



Labour, Nature, Freedom and Universalism: Communism between capitalist longevity and radical break

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ABSTRACT: Marx is praised as an honorable fighter for equality, even by many political opponents. At the same time, it seems to be the broadly accepted consensus that he sacrificed individual freedom to loftier ideals of justice and equality. This narrative must be retired, as it does not hold up to scrutiny; Marx saw great value in freedom and individuality. However, he did not share the liberal anthropologist view of the abstract concept of freedom. Instead, he insisted on the need for social cooperation to realize further degrees of personal freedom. He understood that freedom does not exist as a formal category, but only ever in relation to a specific need in a human-nature interaction. For this reason an understanding of Marx's conceptualization of work and society is indispensable. Building on that some general challenges for a Communist society dealing with contemporary challenges can be extrapolated.

KEYWORDS: Marx, labour, freedom, economy, communism.

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Introduction

It seems strange that Socialists and Communists praise Marx as the most important thinker on liberation and human emancipation, when simultaneously his reputation among bourgeois intellectuals could hardly be worse. Marxism, and especially Communism, are harshly criticized for being inherently totalitarian and having no respect for individual rights. It is sometimes granted that Marx's supposed fight for "social justice" and the common good is honorable, but that its overall implications lead directly to Stalin and North Korea. It is a well-known rebuttal of Marxist ideas that their supposedly egalitarian approach undeniably erases any forms of individuality. Even Marxists like Michael Brie declare that while the goal of providing a good life for everyone is extremely honorable, Communism suffers under a severe lack of a concept of individual freedom (Brie 2022, 39). One sees that the history of real existing Socialism overshadows Marx's actual approaches to freedom. While it is true that Marx did not share the hegemonic bourgeois concept of personal freedom as a naturally given right guaranteed by the state, this does not mean that he denied the crucial importance of freedom. Furthermore, the common narrative that Communism erases freedom in exchange for pure equality must be debunked, as it could not be further removed from the actual stated ideas of Marx.

In this article, I have two objectives. Firstly, I aim to provide a concise refutation—underpinned by numerous direct quotations—of conventional prejudices against Marx, such as those that still persist in the dominant discourse and have recently become more frequent. Although some important clarifications on this matter already exist, this strikes me as a politically pressing task in view of the prevailing and increasing repression against Marxists (see, for example: Leipold 2025; Hoff 2026, 24), which thrives on such accusations. Secondly, my aim in writing this article is to contribute to the internal Marxist debate on the relationship between freedom and necessity, as well as to the dialectical relationship between individuality and community in the future communist society and on the path towards it. For that I seek to use Marx's more anthropological elaborations as well as his criticism of capitalism, to reflect on how Communism must deal with the challenge of surpassing bourgeois notions of freedom and equality in a world which is deeply marked by capitalist destruction. I draw on existing literature, which I believe already entails important insights about a "Communist vision" of freedom. My goal is then to extrapolate two core thoughts about the rela-

tionship of Communism and freedom in Marx and the secondary literature to show how they must be interwoven to enrich the inner-Communist debate about the practical relevance of freedom in a potential Communist society.

The two sides of Communism

As stressed, one of my aims is to enrich the debate about freedom under Communism. To do so, it is inevitable to briefly discuss what is understood under Communism, given that it is a term, which almost immediately evokes harsh reactions by supporters, as well as opponents, even if there is no precise and shared definition. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify how I will use the word in this article. To begin with it is central to emphasise that unlike Peter Hudis argues (2012, 190) Socialism and Communism are not used inseparably by Marx or Engels. Although Hudis is certainly right, that there exist some imprecise usages of both terms, this should not lead us to becoming blind for the actual differences, which existed between the two historical movements (Graf 2025a, 56–65; Leopold 2015, 35). Marx and Engels clearly self-identified themselves as Communists and therefore this will also be the term used by me. Nevertheless Hudis is of course correct, when he remarks, that Marx never introduced today's popular distinction between Socialism as a first phase and Communism as a higher stage (Hudis 2022, 365), as this distinction comes from Lenin, not Marx (Lenin 1974, 461).

Besides that, it might be insightful to take a closer look at what Marx meant by Communism. Here I see two popular meanings.

Firstly, as already touched above, Communism is designated as a state of society, in which private property is transcended, and a community of goods is achieved through the revolutionary victory over Capitalism. This reading is most famously applied in the notorious *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Marx 2010a, 75–99).

Secondly, Communism does not only describe a future and more elevated state of society, but also the path towards it. In this meaning the term Communism refers to a historical tendency inherent to bourgeois society to (hopefully) entail its own negation. This reading is most prominent in the manuscripts of the so-called *German Ideology*, in which Communism is characterized as the “*real* movement which abolishes the present state of things” (Marx and Engels 2010a, 49). This meaning is crucial as it refers to the materialist and therefore scientific self-understanding of Marxism in demarcation from “Utopian Socialism.” It points out that Communism is not merely a thought project, but that its concrete circumstances must be derived from the material world that exists

and that should be transcended through it. Hopefully it will become clear why both meanings must be thought together, although in peculiar cases, the one meaning might be more appropriate than the other.

Combining those two elements, I will follow the brief definition given by Ernest Mandel, who explains that Communism designates

Both a classless society without property, without ownership—either private or nationalised—of the means of production, without commodity production, money or a state apparatus separate and apart from the members of the community, and the social-political movement to arrive at that society. (Mandel 1990, 87)

Humans, animals and the body: Revisting some anthropological considerations of Marx

When trying to discuss the relationship between labor, freedom and individuality in an alleged future communist society, it is imperative to start with the undeniable biological circumstances. For providing a materialist analysis, at least two tasks must be fulfilled. Firstly, the palpable material conditions of human life must be acknowledged. Secondly, drawing on this, one must see how those overtemporal conditions always only exist under peculiar concrete, historical and social relations. Drawing on those methodological assumptions, it makes sense to start the examination with one presumably basal but still undertheorized category: the human body.

As Søren Mau (2026, 5) remarked; Marx by performing his break with Ludwig Feuerbach, turned to a more intense engagement, with “human corporeality.” As early as the *Germany Ideology*, Marx and Engels insisted upon the central importance of harnessing nature as a consequence of the peculiar circumstances of the human body. They write

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life. The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the means of subsistence they actually find in existence and have to reproduce. (Marx and Engels 2010a, 31)

Following this line of argumentation humans must be considered overwhelmingly incapable of surviving in raw nature. Although this seems to be quite near, to the argumentation of the radical right-wing thinker Arnold Gehlen, who conceptualized humans as “Mängelwesen/ deficient beings” (Gehlen 2016, 16), the conclusions could not be further apart.

Whilst Gehlen derived the necessity of domination and nation states as ethnic communities, Marx saw it as a potential strength of humanity, to be capable of changing one's natural surrounding to a degree, which remains unmatched in the animal kingdom. The human body entails many capacities as well as many natural boundaries (Fracchia 2005, 43). The peculiarity of humans to be dependent of consciously harnessing nature leads to a double-bind situation for them. Their life process can be seen as more vulnerable. This, at least implicitly, means that community and division of labour are necessary conditions for human flourishing. On the other hand, it leads to humanity's extraordinary position, that allows them to gradually liberate from natural dependencies and scarcities. This progress of overcoming scarcity functions over cultivation of land and the implementation of tools and machines (Mau 2021, 104). Speaking with Benjamin Franklin, Marx once characterized humans as "tool-making animals" (Marx 2010b, 189).

To be precise here, Marx did not deny that other non-human animals could also coordinate their material surroundings in quite astonishing fashion (Sommer and Stache 2023, 10). Also, Marx's dialectical anthropology does not evoke a necessary ontological distinction to other animals, but rather a historically constructed progress of distinguishing oneself through the act of labor (Stache 2019, 77).

Furthermore, Marx does not only distinguish humans from other animals for their usage of tools and machine but also because of the cognitive operation, which humans already perform before the actual start of their work:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. (Marx 2010b, 188)

The peculiar material reality of human's physiology itself entails the historical possibility of a rationally organized society. The special suitability of mankind for developing history and collective progress is written in to their physiognomy.

Labour as an overtemporal condition of human life

Marx understood labour as an inevitable characteristic of human life. Throughout all human history there has been a necessity to carry out

certain tasks. Contrary to broadly held assumptions Marx did not believe work to be the only source of wealth. In the first volume of *Capital*, both workers and nature are described as the “original sources of all wealth” (Marx 2010b, 503). In his famous *Critique of the Gotha Program* he states very clearly that nature itself must be appropriated as one source of wealth. He writes:

Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power. (Marx 2010a, 81)

On the creation of use values Marx explained:

labour is an activity which adapts material for some purpose or other, it needs material as a prerequisite. (Marx 2010c, 278)

Consequently, he points out that natural resources and human labour must be understood as an intertwined relationship. Humans themselves are natural beings. However, in their interaction with nature, they use the available resources and transform them into use values. This means that nature provides raw materials which are rarely suitable for direct use. In the first volume of *Capital* Marx clarifies:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature’s productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway. (Marx 2010b, 187)

Earlier in the text he remarks:

Productive activity, if we leave out of sight its special form, viz., the useful character of the labour, is nothing but the expenditure of human labour power. Tailoring and weaving, though qualitatively different productive activities, are each a productive expenditure of human brains, nerves, and muscles, and in this sense are human labour. (Marx 2010b, 54)

Therefore, labour in a very general sense can be described as a human attempt to use the natural conditions given for its own purposes. Humans thus interact with nature and modify it to serve their needs. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx explains:

All production is appropriation of nature by the individual within and by means of a definite form of society. (Marx 2010d, 25)

In the first volume of *Capital*, he points out:

The labour process, resolved as above into its simple elementary factors, is human action with a view to the production of use values, appropriation of natural substances to human requirements; it is the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and Nature; it is the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore is independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather, is common to every such phase. (Marx 2010b, 194)

As a result of these general anthropologic considerations, Marx ascribes to labour in general a fundamental role in all human societies. Underneath the abstraction of all precise designations of labour processes under various historical social formations, the fundamental concept of labour defined as the expenditure of brain and muscles can be described as an inevitable necessity. This is what Marx clearly emphasises:

So far therefore as labour is a creator of use value, is useful labour, it is a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society, for the existence of the human race; it is an eternal natureimposed necessity, without which there can be no material exchanges between man and Nature, and therefore no life. (Marx 2010b, 53)

Reading Marx against the myth of Prometheism

It has been rightfully established, that the peculiarities of the human body and brain go hand in hand with a unique chance for mankind to consciously form its environment. It is furthermore true, that consequently Marx ascribed increases in productivity as a liberating function for the development of humanity and its capabilities. This generally positive attitude towards the liberating capacities of productivity and machinery led to a well-trodden reproach of Marx for his allegedly “Promethean attitude,” as Anthony Giddens claimed (Giddens 1981, 60). Despite its prevalence, this allegation cannot hold water. As Kohai Saito (2016) has shown Marx was far from not considering the disastrous environmental results of capitalist accumulation. Instead, with the shift towards Justus von Liebig’s research Marx grasped humans as being forced to make use of their environment, whilst still seeing humans themselves as part of the environment (Pineault 2025, 24–30). The claim, that Marx thought of mankind to be situated above nature is untenable. Instead he clearly stated that humans must be aware of their dependency of nature.

Nay more, in this work of changing the form he is constantly helped by natural forces. We see, then, that labour is not the only source of material wealth, of use values produced by labour. As William Petty puts it, labour is its father and the earth its mother. (Marx 2010b, 53)

Moreover, also Engels warned that interfering with natural cycles without considering possible long-term consequences could ultimately outweigh the supposed benefits of technological domination over nature:

Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first. (Engels 2010a, 460–461)

Humans are natural beings. They are forced to harness nature. To do so they often use (highly developed) tools. Nature and work are both the roots of all accumulated wealth. The starting point of human history is not a form of romantic connection between humans and nature, but the difference between humans and their ability to provide themselves with the goods needed to survive. It is the primitive disparity between humans and the ability of their natural conditions to fulfill their needs (Mau 2021, 109). The fulfillment of needs is particularly closely tied to the achieved level of productivity. Here Marx explains:

natural wants, such as food, clothing, fuel, and housing, vary according to the climatic and other physical conditions of his country. On the other hand, the number and extent of his so-called necessary wants, as also the modes of satisfying them, are themselves the product of historical development, and depend therefore to a great extent on the degree of civilisation of a country. (Marx 2010b, 181)

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx states:

Hunger is hunger; but hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork differs from hunger that devours raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth. (Marx 2010d, 29)

With the evolution of productivity, human needs increase as well. The starting point of a materialist analysis must therefore be the necessity for (re-)production of life (Haug 1973, 4). For that it has been shown that Marx assigned the special human capacity to make use of its surrounding environment an inherently progressive role, as it marks the necessary precondition for human development as a “history of liberation” (Arndt 2023, 161). He did so without uncritically embracing the potential threats inherent to a deep alteration of nature.

Marx's critique of bourgeois freedom

As stressed Marx worshipped the act of working as a progressive effort of humanity to materially fulfill its given special capability to increase living standards. Also, it has been briefly indicated, that Marx aimed at human flourishing and “freedom” from its naturally given dependence. Nevertheless, the section above operated on a very abstract and over-temporary level of discussion. For now, it is mandatory to discuss how labour and freedom are intertwined in the actually existing society of Capitalism. For that purpose, I intend to highlight how abstract and formal bourgeois freedom, turns into unfreedom and domination for a major part of society, the working class.

In *Capital* volume one, Marx grants that capitalist society seems to be very free, when taken at surface level. He admits that the sphere of circulation is really characterized by glorious attributes of freedom and equality:

This sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labour power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to, is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself. The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interests of each. Each looks to himself only, and no one troubles himself about the rest, and just because they do so, do they all, in accordance with the preestablished harmony of things, or under the auspices of an allshrewd providence, work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the interest of all. (Marx 2010b, 186)

What becomes clear in this passage is an important distinction between the legal status of capitalist workers and feudalist servants. It is not a hoax that under bourgeois relations freedom rules. Formal, legal freedom is, in fact, granted. This is one aspect of freedom for workers, and it should not be dismissed as a chimera. However, Marx spoke of workers under capitalism as being free in two senses:

For the conversion of his money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of

everything necessary for the realisation of his labour power. (Marx 2010b, 179)

Formal and legal freedom is only half of the truth. Workers under capitalism are also free from access to any means of production. Consequently, they are separated from what they need to live. As a result, the “dull compulsion of economic relations” (ibid., 726) forces them to work not for any specific capitalist, but for the capitalist class as such.

In his famous study about the conditions of the English working class, Engels already deciphered the irony of this free choice for workers. The bourgeoisie formally grants a freedom of choice to the workers, which does not exist because rejecting the “offer” to work would necessarily mean dying from poverty and starvation (Engels 2010b, 376).

Where this compelling threat of starvation lacked, not even formal freedom was granted. As David McNally pointed out, the reliance on the “dull compulsion” enabling abstract freedom to satisfy capital’s need for cheap labour, depended on the lack of alternatives to make a living outside of the market system. Where this force did not exist, as there was still enough open land to be conquered by self-supplying peasants juridical freedom and equality was not granted, but capital’s need for cheap labour force was met by open slavery (McNally 2025, 34). Overall, the history of liberalism in its formal form remained a privilege of a small group of mainly white, rich men (Losurdo 2011). It was this hypocritical standpoint, that led Marx to speak of proletarians as “modern wage slaves” (Marx 2010e, 68). Actual freedom, so goes the argument, was neither granted the still existing formal slaves, nor the “modern” slaves and therefore the bourgeois sanctimonious self-image was deconstructed.

Returning to the capitalist centers, Marx referred to this new form of unpersonal domination, which is drastically different from the former feudal forms of personal dependency:

These external relationships, far from abolishing the “relationships of dependence,” merely dissolve them into a general form; they are rather the elaboration of the general *foundation* of relationships of personal dependence. Here, too, individuals enter into relation with each other only as determinate individuals. These *objective* relations of dependence, in contrast to the *personal* ones, also appear in such a way that the individuals are now ruled by *abstractions* whereas previously they were dependent on one another. (Marx 2010d, 101)

Marx understood that freedom in an abstract manner does exist under bourgeois circumstances. It was exactly this freedom which he scrutinized.

This type of individual freedom is therefore, at the same time, the most sweeping abolition of all individual freedom and the complete subjugation of individuality to social conditions which assume the form of objective powers, indeed of overpowering objects—objects independent of the individuals relating to one another. (Marx 2010c, 40)

For Marx, freedom and the abolition of freedom can go hand in hand. This is the case with bourgeois freedom for the “outlawed proletarians” (Marx 2010b, 731). Under class domination, abstract freedom and formal equality “turn out to be inequality and unfreedom” (Marx 2010d, 180). It was exactly the abstractness that systematically subsumed all people, regardless of their economic position, under a formal freedom, which necessarily reproduced poverty and a lack of prospects for the poor masses. The abstract approach towards freedom is epistemologically highly questionable, for various reasons. It is an ahistorical approach which lays upon a false methodological individualism (Heinrich 2020, 82). If one argues that Marx did not grant this sort of ahistorical and antisocial freedom much worth, it is true, however, it seems highly doubtful that one could use this as an argument.

Bruno Leipold highlighted how Marx used the narratives of political liberty, as they were articulated from the bourgeoisie in their conflict against the old ruling feudal classes and contrasted them to the lived experience of workers in daily factory business (Leipold 2024, 304–307). For this purpose, Marx used politically connotated formulations, to portray the owning class, as arbitrary rulers, speaking of them as “factory autocrats” (Marx 2010b, 428). Whilst claiming liberal rights in political terms, where they benefited, they did not let participation count in their realm of economy and private property. When outcalling the bigotry of the economic ruling class and their half-sided approach towards freedom (and equality) Marx went beyond the established formal juridifications. Thereby it becomes clear, that Marx surpassed the necessary limitations of bourgeois freedom in regard of the quantity of people to which it applied. The accusations against him, treating him as an enemy of freedom are obviously flawed (Leipold 2025).

Additionally, it must be stressed, that Marx’s critique of bourgeois freedom also entails another perspective. Not only is freedom realized in bourgeois society quite exclusive, it is also one-sided to say the least. Marx’s argumentation further considers, how even the bourgeois class

is captured in its own structural compulsions and insofar not open to actually decide freely on some basic topics. Although capitalists can rule quite arbitrarily in their enterprises, this does not mean that they are “free,” if freedom is defined in a more emphatic sense. Being the “personifications of economic categories” (Marx 2010b, 10), of which they benefit, which however also force them to subsume under the rule of capital accumulation to survive in competition, they are unfree in a deeper sense. They are unfree to match some environmental and social standards, even if personally they wanted to, as it would put them at the risk to perish in competition (Heinrich 2018, 102–107). It is the merit of this tradition in Marxism, to deliver compelling arguments against a moralistic critique of bourgeois society, by insisting that the decisive question is not, whether an individual capitalist might be “morally” good or bad. Nevertheless Bruno Leipold makes an even more nuanced point, compared to proponents of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre*, which erases the unintended yet existing danger of sounding like an apologetic towards the executing capitalists, immanent to the core argument of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre*. He remarks, that whilst it is true that capitalists themselves must subordinate under the impersonal imperatives of the market, they only have to do so, under the accepted precondition, that they want to fulfill their social role as capitalists, to benefit from worker’s exploitation: “Marx thought that we had to understand that it was only the capitalist’s will, *as a capitalist*, that was dominated by the market” (Leipold 2024, 338). Or as Peter Schadt explains, the competition of the capitalists, including its compelling imperatives, is nothing but the “result” of *multiple capitalists’ interests* in maximizing profits (Schadt 2020, 114–115).

Beyond this, the same logic applies to the proletarians competing for (the best) jobs, who are forced to pursue their own interest on the cost of others. Resulting from their economic subordination they are unfree to establish a connection to their fellow human beings in a truly solidaric way. However, as Leipold rightfully observes, the proletarian precarity makes it impossible for them, to opt-out of the system and to simply consume their accumulated wealth, as there is none (Leipold 2024, 339). The market imperatives, executed by the empirical individual capitalists remain ubiquitous for the proletarian.

Moreover, one can make this argument on an even more basal level. Not only all individuals, but society as a whole, is basically stripped of the ability to freely deliberate political decisions, as it must always keep

in mind the success of the national capitalist economy as an inescapable precondition of its existence.

On a political ground capitalism and its necessary priority on profit-maximization denies (or at least shrinks down) a form of social freedom, which would consist in the collective ability to prioritize some social goods over others, even if they are not financially attractive. What this shows is, that the break with Capitalism must be situated on a deep ground. It is not enough to exchange singular operative persons. It is even not sufficient to solely overcome the capitalist class as a whole, whilst the general categories of commodity production and competition remain untouched.

In conclusion, Marx's access to bourgeois freedom relies on at least three core arguments. First of all, he truly acknowledges that abstract freedom is granted (in the developed capitalist centres) and that this is real progress compared to feudalist personal domination. Secondly, he dialectically shows how even this formal freedom, shifts into actual unfreedom for the major part of society, which lacks access to the necessary goods of lives and therefore becomes compelled to sell themselves "piecemeal" (Marx 2010f, 203). Thirdly, Marx's argument is located on a more political level, as it touches the (im-)possibility of freely chosen collective deliberation and practice mechanisms.

Going beyond liberal freedom with Marx's materialist approach

As seen, Marx was far from supporting the hegemonial narrative of freedom as an innate right of man. He was clearly opposed to this kind of supertemporal and abstract conceptualization of freedom. While liberal ideas conceptualise humans as being born free but finding themselves caught in shackles, Marx had a completely different approach to freedom. He was aware of the inherently social character of laws and rights, but more importantly of humans themselves. He did not think of humans as being free in a general manner, but as always being embedded in certain material and social relations, which decide to which degree freedom is possible or not. As Pierre Charbonnier grasped it "nothing is more material than freedom" (Charbonnier 2020, 9) because to be actually free to pursue one's interests demands remarkable material foundations.

It is inaccurate to conclude that Marx did not care about freedom. Quite the opposite: he supported the struggles for freedom and emancipation of the oppressed world wide (Graf 2025b, 379–384). For him free-

dom, in its liberal fashion was a progressive temporary achievement underpinning the activities of the Communist movement and freedom in its more developed Communist sense, was a status achieved through the collective organization of use values by the association. Here a serious difference between classical individualistic notions of freedom and the Marxian account comes into play. For Marx, other humans, are not an alarming threat to one's sacral freedom, but they are needed to realise the material conditions of acting in accordance with one's interests. He bluntly states: "Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man" (Marx 2010g, 807).

Here he reflects the impossibility of humans living a decent life of material wealth without a high degree of cooperation. Elsewhere he became even more precise:

Man is a *zoon politikon* in the most literal sense: he is not only a social animal, but an animal that can isolate itself only within society. (Marx 2010d, 18)

In addition to this, he explicitly emphasizes the individual's dependency on the collective:

The further back we go in history, the more does the individual, and accordingly also the producing individual, appear to be dependent and belonging to a larger whole. (ibid.)

Consequently, one sees that Marx has a completely antagonistic approach to the problem of freedom, individuality, and society, in contrast to bourgeois methodological individualism. Not only does he not see society as the ultimate threat to individual freedom, he goes so far as to insist upon the inherent social content of individuality. Community and society become a precondition for the realization of individuality.

For Marx, freedom exists only in relation to an object of which one can be free. Under communism, for instance, people are free from class-based domination. However, fulfillment of basic needs must be seen as a precondition for everything else. Meaning: individual development can only be realised when more basal inquiries are already met. For this, cooperative production is central. Furthermore, humans rely upon other humans as partners to fulfill their needs and to follow their own goals.

One very simple example helps to illustrate this. One can play football on his own. One can shoot and pass against a wall. However, the game and the fun will be severely restricted because of a lack of the teammates and opponents required to play a normal game. Many of the most joyful actions, such as tackling or shooting on a goal with a goalkeeper,

require the existence of teammates. Here interaction and cooperation with other humans is the foundation of self-fulfillment. One could also go further, and ask who produces the ball, or the wall to kick against. It is dubious to argue that people are free by nature but tied up in shackles through society. Quite the opposite is true. People need material conditions and social interactions to follow their very purposes. Cooperation to efficiently produce use values is an inevitable precondition towards a liberated life.

Drawing on this basic, but crucial insight we can now spend some time debating the perhaps most prominent passage from Marx about the relationship of freedom and necessity in a potential Communist society. In Volume 3 of *Capital* Marx writes:

In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite. (Marx 2010g, 807)

This shows that freedom itself remains only possible within the objective reality of corporeal materiality. In a very basal sense freedom must remain relative to some degree, as for example there exists no freedom against the objective laws of nature. Besides this obvious insight, this touches the relationship of necessity and freedom. Humans, by their material reality as natural beings, are forced to fulfill their physical needs. This highlights the strict materialist approach inherent to scientific Communism. Freedom can only mean a status acquired through a collective and rationally organized use value focused economy and no

lofty entity as it serves in bourgeois society. Freedom can never be absolute, as it is always tied to concrete political and economic circumstances, which still possesses materiality.

To conclude. Marx did not deny the relevance of personal freedom but rejected conceptualizing freedom in an abstract manner of methodological individualism. On the contrary, he reflected on the conditions of relative freedom. Humans cannot overcome the basal necessity of working and modifying nature to their purposes. Furthermore, they depend on each other and a form of cooperation to guarantee the needed material and social conditions for their individual pursuit of happiness. Freedom is always relative, and restrictions can be found in the material and social circumstances. However, those restrictions can be partly overcome by cooperation and productivity. It therefore makes sense to speak not of freedom in an abstract sense but of a gradual, always unfinished process of liberation (Arndt 2023, 167). Additionally, one could also distinguish between various degrees of freedom. People incrementally free themselves of burdens which they find in their given circumstances. Marx is by no means an enemy of freedom, but an opponent of bourgeois abstract concepts, which do not reflect material and social conditions. As we will see in the next chapter, achieving a high degree of individual freedom is, in fact, the goal of a communist society.

The relationship between freedom, labour and individuality under Communism

We have already read in his own words that for Marx the “realm of freedom” only begins where the “realm of natural necessity” is transcended. Broadening this “realm of freedom” is the goal of production under communism. While the “realm of necessity” cannot be abolished completely, society seeks to drastically minimize the time of the working day it must spend on it.

Free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time in order to posit surplus labour, but in general the reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, to which then corresponds the artistic, scientific, etc., development of individuals, made possible by the time thus set free and the means produced for all of them. (Marx 2010c, 91)

In *Value, Price and Profit* Marx reiterated the significance which he ascribed to free time available for resting and for higher self-fulfilling activities:

Time is the room of human development. A man who has no free time to dispose of, whose whole lifetime, apart from the mere physical interruptions by sleep, meals, and so forth, is absorbed by his labour for the capitalist, is less than a beast of burden. (Marx 2010h, 142)

It can be said that Marx ascribed labour a significance for the realisation of “real freedom.” Despite this, the first condition for this free work is that the individual is not forced to do it but rather finds creative joy in it.

Under Capitalism, necessary labour should be diminished, not to enhance free time and the possibility for individual development, but to increase profit rates and to increase unpaid time. Under Communism, diminishing the time needed to create certain existential goods remains a goal. But the ultimate goal now becomes maximizing the time and material conditions for free chosen activity. This means not only that enough free time must be created, but also that the needed use values for individual self fulfillment must be produced. Consequently Communism does not demand ascetism. Long before his mature economic studies, in the *philosophical-economical manuscripts* from 1844, Marx already mocked contemporary communists for advocating a primitive communism. Even back then, when he was far from having a mature understanding of the bourgeoisie society, he insisted that an increase in living standards should be affirmed and not rebuked as some sort of degenerated modern vice (Landa 2018, 3 ff.). While politics under real existing socialism often despised luxury and material wealth, their putative stylite Marx had a completely different approach.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx reformulates his positive opinion of consumerism and material wealth:

Real economising—saving—consists in the saving of labour time (the minimum production costs, and their reduction to the minimum). But this saving is identical with the development of the productive power. Hence in no way *renunciation of enjoyment* but development of POWER, of the capacity to produce and hence of both the capacity for and the means of enjoyment. The capacity for enjoyment is a condition for it, and hence the basic means for it, and this capacity is created by the development of an individual disposition, productive power. (Marx 2010c, 97)

In another passage he defines “*luxury*” as “the opposite of *natural necessities*” (Marx 2010d, 452). He clarifies:

Necessary needs are those of the individual reduced to a natural subject. (ibid.)

As established above, Marx was no supporter of destruction of natural resources. He did not define wealth in purely material terms. On the other hand he was not against a materially good life for everybody. His Communism was not hostile to the good life, but sought to establish a new valurisation of quality rather than pure quantity of cheap goods.

In this qualitative definition of wealth, Marx included certain forms of performing labour. He even criticized Adam Smith for having too negative an approach towards labour:

But equally A. Smith has no inkling that the overcoming of these obstacles is in itself a manifestation of freedom—and, moreover, that the external aims are [thereby] stripped of their character as merely external natural necessity, and become posited as aims which only the individual himself posits, that they are therefore posited as self-realisation, objectification of the subject, and thus real freedom, whose action is precisely work. (Marx 2010d, 530)

Here the ambivalence of labour becomes clear. On the one hand, it is an imposition, which requires the expenditure of “brain, muscles, nerves,” and so on. On the other hand, it provides the opportunity to realize personal aims. This is why Marx went so far as to admit that labour could become an act of “real freedom” when it is carried out as “self-realization.” It is crucial to emphasize the conditions, that must be met for work to become “self-realization.” Marx admitted that this could never be the case under present or historic forms of forced labor:

Of course, Smith is right that in its historical forms of slave labour, serf labour and wage labour, work is always repulsive and always appears as *externally imposed, forced labour*, and as against that not-work as “liberty and happiness.” This holds doubly: it is true of this antagonistic work and of everything connected with it, it is true of work which has not as yet created the subjective and objective conditions (or also of the pastoral, etc., state which has lost them) for work to become *travail attractif*, to be the self-realisation of the individual, which in no way implies that work is pure fun, pure amusement, as in Fourier’s childishly naive conception. Really free work, e.g. the composition of music, is also the most damnably difficult, demanding the most intensive effort. (Marx 2010d, 530)

Free work begins only after the “realm of natural necessity” is left behind. However this does not mean that “realm of freedom” and “realm

of labour/work” are opposites. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx even describes this free labour as the “living, form-giving fire” (Marx 2010d, 286). Here inspiration coming from the “Utopian Socialism” can hardly be overseen. This does not mean that this work is easy. The scientific or artisan actions people carry out demand a high degree of skill and concentration. Under Communism, increasing the time available for this kind of self-fulfilling work is the goal of production. Therefore Marx goes so far as to define free labor in a higher communist society as “not only a means of life but life’s prime want” (Marx 2010a, 89). It becomes clear that freedom and discipline including labour are by no means necessary contradictions. Not only because a certain discipline and accountability will remain inevitable in the remaining “realm of necessity” to successfully plan and perform a shared economy, but also because self-development demands self-discipline. In this regard James makes an interesting point. Freedom and constraint and not even freedom and subordination under another person’s command must be contradictions, as long as this subordination was chosen freely to attain a common goal (James 2017, 284). As an example for that one could think of a football team, all voluntarily agreeing on listening to the Coach and to follow his instructions, convinced that this will help them to achieve their shared goal. For a communist society this means that freedom and subordination must not stand in contradiction, as long as the latter is temporary and chosen by the individual to ultimately follow its own pursuits. Ultimately this brings up the question of “revolutionary subjectivity.” Famously Marx argued for the necessity of a revolutionary transitional period also because of the requirement of self-alteration to become a suitable Communist subject (Marx and Engels 2010a, 214). As shown, considering the supertemporal reality of material necessity makes it imperative of Communist subjects to self-organize after abandoning the “dull” compulsions of poverty and starvation, which previously forced them to work. Insofar free subjects must foster a culture of reliance to perform the supertemporarily needed exercises after the economic force is overcome. Communist liberation requires a complete alteration of one’s relationship to labour and duties. People need to acknowledge that the new society actually matches their interests and relies on their proactive participation. Given that, Battistoni argues, that it makes sense to speak of “freedom in necessity” (Battistoni 2025, 216). Freedom would then mean choosing without monetary or political constraints how to organize the economy so that it serves to meet the interests of the people living in it.

It has been established that the Communist society would radically redefine wealth not in the form of commodities and money but in time and material circumstances enabling individuals to grow and flourish. In this regard some basic, often joyless tasks may remain necessary, but they serve a higher goal. Here Robert X. Ware warns us to uncritically apply the categories of a realm of “freedom” and one of “necessity” as separate entities, in which the latter comes after the former. Instead an association of free producers is of course also capable of debating whether certain production processes might take longer, but therefore could be more joyful (Ware 2019, 93). Here Battistoni’s more social and deliberative approach towards freedom comes back into play (Battistoni 2025, 216). Unlike under Capitalism, in which the concrete organization of the labor process is mandatorily decided through its undebatable aim of capital accumulation, Communist economy serves the interests of the people. This means that while a materially undeniable necessity to produce use values is a supertemporal reality, the concrete fashion of this production process remains up to debate. The collective could value a creative working process over pure timely efficiency. On the other hand, it could also be decided that some activities cannot be made joyful after all and for that should only be regarded under the lenses of time reduction.

Perhaps the most striking example for this potential new Communist social freedom is the current role AI plays. In Capitalism, many creative jobs are being wiped away by artificial intelligence. Designing and building pieces of art is being outsourced to machines, as it is cheaper, whilst the harsh drudgery that brings absolutely no joy at all remains left over to humans. It is hard to imagine this approach towards the potential of artificial intelligence to improve people’s life, would remain the same if society as a whole could collectively reflect how (long) it wants to work and what it wants to produce.

To open up a debate on those issues demands a clear break with Capitalist logic and probably also a break with the established machinery, which itself bears a certain economic logic (Mau 2021). Furthermore, it demands collective deliberation processes on how society wants to organize itself and how it wants to deal with the remaining necessary drudgerys. Consequently, an approach towards Communism, which believes in the possibility of a purely bureaucratic planning mode fails to grasp the complexity of decision making. Still forms of non-hierarchical decision-finding must be established.

To cut a long story short. Undoubtedly Marx embraced a high productivity to secure material wealth. By no means did he oppose public luxury. He supported a high living standard as well as free disposable time. Under Communism, the necessity of producing certain useful goods remains a given. The time required for this should be reduced as far as possible (Graf 2023, 9), although the definition of necessary labour and labour, which itself brings joy can blurr from time to time. Beyond this, the self-realisation of individuals is the goal. Pies and Leschke were right in stating that Marx supported “Communist individualism” (2005). The common reproaches of Marx as being collectivist and denying individuality could thus not be further from reality. Quite the opposite is true; broadening space for individual fulfillment is the goal of production under Communism. However, collective cooperation is a requirement for precisely this purpose. Or as Luca Basso has put it:

He is outlining a sort of collective “Robinson” whose determinations are not atomistic but social, a “social” that is not conceived in opposition to the “individual” [...]. This means articulating the common with the singular not by way of subsumption [...] but on the basis of co-operating among individuals, thus empowering their individual faculties. (Basso 2016, 198)

Countering the hegemonial accusation of collectivism and an alleged Marxian contempt towards individuality, it is necessary to be more precise. Marx’s criticism attacked the social atomism of classical liberal theory and the metaphysical treatment of a totally “free” subject as invented by political economy. Marx (and Engels) criticized a society in which the flourishing of one came to the costs of another one. This does not stand across understanding that Marx supported a theoretical and practical program aiming at universal emancipation, including all those who were ignored by classical liberal theories. As Tony Smith rightfully observed: “Accepting normative individualism is fully compatible with agreeing that individuals are not atoms” (Smith 2017, 57).

A short recapitulation

By reconsidering the Marxian critique of bourgeois abstract freedom I hoped to extrapolate two strings of argumentation that have both been acknowledged by other scholars before, but which, from my perspective need a further unifying approach.

Firstly, Communist freedom on an individual level seeks to broaden the “realm of freedom,” meaning the disposable time for free chosen activity and self-fulfilment for the individual. In that sense Marx devel-

oped a dialectic understanding of the relationship between the individual and the collective, in which the holistic the development of the former is enabled and not merely limited by the latter. In this understanding Communism remains guarded by the principle of “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 2010b, 506).

This Communist freedom based on “normative individualism” was developed in the engagement with Stirner’s anarchist theory (Henning and Thomä 2010, 213) and theoretically strengthened by Marx’s enhancing engagement with political economy.

The more “individualistic” side of Marx’s concept of Communist freedom depicts Communism often in an ornate way, which bears the danger of conceptualizing Communist society as a purely harmonic land of milk and honey. In that sense, the individual notion of Communist freedom enables us, to portray a positive counter-image against existing Capitalist constraints, whilst it nevertheless brings with it the danger of undertheorizing the remaining conflict potential under Communist social relations.

Secondly, freedom under Communism is captured in a more political sense. Overcoming the restraints of capital accumulation imperatives opens up a space for actual collective political deliberation about the organizing of that common good. This tradition of Marx’s reception, which gained trace in the last few years by its focus on questions of post-capitalist forms of collective deliberation (see: Leipold 2024; Thompson 2019, 391–409; Roberts 2019, 41–58) is valuable as it centers the political dimension of capitalist unfreedom and therefore the collective liberative potential of Communism. It is the merit of this theoretical tradition to point out that “politics [are] an inescapable dimension of the communist” (Del Aguila Marchena 2022, 1).

As seen in my depiction above, this formal distinction between the two forms of Communist freedom cannot be entirely separated, but depend on each other.

A case against [formal] equality—*Critique of the Gotha Programme*

One of the most influential accusations against Marx and Communism throughout history has always been a putative devaluation of individuality for the sake of equality. Most notably, the practical politics of many existing socialist states have supported this narrative. The argument is that Marx’s fight for equality may be honorable but ultimately leads to

the complete extinction of individuality. Here, once again, bourgeois opponents use their own abstract categories of equality to supposedly rebuke Marx.

The allegedly most known text with regards to more or less concrete formulations on a future society is Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. This text can be considered a direct theoretical ancestor to his mature opus magnum *Capital* (Malysch 1978, 59). It is of special interest as it includes the most practical thoughts of the mature Marx with regards to a future society. As a result, one can learn a lot about Marx's ideas on the compound of freedom and equality.

When reading the short text, it becomes clear that Marx did, in fact, not support equality in its usual understanding. As already mentioned, in *Capital* Marx even ridiculed equality as an inherent capitalist ideology (Marx 2010b, 186). In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* he openly declares that future law should not be equal, as the people whom it should serve are not equal (Marx 2010a, 87). He points out:

It is, therefore, a right of inequality, in its content, like every right. Right by its nature can exist only as the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable by an equal standard only insofar as they are made subject to an equal criterion, are taken from a *certain* side only, for instance, in the present case, are regarded *only as workers* and nothing more is seen in them, everything else being ignored. Besides, one worker is married, another not; one has more children than another, etc., etc. Thus, given an equal amount of work done, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, etc. To avoid all these defects, right would have to be unequal rather than equal. (ibid., 86–87)

Here Marx gives credit to the peculiarities of humans as individuals. Under Communism, where the individual's benefit and flourishing is the main concern, this abstract equality must be rejected. Nevertheless, as Communism is an objective historical movement it must always deal with the society it inherited from Capitalism:

What we are dealing with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society, which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. (Marx 2010a, 85)

Coming from a materialist and hence realistic perspective he was willing to acknowledge imperfectness as an inevitable feature of early

stages of Communism. Only with further progress after the successful implementation a superior political order, that objectively matches Marx's normative convictions could be installed. For the higher stage of Communism he gave the motto:

From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs! (ibid., 87)

To sum up: Marx did not promote equality, at least not as it understood normally. His central measure was the fulfillment of needs (McCarthy 2017, 248), which he sought to organize as rationally and comfortably as possible. A Communist society should take individual circumstances, predilections, and needs seriously, instead of subsuming everyone under the sword of Damocles called "equality." Once again Tony Smith correctly stated that Marx was sure that:

All persons are equally worthy of concern and respect, from which it follows that all should have an equal fair opportunity to attain well-being. (Smith 2017, 335)

To say it clear, Marx was no foe of equality, but an upright critic of bourgeois abstract equality, which he transcended theoretically and sought to transcend politically practically by installing Communism. I therefore think that one could rightfully argue that Marx did support an universalistic normative standpoint, however one that was considering existing differences (Elias 2025, 68).

Dézamy, a materialist French Communist, who Marx and Engels highly cherished, once spoke of a reflected Communist stance on equality as "proportional equality" (Dézamy 1842, 50), meaning everyone to be equally valuable to society, not everyone getting the same. It is obvious that Marx (and Engels) had the same idea when thinking about the relationship between equality and individuality, even if they did not invent a peculiar term for this conviction.

Political implications in the age of disaster

Based on the thoughts of Marx (and Engels) outlined above, I find it necessary to briefly discuss what this means for a project of liberation nowadays. Surely the outlined theoretical insights can only serve as general guidelines for practical steps. Nevertheless, they can help to uncover the most pressing contradictions, with which revolutionary real politics must grapple.

For that purpose, it is crucial to keep in mind the synthesis between Communism as a process and Communism as a goal, as it is specific

for a materialist and scientific approach. Marx's unwillingness to provide a blueprint of a future Communist society was a result of his strictly materialist approach and his criticism of doctrinaire politics (Cleaver 2014, 267). Nevertheless, this does not mean that any guiding thoughts about a future society must be discarded as "utopian" (Graf 2025c, 207).

The "ruthless criticism" (Marx 2010i, 142) of contemporary capitalism demands a precise insight in its mechanisms, whilst the other task of thinking about outlines of a future Communist society also needs to consider the more abstract thoughts about the relationship between humans, society and nature.

Drawing from the ideas elaborated above, some principal questions regarding individuality and freedom in Communism can be brought up. Especially when thinking of Communism as a progress one must acknowledge that Capitalism's systematic motions do not only include a tendency towards Communism, as some (overly) optimistic assumptions in historical materialist philosophy suggested, but also a tendency towards the undermining of conditions, that make collective radical emancipation likely. Certainly, the most pressing issue in this regard is the rigid destruction of natural livelihood by Capital's "were-wolf's hunger for surplus labour" (Marx 2010b, 271).

Especially if one shares the argument, that Marx's theory entails a basal ethical standpoint of a non-bourgeois universal egalitarianism, which does not equal an anti-individualistic collectivism, then one must accept the materialist reality, that freedom under Communism must be understood rapidly different from its contemporary bourgeois meaning of dull consumerist liberties of the egoistic individual. Not only must one show, that Capitalism systematically denies the material needs for a fulfilled "free" life even of the more "privileged" proletarians in the imperialist centres, but that the kind of freedom, which Capitalism grants its few benefactors is not supportable after all. To put it shortly, neither can Capitalist freedom beyond its abstract sense be universalized, nor could such an universalization be desirable for a rational Communist future.

With that being said, a Marxian account of freedom must move beyond egomaniac conceptions of free development and broaden the picture towards collective deliberation processes (Battistoni 2025, 226). Communist freedom in "the new age of Catastrophe" (Callinicos 2023) must focus on ways of collectively debating how individual flourishing can be brought in lign with planetary boundaries. This in no way means

establishing an anti-individualistic collectivism, but it demands transcending bourgeois individualism. Obviously generalizing the consumer level common in the imperialist centres is no real option (Birkner 2014, 81). Defining freedom as the freedom to pursue an unsustainable egocentric lifestyle is no solution. Also, in this regard Capitalism must be broken with on a deeper level. It is not enough to break the power of the Capitalists, but the logic of capital in general, including the hegemonial portrayal of an allegedly “good life.”

Communist real politics needs to embrace a whole new definition of individual and collective well-being that transcends capitalist forms of mass consumerism (Saito 2024, 194). On the other side it needs to do so, whilst considering the still existing gaps in productivity of different political economies of the world. Neither can it generalize established Western Consumerism norms, nor can it apply a form of DeGrowth-Communism in every part of the world, regardless of its concrete situation. Communist “freedom” would not be ascetic, but it must overcome the hegemonial understanding of freedom as a relentless exploitation of natural resources.

Lastly, coming from a perspective that sees Communism as being stigmatized with Capitalist continuities one must be aware that the level of ecological destruction caused by Capitalism so far has already reached various irreversible tipping points. Following this, it will be indispensable to use a sure amount of social labour time to deal with the disastrous consequences by working on climate adjustment projects and to help victims of emergencies. Consequently, realism demands admitting that a Communist future would hardly be a pure land of milk and honey. Ultimately this requires to understand Communism as both: a truly radical break with the status quo and its hegemonial flawed conceptions of a good life and as the successor of the very society it so deeply criticizes. From my point of view, freedom in this realm can only mean the freedom to collectively and rationally debate how economy and human reproduction should be planned.

Conclusion

The hegemonial portrayal of Marx as being uninterested in freedom must be rejected. The narrative of a putative sacrifice of individual freedom in exchange for equality and justice cannot be upheld. Marx did not argue that the individual should be subordinated to the collective to support the higher good. In his argumentation he transcended the established bourgeois understanding on a quantitative and qualitative level. He

ascribed society as a whole a significant role in the realization of freedom. Being able to provide goods without being forced to work for most of the day is a precondition for the realisation of personal freedom and self-fulfillment. On a societal level overcoming the structural compulsion of constant accumulation is a necessary condition for a political community, which freely deliberates its shared goals and the path towards achieving them. It is only through cooperative interaction with others that such a degree of productivity can be reached, that conditions for personal freedom are created to a greater extent.

Unlike the liberal conceptualization of lonely but naturally free “Robinsonades,” Marx did not understand other human beings as mere limitations on personal freedom. For that reasons neither makes it sense to call him a supporter of “collectivism” nor a fan of “individualism” in the classical manner. Instead, he saw Communism as a way of creating a dialectical synthesis between individual and collective. He saw other humans as a necessary condition to attaining freedom. Further, Marx did not believe in freedom as an abstract category as understood by liberals. Freedom does not exist as such. It always exists under certain historical and social conditions. This means that freedom is always tied to certain boundaries, which can be shifted, but not ultimately abolished. Therefore, freedom is not an absolute entity. Especially, when drawing on the materialist notion that Communism follows Capitalism and does not arise out of the blue, one must accept the reality that it will remain bothered by serious longevities. Freedom in this regard can only mean “freedom in necessity” and must also consider the herited inequalities. Considering the urgency of climate catastrophe, freedom furthermore needs a qualitative shift away from consumerism to more sustainable immaterial qualities of life, whilst keeping in mind that different world areas inherit different conditions. Considering this Communism must be a radical break not only with society’s class character but with the very basal logic of production inherent to Capitalism. Centering the individual and its needs of course implies a transformed revolutionary subjectivity that itself transcended the stubborn conflict of subjective well-being and fellow human beings.

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Biography

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