

To Choose without Sacrificing Happiness: A Marxist Reading of Jose P. Laurel's concept of Freedom and Morality

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Abstract - Significantly, ideas about freedom are not limited to the Western thinkers' arena. In the Philippines, Jose P. Laurel has his share in intellectual discussion about freedom. In Laurel's concept of freedom, the exercise of rights is very crucial in determining what freedom is. Laurel's concept of freedom deals on the socio-political aspect of freedom including its implications. In one of his speeches, he equated freedom with political independence.

This paper aims to examine and analyze the concept of freedom of one the Filipino historical figure who is regarded as Filipino philosopher, Jose P. Laurel. It is interesting to analyze how a man who is considered to be the president of what is called "puppet government" views freedom. It is significant to find out how a president whose actions are defined and dictated by the Japanese authorities thinks about freedom. In addition, this paper aims to show the relationship of Laurel's concept of freedom and his concept of morality, having righteousness as the guiding principle to individual morality.

The aim of examining and analyzing Laurel's concept of freedom will be done through Karl Marx's concept of freedom and morality. It will consult the different ideas and views of Marx about freedom and morality manifested in his socio-political theories.

Keywords – Laurel, Marx, Philosophy, Freedom, Morality

I. INTRODUCTION

Freedom is a broad issue that is discussed in many areas like Politics, Sciences, Theology, Philosophy and even Religion. Many notable thinkers defined, discussed and interpreted it in so many ways. Freedom is understood as one's ability to decide and to exercise his own will. However, freedom itself is a limitation. It is a contradiction in itself. If freedom is the ability to decide and direct our will, it is then a limitation since everyday man can't help but to make choices. He is obliged to choose. Possessing freedom and having the ability to choose is a contradiction of the very definition of

freedom since one is obliged to choose. Choosing is not an option. This makes freedom worthy of inquiry and analysis.

Many thinkers discussed and interpreted freedom, which led them to give different ideas and views about freedom. For instance, in existential philosophy, existentialists strongly affirm the subjectivity of man and justify such subjectivity through the exercise of freedom. For many existentialists, subjectivity is actualized by the exercise of freedom. In Religion, specifically in Christianity, man is the peak of all creation because among all creatures humanity is the one blessed with a degree of dignity. Such dignity involves freedom and rationality. These were two things that cannot be found in plants, animals and to every other creature. As a free human being, one has the capacity to choose, to choose between good or evil, to do or not to do.

Significantly, ideas about freedom are not limited to the Western thinkers' arena. In the Philippines, Jose P. Laurel has his share in intellectual discussion about freedom. In Laurel's concept of freedom, the exercise of rights is very crucial in determining what freedom is. Laurel's concept of freedom deals on the socio-political aspect of freedom including its implications. In one of his speeches, he even equated freedom with political independence.

This paper aims to examine and analyze the concept of freedom of one the Filipino historical figure who is regarded as Filipino philosopher, Jose P. Laurel. It is interesting to analyze how a man who is considered to be the president of what is described as "puppet government" viewed freedom. It is significant to find out how a president who is biasedly judged as a president defined and dictated by the Japanese authorities thought about freedom. In addition, this paper aims to show some parallelisms between Laurel's concept of political liberation and Marx's idea of economic liberation.

Such objectives of exposing Laurel's concept of freedom, analyzing it and showing its significance will be possible by using Karl Marx's concepts and ideas in socio-political theories. His idea of an ideal government,

physical and ideological liberation of the people from the capitalists' ruling and attaining the utopian society play an important role in doing an analysis and discussion regarding the Laurel's philosophy about freedom.

This research relies on the use of history and philosophy books. Books about the life and philosophy of Karl Marx and Jose P. Laurel were also consulted. Most of the ideas and philosophies of Karl Marx were found in his writings, publications and correspondences. On the other hand, Laurel's philosophy was found in his speeches, decisions, laws and writings during his presidency.

As thinkers, Marx and Laurel offers a variety and wide ranging intellectual thoughts which may be significant in many socio-political theories. Given this reality about their works and ideas, this research limits its scope on Laurel's concept of freedom and socio-political thoughts of Marx relevant in analyzing Laurel's view of freedom and liberation.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper aims to examine and analyze the concept of freedom of one the Filipino historical figure who is regarded as Filipino philosopher, Jose P. Laurel. It is interesting to analyze how a man who is considered to be the president of what is described as "puppet government" viewed freedom. It is significant to find out how a president who is biasedly judged as a president defined and dictated by the Japanese authorities thought about freedom. In addition, this paper aims to show some parallelisms between Laurel's concept of political liberation and Marx's idea of economic liberation.

III. METHODS

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IV. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Laurel's Philosophy of Freedom

Jose P. Laurel's presidency and intellectual thoughts are surrounded by many interesting events that influenced his views about freedom and morality. For instance, his graduate degree studies were in a Japanese university and it was during the era of colonization in the Philippines. He was the president of the Second Republic, which

happened to be the time of Japanese occupation in the Philippines. It is interesting to know how a person in the era of colonization talks and views freedom and morality. It is interesting to know how a colonized individual view the opposite of such, which is freedom.

In one of his speeches, Laurel stated that; "Freedom abused is happiness forfeited. The very nature of freedom which is not looseness, laxity and promiscuity, but the self regulated exercise of rights with the discharge of corresponding obligations is most sensitive to any form of abuse or violation. If man does not today enjoy the desirable well-regulated freedom it is because the tendency is for society to concentrate more on the rights. Thus, it over-accentuates its importance while at the same time ignoring the imperative of obligations. To fully enjoy and appreciate freedom one must deserve it, work and strive or even undergo untold sacrifices for it and lastly, know how to use it." [1] Freedom is still based on how one relates with the society. Doing things happily and not negatively affecting others is part of freedom. Freedom is not plainly a right. It is earned. Freedom is accumulated through the experiences one has as time passes by.

In addition, in one of his speeches, as the president of the republic, he said: "Naturally, as the head of the state, I feel there is nothing more important in an independent state than a certain degree of freedom of thought, a certain degree of freedom of religion, and a certain degree of protection of life, liberty and property as the minimum requirements for the happiness of the people and of individuals, whether in Japan, in the Philippines or elsewhere." [2]

Not only that he knows what freedom is but also he showed that he is ready and willing to fight for it. Freedom needs to be gained. The circumstances of history pushed man to alter the freedom that they have. To regain this freedom, one ought to understand fully what it is all about. Thus, there is a need for them to compare it with the past, from the aboriginal state (pre-Spanish era), Spanish era, American era to their present status. For him, the political state has affected freedom.

Expressing his political ideology, he stated the following words, " As I have said, the dream and aspiration of Filipino heroes and patriots have always been complete and absolute political freedom for the Philippines, and all true Filipinos are pledged to the realization of that ideal. I therefore stand for the government of the Filipinos exclusively and alone without the interference of, injunction or dictation from the foreign power." [3] Freedom is independence, political independence.

However, Laurel understands that it is not that easy to gain such freedom, given the case that they are still under the influence of the Japanese. It will undergo processes. A drastic change is needed. But the change will always be in consonance with the society's status. Thus, in his speech in a meeting in Davao he said, "Real freedom has to be striven for. It is not something that can be given to us on a silver platter by an outsider: We have to fashion it slowly, carefully, patiently, with our own hands. And this will take time. When we plant a seed, we do not expect to harvest the fruit the very next day. The same may be said of our Republic." [4]

Freedom and Rights for the Filipinos

Laurel is a witness on how the Filipino people valued freedom; they were people who were conscious of their rights. As a president, he made a big contribution in order to fulfill this aspiration of his countrymen. He stated that, "The history of the world is the history of man and his arduous struggle for liberty and the history of the Filipinos is their gigantic struggle for emancipation. It is the history of those brave and noble souls who have labored, fought and bled that the government of the lash...that symbol of slavery and despotism...might endure no more..." [5] Filipinos have been freedom seeking people. To be free for them is a state of non-interference from outside forces.

If freedom is that important to the Filipinos, they also feel the same in so far as their rights are concerned. Laurel also knew this and more importantly he knew how to protect these rights. According to him; "Every right that has been won is held in sacred esteem and guarded with intense jealousy by those who possess them. To protect and preserve those rights—such is the desire of liberty-loving and free. With this end in view, care has been taken to insert in the constitution what is commonly known as the bill of rights, a comprehensive statement of those invaluable conquests of the past" [5].

Freedom entails a lot of factors, specifically political in nature. The basis of which is rooted to his existence and his life. Some of Laurel's proposed provisions in the Bill of Rights were the following: "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty and property without due process of law, nor shall any person be denied the equal protection of the law;" "Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation;" "No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people to peacefully assemble and petition the government for redress and grievances" [5].

The activities of man dictate how freedom is achieved and how it is being experienced. His relation to

man in society defines his freedom. But these activities are not purely social in nature but more political in status. Rights and responsibilities are always tied up with freedom.

And in trying to educate the Filipinos, he stated the following statement; "Liberty is a blessing, without which life is a misery, but liberty should not be able to prevail over authority because then society will fall into anarchy. Neither should authority be made to prevail over authority because then the individual will fall into slavery. The citizen should achieve the required balance of liberty and authority in his mind through education and personal discipline, so there may be established and resultant equilibrium, which means peace and order and happiness for all." [5]

Marx's Philosophy of Man

It is important to understand Marx's view about man to understand his concept of freedom, which is crucial in analyzing that of Laurel. This will explain Marx's view about freedom in connection to his philosophy of man.

It can be inferred that Marx viewed man as a social being just like how many thinkers viewed the person. Man is part of a particular society and is governed by the mechanisms and standards set by such society. Being a man is based on what his environment made him. Man is a being defined by his gender, history and most importantly by the class where he belongs. This inference that man is a social being is clearly evident in Marx's concept of five epochs or different historic phases. In his Communist Manifesto, Marx enumerated the historical phases such as: primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist and his prediction of socialist and communist phases. In all these phases of history man as part of a particular society belongs to a specific class. In his Communist manifesto he said: "What I did that was new, he said he was to prove (1) the existence of classes, (2) the class struggle necessary leads to dictatorship of the proletariat, (3) that the dictatorship itself constitutes the transition to the abolition of classes and to classless society."

In addition, as a human being, one is composed of body and soul. This has been the view of early Greek thinkers and even Christian philosophies and religion. Soul is the life principle, and by means of living one is susceptible to change. Men, as a living being, have always every potentiality to grow and develop. Growths and developments entail changes but limited to the physical being. The soul would still be unchangeable. It seems that Marx's connected these potentialities of man into his existing environment. According to Fromm, "Man's potential for Marx's, is a given potential. Man is,

as it was, the human raw material, which, as such, cannot be changed, as the brain structure has remained the same since the dawn of history. Yet, man does change in the course of history. He develops himself; he transforms himself. He is the product of history. And since he makes history, he is his own product. History is the history of man's self realization; it is nothing but the self-creation of man through the process of his work and his production." [6] While the rest are still looking at the potentialities of man as a man Marx's was already looking at the potentialities of man in the aspect of production.

Man as a social being determines his existence by means of his society. Society is also something, which tells what kind of being a man is. Men set categories for themselves. Marx has always something to say about man's social reality, but of course with respect to his economy. Fromm added, "For Marx the only social reality is not man, nor the individual, but economic classes of men. Status in life becomes the standard of this characterization. Individuals and their motives count for naught. What they have are the ones that give bearing to their identity. The only form of consciousness which can be translated into action – and which can explain history, past, present, and future - is class consciousness. Development and progress were measured according to this level." [6] As if, in this statement, Marx was also saying that individual consciousness was equivalent to nothing. In other words while men are not conscious of their class, then they are equivalent to non-existent.

With this case at hand, it is now easy to imagine how Marx's execute his definition of freedom. And by looking at his definition his aim can also be determined. Fromm even mentioned that, "Marx's aim was that of spiritual emancipation of man, of his chain liberation from the chains of economic determination, of restituting him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and unity with his fellow man and with nature." [6] With this note, the discussion of Marx philosophy of freedom will now have a clearer view.

Marx's Philosophy of Freedom

Freedom is not only a rich word but it is also a word related to different other words. Looking at the dictionary a lot of words are connected to it. And there are even many terms that could be interchanged with the word freedom. Freedom connotes with liberty or liberation, emancipation, democracy and independence. Before moving on with the definition of freedom, it is but necessary to define the abovementioned terms in order to avoid confusion. From the Webster dictionary; "Democracy" is a community or state in which the

government is controlled by the people; "Emancipation" is the deliverance from the onerous or controlling power or influence; "Independence" is equivalent to freedom or liberty and; "Liberty" is the quality or state of being free [7].

Marx, in his definition of freedom, also used these words primarily to tighten and strengthen his ideas and theories. In Brenkert's essay, he said, "Marx calls man's freedom as 'the positive power to assert his true individuality' at the height of his powers and needs, thoroughly and intensively while cooperating with his fellows, and appropriating all of nature. Free activity is activity that fulfills such powers, and freedom therefore is the condition of man whose human powers are thus fulfilled; it passes beyond the absence of restraint to the active unfolding of all his potentialities." [8] Again it can be noticed that Marx is suggesting that the perfection of freedom is basically by means of the society and the environment. Freedom is not freedom unless one exercises it. The activities and the things that one does, determine how his freedom is being exercised. The society, his fellowmen and the environment he is in, gauge his freedom. These are the measuring standards of man's freedom.

Due to that idea of Marx, one might ask; is individual or personal freedom still possible for him? The answer was elaborated at Brenkert's essay. Brenkert took this from the *German Ideology*; "Only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence, personal freedom becomes possible only within the community. In the previous substitutes for the community, in the state, etc., personal freedom has existed only for the individual who was developed under the condition of the ruling class, and only in so far as they were individuals of this class. The illusory community in which individuals have up till now combined always took on an independent existence in relation to them. And since it was the combination of one class over another, it was at the same time for the oppressed class not only a completely illusory community, but a new fetter as well. In the real community, the individuals obtain their freedom in and through the association" [8].

This basic idea of the existence of having status paved way to the establishment of a classless society. The different classes that the society built became the major hindrance to the exercise of freedom. Freedom will not exist in an environment where there is division among men, where there is classification of men. Categorizing them will only lead to envy and dissatisfaction. It would not lead to a harmonious life. One could not associate himself with the rest if one is not of the same class.

Basically, one considers himself free when he is independent. This independence can be considered only as an individual freedom. That is because when men are dependent on others, there is an equivalent limitation of freedom coming from the forces of those others. But Marx proposes a different idea. Fromm said, "Independence and freedom, for Marx, are based on the act of self-creation. A being does not regard him as an independent unless he is his own master. And he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself." [9] Man must detach himself to things about his existence due to some unseen forces. He is primarily a social being. Man lives in a society of being. Marx elaborated these ideas and made this clear by connecting it to his idea of full emancipation. According to Marx; "Only when the actual, individual man has taken back into himself the abstract citizen and in his individual relations has become a species-being, only when being recognized and organized his own powers as social powers so that social force is no longer separated from him as political power, only then is human emancipation complete"[10]. The society is the one that completes his being. Man becomes part and is one with his environment. It would only be in this state that he is free and can exercise his freedom.

Considering these ideas, it is evident that what he wants was not only the individual emancipation but of course, in connection with the society and production, the political emancipation. Brenkert even made it clear in his essay; "For Marx, political emancipation is the dissolution of the old society, on which the sovereign power, the alienated political life of the people, rests." [11] This seemed to be the real goal of Marx's philosophy of freedom. He desires the abolition of classes set by the political standard that has set men apart from the rest. Classes basically restrain the exercise of freedom. This would only limit the social activity of men, thus, hindering the flow of freedom.

Marxist Analysis of Laurel's Concept of Freedom and Morality

According to Laurel, the very essence of freedom is self regulated exercise of rights with the discharge of corresponding obligations is most sensitive to any form of abuse or violation. This essence implies one's enjoyment of rights and privileges as a person and as member of a particular society. Such exercise of rights and privileges does not guarantee absolute exercise. Rather, it is subject to limitation manifested in the different standards and mechanisms provided by a particular society. However, it has to be noted that freedom is not simply a privilege and a right. It is something that an individual has to work for. In this view,

we see a shade of social condition that Laurel had and the social condition of people around him, colonized.

These circumstances show the parallelism between the concept of freedom given by Laurel and Marx's view about freedom. Marx belongs to the upper class of the society yet his thoughts tried to fight for the masses. To mention, Marx rarely mingled with the masses yet his political ideas fought for the liberty of the masses from the abusive practices of the capitalists. The colonizers may be likened to the capitalists that Marx was referring in his works who abuses and imposes their will to the workers. This is synonymous with the social condition of the Filipinos. Japanese colonizers imposed their will and Filipinos had no recourse but to follow since, disobedience follows punishment or even death.

Another point of Laurel's view has something to do with freedom and mental colonization. In one of his speeches he said: "...independent state than a certain degree of freedom of thought, a certain degree of freedom of religion, and a certain degree of protection of life, liberty and property as the minimum requirements for the happiness of the people and of individuals." To be free is not only being able to exercise your rights and enjoy your privileges. To be free is also not to be fully controlled by internal forces. Here, I am referring to forces that control the mind and how one think. These are evident in religion, laws and other ideologies.

In connection to Marxist concept, he was addressing freedom as being free from the control of the superstructure. Superstructure refers to the state and its popular ideologies. These may include philosophy, religion, arts and even politics. In Marx's view, the substructure, referring to the forces of production, the economic aspect is determined by superstructure. This means the standards, behaviors, laws and the like are determined by external factors, in Marx's view the economic factors. What does it say about Laurel's view of freedom? In Laurel's concept of freedom, to be free is to be free from the determinism of such forces like colonizers and he even included religion as he enumerated them. The thinking of an individual is not to be controlled by ideologies set by the colonizers. In reference to Marxist view, these are the standards set by the capitalists. The capitalists set standards that control the working class. The colonizers, in relation to the context of Laurel, set standards for the colonized.

Furthermore, Laurel also viewed freedom as political independence. "...As I have said, the dream and aspiration of Filipino heroes and patriots have always been complete and absolute political freedom for the Philippines, and all true Filipinos are pledged to the realization of that ideal. I therefore stand for the

government of the Filipinos exclusively and alone without the interference of, injunction or dictation from the foreign power.” [3] Marx, on the other hand, anticipated a classless society. He anticipated the abolition of private property and classes having socialism as intermediary stage. Laurel’s concept of political independence, the freedom from foreign powers may be likened to Marx’s anticipation of liberation of the proletariat from the capitalists. Filipinos’ liberation from the Japanese is synonymous to the proletariat’s liberation from the abuses of the capitalists. This is like Marx’s desire of abolition of social classes brought by the powerful capitalists. Political liberation for the Filipinos is like the liberation of the working class from the standards set by the capitalists. In connection to this, Fromm has something to say, “Marx’s aim was that of spiritual emancipation of man, of his chain liberation from the chains of economic determination, of restituting him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity with his fellow man and with nature.” For Laurel, liberation from the colonizers both physical and mental colonizers will restore the wholeness of Filipinos that will also enable him to find unity with his fellow Filipinos.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Freedom in its broader sense pertains to one’s ability to do what he wants. It is the practice of one’s rationality by making decisions and defining the meaning of your life. In a political sense, freedom is synonymous to liberty but not equated or the same as liberty. This paper showed what freedom as viewed by Jose P. Laurel. From the views and ideas of Laurel about freedom, interpretation and meaning are given through the ideas and concepts of Karl Marx. It is encapsulated in a Marxist reading of Laurel’s concept of freedom. It attempted not only to analyze Laurel’s concept of freedom but also to show its parallelisms with Marx’s concept of freedom in relation to his anticipation of a utopian society.

From the research and analysis, several relationships between Marx and Laurel’s views about freedom are inferred. These are: a.) the social condition that Laurel was addressing is synonymous to the social condition addressed by Marx. Laurel was making sense of the freedom pertaining to colonized Filipinos while Marx was making sense of freedom of the working class colonized by the capitalists. b.) Laurel was addressing freedom in the context of liberation not only from physical colonization but also from mental colonization while Marx was addressing freedom from the context of consciousness, more specifically false consciousness injected in the working class. For Marx, the working

class will not only be liberated from the abuses of the capitalists but also from the consciousness injected by the powerful, which make unjust practices bearable to them. Here, he addressed substructure and superstructure, which are mentioned in the paper. c.) Freedom is also political liberation for Laurel. This implies being free from the dictates of the colonizers and Filipinos living on their own. In view of Marx, his anticipation of a classless society, having socialism as intermediary state is parallel to Laurel’s hope and anticipation of Filipino’s liberty from the colonizers. The Filipinos will not be run by the Spaniards or by any foreign force. In Marx context, the working class will not anymore be working class since there is classes are abolished. They’ll not anymore be governed by the false consciousness injected by the powerful like the capitalists. On the part of the Filipinos, they liberate themselves from the standards and mechanisms set by the Japanese since they are not anymore colonized.

To choose to liberate means liberation is chosen and not given in an instant. To be free from mental and physical colonization is a choice to make. One has to choose and others will not choose for you. Filipinos should choose to liberate themselves from the colonizers who may not be physically present but mentally present. It is the working class who has to choose to free themselves from the abuses of capitalist and from the false consciousness being injected to them. It is not Laurel to choose for the liberation of Filipinos and not Marx to choose for the working class people.

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