

J.S. Mill and Marx on Freedom and Alternative Structures of Political Economy: A Reconstructive, Critical and Comparative Inquiry

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Abstract:

The proposed paper is intended to provide critical and comparative perspectives on the ideas of freedom to be found in the works of John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx, and how these normative conceptions relate to their visions of alternative economic, social and political systems. Drawing ideas and perspectives from their classic texts (by Mill, such as those from: *On Liberty*, *Principles of Political Economy*, *On the Subjection of Women*, *Utilitarianism*; and by Marx, such as those from: *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *German Ideology*, *Capital*, among others), I shall provide interpretive and reconstructive accounts of the conceptions of freedom which may be implicit or explicit in their written works, and how they relate to their alternative conceptions of the political economy – the latter understood as alternative configurations of socio-economic and political structures. With these possible interpretations and reconstructions, I shall proceed to argue that these, in certain ways, different but related conceptions of freedom, based on ideas which may be implicit or explicit in their works, are crucial to understanding their normative conceptions of political economy. Moreover, I shall suggest that their views on freedom go deeper and more systematic than what tends to be often attributed to them (or denied them, as is often the case with Marx). Apart from the interpretive and reconstructive attempts of their normative understandings and visions (which may include other normative ideas, such as those relating to equality and human development, but with freedom as the central and fundamental conception), I shall also attempt – with many contemporary issues and problems, as well as ideas and perspectives, in mind in the background – to critically compare these conceptions/perspectives and examine them, with the end in view of learning from these ideas. I shall critically compare and characterize their conceptions of freedom in terms of their various aspects, including the formal/substantive, process/outcome, justificatory/validity, and realization/feasibility aspects, which I shall relate to issues of alternative designs of institutions and policy – including those at the level of fundamental constitutional framework, in the domains of markets, regulatory framework and interventions, property relations, education, and so on.

Outline

I Freedom and Alternative Structures of Political Economy: Some General Considerations on Frameworks and Fundamental Issues

A. Basic Deontic Considerations: Freedom in Terms of Permissions, Obligations, and Forbearances

- 1) On Negative and Positive Rights
- 2) Distinguishing Libertarianism and Liberalism
- 3) Distinguishing Obligations

B. Capability Considerations: Some Critical Reflections and Reconstructions From A.K. Sen

- 1) Commodities and Capabilities
- 2) Unpacking the "Utilization Function"
- 3) Distinguishing Innate and Developed Capacities;
- 3) Non-commodity Aspects of Capabilities
- 4) Process and Outcome Aspects
- 5) The Importance of both Positive and Negative Rights

C. Structural-Dynamic Considerations on Capacities: Towards Generalizing and Developing Insights from Piaget-Habermas-Kohlberg

- 1) Environmental-Institutional Structures and the Development of Capacities
- 2) Reciprocal and Dynamic Interactions
- 3) Agency Considerations

D. "Inner" Environments and Motivational Structures: Some General Considerations on Autonomy and Practices

- 1) Freedom, Decisions and Practices
- 2) Developing Capacities and Practices

E. On the Communicative Aspects of Freedom

- 1) Rights, Freedom and Dialogue
- 2) The Proceduralist and Constructivist Conception of Freedom
- 3) The Value of Communication to Freedom and Vice Versa

F. “Agency Aspects”: On the Reflection, Design, Construction and Transformation of Theoretical Frameworks, Valuational Systems and Institutional Structures

- 1) Freedom and Alternative Theoretical Frameworks
- 2) Value Systems, Reflection and Decision
- 3) Design and Transformation of Institutions

G. On Freedom Regimes and Institutions

- 1) The Constitution
- 2) Property and Other Rights
- 3) Markets and Regulatory Frameworks
- 4) Education and Other Institutions

II J.S. Mill on Freedom and Institutions: Dialectical Confrontations

A. Mill on Liberty, Justice and Utility

- 1) Liberty: Basic Conception
- 2) The Greatest Happiness Principle and Liberty

B. Equality, Liberty and Freedom

- 1) Mill on Equality, Opportunity and Freedoms
- 2) Negative and Positive Freedoms in Mill
- 3) Equity and Voice

C. Mill on Cultivation, Autonomy and Practices

- 1) Capacities and Cultivation
- 2) Freedom, Practices and the Cultivation of Capacities

- 3) "The Permanent Interests of Mankind as a Progressive Being"
- 4) Pursuing a Broader Conception of Freedom

D. The Institutions of Freedom in Mill

- 1) Constitutional Rights and the State
- 2) Markets and Freedoms
- 3) The Family and Other Institutions

III Marx on Freedom and Institutions: Reinterpretations and Reconstructions

A. Essentialism, "Species- Being" and "True Community": Interpretations and Reconstructions

- 1) Alienation and "Species Being": Human Development and Freedom in Marx
- 2) The Idea of a "True Community"

B. On Rights and Individual and Collective Interest: Critical Reconstructions

- 1) Marx's Early Critique of the Concept of Rights
- 2) Distributive Justice and the Historicity of Rights in Marx
- 3) Towards a Broader Conception of Freedom: Reconstructions and Reinterpretations from Marx

C. Anarchist and Liberal Trajectories: Communism and Human Development

- 1) The "Communist Man"
- 2) Freedom and Human Development
- 3) Beyond Essentialism and Extreme Libertarianism

D. Considerations on Alternative Structures of Political Economy: On Constitutions, Rights, Markets, and Regulatory Regimes

- 1) Constitutions, Rights and Human Development
- 2) Planning, Markets and Freedoms

IV Freedom and Alternative Structures of Political Economy: Generalizing Reflections on the Reconstructive Project

- A. Beyond Libertarianism and Towards a Comprehensive Framework Involving Formal and Substantive Freedoms
 - 1) Incorporating Negative and Positive Freedoms
 - 2) Involving Both Process and Outcome Considerations
 - 3) Towards a Multi-Institutional Perspective

- B. The Importance of Structural and Agency Considerations
 - 1) Understanding Environmental- Institutional Structures and Agency
 - 2) Understanding Important Relationships Between the Two
 - 3) The Importance of the Collective Agency and the Communicative Aspects of Freedom

- C. Concluding Reflections on Fundamental Frameworks and Alternative Structures of Political Economy: Constitutions and Rights, Markets and Regulatory Regimes, and the Role of Other Institutions
 - 1) Constitutions and Rights
 - 2) Markets and Freedoms
 - 3) Realizing Freedoms through Educational and Other Institutions