reason is that all human values are pushed aside here by one value, namely money, profit, material wealth. There is no place for a sense of public duty, justice, honor and conscience. And, therefore, there is no place for freedom in its proper sense meaning freedom of equal, mutually beneficial cooperation and assistance aimed at living in harmony with natural environment.

It is clear that under existing conditions it is impossible to accustom people to live according to the principles of morality on a mass scale, and it makes no sense to set such a task. How can you educate young people in the spirit of the requirements of morality, if life, economic and political realities teach something completely different, namely personal enrichment, indifference to the needs of those suffering from poverty and the destruction of the natural environment? No moral lessons, neither religious nor secular, can do anything significant here.

Conclusion

The critical account of the notion of freedom and its interrelation with morality permits us to conclude that ecosocialism means not changing merely economic and political conditions of life of people. This requires a change in government policy. The state must become not only social, but environmentally oriented without revolutionary violence. This is an important step towards a future harmonious society. The income gap between rich and poor needs to be significantly narrowed. It is necessary to overcome the prejudice that the state

should not interfere in market relations⁴ otherwise, it could result in ecological catastrophe. As the natural environment can be regarded as a basis of a stable development of any society, such a catastrophe would inevitably result in a total social collapse. To avoid such a scenario, people around the globe must be widely engaged in the political activity opposing the current trends of social development. At the same time, the state remains the center of management within a society within the frameworks of ecosocialism. The state should manage the market in the public interest by means of law (for example, legislation aimed at the environmental protection). Law differs from morality in that it relies on violent coercion. Since not all citizens voluntarily fulfill the norms of morality, fear of external punishment, along with conscience, has always been and, apparently, will remain in the foreseeable future as a factor in the regulation of the behavior of individuals. At the same time, the law must always correspond to morality, embody its essence, the law of the highest social expediency. In this context, law enforcement must be fully incompatible with humiliation of human dignity in any form. A truly legitimate legal system is possible only in a humane society living in harmony with the nature.

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