

## **'In and Through their Association': Freedom and Communism in Marx**

Andrew Chitty and Jan Kandiyali

### **1. Introduction**

In Kant's 'positive' conception of freedom, freedom consists not simply in acting independently of alien laws but in acting in accord with the 'autonomy of the will', that is, on laws that are prescribed by the nature of the will as such (*Groundwork*, 446-7, 450, 453-4). This claim about freedom is plausible insofar as the will is my own essence – at one point Kant identifies it with my 'proper self' – so that when I act on laws prescribed by its nature my actions are the expression of my essence (457-8). Kant goes further to argue that acting on such laws requires treating all other persons in a certain positive way, specifically so as to respect their wills, or in his terminology so as to treat them as 'ends in themselves' (428-31). In short, for Kant genuine freedom involves at once expressing my own essence and treating others in a certain positive way.

In this chapter we argue that Karl Marx's thought on freedom incorporates both of these Kantian ideas. For Marx, I achieve what at one point he calls 'real freedom' by engaging in a certain kind of labour through which I express my essence: both my 'individual' and my 'communal' essence. This labour expresses my individual essence in that it involves the development of my essential powers and capacities. It expresses my communal essence in that it is motivated by the desire to satisfy the needs of other human beings.<sup>1</sup>

So, we argue that, for Marx, as for Kant, genuine freedom involves at once expressing my own essence and treating others in a certain positive way. However, the conception of 'essence' and the kind of treatment involved are different. And Marx differs further from Kant in arguing that genuine freedom is only possible in a certain type of society, namely a future communist society.

In what follows we aim to spell out these broad claims. We proceed as follows. In section 2 we consider a canonical passage where Marx asserts that genuine freedom can only be achieved in a communist society. We consider two basic accounts of how this happens. We favour the second account but argue that in its initial form this relies on attributing to Marx too simple a conception of freedom. In section 3 we argue for attributing to him a more complex conception of freedom, as voluntary self-realisation. In section 4 we show why for Marx capitalism prevents rather than enables this conception of freedom, and why by contrast a future communist society enables it. Finally in section 5 we compare this conception of freedom to Kant's.

### **2. Freedom 'in and through' association**

In a number of passages Marx implies that humans can become genuinely free only in a communist society. The most extensive one is this:

The transformation, through the division of labour, of personal powers (relationships) into material [*sachliche*] powers, cannot be dispelled by dismissing the general idea of it from one's mind, but can only be abolished by the individuals again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing the division of labour. This is not

possible without the community. Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible. In the previous substitutes for the community, in the State, etc. personal freedom has existed only for the individuals who developed within the relationships of the ruling class, and only insofar as they were individuals of this class. The illusory community, in which individuals have up till now combined, always took on an independent existence [*verselbständigte sich*] in relation to them, and since it was the combination of one class over against another, it was the same time for the oppressed class not only a completely illusory community, but a new fetter as well. In the real [*wirklichen*] community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association. (*The German Ideology*, CW5, p. 78)<sup>2</sup>

The idea that humans can achieve freedom only in a specific type of society is not original to Marx. Such a claim is, for instance, present in Rousseau's assertion that in the civil state the human being acquires 'moral freedom, which alone makes him truly master of himself' (*Social Contract* 1.8). It is also, of course, central to Hegel's political philosophy and his view that the modern state is the 'actualisation of freedom' (*Philosophy of Right*, §258A).

However, while it is clear that Marx follows Rousseau and Hegel in this respect, it is less clear *why* he thinks that genuine freedom is only possible in a communist society. Indeed, the literature on Marx suggests different answers to this question, corresponding to different accounts of how it is that, in the words of the above passage, individuals in a communist society will 'obtain their freedom in and through their association'. In this section, we consider two accounts of the connection between freedom and communism in Marx.

The first is a 'collective control' account. According to it, in a communist society individuals exert collective control over the organisation of their own society. Unlike pre-communist societies in which human beings have been dominated by the social relations within which they produce, a communist society will be characterised, as Marx says in the first volume of *Capital*, by 'conscious and planned control' over the production process (Marx 1976, p. 173). On this view, the genuine freedom that individuals acquire in a communist society consists simply in exercising this collective control. As Allen Wood puts it, 'true self-determination must consist in the imposition of human control on the social conditions of human production' (Wood 2004, p. 51).<sup>3</sup>

Although Marx, both in the above passage and elsewhere, clearly associates collective control with communism, it is far from clear that he sees the freedom that is attained in communist society as *consisting* in this control. Indeed, this interpretation is at odds with Marx's focus in the above passage on individual (or as he puts it there 'personal') freedom: he says that in the real community it is simply 'individuals', and not individuals acting as part of a group, that obtain their freedom 'in and through their association'.

This suggests a second account, which we call a 'conditions of individual freedom' account. According to this view, in communist society social relations are such that they provide conditions that enable each member to act freely. Marx seems to have this in mind in the above passage when he says that '[o]nly in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom

possible'. Here, a particular community (that provided by a future community society) is seen as an enabling condition of the freedom of individuals.

However, the 'conditions of individual freedom' account admits of multiple variants, depending on what individual freedom is taken to consist in and how a future communist society is said to enable it. One variant of this account that is commonly attributed to Marx is what we can call a 'material abundance' interpretation. According to this view, communism brings about a high level of material abundance, which ensures that my actions are free in that I am not compelled to act in any particular way to meet my needs. In these conditions of material plenty, my actions are also free in that I have the material means available to do whatever I wish; I can 'do one thing today and another tomorrow [...] just as I have a mind' (*The German Ideology*, CW5, p. 47).<sup>4</sup>

However, the 'material abundance' account does not seem to us the best interpretation of Marx's view. Its limits can be seen by reflecting on the fact that, on this view, free action does not require treating others in any particular way: it might be true that a communist society, and only such a society, can provide the abundance required for free action, but this is compatible with my free action involving a purely instrumental and self-interested attitude towards others in that society. Yet, as we shall argue, in the account of communist production in the 1844 *Comments on James Mill* Marx sees individuals as achieving their freedom through intentionally providing others with the goods and services they need. Furthermore, we shall also argue that some of Marx's other remarks about freedom in a future communist society — such as his description of communism as a society in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' — are only plausible if we attribute to Marx a view of free action as involving a similarly other-regarding motivation.

Following this clue, in the next section we argue that Marx was committed to an alternative variant of the 'conditions of individual freedom' account, which goes beyond the 'material abundance' interpretation in that it sees free action as requiring individuals to treat each other in a certain positive way.

### 3. Free activity as voluntary self-realisation

The conception of free action that we propose to attribute to Marx is that it consists in the 'self-realisation' of the individual performing it. We can cite two kinds of textual evidence to support this attribution. First, in some places Marx directly connects freedom with self-realisation. For example, in a passage in the *Grundrisse* (1857-58) he speaks of 'self-realisation, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is, precisely, labour' (Marx 1973, p. 611).

Second, in a number of writings from the 1840s Marx describes communist society as a society in which humans become free for the first time. For example, in *On the Jewish Question* (1843) he describes it as 'human emancipation', and intimates that in it each individual will see in others 'the realisation of his own freedom' (CW3, p. 234, p. 230). In the *Communist Manifesto* (1847) he says it will be a society in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'. And in the long passage we have quoted above from *The German Ideology* he strongly implies that genuine freedom can only be attained in

a communist society. Yet at the same time in his description of communism in the *Comments on James Mill*, he says that this will be a society in which individuals achieve self-realisation (CW3, pp. 227-8). Taken together, these passages suggest that Marx identifies genuine freedom with self-realisation, though of course they are compatible with a weaker connection between the two concepts.

Finally, the view that freedom consists in self-realisation has some inherent plausibility, at least if we combine it with an understanding of the 'self-realisation' of an individual as the expression of that individual's essence in their activities. For, in so far as we identify an individual's essence with their 'true self', when their activities express their essence they express their true self. Thereby they are self-determining, and self-determination is one widely used conception of freedom.<sup>5</sup>

If we turn to the *Comments on James Mill* passage just mentioned, we can read it as describing communist production as being a matter of self-realisation in just this sense of the expression of each individual's essence in their activities. There, Marx thinks of my essence as having both 'individual' and 'communal' aspects. He associates the expression of the individual aspect with activity through which I exercise and develop my powers and capacities, and also objectify those powers and capacities in the product of my labour:

In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality, its specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses* and hence a power *beyond all doubt* (CW3, p. 227).

By contrast he associates the expression of the communal aspect with my production of goods and services in order to satisfy the needs of others (where we take it that for Marx 'a need' means 'something required for self-realisation').

In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed and realised* my true nature, my *human nature, my communal nature* (CW3, p. 227).<sup>6</sup>

It is worth noting several features of this account of self-realisation. First, although we have described the expression of the individual and the communal aspects of my essence as separate aspects of self-realisation, it is clear that Marx does not take them to be in tension with one another, but, on the contrary, complementary. Indeed, his view is that in a future communist society individuals will be able to realise both aspects of their essence in one and the same activity. That is, in a communist society individuals will exercise and develop their own powers and capacities *through* activities that are done in order to satisfy the needs of others. It could even be said that the powers and capacities whose exercise and development constitutes the realisation of the individual aspect of my essence are just those powers and capacities that can be used to satisfy others' needs, thus suggesting that the two aspects of my self-realisation are deeply interlinked.<sup>7</sup>

Second, although we have described the second aspect of self-realisation as ‘communal’, this should not be taken to mean that what is expressed is the essence of some supra-individual collective agent, such as the nation or state. This aspect of my self-realisation is communal, not in the sense that what is realised is a collective agent, but in the sense that my self-realisation has a communal focus: individuals each express their essence through providing others with the goods and services they need in order to flourish. But it is individuals, and not a collective agent, that each express their essence through such activity.

Third, although the early Marx's account of self-realisation has this communal aspect, it is important to note that Marx does not think of individuals in communist society as sacrificing their own interests so as to help others. His vision of a communist society is rather one of individuals inseparably serving their own and each others' interests. For this reason, it would be a mistake to equate the communal aspect of self-realisation with altruistic action, understood as action motivated by a selfless concern for others' wellbeing. As Marx himself later puts it, communism will not be the ‘love-imbued opposite of selfishness’ (*Circular Against Kriege*, CW6, p. 41).

Finally, to say that for Marx real freedom consists in self-realisation as we have defined it above is insufficient, for this would be compatible with individuals being coerced — whether by others or by circumstances — to exercise and develop their powers and capacities so as to satisfy others' needs. However, it is clear that Marx would not consider action performed under such coercion to be free. After all, one of the evils that Marx identifies in alienated labour is that it is ‘not voluntary [*freiwillig*], but coerced’, and this carries the clear implication that its opposite, the unalienated labour of communist society, will not be coerced. Thus, we propose, in addition to the individual and communal aspects of self-realisation described above, another component of Marx's conception of freedom is that such self-realisation is undertaken voluntarily, by which we mean, in the absence of coercion.<sup>8</sup>

That the conception of freedom we attribute to Marx includes voluntariness is important because it challenges a surprisingly resilient misinterpretation of Marx — found most famously in Isaiah Berlin's essay ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ — according to which Marx is as a proponent of positive freedom (in Berlin's sense of freedom as self-determination) who rejects negative freedom (in Berlin's sense of freedom as non-interference). It is true that the notion of self-realisation we have attributed to Marx can be seen as a version of Berlin's positive freedom, as well as of Kant's. It is also true that Marx criticises Berlin's negative freedom, arguing that ‘[I]t makes every man see in other men not the realization of his own freedom, but the barrier to it’ (*On the Jewish Question*, CW3 p. 230). But in our view this criticism only shows that he does not think that this freedom is sufficient for genuine freedom. Rather than rejecting it, he incorporates the core idea in Berlin's negative freedom — that people cannot be said to be free if their actions are done in the presence of coercion — along with a version of Berlin's positive freedom into his account of freedom. To act in a genuinely free way, for Marx, is to *voluntarily* engage in self-realising activity.<sup>9</sup>

#### **4. Communism and the enablement of freedom**

In this section we shall ask how a communist society provides enabling conditions for freedom in Marx's sense of voluntary individual and communal self-realisation. We approach

this question indirectly, by first of all considering why Marx takes it that capitalism fails to enable such freedom and instead systematically tends to prevent it.

For Marx, capitalism can be defined as a society in which the means of production are owned by private companies; workers own no means with which to produce other than their own labour power; companies pay workers a wage to produce; companies compete with each other to sell the resulting goods and service on the market for profit; and the state coercively enforces companies' ownership over the means of production. How does capitalism so conceived fail to enable the three aspects of Marx's freedom that we have considered?

It is relatively easy to see why Marx thinks that capitalism prevents the individual aspect of self-realisation. As we have seen, Marx associates the individual aspect of my self-realisation with the exercise and development of my powers and capacities, and the objectification of those powers and capacities in the product of my labour. Simply put, capitalism generates forms of work that are not conducive to the individual aspect of self-realisation. This is because, for Marx, competition between capitalist companies forces each company to strive to maximise its profits. Therefore companies must generate the maximum output from their workers at the lowest cost. This constraint typically leads to the worker engaging in labour that 'does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind' (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* CW3, p. 274). The point here is not that capitalist employers deliberately engender non self-realising forms of labour. Rather, it is that under capitalism it is 'quite accidental and inessential [...] whether the act of labour itself, is for [the worker] the enjoyment of his personality and the realisation of his natural abilities and spiritual aims' (*Comments on James Mill*, CW3, p. 220).

If it is reasonably clear why Marx thinks that capitalism prevents the individual aspect of my self-realisation, it is less obvious why Marx should think that it prevents the communal aspect. After all, if the communal aspect involves the satisfaction of others' needs, then it might be argued that this also happens under capitalism. So, what is it about capitalism that prevents the communal aspect of self-realisation?

One answer that is often attributed to Marx, or to a broadly Marxian view, is that work under capitalism does not satisfy the *genuine* needs of others. Capitalism creates 'inhuman, sophisticated, unnatural and imaginary appetites' (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* CW3, p. 307). Production is then geared towards the satisfaction of these 'false needs' rather than genuine needs — needs required for self-realisation — at the satisfaction of which communist production will be aimed.

However, this argument is not very plausible. Much might be said against capitalism, but it is hard to deny that workers under capitalism produce many things that other people genuinely need. A more plausible answer, and arguably one that is more authentically Marx's, is that although workers under capitalism produce things that other people need, they do not produce for others *in order to* satisfy others' needs. That is, because a capitalist society in which workers have to sell their labour power to survive, workers are typically motivated to labour 'out of egoistic need and necessity', only as a means of satisfying their own 'dire need' (*Comments on James Mill*, CW3, p. 220). Thus, while work under capitalism may satis-

fy others' needs, in Marx's view, it is generally performed out of a self-regarding motivation rather than a concern for others as such.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the communal aspect of my self-realisation is a matter of me producing for others *in order to* satisfy their needs.

Finally, Marx thinks that capitalism excludes from productive activity the other aspect of freedom that we identified above — voluntariness. As we have seen, Marx describes wage-labour under capitalism as 'forced labour'. Of course, Marx is aware that workers under capitalism are not forced to work in the manner of slaves and serfs. Unlike pre-capitalist labourers, wage-labourers have full ownership over their labour power. However, since a capitalist society is one in which capitalists have full ownership over the means of production, and workers cannot produce the means of satisfying their basic needs without using these means of production, it follows that they are still ultimately forced to sell their labour power, in that they have no reasonable alternative.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, Marx argues that capitalism is less different from slavery and feudalism than its defenders would have us believe. It is a system of 'forced labour, however much it might appear as the result of free contractual agreement' (Marx 1981, p. 958).<sup>12</sup>

In short, for Marx both individual and communal self-realisation are, though not impossible to achieve, systematically prevented by capitalism, while *voluntary* self-realisation is impossible to achieve under capitalism.

We are now in a position to answer the question of how a communist society, by contrast with a capitalist one, would provide the enabling conditions of Marx's freedom. Let us define a communist society as a society in which there is no private property in the means of production; members collectively organise their own production; and goods and services are distributed according to individuals' needs. Let us also assume that we are talking about a society in which there is no coercive state — such a state has 'died out' (Engels, *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*, CW24 p. 321).

Consider the three aspects of voluntary individual and communal self-realisation in turn. First, the individual aspect of self-realisation: the exercise and development of my essential powers, and the objectification of those powers in the product of my labour. Now a communist society is one in which members collectively organise their productive activity. Let us suppose, as Marx does, that human beings, once their basic needs are met, are motivated to express their own essence.<sup>13</sup> Then members would try to organise production in such a way that the productive activity of each member involves the exercise and development of their essential powers and capacities. The degree to which they are able to do this will depend on various factors, such as the society's level of technology. However, it would not be 'accidental and inessential' whether through my labour I exercise and develop my essential powers and capacities, for this would be the aim of communist production.

Second, a communist society would also enable the communal aspect of self-realisation: the intentional satisfaction of others' needs. In a capitalist society whether someone's needs are met is contingent on their labour contribution: those who do not work do not eat. As we have seen, Marx argues that this encourages people to produce for self-regarding motives: agents under capitalism typically produce out of 'egoistic need and necessity'. In a communist society, by contrast, people's needs are met irrespective of their labour contribution.

Since their own needs are met independently of their labour contribution, people will be able to focus on the needs of others.

Thirdly, production in a communist society would be voluntary. Since, as we have said, in a communist society people's needs are met irrespective of their labour contribution, they are not coerced into producing by the threat of loss of their livelihood. Nor are they coerced to work by the state. Therefore, in so far as they do produce their productive activity is not done in the presence of any coercion but is rather voluntary.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, if we make the same motivational assumption stated above, namely that once their basic needs are met people are motivated to express their own essence, we can *also* see that in a communist society my voluntary self-realisation would be enabled by the voluntary self-realisation of all other members. For the self-realisation of those others includes intentionally producing to satisfy the needs of others apart from themselves, including myself. In so far as they understand my 'needs' to include my requirements to be able to engage in voluntary self-realisation, this means that the voluntary self-realisation of all others provides the enabling condition for my voluntary self-realisation. The same will be true for every member of the society. This, we suggest, is what Marx had in mind when he said that communism would be 'an association in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all' (*Communist Manifesto* CW6, p. 506). In a communist society, my self-realisation centrally involves intentionally providing others with the conditions of their self-realisation.

Here it is helpful to compare our account of this mutual enablement of self-realisation with that given by G.A. Cohen with his analogy of a jazz band. Cohen writes:

One way of picturing life under communism, as Marx conceived it, is to imagine a jazz band each player in which seeks his own fulfilment as a musician. Though basically interested in his own fulfilment, and not in that of the band as a whole, or of his fellow musicians taken severally, he nevertheless fulfils himself only to the extent that each of the others also does so, and the same holds for each of them.

He concludes:

So, as I understand Marx's communism, it is a concert of mutually supporting self-fulfilments, in which no one takes promoting the fulfilment of others as any kind of obligation. I am not, of course, denying that each delights in the fulfilment of the others [...] But no such delight is required: it is not something in the dimension of affect which is supposed to make communism possible. Instead, a lofty material endowment ensures that 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (Cohen 1990, p. 32).

In our view, as in that of Cohen, the self-realisation (or what he calls 'self-fulfilment') of all others provides the enabling condition for the self-realisation of each. However, Cohen explicitly defines an individual's self-realisation activity as not necessarily motivated by any desire to satisfy the needs of others: the members of his Jazz band are interested in their 'own fulfilment'. By contrast, for our Marx self-realisation intrinsically includes what we have



called a 'communal' aspect; it necessarily involves activity done in order to satisfy the needs of others. Cohen's view is compatible with the 'free development of each' phrase in *The Communist Manifesto*, in which concern for others is not mentioned. However, we suggest that it is only if self-realisation is understood as having this communal aspect that the whole picture that this phrase describes is plausible. With the motivational assumption that people want to produce for others, we can see how the voluntary self-realisation of each contributes to providing the enabling conditions for the voluntary self-realisation of all others — how 'the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all'. Without this assumption, whether or not this happens becomes a matter of pure chance.<sup>15</sup>

This, then, is our account of how for Marx in a communist society individuals achieve their freedom 'in and through their association'. It is similar to the 'material abundance' account that we introduced in section 2, in that for both accounts communist society provides the enabling conditions of individual freedom. However, it differs from that account, first by construing the freedom in question as consisting specifically in voluntary self-realisation, where self-realisation has both individual and communal aspects, and second by specifying that the enabling conditions for this voluntary self-realisation on the part of each are intentionally brought about as part of the voluntary self-realisation of all others.<sup>16</sup>

In concluding this section, it is worth noting two limitations of our argument, on behalf of Marx, that a communist society would enable voluntary self-realisation on the part of its members.

First, the argument does not conclude that all individuals in a communist society would *necessarily* engage in voluntary self-realisation, since given the absence of coercion in that society some individuals might choose not to. It concludes only that this society provides enabling conditions for every individual to engage in such activity. However, with the elimination of the capitalist barriers to voluntary self-realisation, Marx expects individuals to spontaneously engage in it. This is obviously a contestable claim, though Marx could argue that the contrary claim, that people will only produce for others when they are compelled to as a means of satisfying their own needs, is equally contestable, not least because it appears to generalise motivation under capitalism to human motivation as such.

Second, even if we grant Marx's claim that a communist society would enable freedom understood as voluntary self-realisation, it is a further step to conclude that *only* a communist society would do so. In reply, Marx could argue that, given that a capitalist society cannot enable such freedom, the onus is on others to describe an alternative to communism that would. Until they do so he is entitled to conclude that only a communist society would enable freedom in this sense.

## 5. Marx and Kant on freedom

For Kant genuine freedom involves both expressing my own essence and treating others in a positive way. The resulting connection between my freedom and my treatment of others is perhaps his greatest innovation in the theory of freedom. Based on the account we have given above, it is clear that this connection is preserved in Marx's conception of freedom.

However we can discern several key differences between Marx's way of making out the connection and Kant's.

First, Marx 'socialises' Kant. For Kant, freedom involves first of all acting in accord with the laws that are prescribed by the nature of the will as such, and only second and consequently treating others as ends in themselves. By contrast for Marx the connection between genuine freedom and treating others in a positive way is much closer, for this freedom is a matter of expressing an essence that is both individual and communal, where both the individual and the communal aspect are defined in terms of the needs of others. Marx moves away from Kant's essentially individualistic view of free action to a view in which such action is closely bound up with participation in a certain kind of society.

Second, Marx 'naturalises' Kant. For Kant as we have construed him, my own essence consists in possessing a will. This is defined independently of any reference to the biological human species. By contrast for Marx my individual and my communal essence are both embedded in human biology. Concomitantly, whereas for Kant freedom centrally requires respecting the will of others, that is, treating them as ends in themselves rather than merely as means, by contrast for Marx it involves satisfying the 'needs' of others, where this centrally includes their biological needs.<sup>17</sup> This explains why Marx ties freedom so closely to productive activity. It may be said that the 'universality' which characterises the communal essence of each individual is simply a naturalised form of the universality of Kant's will, and that satisfying the needs of others is simply a naturalised form of treating them as ends in themselves. But Marx at least makes an attempt to rethink Kant's connection between freedom and sociality in a way that recognises humans as part of nature.<sup>18</sup>

Third, Marx 'politicises' Kant. For Kant, freedom is in principle available to everyone in every society, even if it is easier to achieve it in a society governed by Right. For everyone, no matter what their circumstances, can choose to reject their given inclinations and act instead on the laws prescribed by the nature of the will. By contrast for Marx only a communist society provides enabling conditions for freedom. Marx, unlike Kant, thereby enlists the ideal of freedom in an argument for social transformation.<sup>19</sup>

So far we have only outlined an understanding of Marx's conception of freedom and its relation to Kant's, but what can be said by way of assessing their relative merits? Here we might proceed by asking what makes Kant's conception of freedom attractive in the first place. The idea that for me to act freely my actions must not only be voluntary but also genuinely originate from myself, as opposed to some source outside me, is surely appealing. But why should we substitute for 'myself' in this formula the nature of the will? The deep thought behind Kant's substitution must be that each human individual is at root only an instance of agency, or willed action, as such, so that the will is the essence of each person. Therefore for an individual's actions to be genuinely free those actions must originate in the nature of agency, or of the will, as such. A parallel thought in Marx is that each of us is at root only an instance of 'intentionally producing for each other', so that intentionally producing for each other is the essence of each individual – an idea epitomised in Marx's description of humans as 'species beings'. Therefore for an individual's actions to be genuinely free they must originate in the nature of intentionally producing for each other as such. This is then spelled out in terms of expressing the personal and communal aspects of the individual's essence that

we have discussed above. Thus what really differentiates Marx's conception of freedom from on the one hand Kant's and on the other hand a conception that agrees that free action is action that originates from myself but refuses to substitute any 'essence' for myself in this formula is their respective metaphysical accounts of the human self. Accordingly a serious evaluation of the relative merits of each conception will have to become an assessment of the metaphysics of human selfhood that underpins each.

## Acknowledgements

For helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper we would like to thank Meade McCloughan, Joe Saunders, and Nicholas Vrousalis. All errors remain our own.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term 'communal essence' may be misleading insofar as it suggests a reference to a local or national community. However, the community we have in mind in using this term is pan-human. The early Marx's commitment to such a pan-human conception of community is evidenced by his emphasis on the human species.

<sup>2</sup> The passage does not assert that freedom *as such* can only be achieved in a communist society (the 'real community' of the passage), since Marx refers to individuals in the ruling class possessing 'personal freedom' in class societies. However, the context strongly suggests that this freedom has always been circumscribed and therefore incomplete. For this reason, we attribute to Marx in this passage the view that *genuine* freedom is only possible in a communist society

<sup>3</sup> However, Wood is ambiguous. Later he writes: 'Human freedom can only be attained when people's social relations are subject to conscious control' (p. 52), suggesting that exercising collective control does not constitute freedom but is rather an enabling condition of it. This falls into the 'conditions of individual freedom' account that we consider next.

<sup>4</sup> In what follows we think of freedom primarily as a characteristic of an agent's actions (or activity), rather than a modally defined characteristic of agents. Thus, we operate with an 'exercise' rather than an 'opportunity' conception of freedom. However, derivatively we can say that an agent all of whose actions or activities over a period of time are free is free in that period of time.

<sup>5</sup> For a *locus classicus* of the idea of freedom as self-determination see Fichte's statement in the *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796) that if a being is to ascribe 'free efficacy' to itself then it must ascribe to itself 'an activity whose ultimate ground lies purely and simply within itself' (Fichte 2000, p. 17).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the connection, implied in this passage, between producing for each other and Marx's claim that humans are essentially 'species beings' see Chitty 1997 and Chitty 2018, pp. 134-8.

<sup>7</sup> Although Marx claims that the individual and communal aspects of self-realisation are complementary, this does not commit him to the implausible view that every particular act through which I express the individual aspect of my essence is also one through which I express the communal aspect, or vice versa.

<sup>8</sup> We use 'voluntary action' in a strong sense to refer to action that is done in the *absence* of coercion (i.e. in which there are no coercive pressures for the agent to act as they do), rather than in a weaker sense to mean action that is not done *out of* coercion (i.e. in which there may be such coercive pressures, but if there are the agent does not act as they do because of them but instead out of some other motivation).

---

<sup>9</sup> In this respect, Marx follows Hegel, who also integrates negative (or as Hegel puts it, 'subjective') freedom into a larger account of human freedom. For discussion of this aspect of Hegel's view see Neuhouser 2000, pp. 82-113.

<sup>10</sup> These are strong empirical claims. Defenders of capitalism have long argued that the motivation of market participants is more diverse than Marx and Marxists suggest. For such a view, see Steiner 2014. Even if that is the case, however, Marx can still point out that capitalism encourages more egoistic forms of motivation at the expense of other-regarding concerns.

<sup>11</sup> By 'basic needs' we mean, roughly, the things required for a minimally acceptable standard of living. By contrast, needs required for self-realisation include but go beyond basic needs.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of the force or compulsion involved here, see Cohen 1983. It might be argued that capitalism is compatible with voluntary productive activity, for capitalism could be combined with an unconditional basic income that enables people to meet their basic needs without having to work. Productive activity would then be voluntary. For such a view, see Van der Veen and Van Parijs 1986. However, it remains to be seen whether an unconditional income set above basic needs is compatible with capitalism.

<sup>13</sup> This motivational assumption — that human beings are motivated to express their essence — is consonant with Marx's prediction in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* that in the higher phase of communist society labour will become 'not only a means of life but life's prime want' (CW24, p. 87).

<sup>14</sup> Here we have tacitly assumed that a communist society would exclude other forms of coercion, such as social norms.

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the motivational structure of Marx's communism, which however does not address the question of freedom, see Brudney 1998, pp. 183-19. Elsewhere Brudney criticises Marx's view for the way that it appears to see a fortuitous alignment between voluntary activity and social needs. How, he asks, can a communist society 'ensure that while each produces as she pleases, together we generate the right mix of socially necessary outputs?' (Brudney 1998, p. 174; cf. Schmidt am Busch 2014). In our view, the answer is that, as Brudney himself recognises, Marx's view is that people are motivated to provide others with the goods and services they need. Thus, there is no fortuitous alignment of producer freedom and consumer need, but a willing tailoring of producer freedom to satisfy others' needs. For further discussion, see Kandiyali 2020 pp. 569-71.

<sup>16</sup> In the third volume of *Capital* Marx says that the 'realm of freedom' really only begins beyond the 'sphere of material production', that is, beyond the sphere of activities that aim at the end of satisfaction of material needs (Marx 1981, pp. 958-9). In doing so, he puts forward a view that is at odds with the view we have attributed to him here, in which freedom partly consists in activity that is directed towards the satisfaction of others' needs, including their material needs. For further discussion of this tension in Marx's thought, and for why it cannot be seen as a simple shift from the early to the late Marx, see Kandiyali 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Of course Kant's categorical imperative includes an 'imperfect' duty to others, that one must try 'as far as he can, to further the ends of others' (*Groundwork* 430), and these ends may include the satisfaction of those others' biological needs, so the contrast with Marx that we draw here is not absolute.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion of this theme, and of its relation to Hegel, see Neuhouser 2020.

<sup>19</sup> No doubt Kant's concepts of a 'kingdom of ends' and of an 'ethical commonwealth' project a society in which everyone acts in accord with the categorical imperative and so freely, but they do not describe a social structure which uniquely provides the enabling conditions for free action.

## References

Brudney, Daniel, (1998), *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Chitty, Andrew, (1997), 'First Person Plural Ontology and Praxis', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 97 (1): 81-96.

Chitty, Andrew, (2018), 'Human Solidarity in Hegel and Marx', in Jan Kandiyali (ed.) *Reassessing Marx Social and Political Philosophy: Freedom, Recognition and Human Flourishing*, London: Routledge.

Cohen, G.A., (1983), 'The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12(1): 3-33.

Cohen, G.A., (1990), 'Self-ownership, Communism and Equality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 64: 25-61.

Fichte, J.G., (2000), *Foundations of Natural Right*, trans. Michael Baur (first published 1796-97), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hegel, G.W.F. (1991) *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (cited by section number)

Steiner, Hillel, (2014), 'Greed and Fear', *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 13(2): 140-150.

Kandiyali, Jan, (2014), 'Freedom and Necessity in Marx's Account of Communism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22(1): 104-123.

Kandiyali, Jan, (2020), 'The Importance of Others: Marx on Unalienated Production', *Ethics* 130(4): 555-87.

Kant, Immanuel, (1998), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (first published 1785), Prussian Academy volume 4 pagination, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich, (1975-2004), *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (abbreviated as CW followed by volume number), London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Marx, Karl, (1973), *Grundrisse* (written 1857-58), London: Penguin.

Marx, Karl, (1976), *Capital Volume 1* (first published 1867), London: Penguin.

Marx, Karl, (1981), *Capital Volume 3* (first published 1894), London: Penguin.

Neuhausser, Frederick, (2000), *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Neuhouser, Frederick, (2020), “‘Spiritual Life’ as a Criterion for Social Critique’, in Vitoria Fareld and Hannes Kuch (eds.), *From Hegel to Marx and Back: Capitalism, Critique, and Utopia*, London: Bloomsbury.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, (1973), *On the Social Contract* (first published 1762), trans. G.D.H. Cole, London: Dent (cited by book and chapter number)

van der Veen, Robert J. and Van Parijs, Philippe, (1986), 'A Capitalist Road to Communism', *Theory and Society*, 15(5): 635-655.

Wood, Allen, (2004), *Karl Marx*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.