

KARL MARX'S SOCIO-POLITICAL THEORY AS A WELFARIST PHILOSOPHY

Anweting, Kevin Ibok

Department Of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja

kevinanweting@gmail.com

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Abstract

The work examines Marx's political theory as a welfarist philosophy, emphasizing its inseparable connection to his social and economic philosophy. At the heart of Marx's welfarism lies his unwavering commitment to individualism, asserting that the utmost purpose of human societies is the self-realization of individuals. His ontology forms the grounding on which humans have been alienated and institutionalized in the capitalist world. Marx's political philosophy vehemently prioritizes active and practical aspects of life over abstract notions, firmly positioning everyday life as a realm for the realization of self and human welfare. This work actively brings to light Marx's philosophy of welfarism, deeply entrenched in the well-being of the proletariat (the workers), underpinning Marx's resounding assertion, "Workers of all nations unite." Additionally, Marx articulates a robust and pragmatic conception of welfarism, serving as the cornerstone for contemporary unionism. The paper employs the analytic method.

Keywords: Communism, Individualism, Marxism, Philosophy, Welfarism

Introduction

Political Philosophy from ancient times to the contemporary has always been concerned with the need to build a more equitable, just, and prosperous society. Political philosophers have prescribed various philosophical justification that serves as the basis for articulating their thoughts that will result in innovative society structure, institutions, and social practices. It is the need to build a more egalitarian society that necessitated Karl Marx to articulate his socio-political philosophy which is known as Marxism. This work shall analyze Karl Marx's socio-political theory as a welfarist philosophy.

It aims to provide an interpretation and critical exposition of Marx's vision of welfare or what he sees as constituting a good life. His vision of welfare brings to the fore a commitment to workers (proletariat welfare). It suffices to agree with John Elster that "the ultimate value and goal of human societies is the self-realization of individuals," (8). Marx before coming to this position was critical of capitalism as a system because of its exploitative tendency. Capitalism was a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie to exploit the masses of the people, especially the proletariats. For Marx, the enrichment of the powers and capacities of society cannot come at the expense of the power and capacities of the individual. To achieve welfare, alienated labour under capitalism has to be overcome through the enthronement of communism. For Marx labour is best suited for human self-realization. Marx's advancement of communism provides the most feasible and desirable basis for his vision of welfarism. Marx determines what society would be best for human beings and what could lead to its realization. He elevates

social systems, theories, and human actions to whether they promote or inhibit human welfare. Based on this, Marx argues and gives credence to the communist society as the only society in which the full development of all-sided individuals would be the highest value for which human welfare can be truly realized.

Understanding Welfarism

The concept welfarism has been contested by philosophers, economists and political theorists as well as practical politicians, policy analyst and social commentators. Most of these theorists tend to place welfare in relations to rights, equality, justice, needs, and so on. The economist outlined their concept of welfare on three essential features: what are individual welfare, social welfare and the relationship between them. The economist at the individual level identifies welfare with utility, (Alan Hamlin, 2). The idea of welfare suggests that the theory of individual welfare with the notion of welfarism brings about a reasonable conceptualization of welfare in the individual and social sphere.

On the social sphere, social welfare is conceived as, “the ethical value or goodness of social state;” (Alan, 2). Social welfare is dependent only on individual welfare. As a standard, social welfare is used to identify the overall good of the society. The good of society as stated earlier depends only on individual welfare. This is what is meant by welfarism. Welfare is the duty of the government to guarantee. Based on this, Emmauale Eyo defines welfare as the practical or financial help that is provided often by the government and its machinery and agencies for the people in a given nation-state (63). This practical or financial help is the social good which makes up the individual good. That is to say that all individual good contributes to the social good. The government provides a range of social goods, free services, and programmes and projects to the people who need them. In this way, welfare is said to be synonymous with “the common good,” (Eyo, 63). According to him, “the common good” is the collective benefits accruable to all and sundry in a given society. Thus, the common good is the temporal welfare of the society, taken both collectively and distributively,” (Eyo, 63).

Marx and the Problem Of Capitalism

Karl Marx a German Philosopher and political theorist is seen as a founder of communism and dialectical materialism. Marx believes that all societies change by passing from one stage to a new stage and the type of means of production determines these changes. For instance, according to Marx, “the primitive capitalist society gives rise to feudalism,” (Marx, 10). This stage witnessed the struggle of rich landowners and peasants. The next stage was capitalism where there was serious antagonism between the proletariat (workers and Bourgeoisie (Capitalists; those who own the means of production. In other words, there existed a struggle between the haves and the have not. Marx envisioned the revolution of the proletariat class and the subsequent establishment of socialism. That is, the antagonism between the bourgeoisie (thesis) and proletariat (antithesis) will give rise to synthesis which is the emergence of socialism,” (Marx, 130). Marx had said that capitalism was bound to fail because of inherent contradictions in it. The features inherent in capitalist societies like shortages, alienation of labour, inequality of allocation of resources and over production made it susceptible to destruction, (Robert Biel, 40). Given this, Marx attempts to create a society with equal

economic and political opportunities where the state will take charge of ownership and equal distribution of resources to the citizenry for the improvement of their welfare.

Marx opined that in the capitalist system, workers are alienated from their labour. In other words, workers are externalized from their labour. In a capitalist society, the labourers activities prevent them from belonging to them. The more the worker puts his life into the object the more he belongs to the object. The object no longer belongs to him, (Marx, 134). In the capitalist society, the proletariats are seen as productive tools. In this vein, Marx sees the inherent consequences of the capitalist as constitutive of the man receiving the means of subsistence and that he receives an object of labour, (David Harvey, 54).

The proletariats or workers in the capitalist system experienced alienation. The workers' being alien to their labour becomes alienated from their labour and makes them alien from the materials they produce. Life becomes meaningful to workers depending on what they can produce. In this situation workers lose their identity as human beings; they have no chance to develop their mental or physical skills and for survival they continue to live a life of vicious circle and dehumanization. According to Marx, in this situation workers are coerced or forced to work. In view of this, "the worker feels himself only outside his work. His work has coerced and force, not voluntary, (Karl Marx, 136). In this situation, the worker would not feel himself or fulfilled his human and mental needs.

Furthermore, Marx argues that the capitalist bourgeoisie exploit the proletariats. He recognizes that the work carried out by the proletariat created great wealth for the capitalists. The products created in the factory, that is the material outcome of worker's labour sold for more than the value of their labour, invariably more than the worker's wages. The workers in these circumstances do not benefit or are deprive of the fruit of his labour.

More so, given this situation, Marx believes that capitalism contains the seed of his own destruction. He notes that the wealth of the bourgeoisie depended on the work of the proletariat. Based on this Marx predicted that the continued exploitation of the poor workers would create great resentment. This as a consequence would lead to revolution against the bourgeoisie. The struggle will lead to the overthrow of capitalism and its lieutenants. According to Marx, "Modern Bourgeoisie society is like a sorcerer; who is no longer able to control the neither world whom he has called up by his spells," (Marx, 138). Consequently, the defense of the capitalist by the proletariat leads to the emergence of a new society, a classless society based on the principle, "for each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," (Thomas Paul, 159). In this society, everything will be owned in common, including land, industry, wealth and labour will be shared between all people. The idea of class structure will be phased out and the state wither away, giving rise to a classless society or a communist society as Marx would make us know.

Marx on Labour

Marx sees labour as a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man on his accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reaction between himself and nature. In economics, labour refers to any mental or physical exertion undertaken to obtain a pecuniary

gain,” (Alfred Marshall, 204). For Marx, the main aim or essence of labour should be the promotion of human freedom, development, and well-being. For workers, their labour should aim at developing their human potential, and activities and be able to control their work process.

Human labour dignifies man and helps satisfy his living. The goodness and usefulness of work should be incorporated as an integral part of man and his life. Labour as defined by Alfred Marshall, “is any exertion of mind and body undergone partly and wholly to earn some good other than the pleasure derived directly from the work,” (Alfred Marshall, 206).

Again, Marx avers that labour keeps humans in touch with reality, meaning that every man is a labourer or worker. As a labourer man should take absolute control of what he produces. However, in the capitalist system this is not so, the capitalist controls workers lives, limit their power, amass wealth and become more powerful. In this system the worker or what Marx calls alienation, the worker or man is separated from his activity, from his self, labour process and from other men. The worker or labourers have no association with his labour. The worker has no association or identification with his labour. What he produces goes to the employer and sold out under a brand new name which he himself cannot recognize. He does not get any reward, satisfaction or recognition for the labour that he puts in. In view of this, the worker expertise “activity as passivity, power as impotence, procreation as emasculation, the worker's own physical and mental energy, his personal life as an activity directed against himself, which is independent of him and does not belong to him, (Samuel Akpan 155)

Furthermore, when at work, the labourer feels like a person out of sorts. However, he feels more pleasure and happiness when he is not working, rather than when he is at work. He does not work because he likes to work, but because he has no other alternative but to work as a means to earning his/her bread. Without force, all work is scrupulously avoided. There is always a feeling in the mind of workers that they are not working for themselves but for someone else. Workers are also alienated from labour in the sense that private property which is created out of their labour in the form of profit does not belong to them, but belongs to the employer, who have no sympathy for them. For man's labour to become meaningful, he must sever himself from the apron string of capitalism and return to his state of nature. According to Marx, it is a matter of “the complete return of man to himself as a social being, a return becomes conscious and accomplished with the entire wealth of previous development,” (Samuel Akpan, 155). The solution to the labour of the labourers becoming impactful lays in the complete eradication of capitalism with its antics and mechanisms.

Marx On Right

Marx's exposition of human rights in the state brings to the fore the inadequacy of bourgeoisie rights theory to address the needs and welfare of human beings. His critique of bourgeoisie rights theory is due to his belief that the satisfaction of human wants or needs and fulfillment of individual needs is the highest goal for humans. Central to his critique on rights is that bourgeoisie rights theory is based on an account of individuals' interests as well as that which is a leftover from the system of entitlement in feudal society, and functions in the feudal state to protect the privilege of the bourgeoisie. Given this, rights are properties of class society and

the condition of scarcity and domination that characterize relations among human beings in a capitalist system. This kind of right will have no place in a society where the free development of individual is the condition for the growth and development of all,” (Karl Marx and Fredrick Engel, 264).

Hegel in his attempt to explain the nature of morality in his Philosophy of Right, held that “what is rational is real, he noted that the state represent the most rational form of society and resolution of all the contradictions that had propelled the development of history up to his formation; based on this no further political development is either desired or possible. In his reaction, Marx criticized Hegel for not providing an objective account of the nature of right rather he merely described the structure of the Prussian state and considered it to be the highest level of social organization possible. Though Marx regards Hegel's philosophy of right as fruitful but pointed out that Hegel failed to examine the real activity of the state and its impact or consequences for the human beings who have and are affected by it.

Marx sees the modern state as based on capitalism and upon which the man of civil society is linked with other men only on ties of interest and unconscious natural necessity, the slave of labour for grain and of his own as well as other men's selfish needs,” (Austin Sarat and Thomas Keams, 113).

For Marx, “rights in the capitalist state are formulated to protect the privileges which simply do not exist for the vast majority of persons, (Karl Marx, 140). This kind of state when it comes to improving the situation of workers advances human emancipation and allows man's access to society's resources to develop man's capacity, seeing the rights guaranteed by the state as being insufficient.

Consequently, human emancipation which follows from political emancipation liberates man, making man act as a true being, acting in cooperation with other individuals who have an understanding of himself as a member of the community and regard other people as a source of his freedom, not as a barrier to his or other's freedom. The right of man does not:

go beyond egoistic man, beyond man as member of civil society, that is, an individual man withdrawn into himself, into the confines of his private interest and private caprice and separated from the community. In the right of man, he is far from being conceived as a specie being; on the contrary, species-like-itself, society, appears as a framework external to the individual, as a restriction of their original independence ((Austin Sarat and Thomas Keams, 164).

However, Marx argues that appeal to rights plays a progressive role in preparing the proletariats to act as a united power. Right motivates workers to seize power by uniting together aiming at the overthrow of the existing bourgeoisie society. In a transitional socialist society, right of man is quite distinct from that of bourgeoisie society. Right in this society correspond to a person who has no claim to private property and who survives and develops through cooperation with another person upon whom he shares mutual dependence. In the next subheading, emphasis is placed on welfarism through the attainment of communism. Arising from this Marx asserted, “Workers of all nations unite.” This is the fulcrum of Marx's socio-political theory as a welfarist philosophy.

Marx Socio-Political Theory As a Welfarist Philosophy

With global capitalism, worsening poverty, and conflict, sustainable human development comes to the fore as the basic issue that the state should try to solve. It is within this ambit Marx's vision of welfarism would be most helpful. His welfarism informs the struggle for more healthy, sustainable, and liberal forms of human development. This can only be feasible through overcoming capitalism's social separation of the producer from the necessary condition of production. He envisions the conversion of capital into the property of producers, rather as the property of producers, no longer as the private property of the individual producers but as the property of associated producers, as outright social property, (Karl Marx, 437). Marx's communism promotes individual welfare by protecting an individual's right to share in social property. In communist society, individual welfare claims should be left in society with the inscription, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," (Karl Marx, 10). This mode of Marx's welfarism, "allows all members of the society to develop maintain and exert their capacities in all possible directions," (Engel, 221).

Communism as a society organized for cooperative working on a planned basis "to ensure all members of society the means of existence and the full development of their capacities," (Engels, 167). In a similar vein, Engel gives credence to the practical aspect of life by giving priority to "securing for every member of society an existence which is not fully sufficient from a material standpoint but guarantees to them the completely unrestricted development of the physical and mental faculties," (Engels, 309). Marx envisions communism as "an organization of production and intercourse which will make possible the normal satisfaction of needs. According to Marx, the regime of communism is, "a regime of unlimited access to a boundless supply of all goods and services (Engels, 205).

Marx in his vision of welfare put an extraordinary emphasis on the notion of individual self-realization through the all-round development of individual power and capacities. Giving allusion to this Marx says that, "it is every person's vocation, designation, task' to achieve all-round development of his abilities," (Karl Marx and Fredrick Engel, 292). Again, the authentic realization of welfare for individuals is more feasible in the community. Thus human welfare finds its fulfillment in reciprocity and solidarity in mutual identification in common activities and pursuit of common purposes in a community that has an idea of communism. Thus, human welfare or self-realizations are made feasible in a community. According to Marx and Engel:

Only within community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community, in the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association (78).

Marx brings to the fore a reconciliation of human welfare, and self-realization through the community. In the communist state, individuals realize themselves in the community with others.

Furthermore, it is important to note that one of the central capacities of human beings "is the

capacity to develop and pursue their own goals and projects,” (John Rawls, 525). Unlike in the capitalist system, in communism, individual welfare is realized not by fulfilling the goals that are set for them by their social position, but by striving after goals they freely chose for themselves. It is due to this position that many see labour as a fundamental source of wealth and welfare in communism. Again, it is important to note that individual welfare can only take place in the community, (Rawls, 143). Living in a community is a means for the achievement of welfare. Living in the community with others as communitarians will say is a means for the pursuit of a good life.

Furthermore, it is important to state that Marx as a communitarian argues that human welfare or self-realization can only occur in a community because the individual's welfare is realized by fulfilling the goal they are given by the social role they exhibit. On the other hand, Marx also thinks that individual welfare and self-realization can only be achieved in community. Marx however abhors the place of social role in the society, because according to him social roles makes man become alien to his own deed or his deed becomes alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. In the distribution of labour, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. Communism brings to an end the fixation on social activity experienced in the capitalist system. For Marx, roles always come from outside and free individuals should not be bound by them if they want to achieve welfare and self-realization.

More so, Marx claims that to achieve human welfare, alienation must be eradicated. Overcoming alienation entails the transformation of the social world through the abolition of the division of labor. This according to Marx is only possible in society. The individual can only achieve his freedom and welfare through the community. Thus, individual self-realization requires community since it is only in the community in association with others that man can liberate themselves and achieve self-realization and welfare from the enslavement of capitalism.

Individual requires the community under communism, only in community with others does man have the means of cultivating his gift. On this Marx and Engels notes that:

The transformation of personal power into material power, cannot be dispelled by dismissing the general idea of it from one's mind, but can only be abolished by the individuals again subjecting those material powers to themselves and abolishing the division of labour. This is not possible without the community. Only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gift in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community. In the real community the individual obtain their freedom and self-realization through their association (78).

In the *German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx brings to the fore that living in the community with others provides the individual with the means for a good life or welfare. From the foregoing, it is important to note that Marx blends individualism with communitarianism in his communism. Marx on one hand emphasizes the fulfillment that comes from serving others, from producing a product that satisfies other's needs. Given this, to achieve human welfare, Marx reconciled the idea of individual self-realization with ideals of community. Hegel like Marx placed much emphasis on individual self-realization. As for

Marx, individual can only achieve true self-realization in a community.

According to Marx, it is incumbent on the social collective to provide education, to offer human living conditions to those who cannot work to regulate emergencies and for future investment. This theory accommodates a strong principle of equality and welfare. Before full communism, the society would regulate records, so both unequal exchange and violation of initial equal access to resources would have been realized. With this, every person is being accommodated in the regime of welfarism.

Again, human welfare is possible only under communism. Communism is an 'authentic community' where man experiences his essence. "This essence arises out of the need and egoism of individual," (Marx, 356). The authentic community of man expressed in communism is where man experiences his authentic existence through social activity, social enjoyment, and social welfare. Capitalism as we have seen prevents man from recognizing themselves as human and sharing welfare is hard to get. To achieve human welfare, humans need experience upon which capitalism is replaced with authentic human welfare in a communist state.

For Marx, to achieve and enjoy his welfare, a man in need of the totality of vital human expression, is the man in whom his realization exists as an inner necessity, as need, ((Karl Marx, 357). Central to individual welfare is for man to realize himself as truly a human, (Eric Habsbawn, 78). Under communism, the individual self is the greatest wealth for man. In the communist state the inner need of man is realized and sees other individuals as the source of their own life, (Habsbawn, 79). In this vein, Communism becomes a positive abolition of human self-alienation which brings to reality the effective appropriation of the human essence by and for man. For Marx, freedom brings about self-realization in man's authentic experience of himself as the end of capitalism.

Conclusion

Marx as we have seen did not lay down a systematic and thorough presentation of his views regarding welfare, he did leave behind an immerse work investing a wide array of issues in welfare theory. Through a close study of his thought, it is possible to see that Marx had a clear and systematic concept of welfare especially in his critique of capitalism. From the foregoing, it is clear that welfare is central to Marx's vision of a future communist society. His idea of welfare is not limited to the development of certain creative power and capacities of man but in caring for human individuals by producing for their needs. In view of this, in producing and caring for human individual makes Marx's conception of welfarism more realistic vision of a good life. Marx's welfarist philosophy is based on this conception of the satisfaction of essential human needs. His philosophy of welfarism is based on solidarity and cooperation, recognized by its attention to human needs, founded on the collective process of production and distribution of social products, not on principle of exploitation and competition which is at the core of capitalism. In the Communist Manifesto Marx says, that "in place of old bourgeoisie society with its classes and class antagonism, we shall have an association in which free development of each individual is the condition for the free development of all," He further says that, "the proletariat movement is the conscious movement of immense majority

in the interest of imminence majority,” (Marx, 71). With this in mind Marxism brings to praxis the significance of labour in the social engineering of individual welfare. The labour of the labourers (proletariats) is channeled to the common welfare or the interest of the community. That is, with the overthrow of capitalism and introduction of communism the welfare of the citizens is being safeguarded.

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