



J.S. Mill and Karl Marx on Equality and Justice: Issues in Contemporary Political Theory

Grant C Amadi¹, Okechukwu S Amadi¹, Sam B Kalagbo²

Department of Political & Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Rector, Port Harcourt Polytechnic, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract The basic problems of social existence arise in the fact that men of unequal abilities, needs and desires interact and share from the limited resources of nature. Social contradictions are mostly products of the inability of society to determine the best criteria for the distribution of these resources to these different individuals. The questions that a social engineer must answer can be summarized as thus: Does trying to make men of different abilities equal justice if not, what is the basis for the determination of criteria for sharing social values? On what basis inimically or harmoniously is equality related to justice? This piece attempts to show, through the philosophies of Mill and Marx, that equality and justice are naturally and conjugally linked to one another, and thus mutually orchestrating. It argues that where there is no equality, there is no justice which is the most consequential function of society.

Keywords Contemporary Political Theory

Introduction

Surely, if justice by its etymology is to act right, then there are a lot to answer and explain, when one says the establishment of equality among men of different abilities and capacities is justice. This piece takes that tall stand, and attempts to answer the inherent questions with the practical philosophies of Mill and Marx. It is easy to think that all men are created equal with similar materials by an impartial and unbiased workman - God. However, humanity is faced with the problem of expressing in practice the argued equality of men. This is largely because men have many spheres of difference - physical frame, intelligence, mental abilities, needs, aspirations, among others. Thus, it becomes a great challenge to declare equality among a group of people who are different in many respects. Being different in abilities, skills and capabilities men naturally fit in to the different segments to which society is divided. Indeed, this is why social existence is plagued with a plethora of contradictions that are beyond simple logic.

Nevertheless, society is built on the footage of equality, essentially because every man is believed to be merely an article of the creator. This equality does not necessarily mean everyone is given exactly equal share of society's bounties or values. What it implies is that everyone has a right in society; and everyone holds a stake in the enterprise of society, because in society man comes to his full maturity and realization. This thus means that there is the need for the, right yardstick for the distribution of society's values and resources to be evolved. The right application of the best form of equality conducive for a society (and for a situation) is what is called justice. Justice is the expression of the form of equality adequate and appropriate for a situation. Thus, the task of justice becomes dependent on the meticulous calculation of the differences in men and the appeal for a common ground of equality. To be sure, the reconciliation of the differences and similarities (or equality) of man has never and would never be an easy task; although the task is an inevitable one, because the continuous existence of society and the determination of what is due each man in society depends on it. In fact,



all the institutions of society are mechanisms for this tedious job of synthesizing diversity in its most appropriate form and degree. It is the need to devise the best method of distributing society values that calls to existence the relevance of political philosophy. The search for the best way of reconciling the differences in skills, ability, intelligence and other capacities in the form and degree that engender justice is primarily what political philosophy is about. The all too important task of the political philosopher is to protect the mutual enterprise called society by identifying par time the right actions within the dependable and responsible variables of equality to prorate justice. He is to develop the most rational and workable criteria for the determination of equality and justice so as to protect the society from self destruction. Needless to say at this point, that the phenomena of justice and equality arise as a result of the need to settle the problems inherent in group or communal living.

This therefore implies that the task of finding the basis of equality and justice is not a recent endeavour. The task is as old as society itself, mainly because social existence has always been plagued with problems of equality and justice. Philosophers since time immemorial have continued to pry into the nature and determination of the yardsticks of equality and justice. It is thus not a surprise that the first major written philosophy on society was entirely on the issue of justice. Plato's Republic written some 2,400 years ago is in its totality a theory of justice. He was basically consumed in the quest to determining and developing the best form of organizing society to ensure the highest genre of justice is attained and sustained that he developed a theory of society which is today considered as a utopia. His philosophic enterprise led him to refute the then existing Athenian notion of justice (represented by the Ancient Greek Sophist Movement) which sees it as "the interest or advantage of the stronger." He came to show that justice is when everyone operates within his sphere in society as dictated by nature.

As Ndu (1998; 28-29) succinctly puts it:

Following from Plato's criticism of Greek society, it is not difficult to see that his chief concern was for justice... Plato's idea was that where there is harmony, there we must find justice. . . Thus, justice is defined as each person performing that one function in society for which nature has made him/her most naturally fit [1].

Where does equality feature in Plato's conception of justice? Indeed, it is easy to see in Plato's philosophy that his notion of justice is anchored on his believe in the equality of all men, and thus their rights to engage only in one activity in society. Equality is therefore playing in the fact that no man performs more than one function in society; every man accounts for one and one alone. Note that it would have been easy for Plato to make the philosopher rulers higher in relation to any other group in society owing to their knowledge of the good, but for his believe in the equality of men despite their different endowments.

It is however instructive to note that despite the so many years that have been invested into the investigation of justice and equality. The meaning and the relation of the phenomena remains unresolved. The basic questions that beg for answer are: what is the rationale or justification for the equality of men? What are the best criteria for the determination of equality in society that ensures justice? This piece therefore is an attempt at demystifying the thoughts of John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. The choice of philosophers is anchored on the fact that the ideas of Mill and Marx were synthesis of ideas past, and became so influential on subsequent philosophies on equality and justice.

Mill: From Equality to Justice, and then to Utility.

It is true that John Stuart Mill is an executive member of utilitarian group whose general philosophy can be simply summarized as "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." But as Mill himself noted, his principles of utility runs contrary to the classical principles of utilitarianism as laid down by Jeremy Bentham. His consideration of himself as Peter who defiled his master was anchored on his move from the Benthamite collective or quantitative approach to a qualitative approach. He was critical of the amount or the quality of happiness that each individual member of society can achieve, not just quantity of happiness. With this, his philosophy did not just reform (the principle of) utilitarianism but shock its foundation. Unlike, classical utilitarian's, Mill's general philosophy became much more atomistic, concentrating much attention on the happiness of each individual member of society. And obviously his utilitarian principles are premised on his



treatise Liberty; a thesis which emphasizes the need for the freedom of the individual as an independent self and a progressive being. No doubt, to understand Mill's complex conception of the relationship between equality and justice, it is germane to properly comprehend his views on human nature, happiness and liberty.

First, human nature, for him is not a machine which can be built according to a specification or a blueprint, prescribing precisely how it must. It is rather a tree which develops and grows "on all sides according to the tendency of the inward forces which makes it a living thing" [2]. Individual constitute distinct beings who seek unique or different purposes and thus the materials for the satisfaction of one man's needs or the activation of his happiness may not be same with those needed for his neighbour's. This being so, man must be allowed the freedom to decide and make decisions for himself, so long the decisions do not negatively affect the freedom of another member of the community. The political community therefore does not have the moral right to limit the freedom of an individual except that individual's expression of freedom affects the welfare of another individual in society. As he puts it:

There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence: to find that limit and maintain it against encroachment is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs... the only purpose for which power can be rightly exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.

Second, and corollary to the above is the fact that he sees man's freedom and independence as not absolute. Human's arena of liberty must be in consonance with the freedom of other members of society to pursue their individual utility. This in some way is the expression of the common ground of the equality or the collection. And this he argues is the basis of communality and the establishment of society.

... from this liberty of each individual, follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals, freedom to unite for any purpose not involving harm to others. (Mill, op cit)

Third, he observes that human's basic and non-negotiable goal is utility - the actualization of happiness. His entire existence revolves around his quest to match toward achieving that purpose. Therefore, man's religion, law, economy politics, and especially morality find meaning only in their help to the attainment of utility. In other words, there is no sensibility in any morality or institution that does not seek to improve the happiness of man.

On the other hand, Mill also observes that men are naturally inclined to support only moral institutions which increase their liberty of pursuing happiness.

Thus, the moralities which protect every individual from being harmed by others, either directly or by being hindered in his freedom of pursuing his own good, are at once those which he himself has most at heart and those which he has the strongest interest in publishing and enforcing by word and deed... Now it is these moralities primarily which compose the obligation of justice [3].

One issue that is very clear about Mill's analysis of human nature is his believe in the independence and freedom of each individual member of society. He strongly believes society is a collection of different beings that have different purposes, and are only united by the need to attain or achieve the greatest amount of happiness. And indeed the beauty of society or any political community is its ability to sustain these private spheres of men to its greatest possible degree. This is why each individual must be allowed to pursue his aspirations as defined by his conception of happiness so long he does not by so doing shorten the utility of another man.

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interest of others, that human beings become noble and beautiful objects of contemplation. (Mill op cit).

At this point what is important to consider is first Mill's view on inequality. This is necessary because his theory of liberty which gives primacy to individuality easily incline his students to think he does not genuinely believe in equality as a paramount commodity of social existence; to be sure, Mill argues that inequality is - evil, and must be eradicated from the human community. Inequality, for him is a situation where the utility of a man is



deprived him so as to increase the liberty of a man even when the area relates only to his individuality so as to expand the freedom horizon of another man.

He sees inequality as an evil which the state and all its apparatuses must distant themselves from. In fact, the duty of the government is to create the atmosphere where everyone can equally express his liberty. Its necessity is essentially in its ability to provide a fair playing ground for the expression of the liberty of the members of society. In his Letters to Helms, Mill writes clearly his views on the phenomenon of inequality, thus:

Inequality as in itself always an evil... I do not agree with any one society for promoting it [4].

His belief is that there is hardly any justification for inequality and every government would be judge to be either good or id on the basis of its ability to increase the happiness of the individual which is most often engendered by the maintenance of equality. It must be stated explicitly at this point that Mill's view on equality is anchored on the fact that inequality destroys the basis for the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. It is believed that where inequality strives, there is always the fracture of the happiness of the majority of society, and thus the destruction of the prima facie of the state. Even in 1871, almost at the close of his life, Mil still believed and true the equality essence of government as one of its core purposes. This is instructive because most philosophers tend to compromise their views at the tail of their lives; perhaps in their bid to come closer to social realities and their accumulated experiences.

We hold with Bentham, that equality though not the sole end of the ends of good social arrangements: and that a system of institutions which does not make the scale turn in favour of equality, whenever this can be done without impairing the security of the property which is the is product and reward of personal exertion, is essentially a bad government, a government for the few, to the injury of the many (Halliday, op cit).

A critical examination of the foregoing lines of Mill brings into light his definition of the principles that guide his notion of equality. First, it can be observed that one of the guiding principles of his theory of equality is that the equalization of members of a society must not be such that impair the happiness and property of the individual person. In the entrenchment of equality, critical attention must be paid to the private sphere of the individual, and effort must be made at protecting the unique individual of each progressive being. Human race is unique as much as everyone has his sphere, and thus, to Mill, the indiscriminate expression of equality or uniformity destroys the flavor of humanity as a specie. The greatest happiness principle can only come to play when there is a movement towards the equality of men in the full appreciation of the inevitability of differences in humans. Utility thus becomes equality with the allowance of individualism; or in other word, the equalization of individualism.

That principle is mere form of words without rational signification unless one person's happiness, supposed equal in degree (with the proper allowance made for kind) is counted for exactly as much as another's [3].

At this point, it would be noticed that Mill's analysis of equality is anchored on some necessary permutation on the part of both the philosopher and the ruler. To put it differently, his notion on equality puts a responsibility on the social engineer to determine the line between individuality and communality, the private and the public sphere of the individual member of society. This determination of where individualism stops and where equality starts is what he terms, justice. Injustice for him is thus where there is an inappropriate determination of the scope of individualism and where the individual is deprived of his right of expressing himself towards attaining maximum utility. The unjust state therefore is that state whose exercise of power limits without course the liberty of the individual. He thus comments that

The most marked cases of injustice, and those which give the tone to the feeling of repugnance which characterizes the sentiment, are acts of wrongful aggression or wrongful exercise of power over someone; the next are those which consist in wrongfully withholding from him something which is his due—in both case inflicting on him a positive hurt, either into the form of direct suffering or of the privation of some good which he had reasonable or of a social for counting upon [3].



Like Plato and Aristotle, he believes that the state exist for justice. He contends duty of government is to ensure the continuous existence of justice in the society. However, he differs from the duo in that he did not see justice as the sole end of the state. Justice, for him, is a special means to a critical end. The development and sustenance of justice in a society help to the achievement of the sole end of man —utility. Hence, justice is as much important as to the extent it helps the actualization of the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

The relevance of justice is therefore expedient in the realization of a greater good, which is more prone to dynamism.

We are continually informed that utility is an uncertain stand, which every different person interprets differently, and there is no safety but in the immutable, ineffaceable, and unmistakable dictates of justice, which carry their evidence in themselves and are independent of the fluctuations of opinion [3].

To adequately understand justice, Mill thinks it proper to trace the phenomenon's meaning back to its etymology. He observes that in most languages the etymology of justice corresponds to "just" which relate to "Justum," "Dikaion," "Recht," and "la justice" meaning ordered, law suit, right or righteousness and judiciary, respectively. His justification for investigating the meaning of justice through its historical evolution is because most of what has been conceived as corresponding to one part or the other of its etymological meaning. He went ahead to identify some popular notions of justice as viz:

- ❖ Everyone must be allowed to exercise his personal liberty
- ❖ Any man's right must not be deprived him.
- ❖ Everyone must get what he deserves whether good or bad
- ❖ One must not break faith with another man; a just man keep to his agreement
- ❖ It is bad to be partial; partiality is inconsistent with justice
- ❖ Equality is the driving principle of justice.

He believes that what gives substance to any of this view, at any point in time, and links all of them together is utility. His conception of justice is therefore differentiated by the fact that he is directly concerned with creation of utility for the greatest number. As he succinctly puts it:

I account the justice which is grounded on utility to be the chief part, and incomparably the most sacred and binding part, of all morality [3].

Basically, Mill's conception of justice can be seen from three angles:

- (a) The golden rule which forbids human from hurting his neighbor. And this includes that men must never interfere in the expression of the freedom of each other.
- (b) The punishment of those who tries to hurt, or hurts another. This is in consonance with the human impulse of self-defense and the defense of others.
- (c) Third, the principle of impartiality and the maintenance of equality. To all these he writes:
In one point of view, they may be considered as corollaries from the principles already laid down. If it is a duty to do to each according to his deserts returning good for good as well as repressing evil by evil, it necessarily follows that we should treat all equally well (when no higher duty forbids) who have deserved equally well of us, and that society should treat all equally well who have deserved equally well of it, that is, who have deserved equally well absolutely. This is the highest abstract standard of social and distributive justice, toward which all institutions and the efforts of all virtuous should be made in the utmost possible degree to converge [3]

The place of expediency in Mill's conception of justice cannot be overemphasized. His views clearly show that the expression of justice is dependent on suitability of the principle or decision with the end —which is utility. It thus implies that justice does not have the same form all the time; its expression sometimes negates even some of its known definitions. What simply guides the configuration of justice at each material time is the ability of its particular shaper to increase the happiness of the greatest number. This is why he says that historical evidences shows "That all cases of justice are also cases of expediency" [3]. Though the ultimate purpose of justice is the maximization of the happiness of man and thus the greatest morality of humanity, its meaning and character cannot be given specific or predetermined scope. However, when some of its well known principles



are eroded by expediency, the purpose of justice cannot be said to have been distorted, so long as each individual member of society is by that fact bettered off in utility. ‘

...justice is a name, for certain moral requirements which, regarded collectively stand higher in the scale of social utility, and are therefore of more paramount obligation, than any others, through particular cases may occur in which some social duty is so important as to overrule anyone of the general maximum of justice [3].

The only non-negotiable social duty is the happiness of the individual- all other social moralities are dependent on expediency. This therefore implies that justice is meaningless except everyone's happiness is given as much leverage as those of others. For him, his whole ideas on equality, justice and happiness may be summarized in a short clause:

Those conditions being supplied by Bentham's dictum "everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one," might be written under the principle of utility as an explanatory commentary [3].

The above expression of Mill which obviously captures a large part of his view on utilitarianism shows that the principle of utility is generally tied around the principles of equality and justice. One individual counting for more than one is a negation of nature, and utility can only be found in the observance of the laws of nature. It is the assurance of the equality of men that make society a just and happy place. Injustice and inequality, the negations of utility, creep in when one man's liberty is given more leverage than those of another man to the extent that the former distort that of the latter.

Needless to say at this point, that, though Mill's philosophy revolves around the phenomena of equality and justice, he is not particularly a socialist (communist). He favoured private ownership of property (something Marx sees as the only negation of equality and justice, as we shall soon see). He believes it is by allowing each individual to pursue his own end, and acquire properties, that the collective properties of society are increased; leading to development and civilization. However, he proposed a society filled with growing unionism or the associations of workers—more like a consociational capitalism.

His laissez faire gives the state a minimal role in the order of commodity production. The state must not interfere with the private pursuit of happiness of the individual member of society, except this pursuit hampers those of other members of society.

He however disagrees with the socialist supposition that the state is a tool of the rich which favours them against the poor - what became the, Marxist point of departure for analyzing justice. He believes that the state is largely favouring the poor by creating "an Egalitarian plateau" as Ronald Dworkin put it; than being a modality for the domination of the poor. In analyzing systems of taxation, he notes that:

People feel obliged to argue that the state does more for the rich man than for the poor, as a justification for its taking more from them, though this is in reality not true, for the rich would be far better able 'to protect themselves, in the absence of law or government, than the poor, and indeed would probably be successful in converting the poor into their slaves [3].

From the foregoing, it is easy to see that Mill's views on equality and justice is not only complex, but are premised on his views on liberty. Much of this complexity arises as a result of his excessive hold on realism and individualism. He explains in his, system of logic, volume ii that "the most effectual mode of showing how the sciences of ethics and politics may be constructed, would be to construct them." [2].

Let us now turn to Marx who is first of all more historical and than more precise about the importance of equality and justice in the social community.

Marx's Justice in Equality, and Equality in Communism

It is easy to see from his theories that Karl Marx is greatly concerned with the phenomenon of equality. Even though he did not explicitly title any of his writings as "a history of equality," his general philosophy was aimed at the destruction of the basis of social inequalities and exploitation in society, which he saw as arising from the division of every social formation into classes on the basis of people's relation to the means of production. Indeed, Marx's hold on the philosophy or phenomenon of equality as an important commodity in the political



community is well known. However, what are not so well known include: first, the fact that his definition of equality and the means of achieving it is practically problematic. His equality is somewhat vague and often represented casually as, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." A clause which is not as simple in the practical realm as it may seem theoretically.

Second, Marx was as much concerned with justice as he was with equality. In fact, his whole scheme of equality was directed toward justice. However, he believes that attention must be paid on the process - equality, rather than the end product - justice. That is, there is no need pursuing after justice once equality is achieved, because justice is in equality.

Needless to say from the onset that Marx happens to be one of the finest of student of social history. His material conception of history cannot be easily disputed. He believes the premise of all human society and thus of all history is the fact that man must live he has to feed, which then brings up the need for him to engage in production.

History thus becomes an evolution in the quest of men to satisfy the need for food, clothing and shelter. This implies that all aspects of man's history are determined by the character of the organization of material production at each epoch. Therefore, to understand history effort must be made at comprehending the evolution of material processes. As he put it:

Our conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real processes of production starting from the simple material production of life, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this (i.e., civil society in its various stages) as the basis of all history; further to show it in its as state, and so, from this starting point to explain the whole mass of different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. and trace their origins and growth [5].

Marx's philosophy of history can therefore summarized as thus: the primary cause of change in social existence is the system of material production. As the social relation of production changes, every other institution in society changes in consonance.

It was on the basis of his conviction of the primacy of material condition and economic determinism that he believes real equality is economic equality. The propelling force of genuine equality in society cannot be found in the political, legal or social realm; but in the economic realm. All other types of equality are only fictitious if not built on the foundation of economic configurations or the social relations of production.

For him, society must be studied from its utmost goal and the means for satisfying the basic needs of man. He criticizes Bentham and his utilitarian cohorts like Mill that their principle of happiness did not pay so much attention to the real cause of satisfaction and happiness – materials - as modified by historical evolution. Therefore, their theories of utilitarianism are narrow and do not critically examine human nature. Marx says;

To know what is useful for a dog, one must study dog nature. The nature itself is not to be deduced from the principle of utility. Applying this to man, he that would criticize all human acts, movement relations etc, by the principle of utility, must first deal with human nature in general, and then human in nature as modified in each historical epoch [6].

For Marx, man is a material being whose entire activities seek to satisfy first his material needs. Man's level of happiness is therefore dependent on his ability to satisfy adequately his material needs. But his ability to satisfy his needs is also dependent on the prevailing mode of production. It is the mode of production or what is loosely called the economic system that determines the conditions and yardsticks for the distribution of the material production among member of the society. Indeed, the appropriateness of these conditions and yardsticks is what gives rise to equality or inequality in society.

In his study of history, Marx came to discover/realize that the evolution of societies have been plagued with great inequalities. From the communal, through the slave and feudal, to the capitalist mode of production society has been divided into classes who have unequal access to the means of satisfying material needs. This inequality orchestrate the continuous struggle at each historical epoch for the expansion of economic space by economic classes.

Thus Marx declares:



The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles [7].

Changes in society's structure for Marx are orchestrated by this struggle for economic control. It is the struggles between classes that push society into its new contradictions.

He conceives the basics for inequality and the consequent division of society into classes as a product of the advent of private ownership of the means of production and distribution. The basic of inequality, class division and struggles would ultimately lead to equality. In this light, Lenin a staunch Marxist proclaims thus "we want to abolish classes and in this sense we are for equality."

At this point, it could be said that Marx's conception of equality is inherently linked to the destruction of the basis for private ownership of the means of production. He believes that if private ownership of properties is established and class division is exterminated, inequality would be naturally eradicated from the human community. Little wonder why, Marx's frontally and fiercely attacked capitalism; a mode of production which he believes fuels inequality to its highest flames, and ensures the unimaginable pauperization of the ruled class. Although, capitalism is not the inventor of inequality, exploitation and class struggles, the division of capitalist society into owners of the means of production - the bourgeoisie, and the labourers or the working class the proletariat, brought about a new form of exploitation and inequality unprecedented in human history. The new arrangement ensure the exploitation of the ruled class as much as to extent of alienating him; first from the product of his labour - surplus value; second, from his fellow men; third, from nature; and then ultimately from himself.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his race [7].

He notes that the gap between the rich and the poor under the capitalist mode of production because of the profit seeking of nature of capitalism cannot be reconciled with the need of the masses and thus would continue to grow except with a socialist revolution. It is the socialist revolution that can destroy the inequality perpetuated by capitalism, not wage leveling, nor wage increment neither is it any welfare package.

The socialist revolution that would lead to the destruction of capitalism following the principle of dialectics necessarily develops in the womb of its social formation as a result of the monopolistic nature of capital. In other words, capital in trying to augment itself, even beyond the limit of reason inevitable destroys itself. On this, he writes:

Along with constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capitalism... grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation...The monopoly of capitalism becomes a flatter upon the mode of production centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. This is the end of capitalism [8].

"Working Men of all Countries Unite!" a statement which is perhaps the most forcible statement in Marx and Engels' classic, *The Communist Manifesto*, in a very significant way summarizes his thought on the source or propeller of the socialist revolution. Marx believes that the socialist revolution is not something the state or the laws of the state can design. It is the working class that must rise up against the inequality and exploitation of the bourgeoisie, and march toward the communist order.

The state cannot liberate the masses because its essence is against the welfare of the working poor. Marx strongly believes that the state is a tool of the bourgeoisie with which they continue the hegemonic control of the resources of society. "The state thus becomes a modality for class domination." For Marx, unlike for Mill, the state does not favour the poor but rather serves as a machinery for the perpetuation of exploitation and inequality in society. The state has been a class tool since its origin. In fact, the origin of the state can be seen in private ownership of the means of production and the consequent division of society into classes. Therefore the abolition of private ownership of properties would naturally lead to the quiet death of state. This is because, as



Marx and Engels clearly noted in the communist Manifesto, “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the entire bourgeois class.” The procedure for the death of the state is construed as;

The proletariat seizes the public power and by means of this transforms the socialized means of production, slipping from the hands of the bourgeoisie, into public property. By this act, the proletariat frees the production from the character of capital they have thus far borne, and gives their socialized character complete freedom to work itself out. Socialized production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible.... In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the state dies out [7].

This brings us to Marx’s theory of justice. Justice, for him, is nothing rather than the establishment of equality engendered by the abolition of private property. Nothing is just unless built on the ground of equality; any institution not built on the solid rock of egalitarianism would be faced with a lot of internal contradictions, and cannot be said to be just. Therefore, Marx did not exert much of his philosophic energies on the explanation of justice because he believes justice is an inevitable outcome of equality. What society must seek to understand and establish is equality as it holds many social goodies of which justice is a critical element.

As the foundation of the capitalist social formation is built on the foundation of inequality, it cannot, according to Marx, lay claim to phenomenon of justice. Any claim or reference to justice in a capitalist society is fictitious, and merely a dangerous propaganda. He went to the extent of criticizing socialists like Proudhon who preached the idea of distributive justice, claiming that such ideas distort the understanding of the true form of justice. He also observe that the rise in the ideas of justice in the capitalist society in the sense of wage increment, wage leveling and other welfarist packages is aimed at distorting the course of dialectics. Justice as an issue in the capitalist society is only a machination of the bourgeoisie to pervert the genuine understanding of justice by the proletariat. Justice thus becomes a plot; a plan by the bourgeoisie to continue their hegemony in the social production and the distribution of its spoils. This is what Marx and Engel term, the bourgeoisie socialism.

A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improves of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity..., this form of socialism has, moreover, been worked out into complete systems we may cite Proudhon’s Philosophie de la Misere as an example of this form.... This socialism sought to depreciate every revolutionary movement in the eyes of the working class [7].

On the basis of the gross inability of the capitalist social formation to initiate justice through the veritable medium of equality Marx proposes communism as an alternative. He believes that communism would lead to the destruction of the basis of inequalities and class struggles which is built on private ownership of property. This he believes is the unique characteristic of communism. As he puts it:

The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. In this sense, the theory of the communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property [7].

This abolition of private ownership of the means production socializes production and gives every individual equal access to both the production process and the product of collective labour. Communism is however a wasteful mode of production as it gives each man according to his desert. It operates on the principle of, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” It must be noted here that this principle has been attacked by many who argue that the principle is unworkable as it does not appreciate the nature of human. Most of these criticisms steam out of their believe that man is a reserve animal who may not want to work if he is aware his needs will still be met even if he did not work. Another question that the principle brings to bear is: what will be the criteria for the determination of needs?

The above concerns are irrelevant if one takes a look at the proposed nature of Marx’s communism. The socialization of production in the communist society would make work and production process a loveable process that all men would desire sincerely. And given the fact that man by his nature is a worker, he cannot



stop working merely because his needs are always met. He observes that the reason why people have tended to be reluctant to work is because the distribution of the surplus value in society has always been unfair. The rationality of man is what causes him to hate work when the product of his labour is denied him.

But under the communist system, man would be fully active in the production process not merely as a means of survival, but as a way of expressing himself, and socializing with his fellows.

Conclusion

This exercise reveals the fact justice is a product of equality. It attempted to show that equality and justice are consanguineously and conjugally linked. Equality, we discovered, does not imply that every man is treated totally with the same measure; it rather implies that everyone should be given as much leverage or opportunity as the other man. And it is in the determination of the most appropriate criteria for the leverage of men that justice lays.

With Mill, the essence of equality and subsequently justice is found in their abilities to orchestrate the greatest happiness for the greatest number; with a good consideration of the quality and quantity of happiness possessed by the individual as a progressive being. For Marx, justice is seen as an inevitable outcome of justice; and for both to find any concrete meaning; they must be expressed in the improvement of the material conditions of man.

One thing that runs inherently through the theories of both philosophers like a strand holding them to an organic unity, despite their seemingly different position, is the fact that they both discover that equality and justice are aimed at the satisfaction of man. This thus calls into view that all notions of equality and justice in any society must be tested in the light of the fulfillment and satisfaction of the members of that social community. This is essentially why Mill holds strongly that all cases of justice - which is a product of equality, are cases of expediency.

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