

DISCOURSE OF NEEDS AS A POLITICAL DISCOURSE:
A CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF “RADICAL NEEDS”

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Dissertation Abstract

Demet Evrenosoğlu, “Discourse of Needs as a Political Discourse:
A Critical Reconstruction of ‘Radical Needs’ ”

The aim of the present thesis is to explore the possibility of a discourse of needs as a political and a critical discourse. My starting point is the exposition of modern need theories. I argue that, for different reasons and to different degrees, these paradigmatic approaches tend to neglect the contextual and the dissentious nature of need interpretation and satisfaction. This in turn hampers the force of their critique of capitalist societies. The evaluation of modern need theories calls for an understanding of need that is normative *and* historical. In search for an answer, I turn to Hegel’s and mainly to Marx’s works for conceptual and theoretical opportunities of a historical outlook that does not relinquish its critical perspective. I argue that their dialectical treatment of need forms and their theoretical background informed by the relationship between “form”, “totality” and “critique” allow exploring human needs within the framework of an immanent critique.

In this vein, I introduce the concept of radical needs— a relatively unexplored concept in Marx scholarship – as a moment of capitalist need dynamics and reconstruct it in terms of three interrelated aspects: Radical need as the *milieu* of human emancipation, universality embodied in radical needs and radical need as the motivation for collective action. This undertaking has two distinct yet related purposes: The first one is to construe radical needs as a powerful conceptual tool for an immanent critique, which appears to be neglected both in critical theory and in need theories. My second aim is to shed light upon the contemporary forms of “radical needs” and present the need for water, that is commonly associated with the realm of natural necessity, as a radical need form emerging in contemporary capitalism. I argue that formulating a need that is usually ascribed to the realm of natural necessity as a radical need form highlights the peculiarities of neoliberal need dynamics. The reconstruction of “radical needs” opens up a novel theoretical space for the discourse of needs as a political and a critical discourse.

Tez Özeti

Demet Evrenosoğlu, “Politik ve Eleştirel Bir Söylem olarak İhtiyaç Söylemi:

‘Radikal İhtiyaçlar’ ”

Bu çalışmanın amacı, insan ihtiyaçları söylemini eleştirel ve politik bir söylem olarak yeniden tartışmaktır. İnsan ihtiyaçlarına yönelik güncel tartışmaları yönlendiren modern ihtiyaç teorilerinin, farklı nedenlerle ve farklı derecelerde, hem ihtiyaçların tarihsel bağlamını, hem de ihtiyaçların yorumlanması ve karşılanmasına ilişkin toplumsal ve politik çatışmaları göz ardı ettiğini öne sürüyorum. Modern ihtiyaç kuramcılarının göz ardı ettiği veya yok saydığı sorular, siyasi ve toplumsal düşünce tarihi içinde nasıl ele alınmıştır? Hem tarihsel hem eleştirel bir ihtiyaç kavramı mümkün müdür? İnsan ihtiyaçları Hegel ve özellikle Marx’ın toplumsal ve siyasi düşüncesinde merkezi bir öneme sahiptir. İnsan ihtiyaçlarının artışı bir yandan özgürlüğün bir momentini, diğer yandan toplumsal ve siyasi yapılara esareti artıran diyalektik bir dinamik içinde ele alınır. Tarihsel tikeliliği göz ardı etmeyen eleştirel bir ihtiyaç kavramını, ihtiyaç formlarını diyalektik bir süreç içinde elen alan Hegel ve özellikle Marx’ın yaklaşımında bulabiliriz. Bu düşünürlerin “form”, “bütünlük” ve “eleştiri” arasında kurduğu ilişki, insan ihtiyaçlarını içsel bir eleştiri çerçevesinde ele almamızı sağlayan teorik bir arka plan sunar.

Bu bağlamda, Marx literatüründe fazla incelenmemiş olan “radikal ihtiyaçlar” kavramını kapitalist ihtiyaçlar dinamiğinin bir momentini olarak üç farklı boyutta yeniden yapılandırıyorum: özgürleşmenin aracı olarak radikal ihtiyaçlar, evrensellik ve kolektif hareketin itici gücü olarak radikal ihtiyaçlar. Bu denemenin iki temel amacı var. İlki, gerek ihtiyaç teorileri, gerek eleştirel teorinin göz ardı ettiği bir işleve işaret ediyor: Radikal ihtiyaçları, kapitalizmin içsel eleştirisinin kavramsal aracı olarak kurmak. İkinci amacım, güncel radikal ihtiyaç formlarına ışık tutmak ve çoğunlukla temel ihtiyaç kategorisi içinde ele alınan su gereksinimini günümüze ait bir radikal ihtiyaç formu olarak sunmak. Doğal gereksinim alanı içinde tanımlanan bir ihtiyacın, bugün radikal bir formda ortaya çıkışının güncel kapitalizmin ihtiyaç dinamiği içindeki aşkınlık imkanlarına ışık tuttuğunu iddia ediyorum. Bu yeniden yapılandırma denemesi, insan ihtiyaçlarını politik bir söylem olarak kavrayan bir teorik alanı mümkün kılar.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II: PARADIGMATIC DISCOURSES OF NEEDS.....	15
Psychological Approach: Maslow's Hierarchal Structure of Needs.....	16
Objectivist Account and Need/Want Distinction: Doyal and Gough.....	28
Historical-Critical Account: Developmental Understanding of Needs.....	45
Overall Critical Evaluation of Need Discourses.....	54
CHAPTER III: HEGEL AND MARX ON THE DIALECTICAL MOVEMENT OF NEEDS.....	63
Diversification of Needs and Development of Consciousness in Hegel.....	69
Development of Needs in <i>Philosophy of Right</i> : System of Needs.....	80
Marx and Capitalist Need Dynamics.....	91
Rational (General) Abstraction and Determinate Abstraction.....	91
Production and The Role of Needs.....	95
Critique of Political Economy and Critique of Needs in Capitalism.....	98
Necessary Needs.....	103
Social Needs and True/False Needs.....	107
Objectification and Human Needs.....	113
Human Needs as a Critical and Historical Concept.....	117
CHAPTER IV: DISCOURSE OF NEEDS AND THE HISTORICALLY SPECIFIC CONFIGURATION OF ECONOMY AND POLITICS IN CAPITALISM.....	125
Self-Interest and the Discourse of Independence.....	126
Economic Interest as the Paradigm of Self- Interest.....	134

Discourse of Needs and Discourse of Dependence.....	141
Genealogy of a Keyword: Dependence as an Individual Trait.....	143
Discourse of Dependency as the <i>De-politicization</i> of Need Discourse.....	147
Historically Specific Configuration of Economy and Politics in Capitalism.....	149
Relations of Objective Dependence and Personal Dependence.....	153
Objective Dependence: "Market as Imperative" and "Market as Opportunity"....	158
Implications of the Configuration of Economy and Politics for Needs.....	164
CHAPTER V: A CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF “RADICAL NEEDS” AND RADICAL NEEDS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT.....	168
Need Forms and Totality.....	168
Culmination of Capitalist Need Dynamics: Form of Radical Needs.....	174
Radical Needs as the Motor of Transcendence: <i>Theory of Need in Marx</i>	177
Radical Needs and the Process of Production in <i>Beyond Capital</i>	190
The Movement of Need Forms and the Emergence of Radical Needs.....	199
A Critical Reconstruction of “Radical Needs”.....	202
Radical Needs in Contemporary Context.....	208
Formation of the Need for Water as a Contemporary Radical Need Form: The Bolivian Case:.....	209
A Contemporary Radical Need: The Need for Water.....	215
Normativity and Radical Needs as an Aspect of Immanent Critique.....	226
Theoretical Tenets of Immanent Critique.....	229
Radical Need as a Neglected Component of Immanent Critique.....	236
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION.....	242
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	246

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My motivation to undertake a dissertation about the discourse of needs is to a significant extent related with the conspicuous absence of contemporary theoretical discussions over needs and the rather unexplored significance of a critique of capitalist need dynamics in contemporary political philosophy. The neglect of discussions over the dynamics of needs is conspicuous insofar as the number of people who cannot satisfy even their basic needs go hand in hand with the pace of the modification and the diversification of commodities in capitalism. The neglect of need analysis strikes one as even more interesting once we acknowledge that a significant amount of people in the world still innocently believe that the whole purpose of economic activity, of production and distribution, is to satisfy human needs.

Once we recognize the absence of the problematization of needs in contemporary political thought, we are inevitably led to ponder the reasons that might set the stage for this reserve. One reason might be the conceptual difficulties that pertain to the grammar of needs. In daily language, one hardly ever distinguishes between needs, interests, wants and preferences. Nevertheless, some moral philosophers argue that rejecting the force of a need claim and admitting no categorical difference between a need claim and an assertion of preference is hardly ever intuitive. In *Needs, Values and Truth*, David Wiggins cites G.E.M Anscombe, who argues for a similar normative distinction between needs and wants: “To say that [an organism] needs that environment is not to say for example that you want it

to have that environment but that it won't flourish unless it has it.”¹ Notwithstanding the importance of making analytical distinctions for conceptual clarity, conceptual intricacies of the grammar of need can hardly explain this lack of discussions concerning needs. In other words, this dissertation grants that the neglect of a critical stance with respect to needs is not simply due to a theoretical or pragmatic choice but that it is deeply rooted in the present historical conjecture and intellectual constellation of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

Especially along with the end of welfare state, the theoretical terrain came to be occupied by the orthodox economics paradigm of preference and demand based on the principle of interest. Discourses over needs gave way to those over the maximization of economic efficiency and accumulation of wealth.

There are two main reasons why economists have chosen to overlook the differences [between needs and wants]. The first reason is that doing so has not at all hampered the economics profession in developing a descriptive paradigm of today's capitalist economies, based on those economies' experiences since the industrial revolution. The second reason is that not dwelling on the concept of needs and wants has enabled the economists to keep the interpersonal comparisons out of utility theory. This has meant also that the moral and social implications of such comparisons and discussions could be kept out of economic theory and analysis.²

Needs are thereby equated with effective demand, that is, strictly as an aspect of an autonomous economic sphere considered to be unproblematic and exempt from political considerations. Another analogous, yet distinct tendency can be depicted within the culturalist discourse with its emphasis on “consumer society”, whereby consumption came to be celebrated as the *only* path for self-expression.

Controversially, the implication is de-linking consumption and the realm of social

¹ Wiggins (1998), p. 6.

² Raiklin, E.&Uyar, B. (1996), p.49.

production as well as reducing the latter into a technical question – a capitalist paradise, so to speak. This implies regarding needs as the expressions of one's identity - or more precisely, the discourse of desire with its stress on the infinite possibilities for self-creation prevailed as dominating theoretical discourse. Creation of surplus as a consequence of social struggle and conflict was kicked out from the back door and came to be assumed as a natural phenomenon. Even against this roughly portrayed background of an intellectual constellation, where any debate over the emergence, interpretation and satisfaction of needs are either circumscribed within the confines of purely economic paradigm in terms of demand or of cultural theory as the expression of identity, the absence of a critique of capitalist need dynamics, problematization of human needs as a political concern does not come as a surprise.

Against this background, the present thesis problematizes the exclusion of need analysis from social and political philosophy and aims to reveal the questions and normative considerations that are thereby excluded as irrelevant – if not insignificant. This invites questions that traverse and inform the thesis: What is the philosophical and political interest in rescuing needs talk from becoming rhetorical? Against the neo-liberal tendency to regard human needs as unproblematic givens, how can we raise the question of human needs as a *critical* and *political* question today? These considerations may lead the reader to see the present work as a theoretical attempt to understand what need is. Nevertheless, a philosophical inquiry about needs that starts off with the question in the form of “What is X?” risks isolating them from concrete historical context as well as subduing them in rigid definitions that might blind us to the significance of the movement of need forms. Notwithstanding the impact of such

analyses for conceptual clarity, I argue that analyses of needs that have as their starting point such a direct confrontation with the term tend to digress attention from historically particular operation of capitalist need dynamics and the social conflicts that thereby arise. Our focus of inquiry is not the notion of need *per se* but particular discourses about needs. More specifically, we are preoccupied with the means by which discourse on needs can be revealed as fundamentally a critical and a political discourse.

Therefore, the present thesis takes as its starting point the critical evaluation of some contemporary need approaches: The psychological approach exemplified in Abraham Maslow's hierarchal structure of needs, the objectivist account exemplified in Doyal and Gough's theory of need and finally the historico-ontological account of needs by Sean Sayers. Evidently, these do not exhaust the literature on needs; nevertheless they are paradigmatic approaches that have informed the lexicon on needs and operated in the formulation of major controversies concerning the structure of human needs. I first critically evaluate the strengths and the shortcomings as well as their political implications especially by drawing attention to the questions that they raise as well as the ones they tend to undermine. For different reasons and to different degrees, these modern approaches, I argue, tend to neglect the contextual and the dissentious nature of need interpretation and satisfaction. Insofar as a limited degree of historical specificity enters into their construction of the structure of human needs, they cannot sufficiently achieve the task of critically interrogating the historically particular form of needs in capitalism.

I argue that a political outlook oriented toward needs must be able to disclose the historically particular forms of need satisfaction and interpretation as major sites

of antagonism and conflict in capitalist societies as well as being able to expose the historical, thereby the contingent nature of the capitalist dynamics of needs. Common conjectures of conceiving needs either as a purely “economic” or of associating them merely with the questions of culture and identity tend to undermine the antagonistic nature of needs in their relation with capital. This reveals that emphasizing the contextual and the conflictual form of needs in neoliberal capitalist societies is crucial to address the question of needs as a political one. Moreover, only a historical outlook can reveal the contingency of the extant system of needs and hint at the possibilities for changing it. These considerations evidently call for an understanding of needs that is *both* normative *and* historical, which opens the way for an examination of the particularity of capitalist need dynamics without losing a critical edge.

I turn to Hegel’s and mainly to Marx’s works for the conceptual and theoretical opportunities of a historical outlook that does not relinquish its critical edge and a critical stance that takes as its object historically particular need dynamics . By this gesture, I do not intend to suggest that Marx and Hegel offer a theory of needs *per se*. On the contrary, their treatments of needs are apparently far from being systematic. Nevertheless, their ontology of needs in terms of relations and processes open the way for a dynamic understanding of needs, whereby the dialectical movement of need forms can be established as the *topos* of social conflict and evoke questions that are neglected in the approaches above mentioned. They do not only evoke questions that the approaches in Chapter II neglect but their import lies in their critical stance with respect to need dynamics, which they posit as a central aspect of their social and political thought. Both for Hegel and Marx, the expansion of needs involves a

moment of liberation as well as creating “a monstrous system” as expressed by Hegel.³ This dialectical movement pertinent to need dynamics is a central aspect of their social and political thought despite their evident differences. Their critical evaluation opens the way for tracing the contradictions of capitalism back to need dynamics and for identifying the possible moments of transcendence within the movement of needs. Especially Marx’s emphasis on totality of social relations allows revealing the concept of need as a concept of interaction between production, exchange, circulation and distribution and as moving through them by taking different forms.

In view of my critical evaluation of approaches in Chapter II and my exposition of Hegel’s and Marx’s unique treatment of need dynamics, I formulate two distinct modes of need analysis, which in turn shed light upon my initial question concerning the possibility of a critical and a political stance with respect to human needs. The former initiates from a trans-historical, purely normative understanding of need, which designates the standpoint of “ought” from which the critique is undertaken. The second approach on the other hand does not start out by delineating a normative conception of need; rather the object of critique is the historically specific form that needs take in capitalism. Central to this mode of analysis are the historically specific forms of need satisfaction and of interpretation. Rather than starting with a model based on how people ought to be, ought to act, how society ought to be structured according to a principle based on need, the manner in which people actually satisfy their needs in some society in a historical moment and how needs impinge on action is the central concern for the latter mode of analysis. The former corresponds to what

³ Hegel (1979), p. 249.

Raymond Geuss calls an “ethics-first-view”⁴, while the latter is an immanent critique of need dynamics.

On this basis, I introduce the concept of radical needs – a concept that Marx occasionally employs yet never develops – and the final chapter undertakes a critical reconstruction of the concept of radical needs in terms of three interrelated aspects: Radical needs as the milieu of human emancipation, the dimension of universality embodied in radical needs and radical needs as collective force against capital. This undertaking has mainly two distinct yet related purposes: The first one is to construe radical needs as a critical concept – more precisely, as a viable notion for an immanent critique of capitalist need dynamics. According to my interpretation, an immanent critique of need dynamics does not juxtapose a purely normative conception of need against facts but intends to capture the movement of particular need forms in capitalism and the radical needs that emerge through the oppositions between human needs and needs of capital. The link between radical needs and immanent critique appears to be neglected both in need theories and in critical theory. While theories that draw attention to radical needs fail to relate them to the theoretical lexicon of immanent critique, ones that investigate the possibility of immanent critique of capitalism fail to develop the notion of radical needs as its inherent aspect.

My second aim in this undertaking is to shed light upon the contemporary forms of “radical needs”. Reconstructing radical needs as a moment of capitalist need dynamics evokes turning to concrete historical antagonisms and focusing on present-day struggles in order to shed light upon the contemporary form of radical needs.

⁴ Geuss (2008), pp.6-11. The details can be found in Chapter III of the present dissertation.

Given the pace of commodification, the enclosure of the commons and the intensity of struggles for their satisfaction, I propose that subsistence needs - and more specifically the need for water - takes the form of a radical needs in contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Rather than demarcating a need as radical in terms of its object, I propose to characterize it in terms of the particular forms it takes in specific historical conditions, concentrating on the dialectical relationship between how a particular need might take a universal form as a radical need. Given Marx's approach to needs and specifically the debates over radical needs in the works of Agnes Heller, Michael Lebowitz, Ian Fraser and Kate Soper, the gesture of imputing a radical form to a subsistence need is unconventional. Radical needs are commonly associated with the need for leisure or the need for self-realization – “higher needs” as they are called. Against this common view, the crux of my argument is that the permeation of capital into every aspect of life and the commodification of commons compels us to reconsider the status of subsistence needs like the need for water, which are usually delineated within the realm of natural necessity, as a radical need form. This retrospectively evinces for my attempt to reconstruct the notion of radical needs for addressing the present day as a historical moment as well as my emphasis that traverses the thesis on the impact of historically particular need forms for need analysis in general. The commodification and the enclosure of the commons expose the intense antagonism between human needs and the needs of capital through which the need for water attains a radical form. By going beyond the demand to satisfy the particular need for water, the need for water in its radical form surpasses its particularity and opens up to a moment of universality as the struggles for its satisfaction represent a moment of rupture in the existing social structure. Struggles

for the satisfaction of the need for water emerge as possible sites for the formation of capacities and powers, which make a claim on the creation of common wealth and the expansion of the capacities for self-government against the increasing dependence upon capital.

By the end of this dissertation, even if I do not propose a systematic theory of need or provide its definition, I intend to reveal historically particular need forms as a keystone for an elaborate critical standpoint with respect to present-day need dynamics and contemporary capitalism in general. Besides providing us with the conceptual tools to elaborate on human needs in their relation to powers and capacities, turning our attention to need dynamics and more specifically to radical needs, implies the exploration of visions pointing beyond capitalist relations and the immanent moments of rupture that take place in contemporary struggles - something essential for expanding our critical space.

Thesis Plan

Chapter II

Following Chapter I, where I introduce the major problematic of this dissertation, my point of departure in Chapter II will be the critical evaluation of some paradigmatic need approaches. The first one is a psychological approach, exemplified in Abraham Maslow's account. According to Maslow, needs are defined as motivational sources, as drives whose non-gratification cause pathological disorders. Maslow's approach represents a major pattern of thinking on needs, which arranges human needs according to a hierarchy of rank. He classifies needs according to a hierarchy in terms of different degrees of urgency and significance that determine the order in

which they must be attended. The second approach is Doyal and Gough's theory of need, which can be briefly characterized as an objectivist account. The objectivist account formulates needs as strictly distinct from drives and wants. Human need is 'objective' in that its theoretical and empirical specification is independent of individual preference and 'universal' in that its conception of serious harm is the same for everyone. Roughly, needs designate those things that ensure unimpaired participation in a form of life. Accordingly, Doyal and Gough claim the need for physical health and the need for autonomy as two basic universal needs, which in turn provide criteria to evaluate the particular societies.

The last account is Sean Sayers' historical-critical approach. Sayers argues that Marxism implies a historical human nature, which is both objective *and* critical. Sayers argues that the need for self-realization that constitutes the normative basis of Marx's critique of capitalism is founded in historically determinate relations of capitalist society. Sayers' emphasis on the import of a critical and a historical approach to needs distinguishes him from the previous approaches. Sayers' account is distinctive for my purposes insofar it aims to restore the possibility of immanent critique with respect to needs that capitalism gives rise to but is unable to satisfy. I follow Sayers in his view that a historical approach does not undermine a critical perspective but that it facilitates a determinateness and specificity that would otherwise lack. However, the scope of Sayers' discussion is limited to providing a historical account of human nature and a historical normative basis of Marx's critical stance. For the purposes of the present thesis, I need to go beyond Sayers' discussion in order to explore need satisfaction and interpretation as sites of conflict and to address the import of the movement of need forms, which culminates in

contemporary radical need forms – something that Sayers’ historical-critical account would not permit.

As I have previously mentioned, I argue that for different reasons and to different degrees, these approaches tend to overlook the contextual and the dissentious nature of need interpretation and satisfaction. The limited degree of historical specificity entering into their construction of human needs is a hindrance for sufficiently interrogating the historically particular form of needs in capitalism.

Chapter III

This chapter turns to the philosophy of history to analyze the different ways in which needs have been treated. Problematizing human needs has been commonplace in the history of philosophy. In the history of Western political thought, the concept of need has been on the scene especially in times of radical social changes and the discussions were mainly centered on whether and to what extent these social changes respond to the expansion of needs or whether the changes themselves could be regarded as an impediment for man’s authentic freedom or for the good life. In book two of the *Republic*, Plato begins his construction of the city with human beings who are individually incapable of meeting their own needs:

‘Well then,’ I said, ‘a city, as I believe, comes into being because each of us isn’t self-sufficient but is in need [*endeēs*] of much ... [W]hen one man takes on another for one need [*chreia*] and another for another need, and, since many things are needed [*deomenoi*], many men gather together in one settlement, to this common settlement we give the name city, don’t we?’ (R 369b-c/45-46)⁵

⁵ Cited in Chitty (1994).

The problematization of human needs lies at the very core of Western political theory and “it virtually begins with a condemnation of those needs which go beyond the ‘necessary’, as sources of corruption and war.”⁶ Hegel’s and Marx’s dialectical approach on the other hand, enables an analysis of needs as an aspect of men asserting universality in interaction with each other and with their environment, whereby a system of need is created, which in turn imprisons them. The solution, then, is again to be found in concrete historical relations. Especially in view of Ian Fraser’s book *The Concept of Need in Hegel and Marx*,⁷ I argue that they open the way for recognizing the centrality of notion of need for grasping the contradictions of capitalism and for identifying the possible moments of transcendence. Moreover, unlike most contemporary need theories, their significance lies in their achievement to go beyond understanding needs as general abstractions that are not informed by the particular antagonistic forms that they take in relation to capital.

Chapter IV

The previous chapter attempted to demonstrate need dynamics in terms of a dialectic between needs as a source of independence and as a source of increasing dependence. This chapter starts off by exploring the central role of the discourse of interest and the association of self-interest with a discourse on independence that is claimed to characterize free market society. My exposition aims to reveal the association of the discourse of interest with the discourse of independence against the background of the historically specific configuration of economy and politics in capitalism. This peculiar configuration, which reaches its culmination in

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Fraser (1998).

contemporary neoliberalism, provides the historical context for understanding the charge of “dependency” raised against welfare state and need-based politics especially in US. The naturalization of dependence and independence dichotomy conceals the increasing dependence on capital, which Marx roughly coins as objective dependence, and it swiftly renders as irrelevant any struggle for collective freedom. This might as well be described as the absence of a systemic critique that leaves behind any aspiration for collective independence from capital. I try to demonstrate that Marx’s insistence on the historically particular form of dependence in capitalism and his efforts to de-naturalize the configuration of politics and economy provides important insight for revealing the antagonistic nature of need dynamics and for countervailing the tendency to *de-politicize* needs. This eventually brings us to the import of discussing need dynamics against the totality of social relations and in terms of need forms.

Chapter V

Emphasis on the dynamics of need as an aspect of totality of capitalist relations opens the way for grasping the movement of needs interdependently qua production, exchange, circulation as well as distribution without being confined to only one aspect, which in turn reveals the social dialectic characterized by the conflict between human needs and the needs of capital. It is then necessary that this conjecture extends beyond economic determinants of supply and demand to a consideration of different aspects of need emergence, satisfaction and interpretation encompassed in the term “dynamics of needs”. This chapter reconstructs the notion of radical needs as a moment of capitalist need dynamics. The crux of my argument

in this section is that while the contemporary context of neoliberal capitalism serves as a background against which the need for water takes a radical need form, natural need qua the form of radical need might in turn operate as a conceptual tool to confront the current state of capitalism. The import of the reconstruction of radical needs is twofold: The first is to address the emergence of contemporary need forms, which in turn highlight the peculiarities of capitalism and the second is to construe radical needs as a critical notion operative in immanent critique.

The dissertation ends with the conclusion presented in Chapter VI, which highlights the import of radical needs as a powerful conceptual tool for raising the question of needs as a political question today.

CHAPTER II

PARADIGMATIC DISCOURSES OF NEEDS

What is the philosophical interest of thinking in terms of needs, what is the significance of rescuing a talk of needs from becoming rhetorical? Is the category to be dispensed with due to its slippery nature? Or does its rather sheer force as well as its contested nature point towards the possibility of formulating needs with substantial significance? This chapter will undertake an exposition and a critical evaluation of the significant attempts that have answered the last question positively. Evidently these approaches are not exhaustive of all perspectives on needs; yet they can be regarded as paradigmatic examples which have been influential in the formation of major points and discussions in more contemporary controversies over needs. Respectively, the first can be coined as a psychological approach, the second one as an objectivist one, while the third one proposes a historical-critical understanding of needs. In the first psychological approach, Maslow provides a hierarchical structure of basic needs defined in terms of drives. The second approach — namely Doyal and Gough's objectivist account — refrains from providing a hierarchy among needs while depicting two universal basic needs as universalisable goals. Finally, Sean Sayers employs a historical-critical account, which emphasizes the historical unfolding and diversification of needs in terms of the dialectical relationship between needs and forces of production.

Psychological Approach: Maslow's Hierarchical Structure of Needs

Abraham Maslow's approach to needs can be considered as the paradigm of a psychological approach. Through a need-based theory of human motivation and personality, Maslow intends to break with the "analytic, dissecting, atomistic Newtonian approach of behaviorisms and of Freudian psychoanalysis", which dominates the science of psychology of his time.¹ This, of course, has direct implications for the methodology of psychological research. Maslow hints at some methodological changes: "How could I have thought this essence could be put to the test in some animal laboratory or some test tube situation? Obviously it needs a life situation of the total human being in his social environment."² Disputing the image of man that is created by appealing to laboratory tests, Maslow's aspirations by far exceed the confines of science of psychology of his time. He makes an ambitious claim to provide a philosophy of human nature – a new image of man and a humanistic conception of science in general.

We must start by noting that while Maslow frequently uses wants, preferences and needs as interchangeable; he at times distinguishes wants and desires from needs arguing that the latter avoids illness and psychopathology, while the former ones do not necessarily do so. His explanation of human motivations that guide behavior is based on a 'Hierarchical-Integrative Theory of Needs'. Maslow categorizes needs in terms of different domains, each of which consists of different particular needs rather than a single need, i.e. the physiological domain refers to the particular need for

¹ Maslow (1970), p. xii.

² Ibid.

nourishment and the need for sex. He criticizes the common tendency to take them lower needs as paradigmatic for the explanation of other human motivations and for explanatory purposes. He contends that “hunger drive is more a special case of motivation than a general one. It is more isolated than other motivations, it is less common than other motivations; and finally different from other motivations in that it has a known somatic base”.³

Instead, he maintains that higher needs are far more determinative than the subjects themselves might suggest and as a paradigm, they might be more indicative than physiological drives.

The typical drive or need or desire is not and probably never will be related to a specific, isolated, localized somatic base. The typical desire is much more obviously a need of the whole person. It would be far better to take as a model for research such a drive, let us say, as the desire for money rather than sheer hunger,...or even better, a more fundamental one, like the desire for love.⁴

For Maslow, providing a list of needs without taking into account their hierarchy of prepotency and the different ways in which satisfaction of a need might be related to the emergence of another is a futile attempt. On the contrary, he maintains that a need is always in relation and inseparably connected to other needs. Appealing to an empirical generalization, he suggests that if our stomachs were empty or if we were in a constant state of thirst, we could never be capable of artistic creation nor have a cognitive urge for a scientific discovery. He claims that motivation theorists overlook two facts: “First that the human being is never satisfied except in a relative or one-step-along- the-path fashion, and second that wants seem to arrange themselves in

³ Ibid., p.20.

⁴ Ibid.

some sort of hierarchy of prepotency.”⁵ The hierarchy of basic needs is based on the principle of relative potency. Prepotency is defined in terms of the effects of lack. More specifically, the most prepotent need is claimed to be the one whose lack causes the strongest motivation. “In the human being who is missing everything in life in an extreme fashion, it is most likely that the major motivation would be the physiological need rather than the others. A person who is lacking food, safety, love and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly.”⁶

While all needs in the hierarchy are considered to be basic needs, the level of prepotency reflects the extent to which a certain need dominates the human organism when basic needs are frustrated. “... the safety need is stronger than love need, because it dominates the organism in various demonstrable ways when both needs are frustrated.”⁷ In this sense, Maslow regards physiological needs to be stronger than the safety need, which he in turn depicts as stronger than love needs.

The principle of relative prepotency in turn reflects another categorization within the hierarchy – namely the higher and lower needs. While human beings share the lower needs with other living things, the higher the need the more it designates that which is specifically human. For Maslow, human organism itself *dictates* this distinction. Like Mill, who profusely insists that in order to have a profound understanding of human nature we must go beyond physical needs, Maslow is keen on differentiating his theory from approaches which base their understanding of human nature on a model of “animal” instincts. In the Preface, he describes the aim

⁵ Ibid., p.25.

⁶ Ibid. p.37.

⁷ Explaining his methodology, Maslow claims to have “built upon the available data of experimental psychology and psychoanalysis.” He adds that he has “accepted the empirical and experimental spirit of the one and the unmasking and depth-probing of the other.” Ibid. p. ix.

of chapter titled “Instinctoid Nature of Basic Needs” as “constituting the foundation of a system of intrinsic human values, human goods that validate themselves, that are intrinsically good and desirable and that need no further justification.”⁸ This, for Maslow, represents a hierarchy of values to be found in the essence of human nature itself.

For Maslow, basic need satisfaction is a prerequisite for a healthy personality and thwarting basic needs is the cause of severe neurosis and psychopathology. Human motivations based on needs, he concludes, must then be the basis for any theory of psychopathogenesis. Maslow defines basic needs as intrinsic reinforcers – the unconditioned stimuli which can be used as a basis upon which can be erected all sorts of instrumental learnings and conditionings. That is to say, in order to get these intrinsic goods, animals and men are willing to learn practically anything that will achieve for them these ultimate goods. Basic needs stand in a special psychological and biological status. Maslow claims that there is enough experimental basis for accepting that basic need gratification is desirable and good in the biological sense.⁹ In this hierarchal system, satisfaction of a need is a prerequisite for the appearance of another – relatively higher- need. When a certain need is satisfied, it loses its importance for the organization of human behavior. The hierarchal move is from physiological needs to more social ones. The first category of needs in the hierarchal system is the category of physiological needs – the most prepotent need. When all

⁸ Ibid., p.xiii. One must not be mislead by Maslow’s reference to the *instinctoid* nature of basic needs. Maslow spares one chapter to criticize both the instinct and non-instinct theories, which he claims to be based upon dichotomies like nature vs. environment, reason vs. instincts. The instinct theory modelled on animal instincts fail to acknowledge that there are human species-specific needs, i.e. the need for self-realization, the need for love etc.

⁹ Ibid., p.92. Note that Maslow uses “biology” in a rather unique sense. In *The Culture of New Capitalism*, R. Sennett makes a similar note: “Like Maslow, the geneticist Richard Lewontin thinks of biology as furnishing a repertoire of human capacities used, or not used, variously over the course of a lifetime as circumstances demand.” Sennett (2006), p.116.

needs are unsatisfied, the physiological needs dominate the organism and all human capacities will be dedicated to hunger-satisfaction. In that case, the organization of capacities is entirely determined by the one purpose of satisfying hunger. Being dominated by a certain need changes both one's sense of self as well as his sense of future and his grasp of life. This means that, for example, in a state of hunger, a person's whole sense of life and his life purpose are under the spell of satisfaction of this need. Once physiological needs are satisfied, the second relatively prepotent category of needs — the safety needs — emerge. Maslow counts security, stability, dependency, protection, freedom from fear, need for structure, order, law, limits etc. in this category. In the case of threat of chaos, he observes, it is common to regress from a higher need to the level of more prepotent need of safety. In this vein, Maslow explains a possible easy acceptance of a military rule as an example for the need for safety.

It is only after the gratification of the need for safety that the need for love and belongingness can emerge. Maslow observes that hunger for contact, belongingness, intimacy have increased by mobility, the breakdown of traditional bonds, urbanization and scattering of families. Severe pathology and maladjustments are indications of the thwarted need of belonging. Similarly, Maslow's frequent appeal to alienation must be conceived in psychological terms. Christian Bay draws attention to this common use of "alienation" in psychology:

Modern psychologists as well as Marxists have used the term "alienation" profusely...Psychologists see alienation as a tangible web of attitudes or as an outlook or a predisposition of some kind; for example, Kenneth Keniston defines alienation in one context as "an explicit rejection of what are seen as the dominant values of the surrounding society"; other psychologists associate alienation with destructiveness and despair of some kind, as something unhealthy...alienation is seen by psychologists as being in principle

ascertainable empirically, though not readily subject to quantitative measurement.¹⁰

The subsequent group of needs in the hierarchy is esteem needs, such as self-respect, freedom, recognition, dignity, status, which involve a sense of self-achievement. The last of basic needs, the highest in the hierarchy is man's need for self-actualization, which Maslow interrogates in a special chapter of its own. A healthy man is primarily motivated by his desire to develop his potentialities, to become everything that he is capable of. Maslow maintains that the manner in which self-realization takes place might differ from one person to another, yet all self-actualizing subjects transcend class, caste and nationalism. As the highest in the hierarchy of basic needs, the need for self-realization involves "the feelings for mankind" and implies the feeling of identification, affection and profound interpersonal relations.¹¹ Maslow claims that the existence of the basic need for self-realization is scientifically endorsed by researches in biology:

Recent developments have shown the theoretical necessity for the postulation of some sort of positive growth and self-actualization within the organism, which is different from its conserving, equilibrating or homeostatic tendency as well as its tendency to respond to stimuli from outside world.¹²

The empirical basis for Maslow's generalizations about self-actualizing subjects is rather unsatisfying; nevertheless his formulation of the need for self-actualization presumably represents- what one might call- a species-being need. Maslow disputes the mainstream motivation theories of his time by arguing that they obscure the

¹⁰ Bay (1980) , p.239.

¹¹ Maslow's analysis excludes that a need might be destructive, i.e. creative self-destruction, which might as well be related to an aesthetic need. In a chapter which is spared for the preconditions of basic need satisfaction, Maslow mentions aesthetic and cognitive needs as they relate to the need for self-actualization. However, why they are not listed as part of the needs hierarchy rather than being listed as their preconditions is left unanswered.

¹² Ibid., p.78.

interrelations between different drives and they tend to single out isolated elements, hence undermine the diversity of human behavior. Accordingly, one shortcoming of instinct theory – as in other motivation theories - was its failure to realize that impulses are dynamically related to each other in a hierarchy of differential strength. This obscures the essentially holistic or unitary quality of the motivational life. We must note that hierarchy of prepotency is not a hierarchy of value importance. Rather, Maslow is keen on insisting that his claims are scientific, based upon the data of psychotherapy and analysis.

We know empirically what human species want, hence we can say ‘if you are a member of human species, then...’ This is all true in the same empirical sense that dog prefers meat to salad or that flowers prosper best in the sun. I maintain firmly that we have been making descriptive, scientific statements rather than *purely* normative ones.¹³

Despite his persistence on an empirical basis, Maslow’s claim that there is empirical evidence about the hierarchy of needs is contentious. Referring to studies in psychology, Ross Fitzgerald emphasizes that although there is empirical data concerning the two lowest levels in the hierarchy – namely physiological needs and security needs – one cannot equally insist that there is empirical evidence for higher levels of needs– especially the need for self-realization.¹⁴ Given what we have said

¹³ Ibid., p.272. Maslow contends that Freud has made “the mistake of identifying ‘determined’ with ‘unconsciously motivated’ as if there were no other determinants of behavior...Such a stand need not be crippling in the field of neurosis because in fact all neurotic symptoms do have an unconscious motivation. In the psychosomatic field this point of view has created a great deal of confusion.” Ibid., p.144.

¹⁴ In his article “Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs – An Exposition and Evaluation”, R.Fitzgerald comments that most psychologists regard the purely empirical study and the validation of a hierarchy of need presents immense problems. “It is clear that empirical validation of Maslow’s higher needs is non-existent. .. Maslow’s formulation that needs or drives are arranged in a hierarchy of prepotency does receive at least partial support. That the support is partial is because the evidence almost exclusively concerns the needs at the two lower levels of this hierarchy, that is the physiological and safety needs. The dominating effects of severe hunger, cold, heat, thirst and fear on animals and men have well been documented...However, they hasten to point out that ‘while there is some evidence that intense physiological and safety needs dominate the behavior, evidence for the

so far, it seems plausible to interpret Maslow as aiming at a naturalistic basis for values along with a functionalist approach. He explains that the human organism dictates certain needs and it is designed such that “it needs salt and love in the same way that automobiles need gas and oil.”¹⁵ These needs are neither cultural artifacts nor they are “mere” subjective responses; but they designate men’s empirical traits. Maslow upholds his theory of motivation based on need to be a fusion of facts and value. However, this intended fusion has been named as confusion by some. Against Maslow, P. Springborg argues that needs formulated as instinctoid can neither be good nor bad. They can be judged as good - in the sense of a natural functioning of an organism physiologically and psychologically – only by the introduction of a normative premise to the effect that natural functioning constitutes excellence.¹⁶

In order to clarify the discussions concerning the plausibility of Maslow’s analysis and the imputation of a naturalistic account, we need to resort briefly to more contemporary discussions concerning ethical naturalism and the intended role of an account of need within naturalism. Relevant for my discussion is R. Norman’s attempt at an objectivist ethics, which is based upon a range of needs rooted in the fact of human psychology. It is contended that a thorough theory of need can accomplish insofar as it “represent[s] a broader category of needs than the narrowly physiological need to avoid injury, but their objective status as inescapable needs is more securely grounded than [Foot’s claims about] virtues.”¹⁷ In the same page, Norman lists the need for a meaningful life, the need for a sense of one’s identity, the

hierarchy relationship of other needs is wanting” pp.44-45. See Fitzgerald (1977), pp.36-51 for a detailed discussion.

¹⁵ Op.cit., p.276.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁷ Norman (1998), p.173.

need for self-expression through meaningful work as well as the need for activity which makes full use of our faculties and potentialities within the suggested broad category. These needs, for Norman, acquire their objective status in virtue of the necessity of their satisfaction for mental health - understood as that harmony of the personality which enables a person to function effectively. Norman maintains that unsatisfied needs will lead to a frustrated, empty life dominated by irrational actions and compulsive drives. Evidently, it is hard to miss the similarities with Maslow's account. Functioning effectively is something that all human beings need regardless of particular aims and objectives. However, Norman proposes taking a further step in order to link his account of need with a conception of good life.

What I want now to suggest is that those needs which have to be satisfied in order for one to be able to function effectively are the same needs whose fuller satisfaction makes for a richly happy life. The satisfaction of them up to a certain level enables one to cope; the more complete satisfaction of them produces positive enjoyment.

Hence his appeal is to the empirical fact of evolution, which he takes as providing the continuity between the conditions of effective conditioning and those of happiness.¹⁸ Briefly, this sets the naturalistic normative background of Norman's views on needs.

Although Maslow does not seem to intend for a political account of needs, he at times refers to the social and political implications of his views and suggests that only a society that permits man's highest purposes to emerge by satisfying his prepotent basic needs is a "healthy" society. However, once the implications of his pyramid of needs are pursued, one seems to be left with political positions which

¹⁸ Maslow's similarity with such an account is evident in his claims about the "good": "By this concept, what is good? Anything that conduces to this desirable development in the direction of actualization of the inner nature of man. What is bad or abnormal? Anything that frustrates or blocks or denies the essential nature of man." *Op.cit.*, p.270. We might interpret this as a possible response that Maslow might give to address Fitzgerald's criticism about the lack of a normative premise.

seem to pull in different directions. On the one hand, compromising the need for freedom at the expense of need for security under a military rule is legitimate with respect to his pyramid of needs; on the other hand, legitimating social rights in a welfare state is as well possible through the same hierarchal model. We must admit that Maslow's view of a social and political order, which admits of no categorical difference between the structure of family and society, is rather weak and naïve.

My personal judgments are that no perfect human being is possible or even conceivable...As for the perfect society, this seems to be an impossible hope, especially in the view of the obvious fact that it is close to impossible even to make a perfect marriage, a friendship or parent-child relationship. If untainted love is so difficult to achieve in a pair, a family, a group, how much more difficult for 200 million? For 3 billion?¹⁹

An attempt to base political theory on Maslow's hierarchy of needs is undertaken by Christian Bay. In his article "Needs; Wants and Political Legitimacy", Bay examines the relationship between human needs and political legitimacy and follows Maslow's identification of needs as any behaviour tendency whose continued denial leads to pathological responses.²⁰ According to Bay, this concept of need is empirical insofar as the destructive consequences of denial or frustration is empirically observable. Given their empirical content, Bay argues, needs are capable of providing the empirical basis for rights. This allows him to further argue for prioritizing social rights. In other words, Bay argues that a psychologically prior need legitimates a politically prior right. The crux of his argument, then, is that Maslow's hierarchal system of needs is capable of legitimately establishing the priority of social rights, for which they provide empirical and factual support. Nevertheless, regarding the hierarchy of needs as an empirical and factual basis is controversial. In a similar

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 270.

²⁰ Bay (1980), pp. 233-252.

context, P.Springborg draws attention to Bay's rather contentious suggestion that the downfall of liberal democracies is their failure to squarely confront *facts*. Bay's assumption here is that Maslow's analysis ascribes a set of facts that culminate in a conclusive understanding of human needs and human nature, and which liberal democracy fails to confront and to appropriately react. Here the question arises as to whether this alleged nature can be taken as an unproblematically given and the shortcomings of considering it as such. Springborg makes a similar remark: "As if indeed the question of what humans need, human nature and appropriate political goals constitute were relatively unproblematic questions."²¹

Maslow starts with a pre-given hierarchal list of needs that defines human nature which in turn forms the basis of values *dictated* by the human organism. What is important for our purposes is that in this formulation needs are arranged according to a hierarchy as fixed and unalterable. More specifically, needs are ahistorical. This, of course, might serve the purpose of psychoanalysis which Maslow conceives as the "subjective discovery of the objective, to become aware of what one is, biologically, temperamentally, constitutionally as a member of a particular species. This is all what psychoanalysis tries to do, a discovery of specific species character of humanness."²²

Yet it is far from obvious how this might serve as a basis for a critique that claims to have a political edge insofar as the latter requires an acute awareness of concrete socio-historical conditions. Maslow undermines the forms that a need might take, diversification and modification of needs in the course of history. Maslow's formulation of a need structure in terms of an instinctoid nature is conspicuously

²¹ Springborg (1981), p.193.

²² Maslow (1970), p. 88.

individuated and the manner in which higher and lower needs are distinguished is wholly divorced from social production, distribution within different classes. In other words, explaining lower and higher needs distinction solely in terms of the dictates of the organism rather than – as one is tempted to say- the *dictates* of a social structure obscures both the social conditions for the emergence of the distinction and the way this distinction relates to the distribution within a society. Here let me draw on Sean Sayers’ criticism in *Human Nature and Marxism* of Mill’s distinction between higher and lower pleasures.²³ As we shall see in the following pages, Sayers criticizes Mill for undermining that this distinction itself is deeply rooted in socio-historical context - as Sayers coins in the division between manual and intellectual labor. In a similar vein, Maslow’s division between higher and lower needs in psychological terms obscures the source of this division in socio-historical context and that it is embedded in social reality, which cannot be accounted for in psychological terms.²⁴

Appropriating a strict metaphysical distinction between natural and social is a common attitude among different need theories. Although Maslow aims at a holistic approach, his hierarchal system still takes up the same distinction. Despite the acknowledgement that human behavior is informed both by cultural and social drives – which he claims to be the superiority of his approach to instinct theories– he still does not take their interchange into consideration. This has the consequence of failing to take into account the different ways the physiological and the cultural

²³ See Sayers (1998) for a detailed discussion.

²⁴ On the same subject, Heartfield (1998) makes the following remark: “The fact that Maslow’s theory is developed within the relatively new discipline of psychology, obscures the fact that it implies a considerable reinterpretation of traditional economic categories of subsistence and luxury consumption. For the political economists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, subsistence meant the wage fund and luxury, the consumption fund of the leisured classes. Higher and lower needs are not distributed within the organism but within society.” p.62.

might be mediated by each other and the different form that a specific need might take through this mediation. This, in turn, undermines the impact of different means of satisfaction for the modification of needs and the creation of new ones.

Objectivist Account and Need/Want Distinction: Doyal and Gough

A significant attempt that aims to form a conception of need with political significance has been undertaken by Doyal and Gough in *Theory of Need*.²⁵ The overall aim of Doyal and Gough's theory is to establish that universal, objective needs *do* exist. They draw attention to the fact that different disciplines, people with radically different and even opposing views, agree that human need must be conceived as a subjective and a culturally relative concept.²⁶ With the deflation of the concept of objective need, they tell us, the theoretical space is left to an outlook that favors subjective preferences, which are conceived as infallible. The assumption of infallibility implies that one cannot go wrong about his own interest and people must be encouraged to follow their own preferences. This model, welcomed by the New Right, has opened the way to establish the market as the *topos* of freedom.

First part of their book *Theory of Need* is a critical evaluation of different views that are purported to defend some form of relativism with respect to needs. When we look at its content, we realize that Doyal and Gough bring together a variety of

²⁵ Doyal & Gough (1991).

²⁶ Orthodox economics use the terminology of subjective preference or demand. Related with this are the two fundamental principles. Doyal & Gough cite from P. Penz's *Consumer Sovereignty and Human Interests*: "The first is the subjective conception of interest: the premise that individuals are the only authorities on the correctness of their interests, or more narrowly on their wants. The second is the principle of private sovereignty: that what is to be produced, how it is to be produced, and how it is to be distributed should be determined by the private consumption and work preferences of individuals." Ibid., p.10.

approaches under the umbrella of relativism: Orthodox economics, the new Right, Marxism²⁷, critiques of cultural imperialism, radical democrats, and phenomenological approach to needs. Doyal and Gough's argument stated in a nutshell is as follows: In order to maintain its coherency, they argue, a relativist position must implicitly presuppose a universal, objective conception of need – the very thing that it denounces. In other words, for a relativist approach with respect to needs to be coherent it must assume an objective notion of need and/or it must assume an objective goal. This means that the crux of Doyal and Gough's argument is to demonstrate the inconsistencies of rival relativist positions by revealing for them the indispensability of a universal, objective concept of need.

Doyal and Gough are keen on demarcating the sense of need that they employ from "needs as drives", where "... need refers to a motivational force instigated by a state of equilibrium or tension set up in an organism because of a particular lack."²⁸ Following the line of criticism against need as drive, which finds its paradigmatic example in Maslow's analysis of needs, Doyal and Gough argue that need as drive is to be abandoned if one is to have a more comprehensive account of human needing. Their objection to need as drive is twofold. Their first objection amounts to the claim that the hierarchy of needs exemplified in Maslow's theory is simply false. They offer the example of the mountain climber, who is more motivated by the need for self-actualization than the need for safety, as a counter-example for Maslow's model of hierarchal needs. Such a model of hierarchal needs, they further argue, cannot give

²⁷ Against the imputation of relativism to Marxism, Sayers (1998) duly argues that this charge overlooks the significance of dialectic and falls into error of identifying historicism with relativism. This, as Sayers maintains, is rather a futile framework for adequately comprehending the Marxian insight.

²⁸ Ibid., p.35.

an exhaustive list of needs and undermine the fact that basic needs might as well be combined or in conflict with each other given people's variety of life choices.²⁹

They claim that their second reason for discarding “need as drive” and for their insistence to differentiate it from “need as universalisable goals” is more to the point. Here their appeal is to the normative, justificatory role of needs contrary to drives which are imputed as incapable for this task; while needs are normatively capable of providing justification, drives cannot live up to this task. In other words, needs are ascribed a normative status, which drives cannot attain. “In short to have the urge to act in a particular way must not be confused with an empirical or normative justification of doing so.”³⁰ Accordingly, while drives describe a certain state of being, they cannot account for why one *ought to* act in that specific way. By introducing this strict distinction between needs and drives as well as attributing the former a legitimating role, one important target of their criticism appears to be ethical naturalism that have been mentioned in the previous section. This criticism is by all means in line with their formulation of needs as universalisable goals, which they claim to make possible the move from ‘is’ to ‘ought’.

Before I continue with the exposition of their account, let's first consider whether their objections to Maslow's theory so far are admissible. Although one might tempt to criticize Maslow by arguing that his list of needs cannot be exhaustive, Maslow, in no part of the book, seems to suggest the opposite. He does not seem to offer an exhaustive list, which rules out the open-ended nature of needs.

²⁹ For a detailed account that claims the futility and the undesirability of a hierarchal structure of needs, see Bugra & Irzik (1999). The authors argue for the need to participate in society as a universal need and discuss the different manifestations of this need in consumption. See also Bugra (2000).

³⁰ Doyal & Gough. Op.cit., p.36.

R. Fitzgerald makes a similar point. Referring to Maslow, he comments that “he does not say that these are all the needs we have but rather all men have potentially all these needs.”³¹ As each domain of needs contains different particular needs, these particular needs might increase or change. Maslow’s claim that human development is always in a state of becoming and is never completed might suggest just the opposite of Doyal and Gough’s imputation. Moreover does the example of the person who is on a hunger strike for an ideal provide a counter example for Maslow’s theory? Not necessarily so. It seems plausible to say that it is more likely that the person who has a sense of what it means to be free and who has once in his life had the chance to activate a higher need, would undertake such a protest and deny himself food. As in Christian Bay’s example, Gandhi might choose to fast to death for an ideal; yet this by itself refutes neither the view that when all needs are lacking, the physical need for food dominates nor that once higher needs are activated “they come to take full charge, even to the point of suppressing the more basic needs.”³²

Doyal and Gough’s other objection, which they contend to be more to the point, concerning the significance of distinguishing “need as drive” from “need as universal goal”, is not as unproblematic as it appears at first sight. More precisely, we might argue that their objection to “need as drive” as formulated by Maslow, does not seem to sufficiently achieve the task it purports – that is, to distinguish drives from universalisable goals. In their argument, Doyal and Gough claim that “having the urge to act in a particular way must not be confused with an empirical or normative justification for doing so.”³³ They plausibly claim that one might have a

³¹ Fitzgerald (1977), p.37.

³² Bay (1980), p. 235.

³³ Doyal & Gough. Op.cit., p. 36. They cite from Thompson (1987), *Needs*, Routledge, pp.13-14.

drive for something which he does not need as exemplified in the case of alcohol and conversely, need something which he does not have the urge for. Their suggestion is that a drive is not linked to preventing serious harm as a need is. Accordingly, Maslow's failure to recognize that drives lack this normative dimension leads him to collapse needs and drives into the same thing. Hence, Doyal and Gough conclude that conceptualizing drives as needs exemplified in Maslow's theory of motivation is not tenable.

Nevertheless, what seems to be disregarded in this argument is that Maslow's identification of need as drive is *not* intended as a merely descriptive account as Doyal and Gough suggest in their charge. Formulated in the larger framework of humanistic psychology, needs in Maslow's theory, go beyond the attempt to provide a description of human behavior; they operate as empirical justifications for acting in a particular way rather than another. Maslow explains that hierarchy of needs correspond to goods insofar as they constitute a physiologically and psychologically healthy person.

In addition to Darwinian survival value, we may now also postulate 'growth values'. Not only is it good to survive, but it is also good (preferred, chosen, good-for-organism) for the person to grow toward full humanness, toward actualization of his potentialities, toward greater happiness, peak experiences, toward transcendence, toward more accurate cognition of reality, etc... We can consider them [war, poverty, domination] bad because they degrade the quality of life, of personality, of consciousness, of wisdom.³⁴

In a similar vein, Maslow often comments upon the problematic nature of a strict fact/value distinction and the capability of needs to go beyond it. Both his contention that higher needs are peak experiences where 'is' becomes the same as 'ought' and his opposition to classical science's defense of a value-free science as well as the

³⁴ Maslow (1970), p.104. It is hard to miss the Aristotelian tendency in Maslow's account. He comments that he agrees with Aristotle on the idea of good life as living in accordance with man's nature, yet he comments that Aristotle's knowledge of true nature of man is not advanced. p.27.

strict distinction it assumes between the world of facts and the world of values suggest that Maslow's account of need is not intended as merely a descriptive account. Having said this, one wonders whether the example of alcohol drinking that Doyal and Gough give in order to reveal the inadequacy of regarding need as drive is relevant after all. It is not the case that all drives that human beings happen to urge for are needs in Maslow's sense. Rather they are needs insofar as their gratification constitutes a healthy personality. Even though Maslow's reference to basic needs as instinctoid might be puzzling in this regard, one must not undermine his insistent remark that the instinct model must not be based on animal instincts limited to physiological needs but must take into account instincts unique to human species. Hence, he extends instincts so as to include the need to know and to understand. One might contest that the normative aspect of Maslow's theory is not sufficiently developed or that the conception of instinct he employs is so broad that it hardly has any substantial, distinctive significance. However, this line of criticism is different than Doyal and Gough's enterprise and it is not the task that they engage in. Since Maslow's account of need is not intended only as a descriptive account, Doyal and Gough's charge against it fails to adequately address its shortcomings.

Doyal and Gough advance an understanding of "needs as universalisable goals", which establishes that needs cannot be normatively separated from goals. In order to answer why some goals and not others are imputed universality, they bring in a central principle – what I shall call the "harm principle" – which they take as constituting the defining feature of needs. "Human need is 'objective' in that its theoretical and empirical specification is independent of individual preference and

‘universal’ in that its conception of serious harm is the same for everyone.”³⁵

According to this portrayal, one cannot consistently claim that he/she does not need something that avoids serious harm. For the exposition of needs as universalisable goals, Doyal and Gough appeal to the commonly accepted view among need theorists that all need statements can be formulated in the following form: “A needs X in order to Y.”³⁶ In Doyal and Gough’s formulation, X concerns strategies universally linked to goal Y, which they conceive as “preventing serious harm.” The sense of avoiding harm adopted by Doyal and Gough is expressed as the “unimpaired participation in a form of life”.³⁷ Hence when we say that X is a basic need for A, we implicitly assume Y as avoidance of harm – which they regard as expressing the most basic *human interest*³⁸ - i.e., participating in a form of life.

Doyal and Gough employ the harm principle as a conceptual tool for distinguishing needs and wants. The harm principle, which defines the objective human interest of avoiding serious harm, provides “the first criterion for distinguishing needs and wants... When goals are described as ‘wants’ rather than needs, it is precisely because they are not believed to be linked to human interests in

³⁵ Doyal & Gough. Op.cit., p. 49.

³⁶ According to Barry (1965), need statements are incomplete if they fail to address to a normative goal. Accordingly, need theorists distinguish between contingent and non-contingent needs. For example, Brock and Reader (2004) claim that what is at stake in non-contingent needs is the existence of the needing being; however contingent needs do not imply similar urgency and unavoidability. Other need theorists like Doyal & Gough (1991), Wiggins (1998) and Thomson (2005) adopt a similar distinction. Nevertheless, they do not formulate non-contingent needs in terms of existential necessity, but they formulate a basic need approach in terms of the avoidance of serious harm. While some thinkers like Goodin (1985) and Wiggins (1998) claim that the urgency and the unique moral force of basic need claims trump over other moral claims, the suggested normative force and the intuitive appeal is challenged by others, see Frankfurt (1984). For a contemporary discussion and a conceptual analysis of the notion of basic need, see Schuppert (2011).

³⁷ We might say that the harm principle interpreted as “unimpaired participation to social life” intends a thin conception of good as opposed to a thick conception.

³⁸ Doyal & Gough cite their definition of interest from Thomson (2005). “The notion of an interest defines the range and type of activities and experiences that partly constitute a meaningful and worthwhile life and it defines the nature of their worth.” See Ibid., p.315.

this sense.”³⁹ While an unsatisfied need leads to objective harm, it is claimed that unsatisfied wants do not bring about the same consequence.

Thus, the coherence of the distinction between needs and wants is predicated on some agreement about what serious harm is. But for this agreement to exist, [...] there must be also be a consensus about the human condition when it is normal, flourishing and unharmed.⁴⁰

This implies that the alleged distinction between need and want is normative *par excellence*. However, the content of this suggested consensus on which the coherence of the distinction is supposed to be based is far too comprehensive for an intended “thin theory”. In other words, even if we assume a consensus about an unharmed condition, does this imply a consensus about human flourishing? Which one is the “normal” condition? Do they all trickle down to the same thing? Even though Doyal and Gough, like Thomson, use these terms as interchangeable, we must emphasize that they definitely are *not* equivalents and they do not have same political and social implications. Once this is acknowledged, we see that the alleged consensus cannot be as easily settled as it is assumed and the question arises whether the intended thin conception of good can provide a comprehensive framework which aspires to an unharmed state of being as well as human flourishing. One can hardly deny that a consensus over these conceptions is an exception rather than the rule and a theory of need that aims to establish the political significance of needs must be able to explicitly address this difficulty. Doyal and Gough seem to be aware of the difficulty: “For if there is no rational way of resolving disputes about what is and is not generalisable about the human condition or about specific human groups, then

³⁹ Ibid., p.39.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.42.

what are needs for some can be said to be merely wants for others and visa versa.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, they do not explicitly confront the consequences of this difficulty for their theory, and leave this question completely out of their problematization of needs, treating it as a theoretical difficulty rather than the expression of concrete historical context.

Objectivity of needs as the second defining feature intimately related with the first, is predicated upon a strict duality between what is objective and subjective; which implies that what is objective can only be attained at the expense of subject’s perceptions. Hence, while wants are acknowledged as subjective expressions of individual preferences, needs appeal to objectivity defined independent of subject’s feelings, thoughts and beliefs. The objectivity of harm is ensured via its irreducibility to contingent subjective feelings like anxiety and sadness. Insofar as this is the case, they argue, wants are regarded as intentional in that they imply subject’s outlook as opposed to needs, which are characterized as extensional, in that they address to the actual attributes of things, independent of subject’s viewpoint.

Subjective experiences might not always be reliable to depict the extent of serious harm insofar as they might reflect adaptive behavior both common among the poor, as well as the well-off, who might perform an adaptive behavior by interpreting their dislikes as serious harm. Nevertheless, does this give sufficient reason to preclude subjective experience from any identification of serious harm? More specifically, can serious harm be comprehended as wholly independent of man’s self-interpretation? If it can’t, projecting objectivity of serious harm as the defining feature of needs as opposed to wants and the strict distinction between the objective and subjective aspects, become much more controversial than Doyal and Gough

⁴¹ Ibid., p.44.

admit. Moreover, the way in which serious harm is interpreted is significant for understanding the way in which a subject interprets material reality and how particular needs emerge as a consequence of this interpretation. We might further suggest that understanding needs independent of any scheme of interpretation leads to undermining the social and political dimensions that might be thereby involved. Let's first turn to the question as to whether there are examples that can disrupt the logic of this objectivist account, where serious harm can be sufficiently identified only with reference to subjective experience.

In "Self-Interpreting Animals", Charles Taylor characterizes seventeenth century science by its understanding which rules out the subjective insofar as it is regarded only as reflecting the properties of the object in our experience of it.⁴² This understanding, predicated on a strict distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, conceives of subjective experience as an impediment, a mis-description of objectivity and as a 'merely' subjective view on reality. Taylor, on the other hand, argues that the logic of emotions –especially shame – constitutes a rupture for this modern conception of objectivity. This evokes Adam Smith's reference to shame of the man who cannot participate in social life without a linen shirt. In this case, exclusion from social life – hence serious harm- is *internally* linked to shame. Following Taylor, we can say that shame can be grasped only with reference to subjects and their experiences; it reflects, what he calls, a "subject- referring property". As subject-referring, shame is neither a subjective expression of an objective condition of exclusion, which might as well be characterized in mere objectivist terms nor can it be seen as 'merely' subjectivist way of feeling this or that way. Shame does not only reflect an affect of exclusion, but it *is* constitutive of exclusion; as itself, it serves to

⁴² Taylor (1985), pp. 45-77.

isolate. In this sense, shame provides an example where serious harm cannot be wholly defined independent of subject's self-interpretation. This seems to be more the case in the midst of consumerist affluence, which makes shame harder to bear and increase the number of ways exclusion might arise.

So far, I have tried to delineate the difficulties involved in distinguishing between needs and wants in terms of objectivity versus subjectivity and the controversial nature of the harm principle. However, the difficulties involved should not lead one to conclude that these two terms can be duly used interchangeably nor does it diminish the significance of Doyal and Gough's attempt to emphasize the significance of needs as the principle of politics. Rather, as it will further be elaborated in the following chapters, it should lead one to doubt about the adequacy of initially formulating the problem of needs in terms described above, starting with the question formulated in the form of "What is X?" Even though starting off with an analytic distinction provides insight for conceptual clarity, it has the risk of imprisoning the problem within the confines of theoretical discourse and undermining some problems pertinent to the specific form needs take in a certain historical moment. Setting the strict objective/ subjective duality corresponding to need/want distinction as a starting point for a critique might isolate this distinction from its roots in socio-historical actuality. These concerns make legitimate the following questions: What are the limitations of a critique based upon an ahistorical distinction between needs and wants? Which questions does such critique neglect and to what extent can it be satisfactory for raising the question of needs as a political question?

Doyal and Gough formulate physical health/survival and autonomy as two basic human needs. They are basic needs in the sense that they designate

[...] concrete ways in which individuals or collectives can act in practice to *sustain* and *improve* the satisfaction of both. Though these needs had to be satisfied to some degree to account for the possibility of action in general, the success of future actions will also depend on survival chances and the degree of autonomy.⁴³

The need for physical health conceptualized as the absence of biological disease might be satisfied; however one might still be incapable of initiating very little and initiating action is designated as a key phrase for autonomy. “As we have seen, individuals express their capacity to formulate consistent aims and strategies which they believe to be in their interests and their attempts to put them in practice in the activities in which they engage.”⁴⁴ Autonomy defined as such depends upon three key variables, all of which include rationality as an important component. Doyal and Gough describe the first as

the level of understanding a person has about herself, her culture and what is expected of her as an individual within it. It is a process of learning social rules, codes, appropriating skills that will prepare learners for participation in their culture, which will both win the respect of their peers and strengthen their self-respect.⁴⁵

Second determinant is individual’s psychological and emotional capacity, which implies the existence of minimal levels of autonomy – i.e. having the capacity to formulate aims and beliefs common to a form of life, having the confidence to want to act and participate, the capability of taking responsibility and the objective opportunities enabling her to act accordingly, etc. The third key variable is the range of opportunities for new and significant action open to the actor. This means that not any increase in choice would immediately correspond to an increase of autonomy,

⁴³ Doyal & Gough. Op.cit., p. 54.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.60.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

but only *significant* choices. Significant choices refer to activities which the actor regards as significant for the rational improvement of her participation in a form of life. For Doyal and Gough, this is distinctive since it brings in a higher level of autonomy:

Our analysis of autonomy has thus far focused on the necessary conditions for participation in any form of life, no matter how totalitarian. Individual autonomy can reach levels higher than this. Where the opportunity exists to question and to participate in agreeing and changing the rules of a culture, it will be possible for actors significantly to increase their autonomy though a spectrum of choices unavailable to the politically oppressed.⁴⁶

Freedom of agency, i.e. the ability in principle to choose, might be available without having the opportunity to challenge the oppression. If the opportunity to question and to participate in agreeing or changing the rules of a culture is available, then actions are selected critically and appropriated in a more profound sense. This implies a higher level of autonomy – i.e. “critical autonomy”, which as well includes political freedom – more specifically democratic participation. Doyal and Gough insist that their emphasis on personal autonomy does not imply a strong form of individualism that denies the role of sociality in meeting needs. Hence in order to distance their formulation of autonomy from individualist conceptions, which tend to isolate personal identity from the social environment, they propose societal preconditions for basic need satisfaction.⁴⁷ Necessary societal preconditions have to be satisfied by collectives if they are to survive and flourish over long periods. The preconditions concern the normative structure of the group – “the rules within which individuals

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.67.

⁴⁷ They refer to R. Wolff in *In Defense of Anarchism* as an example of the individualistic conception of autonomy they have in mind: “As when Wolff writes: ‘the autonomous man insofar as he is autonomous is not subject to the will of another.’ This implies that really the autonomous agents are completely self-sufficient in that they choose for themselves the form of life which they wish to follow, provided that this does not interfere with the choice of anyone else.” Ibid, p.77.

order their everyday lives and which embody the goals which they must collectively achieve if they are to continue to provide each other with mutual support.”⁴⁸ They present four preconditions valid for all societies. First is production. Each society must have relations of production in order to sustain the collective end of basic need satisfaction. The sphere of production requires some sort of division of labor and a system of exchange as well as a system of distribution, which must stipulate rules by which individual entitlements are negotiated. With reference to this general portrayal of production, they vaguely suggest that the rules for distributing individual entitlements are “linked to factual beliefs about the importance of particular individuals or families for material production and to moral beliefs about the justice of whatever degrees of inequality are tolerated.”⁴⁹ The second precondition is reproduction, which concerns biological reproduction and socialisation. The other two preconditions are cultural transmissions aiming to emphasize that men are not confined to relations of power, production and property. The preconditions of cultural transmission, which seems to have Habermasian overtones, emphasize the existence of normative structures that enables learning, persuading, and exchanging experiences. Socialization that is hitherto achieved must prepare individuals for participating in specific productive and procreative roles within the division of labor. Finally the fourth precondition is the existence of authority, operative through a normative structure and power, guaranteeing that the rules which underpin survival and the success of the collective as a whole are taught and enforced.

Given the basic needs of physical health and autonomy along with the suggested societal preconditions for need-satisfaction, Doyal and Gough critically

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.80.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.83.

evaluate extant societies in terms of the extent to which they satisfy basic human needs. Clearly, what makes this evaluation possible and gives the analysis its critical edge is the existence of universal, objective needs, which are initially demarcated as having normative import. Their critique is primarily endorsed by the moral code that the needs of all people should be satisfied to the optimum extent. This moral code suggests both the moral right to need satisfaction as well as the moral obligation to relieve the sufferings of others and to support national and international agencies which can effectively do so. This means that the moral right to need satisfaction must be guaranteed institutionally – hence it must become an institutionally enforceable right. Doyal and Gough suggest that charities and international aid agencies bear witness to the moral force of need claims.⁵⁰

Let me critically note at this point that offering charity organizations as an example for endorsing the right to need satisfaction as an enforceable right is rather obscure. Charity organizations do not necessarily acknowledge the right to need satisfaction as a right with political significance. Although they might arguably evince for the moral force of need satisfaction, they do not necessarily reveal the right to need satisfaction as *politically significant* and manifestly, these two are not reducible to each other. The increasing importance of charity in neoliberal capitalism seems to demonstrate exactly this phenomenon. Moreover, Doyal and Gough acknowledge that some central agency, which means in practice the state, must counteract the unintended consequences which markets entail. They claim that “Empirically, the evidence is growing that some form of developmental state or corporatist state is a necessary precondition for competitive success in the modern

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.44.

world.”⁵¹ Even though associating competitive success with some form of developmental state might be interpreted as a worthwhile attempt to criticize free market economy in its own terms, we must not undermine that more recent developments have demonstrated that in order to maintain capitalist accumulation and competitive edge in a global market, capitalist states follow the path that is just the opposite of Doyal and Gough’s observation. This observation lays bare the significance of drawing attention to the historical peculiarities of an antagonistic state form in capitalism. A similar line of criticism is advanced by Ian Fraser in *The Concept of Need in Hegel and Marx*. Interpreting Doyal and Gough’s attempt in terms of reconciling needs and rights, Fraser comments upon the influence of their neglect of antagonistic capitalist state form, which in turn affects the way they conceive of the implementation of rights. Fraser underlines that implementation of rights must be conceived dialectically, in terms of labor’s resistance and legal and political acknowledgement of class struggle. With reference to Negri and Hardt’s criticism of thin theories of justice in *Labor of Dionysus* - something I shall take up in the final section of Chapter III - Fraser claims that rights are not rational, independent standards formed in order to judge the extant social relations but they arise from these relations and control them.⁵²

These critical considerations concerning Doyal and Gough’s proposal that the right to basic need satisfaction must become an institutionally enforceable right seems to be, to a significant extent, due to their purely normative stance that neglects a historical outlook. Although theirs is a rigorous attempt at restoring the notion of need in politics, its level of generality fails to single out the problem of needs as it

⁵¹ Ibid., p.242.

⁵² For a detailed discussion, see Fraser (1998) pp.218-222.

specifically pertains to capitalism and to provide the conceptual means to locate need satisfaction as the *topos* of struggle and conflict. This also evinces in their identification of *production as such* as a societal precondition for need satisfaction. “In all cultures, it is necessary somehow to create the food, shelter and other satisfiers require for (what are defined as) ‘normal’ levels of health to be achieved collectively.”⁵³ Of course, no one can sensibly deny that material production is a requisite to satisfy needs. Yet stating the relation between needs and production at this level of generality cannot touch upon the particularity of capitalist production and makes unseen the particular form that the relationship between needs and production might take in capitalism as well as the antagonistic nature of need allocation within different classes. In this context, let me very briefly anticipate – to be discussed again in Chapter III - Marx’s critique of J.S. Mill in the first section of *Grundrisse*. J.S. Mill is severely criticized by Marx (1999) for taking “general preconditions” of production as such as the basis of his economic analysis and thereby failing to single out the specificity of capitalist production as a historically particular phenomenon. Doyal and Gough’s need theory attains its pure normativity at the expense of sufficiently addressing the conflicting nature of need allocation in capitalism. Without considering need as an aspect of a historically particular system of production, exchange and distribution seems to decrease the intended critical potential and thwart the significance of the question of needs as a political question.

⁵³ Doyal & Gough. Op.cit., p.81.

Historical-Critical Account: Developmental Understanding of Needs

Sean Sayers' approach to needs is based on a Hegelian historicist interpretation of Marx's philosophy that he undertakes in *Marxism and Human Nature*⁵⁴. Two opposing views dominate the controversy over the account of human nature in Marx's writings. On the one hand, some argue that Marx maintains a universal human nature, which allows him to ground his critical evaluation of capitalist societies. According to this view, it is only in virtue of a universal human nature that Marxist theory can maintain its critical edge. On the other hand, some refrain from imputing a universal human nature to Marx, arguing that he strictly adopts a historical outlook. They argue that, for Marx, there is no human nature as such but human nature changes contingently with respect to different socio-historical conditions. In other words, the only account of human nature possible in this context can be a radically relativist account at the exclusion of normative considerations. Sayers disputes both of these dominant views and argues that it is possible to depict in Marx's works a historical understanding of human nature, which is both *objective* and *critical*. Sayers' gesture intends to reveal that the opposition of the two dominant views is based on a false dilemma – the dilemma that only an ahistorical, universalist approach can provide an objectivist account with a critical edge as opposed to a historical approach, which can only lead to a disastrous relativism with no critical significance. One important aim of Sayers' account is to restore the possibility of an immanent critique that Hegelian dialectic historicism allows; he correctly notes that this possibility is severely overlooked, especially due to the theoretical fear of relativism. He disputes that both universalist and relativist accounts are

⁵⁴ Sayers (1998).

unsatisfactory not only as interpretations of Marxism, but also as accounts of human nature in general. Instead he proposes, what he calls, “historical humanism”, which he argues to avoid the pitfalls of both abstract universalism that fail to capture man in his concrete existence as well as moral relativism, which precludes a critical outlook.

Sayers claims that the ingenuity of Marx’s account of human nature lies to a significant extent in its manner of associating needs with powers and abilities.⁵⁵ This association implies that Marx does not treat needs as an impediment for human freedom or as a limitation of material reality over man’s being. Rather, in acting upon nature, man changes nature as well as forming his nature and the diversification of needs is a fundamental aspect of this historical development. Satisfaction of a need implies the development and the emergence of new abilities and powers, which in turn create new needs. It is in virtue of this, Sayers indicates, that what used to be a luxury for a generation might become a necessity for the next generation, which he takes as an evidence for man’s continuously changing nature. Accordingly, the dialectical unfolding of the relationship between powers and needs is directed towards the expansion of the realm of freedom. Contrary to primitivist approaches, where the diversification of need is interpreted as enslaving man and as a hindrance for authentic freedom, Marx, following Hegel, illustrates the significance of the diversification of needs for extricating man from immediate needs and open the way for possibility of the development of “man rich in his needs” and of human fulfillment.

⁵⁵ In Chapter V, I explore this point in relation with radical needs – something that Sayers does not mention. Note that L. Sève (1978) develops an account of human personality in terms of capacities and in terms of the rich human being as described by Marx. According to Sève (1978) “Every developed personality appears to us straight away as *an enormous accumulation of the most varied acts through time*, and those acts play a central role in producing human ‘capacities’-‘the ensemble of “actual potentialities”, innate or acquired, to carry out any act whatever and whatever its level.” p.304.

For Sayers, the ideal of human fulfillment forms the moral impetus of Marx's views. Unlike an ahistorical, theoretical standard or an ever existing capacity of an immutable human nature, he maintains that the *eudaemonistic* ideal of self-realization is historical *par excellence*. This ideal is founded upon a theory of history, which is conceived in terms of a progressive process and it is a product of concrete socio-historical conditions. Even though Sayers does not formulate it in these terms, I suggest that we can posit it as a real possibility⁵⁶ in capitalist societies. "Marxism involves a social and historical approach to moral issues which provides a concrete account of their real content."⁵⁷

In order to further explore Sayers' outlook on needs, we need to dwell upon the link between needs and human fulfillment. The ideal of fulfillment is not unique to Marx's views. In the chapter titled "Two Concepts of Human Fulfillment", Sayers introduces Marx's ideal of flourishing in juxtaposition with J.S. Mill's views. Mill's ideal of flourishing is an outgrowth of his version of utilitarianism, which proposes to go beyond a view of man seeking to maximize pleasures without making any qualitative distinction between them.⁵⁸ However, Mill finds this illustration of human nature narrow and superficial. Instead, he undertakes the task of differentiating higher satisfactions, which relate to man's mental faculties from lower ones, which designate physical appetites. His argument presupposes that people prefer a life which satisfies their higher faculties even if this involves compromising the quantity of pleasure experienced. Hence, Mill's framing of morality is based

⁵⁶ We will explore the notion of "real possibility" in Chapter V.

⁵⁷ Sayers (1998), p.5.

⁵⁸ This form of utilitarianism is advanced by Bentham, where there is no qualitative difference between the pleasure one gets from different activities. Preferring an activity rather than another is explained solely in terms of the quantity of pleasure rather than a categorical qualitative difference.

upon strict contrasts between higher/lower faculties, mental and physical activities, qualified and unqualified pleasures, etc. Not to mention the problems that this would raise for Mill's utilitarianism, this problematic distinction has an enduring status in the history of philosophy.

Sayers comments that the contrast between higher and lower activities, mental/physical, which involves an appraisal for the former and a disdain for the latter is untenable. Mental/physical and higher/lower activities, Sayers argues, are not mutually exclusive and they can never be entirely separated. Intellectual work always requires some physical activity and it cannot be pursued unless the basic, physical needs are met. Conversely, insofar as the physical activity is beyond the level of mere reflex, it requires some degree of thought and intelligence. However, we must not be misled into thinking that Sayers takes this distinction to be a purely theoretical construct. Sayers' invaluable insight lies in his suggestion that the alleged "division of human life is a historical fact, a palpable feature of social life."⁵⁹ In other words, this distinction reflects a real dimension of contemporary social life – namely "the great divide between mental and manual labor. Those who work with their hands and those who work with their minds tend to be different groups, different classes."⁶⁰ For Marx, the differentiation between manual and mental labor is the moment in which division of labor is realized. Hence it marks a major social division and the basis of class difference. For Sayers, it is exactly this historical fact that is reflected in Mill's discussion of morality in abstract terms. By employing this abstract distinction, Mill fails to address its concrete historical and social basis. Following a discussion of Marx's analysis of division of labor and its destructive consequences for the worker,

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.28.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.26.

Sayers concludes that in his appraisal of mental activities, Mill overlooks the fact that like manual labor, the modern intellectual is a product of division of labor. Sayers cites from Marx, that the modern intellectual is equally “a one-sided and stunted creature. The development of the mind through education and culture has become almost entirely a matter of theoretical activity and book-learning divorced from practical affairs.”⁶¹

In Sayers’ opposition to Mill, we witness how acknowledging historical facts can be significant. Such an acknowledgement provides the possibility of reflective judgment concerning the ground of one’s manner of thinking. Sayers’ argument casts doubt over Mill’s sharp contrast and his prioritization of higher pleasures. Sayers concludes that it is unsatisfactory to posit the mental/physical as mutually exclusive just like it is implausible to posit the former as possessing inherent value. Neither the life of mere physical labor nor a life of mere mental labor is satisfactory.

The fullest human life demands the development and exercise of all our powers and capacities, the realization of all sides of our natures: both mental and physical – but the whole present organization of society makes it an unrealizable ideal for all but a small and fortunate handful. So this ideal, if it is to be taken seriously as an ideal, must involve the diminishing and eventual abolition of the division of labor as we have it in present.⁶²

The capitalist division of labor enslaves men to a one-sided activity; it is alienating and destructive for man’s creative powers. Nevertheless, Marx sees for the first time in history, the enormous development of forces of production, the universal extension of interdependence in capitalism. He conceives this as preparing the conditions for an all-round development of man; hence the possibility of human

⁶¹ Ibid., p.29.

⁶² Ibid., p.30.

flourishment. The ideal is to be found within the present conditions rather than in the nostalgic remembrance of the past or in *a priori* ideals.

It is fruitful to juxtapose Sayers' account of human nature with utilitarianism, whose paradigmatic view of man can be coined as "man as a passive consumer", which presents human nature as a collection of desires and needs which have to be satisfied as man seeks pleasure and avoids pain. On the contrary, Sayers, following Marx, disputes this figure and contends that "men are not simply creatures of need but they also act in and on the world to satisfy their needs. Material, productive activity is for Marx the primary fact of human nature."⁶³ Sayers' critical employment of needs is distinctive for a couple of reasons. First it is not confined to a notion of basic needs. In other words, capitalism is criticized not only for its inability to satisfy the most basic needs of a significant number of people, despite the tremendous development of productive powers. Hence needs are posited right at the center of social production. Referring to a form of socialist critique based upon basic needs, Sayers comments that

if social criticism is based on these alone, it is confined to the lowest common denominator of requirements of bare life; and it is important to see that Marx's historical approach and the critique of capitalism and the concept of socialism which flows from it, involves much more than this.⁶⁴

Second significant aspect of Sayers' account for the aims of the present thesis is his attempt to found the pillars of a critical perspective in extant, historical conditions rather than in ahistorical, *a priori* standards. The Hegelian historicist interpretation of Marx's account of needs opens the possibility of an immanent critique rather than a

⁶³ Ibid., p.31.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.157.

transcendent one.⁶⁵ As I shall elaborate in the final chapter, this means that capitalism is criticized not with reference to pre-given set of capacities but rather in terms of needs that it gives rise to and yet cannot sufficiently gratify. This in turn prepares the way for reconstructing the notion of “radical needs” as a critical notion – something I shall take up in Chapter V.

Sayers argues that the need for self-realization is a *real* need⁶⁶ which has emerged within capitalism. Upon empirical evidence, he contends that in contemporary societies, the need for self-realization is increasingly satisfied through work; this need for self-realization shows itself in the way people conceive of work as an end in itself, rather than as a means. Here Sayers’ main target is Andre Gorz, to whom he attributes the view that in capitalist societies, the realm of freedom resides in being free from work - characterized as the realm of necessity- and the expansion of leisure, which briefly amounts to the performance of activities as ends- in-themselves. Sayers objects to Gorz’s resort to leisure as the realm of freedom at the exclusion of work and as those activities that cannot be captured through economic rationality as well as his view that in contemporary capitalism life centered on work is neither tenable nor desirable. Gorz’s views are evidently in stark contrast with Sayers’ view that associates the need for self-realization with work.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See Benhabib (1986) for an eloquent account of the distinction between transcendent criticism and immanent critique and the way Marx develops an immanent critique in his early works.

⁶⁶ According to Sayers, Marx does not offer an ahistorical distinction between real and unreal needs. In other words, this distinction, he claims, can only be made with respect to a given historical condition. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter V of the present thesis.

⁶⁷ For Gorz’s views on leisure and work, see Gorz (2007) and Lodziak&Tatham (1997). For a discussion of the need for work and for a relevant discussion concerning the role of labor in Marx, see Sayers (1987) , Sayers (2007) and Lafargue (1991). For a historical explanation of the significance of leisure and conspicuous consumption for recognition and social status, see Veblen (1991).

It seems that the link between the need for self-realization and work as the means of its satisfaction is Sayers' most controversial claim. To support this view, Sayers appeals to empirical studies in the sociology of work.⁶⁸ He proposes these empirical findings to evince for Marx's view that productive activity is man's primary creative activity *par excellence*. Sayers suggests that the empirical evidence from sociology of work in the 70's shows that "the great majority want work and feel a need for work, even when they find it unsatisfying in all sorts of ways: dull, repetitive, meaningless."⁶⁹ As I have mentioned, this seems to be the most controversial claim of his analysis for a couple of reasons. First, the empirical evidence that he presents is rather weak. Or to be more precise, from the researches he appeals to, Sayers is too quick to conclusively infer that work is a real need. For example, he refers to a British survey in 1978, where a high percent of both skilled and unskilled workers respond that they like their work a lot. However, we are uninformed about the details of the research, which might in turn require further qualification of the answers. Moreover, work is wage-labor in capitalism and if wage labor is the only choice to sustain even the level of survival in a capitalist society, can we ignore that the answers must be evaluated within the framework of given alternatives available?⁷⁰ The second point concerns the nature of work in post-industrial societies. Although this is a very wide topic beyond the limits of the present study, let me briefly refer to Richard Sennett's characterization of contemporary form of work as an insecure position within a constantly changing

⁶⁸ See Sayers (1998), pp.46-66.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.37.

⁷⁰ It is clear that Sayers is aware of these points: "Of course, caution is needed in interpreting such crude findings. It is clear that answers are given in the light of available alternatives, which are usually unattractive." p.38. Yet, he still takes the researches at face value.

network. One crucial point is that in this network, insecurity “is not just an unwanted consequence but is structured within this new institutional model”⁷¹ Moreover, the shift of production to third world countries not only implies the search for cheap labor but usually overqualified workers for a rather mediocre job. Along with these phenomena and with the rise of working poor, we witness a radical transformation of moral prestige of work. How would these bear upon Sayers’ suggestion that work is the *topos* of the need for self-realization? Of course, Sayers comments on the alienating aspects of work, yet he says that these are not sufficient for denying that work is a real need. Nevertheless this seems to lead to a more compelling question – namely, how can any empirical evidence constitute counter-evidence for Sayers’ view?

Even though Sayers does not tackle with Marx’s concept of radical need, his characterization of the need to work – notwithstanding its shortcomings mentioned above– suggests the need to work as a radical need.⁷² Agnes Heller reconstructs the concept of radical needs in *The Theory of Need in Marx*, which is one of the most systematic efforts to comprehend the role of needs in Marx’s writings. One defining feature of a radical need is that although capitalism stimulates its emergence, it is incapable of satisfying it. Moreover, it is the impetus for transcending the existing system of needs. As I shall elaborate in detail in Chapter 4, radical needs open the way for the politicization of the struggle over needs and for the complete restructuring of the capitalist system of needs. Hence they mark the glimpse of a political turn that a need form might take.

⁷¹ Sennett (2006), p.187.

⁷² The notion of “radical needs” will be explored in Chapter V.

Sayers' account provides conceptual tools that allow us to appreciate the significance of taking into the account the particular socio-historical conditions for a critique centered on the contemporary form of needs. Instead of appealing to *a priori* standards, which tends to leave unexplained the respective *differentia specifica* of capitalist need dynamics, it attempts to invoke critical standards that pertain specifically to capitalism. This is not the same as denying that there are universal human characteristics like the need for nourishment but it is to suggest that they are far too general to operate as the basis for a critical approach. To take up in the next chapter, let me briefly note that they might be coined as 'general abstractions', which have very limited epistemic function for grasping historical particularity. Marx's criticism of the level of generality is present in different aspects of his critique, i.e. critique of political economist, critique of Proudhon, critique of Young Hegelians. I must add at this point that not only is their epistemic function insufficient but they also provide inadequate basis for a critique of the *political economy* of capitalist need dynamics.

An Overall Critical Evaluation of Need Discourses

In order to delineate the contours and the limits of a socio-political theory, of a social critique, the questions that are left out, undermined or simply taken for granted are as fundamental as the ones that the analysis explicitly raises and undertakes. What is taken as relevant or simply taken for granted for the inquiry as what is excluded as irrelevant define the level of abstraction the theory involves. This does not only impinge on the theoretical point of departure but maps out the tenets of an intended critique as well as the limits of its critical scope, which involves the questions that

can significantly be raised, the constitution of the object of critique and of the principles by which the critique is undertaken. Developing and propounding a theory is itself an action whereby one takes a position in the world.⁷³ Hence the level of abstraction it involves is not only a theoretical concern *per se* but has actual practical implications. An important aspect of the level of abstraction involves the degree of historical specificity that enters into the construction of a particular theoretical category.

The level of abstraction is a foremost concern in Marx's critique of political economy as he argues that the level of abstraction never simply designates a theoretical starting point. In this vein, *Grundrisse* can be regarded as a critique of political economy in terms of the analysis of its abstraction and tracing the ways in which they are reproduced in concrete social processes. Let's just briefly – to be taken up in the next chapter- introduce Marx's characterization of rational abstraction that is fundamental to appreciate the significance of this critical undertaking.

Production in general is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction in so far as it actually emphasizes and defines the common aspects and thus avoids repetition[...] The most modern period and the most ancient period will have (certain) categories in common. Production without them is inconceivable. But although the most highly developed languages have laws and categories in common with the most primitive languages, it is precisely their divergence from these general and common features which constitutes their development.⁷⁴

Level of generality that pertains to “production in general” concerns the depiction of generic features common to all productive activities throughout different epochs.

While it can address the general preconditions of production *as such*, it cannot capture particularity – the *differentia specifica* of capitalist society. In Marx's words,

⁷³ Geuss (2008), pp.28-30.

⁷⁴ Marx (1970), p.125.

“the so-called *general conditions* of all and any production, however, are nothing but abstract aspects which do not define any of the actual historical stages of production”.⁷⁵ This is in stark contrast with kind of abstraction at stake in Marx’s category of abstract labor, which conceives of abstraction as historically determined and as exclusively belonging to the historically particular capitalist mode of production. Namely, it is not a determinate abstraction, which has as its *topos* the historically particular context. When the critique does not take off from a historical particular context, then a crucial question can never be significantly raised: “Why this content has assumed this particular form?”⁷⁶

In view of the distinction between rational and determinate abstractions, it seems plausible to assert that needs are treated as rational abstractions in most need theories aforementioned. A general statement like the need for nourishment - defined either as a motivational source whose non-gratification leads to pathological disorder as in Maslow’s account or defined as a universal goal which is normatively linked to avoidance of harm – might be regarded as a rational abstraction par excellence. Despite their evident differences, they both ignore the historically particular need forms, forms of need satisfaction and interpretation; hence they cannot encapsulate the movement between the universal and the particular. This culminates in undermining issues like form of food production in society, who has control over it, how material reality in turn effect the universal concept, which in turn reflect back upon the world.⁷⁷ This is not to suggest that men do not have any common needs,

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.126.

⁷⁶ Fraser (1998), p.32

⁷⁷ Geuss argues that general statements that are devoid of historical specificity are not interestingly informative for the purposes of politics. In his specific example of the need for food, he comments:

but to point at the limits of a critical analysis, which is based on rational abstractions and the questions that are either taken for granted or as irrelevant. In this case, it means undermining the significance of the historically particular form of needs in capitalism, of grasping need as the conceptual expression of a historical movement.

Both in Maslow's and Doyal and Gough's account, theoretical tenets of need grasped as a rational abstraction depend to a significant extent upon the dualist thinking between the objective and the subjective. Despite their differences, both accounts propose an objectivist account of needs in the sense that they demarcate needs via the elimination of subjective states like feelings, ideas, beliefs etc. More precisely, avoiding the vicissitude of subjective interpretations and impressions is considered to be a necessary condition for a properly scientific approach. According to the objectivist account, the subjective is not only uninformative but it implies a "bias"; science cannot rest upon the variability involved in subjective insights. As we formerly mentioned, for Maslow needs as constituents of the human organism are objective drives such that human being needs salt and love in the same way that automobiles need gas and oil. This analogy intends to show that needs are neither cultural artifacts nor "mere" subjective responses but "they are *empirical* traits of men which are not idiosyncratic." While trying to keep distance with subjectivist accounts, Maslow cannot help but resort to the "thing language" of natural science—something that does not seem to sit squarely with his intention of a humanistic psychology. Similarly, Doyal and Gough's account takes up the dual thinking between the objective and the subjective. Objectivity of needs is central to their

"People do not eat 'food in general' but they eat rice, pork...and people have sometimes willingly starved themselves to death. See Geuss (2008), p.14.

account. They characterize human need as 'objective' meaning that its theoretical and empirical specification is independent of individual preference. Objective human needs do not incorporate any subjective interpretation; the duality between subjective and objective is fundamental for this account insofar as it sets an important tenet for the normative distinction between wants and needs as it has been discussed above. So when we say that 'X needs Y', Y can properly be coined as a need to the extent that it avoids serious harm only in virtue of its actual attributes rather than the meaning attributed to it by X.

These two approaches from different disciplines, despite their different methodologies and formulations of needs, take up and reproduce the dichotomy of the objective and the subjective as well as the universal and the particular. Even though this demarcation may facilitate conceptual clarification and classification, it fails to deal with the substantial questions concerning needs that arise just when we notice the ways the objective and subjective as well as the universal and particular meet and move through each other. One might plausibly expect a consensus on the view that the need to shelter is a basic need; yet the problematic and antagonistic nature of needs come into sight just when we leave behind this level of abstraction and start asking questions about the variety of ways in which a need might be interpreted, the particular means of satisfaction and emergence. For example, whether the right to need satisfaction as well as the moral obligation to relieve the sufferings of others is actually acknowledged and undertaken depends to a significant extent on the concrete social and political mechanisms in which a need is interpreted. Yet the level of abstraction that operates in terms of universal at the expense of particular as well as objective at the expense of subjective overlooks the issues,

which give rise to significant and interesting question that might form the ground for a political perspective.

Although they have diagnosed the problem of needs differently, thinkers with different orientations have addressed similar issues. For example, in *Limits of Satisfaction*, William Leiss argues that emphasis on needs as objective as opposed to wants as subjective detract attention from what he calls the ‘qualitative dimension of needs’, which he claims to represent the most problematic aspect of contemporary means of need satisfaction.

[...] the real problems about the satisfaction of needs arise when we abandon the abstract categories of food, clothing and shelter, and the similarly abstract categorizations of sociability needs (security, self-esteem and so forth). All the most interesting and important issues arise when we study how the objective necessities of human existence are filtered through the symbolic processes of culture and of individual perceptions. In short all the most important issues arise just in that nebulous zone where the so-called the objective and the subjective dimensions meet. It is trivial to calculate the need for food in terms of minimum nutritional requirements for example. The real issues are: What kinds of foods? In what forms? With what qualities? And how does the perceived need for certain foods stand in relation to other perceived needs? If we attempt to answer these questions, the distinction between needs as objective requirements and wants as subjective states of feelings breaks down.⁷⁸

In her article titled “Talking about Needs: Interpretive Contests as Political Conflicts in Welfare-State Societies”, Nancy Fraser focuses on current discourses about needs and aims to change the commonly held perspective about the politics of need, by appealing to politics of need interpretation whereby she highlights the significance of taking into account the contextual as well as the conflictual nature of need claims. Fraser duly expresses that once we leave behind a certain level of generality, we encounter bottom line questions that reveal the conflictual and contextual nature of politics of need. She claims that different interpretations, conflicting demands are

⁷⁸ Leiss (1998), p.62.

linked to each other via numerous chains of formulations “A needs X in order to Y”. Nancy Fraser, like many other theories about needs, appeals to this formula commonly accepted to be expressive of the common structure of need claims. Yet, the use she makes of it is radically different. Rather than appealing to this formula for pointing to the possibility of specifying what counts as a basic need, she appeals to it for highlighting the *dissentious nature* of doing so. This long passage is a perfect summary of her views:

As many theorists have noted, needs claims have a relational structure; implicitly or explicitly, they have the form 'A needs x in order to y.' Now, this structure poses no problems when we are considering very general or "thin" needs such as food or shelter simpliciter. [...] However, as soon as we descend to a lesser level of generality, needs claims become far more controversial. What, more "thickly," do homeless people need in order to be sheltered from the cold? What specific forms of provision are implied once we acknowledge their very general, thin need? Do homeless people need forbearance to sleep undisturbed next to a hot air vent on a street corner? A space in a subway tunnel or a bus terminal? A bed in a temporary shelter? A permanent home? [...] Tax incentives to encourage private investment in low-income housing? Concentrated or scattered site public housing projects within a generally commodified housing environment? Rent control? Decommodification of urban housing? [...] We could continue proliferating such questions indefinitely. And we would, at the same time, be proliferating controversy. That is precisely the point about needs claims. These claims tend to be nested, connected to one another in ramified chains of "in-order-to" relations. Moreover, when these chains are unraveled in the course of political disputes, disagreements usually deepen rather than abate. Precisely how such chains are unraveled depends on what the interlocutors share in the way of background assumptions. Does it go without saying that policy designed to deal with homelessness must not challenge the basic ownership and investment structure of urban real estate? Or is that a point of rupture in the network of in-order-to relations, a point at which people's assumptions and commitments diverge? [...] It is this network of deeply contested in-order-to relations that I mean to call attention to when I propose to focus on the politics of need interpretation. I believe that thin theories of needs which do not descend into the murky depths of such networks are unable to shed much light on contemporary needs politics. Such theories assume that the politics of needs concerns only whether various predefined needs will or will not be provided for. As a result, they deflect attention from a number of important political questions.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Fraser (1989), pp.293-294.

The significance of N. Fraser's remark lies in her emphasis on the social and political dimension of need interpretation as well as the dissentious nature of both need interpretation and satisfaction. Given this, thin theories of needs can be claimed to be deficient for at least two reasons: First by focusing solely on the objective determination of needs rather than their different, contentious interpretations, they overlook a key political dimension involved in their articulation. Second point concerns the sense of interpretation that they take into account. The sense of interpretation that they implicitly take for granted is limited to beliefs, feelings, impressions that express the subjective mental states of the individual. In other words, interpretation is conceived as limited to a subjective activity at the end of which the individual expresses his/her preference. However, the significance of need interpretation cannot be acknowledged within the confines of subjective states and this limited understanding overlooks the political force of interpretation processes and mechanisms. N. Fraser's focus on the politics of need interpretation reminds us of the significance of interpretation as a domain of socio-political struggle where "groups with unequal discursive resources try to establish the hegemony of their needs socially accepted as legitimate".⁸⁰ Need interpretation as a domain of social and political struggle is rendered invisible from perspectives which are based on the duality between the objective and subjective.

Hence my focus will be on the so-called "nebulous zone", where the objective and subjective meet in such a way as to encapsulate the universal and the particular in historical movement and inquire into the possibility of a critique of needs. What, then, is the way of thinking about needs, which would surmount the alleged dichotomies and allow us to encompass the particular form of needs in capitalist

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 296.

societies without discarding a normative dimension? What are the conceptual tools that would render the mentioned questions otherwise not problematized as inherent aspects of the inquiry? The next chapter will explore Hegel's and Marx's analysis of needs in order to formulate viable answers.

CHAPTER III

HEGEL AND MARX ON THE DIALECTICAL MOVEMENT OF NEEDS

It is possible to delineate two distinct modes of critique in which the analysis of need operates at distinct levels. The first is a critique of existing societies from the standpoint of need; the other is a critique of need in capitalism. The former initiates from a trans-historical, purely normative understanding of need, which designates the standpoint of “ought” from which the critique is undertaken. The second approach on the other hand does not start out by delineating a normative conception of need; rather the object of critique is the historically specific form that needs take in capitalism. Central to this mode of analysis are the historically specific forms of need satisfaction and of interpretation. Rather than starting with a model based on how people ought to be, ought to act, how society ought to be structured according to a principle based on need, the manner in which people actually satisfy their needs in some society at some given time and how needs impinge on action is the central concern for the latter mode of analysis.

In his criticism of pure normative theories that dominates political thought, Raymond Geuss is critical of the tendency to start thinking about the social world ‘by an ideal theory of ethics. In “ethics-first view” approaches, the concrete, historical specificities enter into the analysis only at the level of application of an ideal theory to a given society. Instead, Geuss argues that understanding politics first requires an understanding of why real political actors act as they do and it must involve analyzing the motivations, powers and concepts of actual people, which shape the way they react to particular historical situations. Otherwise, Geuss adds, thinking

about political thought amounts to “applied ethics” and cannot sufficiently explore the scope of political action.

I propose that we can expand Geuss’ suggestions to considerations upon the possibility of alternative ways of thinking about the problem of needs. This involves the suggestion that raising the question of need as a political question primarily requires starting not from an ideal theory, but from how men act upon their needs, how existing system of needs actually change by acting upon them, which in turn implies exploring the conflicts involved in the satisfaction and interpretation of needs in particular historical situations; hence revealing their contextual and conflictual nature. Dispensing with historical particularity in order to establish that “there are universal, objective needs” is to sterilize, so to speak, the question of needs. Instead, examining the different manners of satisfaction and interpretation, hence focusing on the so-called “nebulous zone” is fundamental for any view that aims to criticize a system of need operating in a particular historical social setting - for us, that setting is capitalism. Take the basic need for nourishment, which appears as straightforward yet becomes an increasingly complex phenomenon. What is the object/content of need? Is it enough nutrient in-take? Food? ¹ Do they amount to the same thing? If not, can we say that thinking in these different terms also has impact on our understanding of need in general? Is it possible to assert that these two different objects of need imply different manners of needing? If yes, would this consideration render dubious Maslow’s claim that human beings have the need for nourishment

¹ As a possible remedy for hunger and environmental problems, Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations considered a different model of eating that has been developed in Wageningen University of Belgium. The proposed model of eating offers nourishment by bugs that provide a considerable amount of protein and mineral in-take required daily. This directly addresses to the significance of different identifications of need and the different social and political implications these might have for need satisfaction and interpretation.

just as an automobile has the need for fuel? How would this bear upon any understanding of need? Evoking Marx's remark in *Grundrisse* about the different forms of hunger, Geuss comments that "it is by no means obvious that the hunger which was satisfied when Neolithic humans tore apart raw meat with their fingers is the same kind of thing as the hunger that is satisfied by dining in a five star restaurant in 2008."² These two different forms of hunger imply different social relations, different contexts of action, different manners of relating to the object of need and call for a critique of the specific form of social production. If one takes generalizations such as the need to eat to be more than what they really are – "mere schemata that need to be fulfilled with concrete historical content" and uses them as part of an attempt to understand real politics, they will be seriously misleading.³

In view of these considerations, this chapter is an attempt to question Hegel's and especially Marx's dialectical approach to the question of needs and discuss the prospect they provide for addressing the questions fundamental for a critique of historically particular form of needs. The focal point is Marx's treatment of needs, which inherited a great deal from Hegel's. Obviously, this is not the same as suggesting that Hegel or Marx provides a proper theory of needs. Rather, I suggest that by treating a critique of the dynamic of needs as an essential part of their critique of particular social and political settings, they might open up a space for a theory of a historically particular form of needs and facilitate our understanding on the conflicts and antagonisms involved therein.

Human needs play a key, yet an underrated role both in Hegel's and Marx's social and political thought as well as in their understanding of history. Unlike the

² Geuss (2008), p.4.

³ Ibid., p.14.

early socialist thinkers (i.e. Saint Simon, Fourier, R. Owen etc.), Hegel and Marx often positively evaluated the multiplication of needs and treated their expansion as the motor of the progress of history. In this respect, they differed radically from some early socialist thinkers (i.e. Saint Simon) who applauded primitivism that can roughly be stated in terms of ‘man of few needs.’⁴ Their position is also explicitly different from a line of thinking that evaluates the problem of needs solely within a moral framework by delineating some needs as “evil” or as “non-virtuous” since they are regarded as representing inauthentic, artificial existence at a specific moment in history. Even though the problem that pertains to needs is usually regarded as related to a specific moment in history, the moralistic approach searches for a solution not in historical conditions but in the criterion which helps to delineate some needs as authentic and denying some others as inauthentic. On the other hand, Marx’s dialectical approach, which he has significantly inherited from Hegel, enables an analysis of needs as an aspect of men asserting universality in interaction with each other and with their environment in a concrete historical context, whereby a system of need is created, which in turn imprisons them. The solution Marx finds is again to be found in concrete historical relations. Unlike an “ethics-first” approach, historical context does not enter into the discussion solely during the application of theory to concrete phenomenon, but traverses it both as its starting point and its destination.

The German term *Bedürfnis* figures in the works of Marx and Hegel and it is translated to English both as “need” and as “want”. Neither in Hegel nor in Marx, one comes across a definition of “need” or an attempt to make an a priori conceptual distinction between “drive“, “want” and “need”. This has been a subject of criticism

⁴ For a detailed discussion, see Springborg (1981), “The Early Socialists on Needs and Society” pp. 53-73. Rousseau is frequently referred as an important transmitter of these ideas. (Ibid. p. 59) However, despite his praise for “man of few needs”, in *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau explicitly warns us against a primitivist interpretation of his views.

for some. For example David Wiggins in *Needs, Values and Truth* expresses his disappointment concerning the neglect of a definition:

It is true that each of these writers makes heartening acknowledgement of the familiarity and importance of the concept of need, and true again that in Marx one will encounter the famous or infamous formula “From each according to his ability; to each according to his need”. But neither Marx nor Hegel says what a need is, or indicates what it really turns on in a given case whether this or that is needed by someone.⁵

On the other hand, some thinkers acknowledge the absence of definition as strength rather than weakness arguing that a dialectical approach to needs renders such strict distinctions unnecessary. Ian Fraser, a proponent of this view, argues for the significance of ‘form’, which allows both Hegel and Marx to understand universal and particular forms of needs in their movement and transition. A dynamic understanding of needs, he argues, does not operate on such strict distinctions.

As the detailed examination of need in Hegel and Marx’s writings would suggest however, they would reject the attempt to hold needs and wants so rigidly distinct. If Hegel were able to hold needs and wants apart, he would be committing the errors of the understanding [*Verstand*]⁶. Similarly, Marx would be operating within a bourgeois mode of theorizing which sees concepts as static and separate instead of being internally linked. Rather a focus on the movement of need concepts is what is essential to understand properly the forms needs take in society.⁷

⁵ Wiggins (1998), p. 3.

⁶ In *Science of Logic*, Hegel criticizes what he coined as the thought of Understanding since it refers to the attitude of the mind which takes everything as given with complete demarcation of its boundaries. Simply, the Understanding seeks to explain a specific phenomenon in isolation from its relations with other phenomena; hence tries to render it determinate in an abstract manner. R. Plant adds that in the section “Determinate Being”, Hegel argued, following Spinoza, that all determination and identification presupposes negation. That is to say, “if a phenomenon is characterized in terms of quality X, the X is meaningful only against the background of other qualities that it rules out.” (p.90)

⁷ Fraser (1998), p.172.

Fraser notes that for Hegel, the concept has three moments: the universal, the particular and the individual. These moments, he warns us, are not distinct at the expense of excluding the others, but they are regarded as the moments of the same concept.

The universal concept for example is not the same as ‘the abstract generality’ used by the understanding. The latter wrongly sees the universal concept as simply those features that are common to specific phenomena ... whilst the particular enjoys a life of its own... On the other hand, the universal concept contains the particular and the universal within itself.⁸

This can be exemplified in the concept of man, which requires the unity both of man as an abstraction with man in his mode of existence.⁹

Consequently, one might plausibly argue that raising the charge of inconsistency, as Wiggins does, seems to be due to the failure to acknowledge the significance of the dialectical movement between the universal and the particular forms and that the absence of a clear-cut definition is significantly related with the aim of grasping the nature of social reality in constant movement. This is what Engels must have in mind in the Introduction to *Capital III*, warning that we should not expect any fixed, once and for all applicable definitions in Marx’s words. Once the significance of capturing the dynamics of need is realized, we can then further suggest that this requires focusing on *relations* and *processes* rather than prioritizing

⁸ Ibid., p.27.

⁹ Ian Fraser gives the example of Marxism to explain the movement of universal, particular and the individual, as interrelated moments: “Take Marxism as an example. As a universal concept, as an abstraction, it contains many different forms. Stalinism was one such form. The particular manifestation of Marxism emerges in an individual, Stalin. Universal moves through the particular and the individual. Yet this is not a one way process. There is a back and forth movement between these moments. The individual existence of Stalin itself becomes a universal, or at least it did in terms of the former east European states. This reflects back into the universal concept of Marxism, which becomes indistinguishable from its Stalinist mode of existence. Universal, particular and individual are therefore distinct but also in a unity.” Ibid.

static definitions and strict distinctions. In her discussion of a Marxist ontology, Carol Gould expresses a similar view:

The ontological character of this reality is that it is not fixed or static; rather its basic entities and relations are to be understood as changing. Thus Marx's theory of the nature of social reality is at the same time a theory of social change. That is his philosophical ontology is inseparable from the applied description of social and historical development.¹⁰

The understanding of social reality as dynamic and the effort to grasp it in terms of relations and processes through a dialectical approach evidently opens the way for a critique of need dynamics. Such a critique involves exploring concrete need forms and the manner in which the universal and the particular forms interact, whereby forms of need satisfaction, interpretation and the manner in which needs emerge from the interaction of men can become central to analysis. As we shall discuss, this opens the way for revealing particular forms of need satisfaction and interpretation of needs as the locus of major antagonisms and conflicts.

Diversification of Needs and The Development of Consciousness

In his article "From Kant to Hegel and Back Again", Habermas argues that a break with the mentalist tradition marks the watershed separation of Hegel from Kant and Fichte. The mentalist tradition encompasses a complex history that can roughly be characterized with reference to a baseline dualism: the duality between the subject on the one hand and the object on the other. The knowing subject and the world of

¹⁰ Gould (1978), p.27.

object is mediated by representation, which means that the subject is the one who represent the world of objects and the objective world – conceived as that which is to be represented. It is through self-reflection, “reflection on myself as a subject having ideas or representations of whatever objects. In representing my representings, I disclose an internal space called subjectivity.”¹¹ This baseline opposition between the subject and the object further circumscribes other dichotomies such as the “mental” and the “physical”, “inside” and “outside”. According to Habermas,

This coincides with two further delimitations: the boundary between what is immediately given and what is given in an indirect way, the private and the public realm; and the boundary between what is certain and what is uncertain, the incorrigibly true and the fallible.¹²

One main target of criticism for Hegel in Jena lectures is the self-contained subjectivity of mentalism, which rests on the opposition between the subject and the object prior to any actual interrelationship between them. Against the mentalist comprehension of subject and object relation, he maintains that “subject and object are *relata* that exist only with and in their relations, so that the intermediary can no longer be conceived in mentalist terms.”¹³ For Habermas, it is to Hegel’s credit that he maintains the epistemological relevance of language and work, through which he undercuts any dualist description. As Habermas comments, “language and work provide the media in which the internal and the external aspects, split by the mentalist tradition, now merge.” In a similar vein, Habermas cites from Hegel:

The speaking mouth, the labouring hand, even the legs if you will, are the actualizing and accomplishing organs which embody the act as act, or what is inward, in themselves. The externality which the act acquires through them

¹¹ Habermas (1999), p.132.

¹² Ibid., p.131.

¹³ Ibid., p.135.

makes it a reality separated from the individual. Language and labour are forms of expression in which the individual no longer contains and possesses himself within himself, but allows the inward to become completely external, and surrenders it to the other.¹⁴

We must notice that this is not simply a change of emphasis or a paradigm shift whose consequences are confined to epistemology. Synthesizing activity no longer bound to the act of representing “spills over into public space”, in Habermas’s words, which in turn opens the way for bringing social and political processes and relations right at the core of discussions concerning the interrelation between the subject and the object. At this point, we must remember our considerations in the previous chapter concerning the shortcoming of thinking of needs in terms of the strict duality between the subject and the object as well as the universal and the particular without interrogating their particular forms of interaction. For the moment, let’s briefly note that breaking free from the mentalist tradition opens the way for grasping the object-subject relation in social and political terms and reveals need interpretation as an aspect of social and political processes rather than construing it within the confines of “internal subjectivity”. At this juncture, we can further explore the impact of Hegel’s abandonment of the mentalist tradition for his treatment of needs. How does this affect and shape Hegel’s understanding of needs?

The significance of needs for Hegel is not confined to his infamous analysis of system of needs in *Philosophy of Right*. Although he did not manage to clearly delineate the system of needs as the system of production and exchange characteristic of the modern world in Jena lectures (*Realphilosophie, System of Ethical Life*), he makes noteworthy remarks on the character of labor and human

¹⁴ Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* cited in Ibid., p. 136.

needs in their relation to social production. Especially his *System of Ethical Life*¹⁵ (*SEL*) is commonly acknowledged as one of his most vigorous early attempts to explicate language and labor as the medium of self-formative processes, where the role of needs in this process can be traced back to the early forms of consciousness. In view of this book and Ian Fraser's comments about it in *Hegel and Marx: The Concept of Need*, let's turn to the role of the movement of need forms for the development of consciousness. Hegel traces the movement of consciousness in terms of the movement of different forms of need satisfaction and interpretation. One of Hegel's first explicit references to the concept of need is in *SEL*, where one of his major concerns is to elaborate on the process of transition from particular interest to public spirit – or what Hegel would later call “the move from natural to absolute consciousness.” ‘Intuition’ is the first level of consciousness which indicates the particular feeling of a single individual in the controlling of the environment. This level indicates a pre-conceptualized mode of natural life, which is culminated in feeling as “entirely singular and particular”. At this point, Hegel claims that

[...] feeling as separation is need (*Bedürfnisse*) and feeling as separation superseded is satisfaction (*Genuss*). At this level, need is subjective, satisfied by the destruction of the object e.g. in eating. Feeling as need is practical insofar as it proceeds actively to satisfy itself. At this stage the union of subject and object involves the physical assimilation and so the destruction of object.¹⁶

Hegel identifies the starting point for the progress of consciousness in terms of need as a feeling of separation, designating the primary experience of both separateness from and dependence upon nature; at this level of consciousness need indicates the

¹⁵ Hegel (1979).

¹⁶ Ibid., p.105.

separation between subject and object. As Fred Dallmayr expresses in *Modernity and Politics*,

Due to its singularity, this feeling soon discovers its opposition to other singular phenomena; that is the separation of life into inside and outside or subject and object. This discovery engenders the impulse to overcome the separation, by integrating objects into itself.¹⁷

At this stage of consciousness, a need can be conceived in terms of a stimulus-response model; it is a feeling restricting itself to the subject as it belongs to nature. Need *qua* this feeling designates the primary form of relation that man has with nature. Moreover, development of consciousness begins via need felt as lack. Given this formulation of need in terms of a stimulus-response model, one tends to think that this would be the sense of need at stake which posits the needs of human beings on a par with those of animals. Nevertheless, Hegel seems to maintain that, need formulated in terms of stimulus - response model does not correspond to an understanding of need that humans would share with animals. His comments in *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (161/133) concerning animality and humanity seem to support this.

[M]an ... cannot have developed out of animal insensibility but he may well have developed out of human insensibility. Animal humanity is quite different from animality. Mind makes a beginning; it is initially in itself, it is natural mind; nevertheless the character of humanity is already imprinted on it throughout. The child has no rationality, but it has the real potentiality to become rational. The animal by contrast has no potentiality to become conscious of itself.

Even at this initial level, then, a human need is distinct from animal need according to Hegel in virtue of man's potentiality to become conscious and in virtue of the role that a need would play in the process of becoming. This might arguably be regarded

¹⁷ Dallmayr (1993), p.50.

as evincing for the fact that Hegel does not start out by classifying a need in terms of its object or by categorizing a particular need as a physical need as opposed to a social need. Unlike Maslow who takes the need for food as a need that we share with animals, Hegel would avoid this association at the outset. Or even if he does affirm Maslow's view, he would consider the need for food as a general abstraction. For Hegel, the difference between animal and human need cannot be sufficiently expressed in terms of object of need; their object might be the same but the difference does not lie in content but in the form in which consciousness relates itself to its object. Another point worthy of remark is that Hegel does not distinguish between drive and need but he rather uses them as interchangeable. Fraser comments upon this point:

For Hegel, a drive can be a need. For Hegel, a drive can take the form of a need. Hegel's approach based on analyzing forms, offers greater sensitivity to the ways in which subjects manifest their drives through needs. Hegel then follows the forms needs take as humans interact with nature and other humans.¹⁸

Note that this is in stark contrast with the views that we have considered in the previous chapter, which advocate a strict demarcation between drive and need, where the former is regarded as lacking the justificatory power that the latter is claimed to have.

There is nothing in itself as 'drink' or 'food' in the order of nature. Practical need of the subject identifies these things *here* and *now* as 'food' and 'drink'; and they are 'food' and 'drink' only when they are consumed. When consumed, self-enjoyment is attained on the part of the subject, which implies the consciousness of

¹⁸ Fraser (1998), p. 51.

objectivity of the object.¹⁹ Determining something as “food” or as “drink” - positing difference - is not via the “mental activity of synthesis” but via the *act* of need satisfaction. What is more, Hegel seems to demand us to see that everything is what it is in the context of an evolving system of interpretation, which is present even in the forms of need satisfaction of early forms of consciousness. This system of interpretation enters into the constitution of things. However, need as feeling restricted to the subject and to the most basic level of satisfaction does not fully capture “the manifold and the systematic character of this feeling of need.”²⁰ This is because all we could see is the bare necessity of action to satisfy a need when the stimulus of need is felt. As H.S. Harris argues, the need which absorbs the subject’s whole consciousness is only a detail in the whole economy of life and it is insufficient to capture the manifold and the systematic character of the feeling of need.²¹ The human attempt to overcome natural necessity then leads to further forms of needs and different means of satisfaction.

Development of consciousness requires looking at the means of needs satisfaction, which brings in the analysis of labor. Since exploring the role of labor for Hegel is beyond the limits and the purpose of the dissertation, I will limit myself to drawing attention to the relationship of laboring activity with the development of needs. Dealing with nature through labor marks a breakthrough in the development of consciousness. It is “an indication of man’s growing awareness of his

¹⁹ A note in Hegel (1979) is explanatory regarding this point: “Need implies a difference between itself and what is needed. Enjoyment presupposes this difference. It is not a feeling of self alone, with no consciousness of the object. Thus a difference and a relation between subject and object persists, despite the annihilation of *this* edible object.” p. 105.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

confrontation and differentiation from nature”.²² Via the activity of labor, the relation with nature is transformed from a relation based on the annihilation of the object to a positive, constructive relation. Significance of labor with respect to needs lies in the dialectic that while transforming objective world, labor transforms the laboring individual into a conscious agent - a view that is inherited by Marx. Hence, laboring activity provides the relationship between the object and the subject. This is expressed even in Hegel’s early works. “The essence is not ‘within’ the subject; it ‘floats over’ him as the relationship of subject and the object. In this *relation*, the living energy which he intuitively feels is subordinated to the real order of nature in order to change that nature.”²³ Fraser presents Hegel’s developmental theory of need in the primitive levels of consciousness in terms of the following scheme. This scheme demonstrates Hegel’s attempt to capture the movement of needs beginning from the subjective satisfaction of individual needs. Hegel tries to understand the first level of ethical life in terms of three stages:²⁴

First stage: Need:.....>Enjoyment

Second stage: Need:..... >Labor:..... >Enjoyment

Third stage: Need:..... >Labor:..... >Tool:..... >Enjoyment.

“Natural needs” is a category of general abstraction which captures the need to eat and drink as needs common to all human beings. Hegel tries to comprehend the development of needs starting from the particular satisfaction of natural needs; yet as it has been mentioned above, this level is not considered to be the place for

²² Avineri (1971), p.101.

²³ Hegel Op.cit., p.25.

²⁴ Fraser (1998), p.48.

comprehending the manifold and the systematic character of this feeling of need “that must come later in human development through the mediations of labor and the tool.”²⁵ A manifold of needs emerge along with the laboring activity, as men shape their world while simultaneously forming themselves. Labor appears in the second stage as the “middle” of need and enjoyment. In other words, labor defers enjoyment, which implies the possibility of digression from drive as need, which longs for immediate satisfaction, through the activity of labor. Evidently, Hegel traces the form that needs take as men interact with nature and with other men via the activity of labor. Starting from the form that natural needs initially take as particular, subjective cravings, Hegel is trying to “grasp the subject positing himself or herself particularly and universally through his needs.”²⁶ Unlike an animal with a need for food passively consuming an object, “a man develops self-consciousness and freedom not by merely consuming merely what is present at hand, but by transforming it through labor...Labor, self-consciousness and freedom go together in Hegel’s mind.”²⁷ We must further add that needs move and develop through this threefold relationship.

The relation of labor and needs is manifold: *Qua* labor, need is the motive. In the process of laboring, need which started out as a motive that might be confined to a subjective, particular craving, is transformed into an external object - an object that embodies universality. Secondly, laboring process itself creates new needs; which in turn designate different forms of relating to nature, to others and to oneself.

Satisfaction of need then appears simultaneously as the creation of needs and the

²⁵ Ibid., p.49.

²⁶ Ibid., p.51.

²⁷ Plant (1977), p. 84.

laboring individual creates its world by acting upon, satisfying and interpreting needs. One important point not to be missed in Hegel's treatment of needs is that, it is not the case that there are needs on the one hand and the different ways in which they are satisfied, interpreted and conceived. On the contrary, these moments are internally linked and they move through each other. An important aspect of Hegel's explanation of the dialectical movement of consciousness is to significant extent in terms of the change in the forms of needs and of need satisfaction.²⁸ The role of labor in this movement is emphasized in terms of the liberating moment involved in the satisfaction and interpretation of needs.

Labour is thus the mediator between man and nature and therefore in labor there always exists an intrinsic moment of liberation, since labour enables man to transcend the physical limits set upon him by nature. Not only is the satisfaction of human needs dependent upon labor and consciousness but human needs themselves are not purely material, physical needs. Their articulation implies the mediation of consciousness and hence human needs are of a different order from animal needs which are purely physical. Because human needs are conjunction of immediate, natural needs with mental needs arising from ideas, there is a liberating aspect in the very process of satisfying and interpreting needs.²⁹

²⁸ Chitty(1994) emphasizes the significance of the idea of common needs for the transition to universal consciousness from the master-slave relationship, which he argues to signify a fundamental transformation of the motivational source of human beings. Two important moments of this transition: "The master must care for the servant as a living being". In other words, the master for the first time formulates the idea of the actual need of another and conceives the commonness of need, which forces him to raise his eyes beyond the present and beyond his immediate desires. Chitty cites Hegel:

On the one hand, since the servant, the means of the master, must be preserved in his life, this relation is *commonness* [*Gemeinsamkeit*] of need and concern for the satisfaction of this. In the place of crude destruction of the immediate object, there enters the acquisition, preservation and forming of it as something mediating, in which the two extremes of independence and dependence [master and servant - AC] unite themselves. The form of universality in the satisfaction of needs is a *lasting* means and a care which takes the future into account and secures it. (PSS §434/3:65).

The citation above is from *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (PSS), M.J. Petry (Ed.&Tr.), D. Riedel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, Holland.

²⁹ Avineri (1972), p.144.

As mentioned before, we see that Hegel does not make a distinction between needs in terms of their content, but in terms of the form in which they might be articulated, satisfied and interpreted. Consequently, “human needs” does not refer to a catalogue of needs which are demarcated according to a criterion, but to the form in which man relates to nature, to others and to himself, which implies the movement of consciousness.

In the second level of ethical life, manifestation of universality occurs in the form of a division of labor. In the previous level, what is at stake was the individual satisfying his/her own needs; in the second level, the individual does not merely produce for himself but his particularity takes up a universal aspect via the division of labor. Despite the consequence of mechanical and dreadful laboring the division of labor gives rise to,

division of labor also has the positive outcome that humans create a surplus that goes beyond the satisfaction of a particular person’s need[...] The individual has worked on the object not for his own need but for the need of someone else. Whereas at the first level of ethical life the individual had oneness with the object through his or her own labor, now we get a real difference or the cancellation of the identity of the subject and the object.³⁰

As the passage suggests, different needs yield interdependence and the contact with the universal implies the progression of consciousness towards absolute ethical life. Once the economy of exchange develops, laboring to satisfy needs in an exchange economy leads to the form of money. Mediation of surplus and money now enters the scheme, which Fraser provides in the following form:

Need-----Labor-----Surplus-----Money-----Enjoyment.

³⁰ Hegel (1979) cited in Fraser (1998), p. 54.

In a way that prefigures the master and slave dialectic of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel claims that the movement from labor to surplus and then to money gives rise to the domination of one person over the other. The difference in power between the individuals, or more precisely the relationship between the one who has possession and control of surplus on the one hand and the other who lacks it, leads to the relationship between the master and the servant: “the master [is] in possession of a surplus, of what is physically necessary; the servant lacks it, and indeed in such a way that the surplus and the lack of it are not single [accidental] aspects but the indifference of necessary needs.”³¹ Here, we can see that Hegel acknowledges that in exchange economy some will force others to serve them in virtue of the control they have over surplus. What is more, he expresses the relationship between master and servant in terms of the “indifference of necessary needs”. In other words, the lack of surplus on the part of the servant implies the lack of the means of satisfying necessary needs and he has access to them only through the master, who has control over the surplus and the means of satisfying necessary needs. This demonstrates Hegel’s treatment of necessary needs as the form that natural needs take in the context of exchange relations.

Development of Needs in *Philosophy of Right*: System of Needs

In the section titled “System of Needs” in *SEL*, one can find the kernel of the system of need as later developed in *Philosophy of Right*.³² (PR) System of need, according to Hegel, is roughly characterized as universal dependence. As afore mentioned, this

³¹ Hegel (1979), p.126.

³² Hegel (1991).

moment of universal dependence is characterized in terms of need satisfaction taking the form of surplus and then money. Hegel describes this system as a “blind entirety of needs and the modes of satisfaction” which is likely to hinder the satisfaction of needs. It is not only this possible hindrance that seems to worry Hegel, but the system of need emerges as –what he calls– a “monstrous system of domination.”³³

Both in Hegel’s earlier works such as *SEL* and *Realphilosophie* as well as in *PR* the movement of needs culminates in what Hegel names as a “system of need”.³⁴ System of needs capture needs in their dialectical movement between the particular and the universal. In *PR*, Hegel treats the system of need in the third section of the manuscript titled *Sittlichkeit*, where it emerges as a sub-moment of Government and we can observe the emergence of the market as a distinct, independent entity. He reminds us that in the system of need, concerning the totality of his needs, no one is entirely independent. Needs, relations of exchange and production are intertwined in an overpowering system, where the value of surplus depends on an alien power over which one has no control and social labor that entails alienation no longer guarantees that a particular need will ever be satisfied. Avineri cites from Hegel in *RealPhilosophie II* in order to show that this theme prevails over most of his works:

Man thus satisfies his needs, but not through the object which is being worked upon by him; by satisfying his needs, it becomes something else. Man does not produce any more that which he needs, nor does he need any more that which he produces. Instead of this, the actuality of the satisfaction of his needs becomes merely the possibility of this satisfaction. His work becomes a general, formal, abstract one, single; he limits himself to one of his needs and exchanges this for the other necessities.³⁵

³³ Hegel, Op.cit., p. 249. See also Fraser (2000) for Hegel’s and Marx’s similar views on the movement of needs as a “monstrous system”.

³⁴ Avineri (1971) argues that there is continuity between *Realphilosophie* and *PR*.

³⁵ Cited in Avineri (1971), p.104.

In the system of need, one's labor is for *need in general*; it is not laboring for a particular need but for a universal abstract need and satisfaction of the totality of one's need happens to be labor for everyone. This brings in another, more problematic link between needs and production. As Avineri insightfully notes, even though every particular need is concrete, "totality of needs for which the totality of production is undertaken is abstract and it cannot be expressed concretely prior to the completion of the process of production and distribution."³⁶ Thereby, production takes an abstract form and the division of labor relates to the needs of production instead of the needs of the producers. Man produces not the objects of his own specific needs, but a general product so to speak, which can be exchanged for the concrete object of need. "He produces commodities, and the more refined his tastes become, the more objects he desires which he cannot produce himself but can achieve through the production of more objects, which he then exchanges."³⁷ Therefore, through this interrelated system, emerges the universal dependence of each human being on the universality of the producers and the character of labor undergoes a change. In Avineri's words:

The dialectical nature of social labor is thus evident. On one hand, it creates sociability, a universal dependence of each on all, and makes man into a universal being-the characteristic of civil society (as later described in the *Philosophy of Right* 182-183). On the other hand, this reciprocal satisfaction of needs creates a hiatus between the concrete individual and his particular and concrete needs.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., p.103.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p.104.

The dialectical nature of social labor reveals the dialectical nature of the movement of needs. Particular needs of an individual and their satisfaction are mediated by (abstract) universal need and (abstract) universal labor. In other words, one's particular needs are not merely just "for him" but acquire abstract universality. On the one hand, there is "universal dependence of all on all" whereby a particular need attains a universal form, on the other hand, there is the system of need thus achieved, which in turn imprisons men.

Interestingly, especially in *First Philosophy of Spirit* Hegel seems to anticipate Marx's depiction of labor as "dead" and "living" labor. He refers to the process of labor and need as "the movement of the living dead":

Need and labor, elevated to this universality, then form on their own account a monstrous system of community and mutual interdependence in a great people; a life of the dead body, that moves itself within itself, one which ebbs and flows in its motion blindly, like the elements and which requires continual strict dominance and taming like a wild beast.³⁹

In *PR*, Hegel provides the most systematic and paradigmatic treatment of system of needs. In the moment of system of needs, § 190, Hegel (1991) defines the object of inquiry as the "concretum of representational thought which we call the human being. And this is the first and actually the only occasion on which we shall refer to the *human being* in this sense." It is characteristic of the concretum of representational thought, i.e., the human being, to expand the needs and the means of satisfaction, whereby the moment of universality is asserted, unlike the animal with restricted needs and means of satisfaction. There are two ways in which a human

³⁹ Hegel (1979), p.249. Hegel's first explicit reference to Adam Smith is again in this work. In his criticism of industrial division of labor, which he portrays as decreasing the value of labor despite the increase in volume of production, he directly makes use of Adam Smith's English pin factory example in order to demonstrate that 'in the same ratio that the number produced rises, the value of the labor falls; the labor becomes that much dead, it becomes machine work, the skill of the single laborer is infinitely limited and the consciousness of the factory laborer is impoverished to the extreme dullness.' §248. Hegel frequently expresses his amazement with the science of political economy and one can hardly miss the influence of British political economists on his portrayal of system of needs.

being asserts the moment of universality with respect to needs. First, he/she multiplies his/her needs and the means of satisfaction. Second, he/she particularizes, in Hegel's words "makes more abstract", by dividing and differentiating an existing need. For example, cooking raw meat is one way among many others in which man can satisfy a need. Unlike the animal that has fixed needs and bound to immediate satisfaction, a human being is distinct in being determined neither by specific, fixed needs nor by a particular manner of satisfaction. On the contrary, human beings transcend natural needs via the different means of satisfaction and during this process they create different tools, which in turn correspond to the creation of new needs. The proliferation of needs entails their subdivision into more abstract and particular components. Hegel maintains that this involves the operation of understanding whereby a certain need becomes more abstract and more particular. As the "manifestation of rationality" understanding operates to bring multiplicity into existing needs, makes distinctions so that "taste and utility become the criteria of judgment so that the needs themselves are also effected. In the end, it is no longer need but opinion that has to be satisfied." (§189)

This is rather a confusing claim. What does it mean to say that an opinion is satisfied instead of a need? Hegel seems to suggest that as the object of need becomes more specific and concrete, the need itself becomes more abstract, in a rather peculiar sense of abstractness, implying that it becomes more particularized as it is mediated by beliefs, tastes etc. A need in this abstract form takes the form of opinion. By specifying that only a Mozart string quartet can satisfy my need for music, I transform that need itself into a need for a specific organization, tonality and

composition of sound.⁴⁰ Hence “an opinion is satisfied” means that what is satisfied is not only the need for music but an abstract need in the form of opinion. The particular form of opinion, in turn, becomes the universal criterion against which the need for music in general is to be judged. Hegel reminds us that needs and the means of satisfaction imply a certain sense of sociality, which is characterized by abstract universality. In other words, he takes the abstractness of needs as a characterization of social relations. In §192 of *PR*, Hegel writes:

Needs and means, as existing in reality [*als reelles Dasein*], become a being for others whose needs and work their satisfaction is mutually conditioned. That abstraction which becomes a quality of both needs and means (see §191) also becomes a determination of the mutual relations between individuals. *This universality, as the quality of being recognized is the moment which makes isolated and abstract need, means and modes of satisfaction into concrete, i.e. social ones.* (My emphasis)⁴¹

In other words, abstractness of needs pertains to the character of determinate relations between individuals, which we might as well take as evincing for Hegel’s view that “there is no naturally pre-given inventory of human needs.” Needs becoming more abstract implies the moment of universality with respect to mutual relations. Hegel characterizes this moment of universality as the quality of being recognized and a need attains a social form in virtue of this recognition. The mutual dependence with respect to needs requires that one accepts the opinions, tastes and standards of the needs of others and one must produce according to this universal form as well. “To this extent, everything particular takes on a social character”. In a similar vein, Hegel describes a social need as “the combination of natural need and representational thought” and in social needs it is the latter that dominates. Universal

⁴⁰ Benhabib (1981), p.157

⁴¹ Commenting on this passage, Benhabib (1981) claims that Hegel’s last remark in this paragraph is the gist of Hegel’s analysis of civil society.

recognition is attained in virtue of possessing an object of social need –something that reflects the opinion of others. For Hegel, social form of need contains a moment of liberation insofar as it marks man’s breaking out of the bonds of natural necessity. Through the development of social needs, he relates himself to the need in the form of the opinion of all others. In the moment of social needs, possession of an object of need is the means of attaining universal recognition. The act of exchange between two individuals implies recognition of freedom since it involves the respect for the property of another. Yet this is by no means universal since it involves exchange only with one person. For this recognition to acquire universality, the object of need must be such that it is demanded universally so as to operate as a universal criterion reflecting the opinions of others.⁴² In virtue of possessing an object of social need that others also try to acquire, one attains universal recognition. Hegel’s interesting remark at this point is that, once this is the case, then one develops – and must develop- needs that correspond to social needs. In *Addition* to §192, he comments:

The fact that I have to fit in with other people brings the form of universality into play at this point. I acquire my means of satisfaction from others and must accordingly accept their opinions. But at the same time, I am compelled to produce means whereby others can be satisfied. Thus, the one plays into the hands of the other and is connected with it. To this extent, everything particular takes on a social character; in the manner of dress and times of means, there are certain conventions which one must accept, for in such matters, it is not worth the trouble to seek to display one’s own insight, and it is wisest to act as others do.

One source of indeterminate expansion of needs ad infinitum can be articulated right at this juncture. The moment of social needs is further explained in §193:

[...] immediately involves the demand for *sameness* in this respect with others. On the one hand, the need for this sameness, together with making oneself the same [as others], *imitation*, and on the other hand the need for *particularity*

⁴² For a detailed discussion over social needs and their role in the expansion of needs as a whole, see Chitty (1994), pp. 147-149.

which is just as much present here, to assert itself through some distinctive quality, themselves become an actual source of the multiplication and spreading of needs.

These passages demonstrate that, according to Hegel, proliferation of needs can be traced back to the twofold nature of social needs. More precisely an important source of proliferation is the incongruity that lies at the root of social needs, which implies longing for sameness as the universal *I* as well as for difference as the particular. In this moment, it is this contradiction that provides the dynamics of need proliferation. Through the expansion of his needs, which implies discarding the bondage to natural necessity in the progress of consciousness, man is no longer bound to arbitrary, external necessity but to opinion as an aspect of social needs. This is clearly related to §194 in *PR*, where Hegel opposes those views that envisage man's freedom in a state of nature and in primitivism.

For a condition in which natural needs as such were immediately satisfied would merely be one in which spirituality was immersed in nature, and hence a condition of savagery and unfreedom; whereas freedom consists solely in the reflection of the spiritual into itself, its distinction from the natural, and its reflection upon the latter.

In this context, Hegel's reference to Cynics in *Addition* to §195 is also noteworthy. Here he draws attention to Cynics, who applaud a man of few needs and living in accordance with nature by denying the fruits of luxury, which as Hegel acutely notes, is an idea that could only emerge at a certain stage of the development of needs. Such a longing for a life of few needs can evoke only in its opposite extreme. It is clear that Hegel's approval of the expansion of needs significantly anticipates Marx's critical stance with respect to some 19th century utopian socialists – or what he names as “crude communism” – who claim that freedom can be attained only by returning to the man of few needs.

Although Hegel positively evaluates the expansion of needs, he also acknowledges that the unprecedented expansion of needs in history is equally an enormous accumulation of wealth, which in turn renders this proliferation an enormous source of profit. This proliferation, which is reflected in the division of labor and in the increasingly specialized work, tends to decrease the ability to enjoy the liberation hitherto attained. In *Addition* to §191, Hegel is aware that a need is “created not so much by those who experience it directly as by those who seek to profit from it.” As Avineri acutely expresses, “Hegel is one of the first thinkers, to grasp the immanent logic of constantly changing fashions and fads and its function within the productive process.”⁴³ In a poignant foresight, Hegel illustrates the consequences of the fluctuations of tastes and the consequences of the expansion of needs as responsible for the insecurity typical of modern societies.

Whole branches of industry which supported a large class of people suddenly fold up because of a change in fashion or because the value of their products falls due to new inventions in other countries. Whole masses are abandoned to poverty which cannot help itself. There appears the contrast between vast wealth and vast poverty—a poverty that cannot do anything for itself. [...] Wealth, like any other mass, makes itself into a power. Accumulation of wealth takes place partly by chance, partly through the universal mode of production and distribution. Wealth is a point of attraction [...] It collects everything around itself—just as a large mass attracts to itself the smaller one. To them that have, shall be given. Acquisition becomes a many-sided system which develops into areas from which smaller businesses cannot profit. The highest abstraction of labor reaches into the most particular types of labor and thus receives ever-widening scope. This inequality of wealth and poverty, this need and necessity, turn into the utmost tearing up of the will, an inner indignation [*Empörung*] and hatred.⁴⁴

Both in his earlier works and in *PR* Hegel depicts poverty and mass inequality as a distinctive structural problem of civil society and as one of the most disturbing problems that agitate modern society. He confronts the complexity of this problem

⁴³ Avineri (1971), p.108.

⁴⁴ Hegel of *Realphilosophie II* cited in *Ibid.*, pp.108-109.

through a dilemma: If the mass of people who fell under the standard of living were supported by the wealthy or by other public institutions like foundations, monasteries, hospitals, which enables them to maintain their livelihood, they would be threatened to lose their dignity and the sense of independence. On the other hand, if they were to maintain livelihood by the mediation of work, then this would lead to overproduction, whereby the cycle of deprivation cannot be broken. In §246, this is explained as having the consequence that “the inner dialectic of civil society drives it to go beyond its confines and look for consumers and hence the means it requires for subsistence in other nations, which lack those means of which it has a surplus which generally lag behind it in creativity, etc.” Accordingly colonization is regarded by Hegel as a direct consequence of the emergence of a mass of people who cannot satisfy their needs through labor.

As Avineri rightly comments, Hegel’s analysis is a paradigmatic synthesis of speculative philosophy with the consequences of political economy, which forms a distinctive aspect of his treatment of needs. Hegel is unique in his portrayal of the movement of needs from their immediate satisfaction to the creation of a system emerging as a consequence of men acting upon their needs, which in turn tends to imprison them. Avineri reminds us that Hegel’s description of the conditions of life is truly amazing since he arrives at his conclusions through an immanent development of the consequences of political economy. Similarly, in her article titled “The ‘Logic’ of Civil Society: A Reconsideration of Hegel and Marx”, S. Benhabib (1981) expresses a similar amazement for Hegel’s projection:

Considering that this was written in 1821, one cannot but be amazed as to how astute Hegel’s analysis of the contradictory dynamics and tendencies of civil society was. The suggestion that imperialist expansion, which Hegel views as an inevitable consequence of the inner contradictions of civil society, may even

be a way of relieving social class tensions in the home country reveals genuine foresight.⁴⁵

In Hegel's analysis, labor and language mediate between acting subjects and objects that are of their creation. Similarly, needs are treated in this framework which aims to overcome the mentalist gap. This approach puts forward the dynamic aspects of needs, which illustrates the movement of different forms in which man relates to objects, to others and to himself. In this dynamics, relations with things are mediated by relations with objects and relations with objects are mediated by relations between men. Needs are conceived in terms of relations; thereby they cannot be expressed sufficiently as predicates of individual consciousness, their locus is men interacting with each other. The proliferation of needs along with the different ways of satisfaction implies a change in the way subjects conceive of themselves, their relations with each other and with the objective world. This evinces for a new ontology of needs, where the basic unit of analysis are not properties and substances but relations and processes. This dynamic and relational perspective with respect to needs does not permit Hegel to start out by giving a definition of what a need is; instead he concentrates on how needs operate in their dialectical movement between particularity and universality. In the ceaseless movement of need forms, categories like natural needs and social needs are treated neither as mutually exclusive nor they are provided with *a priori* definitions according to the object/content of need. The manner in which needs are satisfied and articulated marks their difference in form; and need forms move through each other. However, as individuals interact in order to satisfy their needs, conflicts and contradictions proliferate. The initial moments of the movement of consciousness, where need is delineated by Hegel as a feeling of

⁴⁵ Benhabib (1981), p.158.

separation, then develop into the creation of a system of need which in turn imprisons men.

Hegel's analysis problematizes the proliferation of needs in relation with the impossibility of their satisfaction and with the system of domination thereby created. This in turn paves the way for exploring different need forms and the particular forms of need satisfaction as well as need interpretation as the locus of major antagonisms and conflicts. Via the dialectical movement of need forms, dynamics of need emerges as the site of dependency and independency, necessity and liberation. Via the dialectical movement of need dynamics, one can capture the possibilities for alternative need dynamics that exist within the present and the possibilities of human needs that might take the form of powers and capacities – something that I shall discuss in the final chapter.

Marx and Capitalist Need Dynamics

Rational (General) Abstraction and Determinate Abstraction

Like Hegel, Marx neither gives a definition of need in order to provide a catalogue of needs, nor does he attempt to provide a universal criterion whereby needs can be distinguished from wants. Nevertheless, as A. Heller (1974) rightly comments, Marx explains some key notions like use value and commodity in terms of needs, and important tenets of his critical analysis frequently involve a reference to needs, some of which include his identification of laboring for need satisfaction as “the first historical act”, his formulation of “man rich in his needs” in contrast with the crude needs of capitalism, the characterization of true wealth in terms of need, his

presentation of one tenet of the society of free associate producers in terms of the principle “to each according to his needs” and finally his declaration that a radical revolution can only be a revolution of radical needs. Marx’s appeal to needs in diverse contexts, which is in some measure due to the wide scope of his analysis, is both an indication of the theoretical possibilities that his critical project might provide for an analysis of the dynamics of needs in capitalism as well as the difficulties of such an attempt. Keeping this in mind, my attempt will be to explore and to delineate the theoretical tenets of Marx’s treatment of needs in order to facilitate a critical standpoint with respect to present-day need dynamics that will make central their contextual and conflictual nature.

In view of these considerations, I must at the outset clarify that for Marx the distinction between general abstraction and determinate abstraction is fundamental.⁴⁶ Before proceeding, let me note that Marx’s discussion of abstractions is fundamental to dialectics and – needless to say – its significance cannot be grasped in terms of a methodological controversy *per se*. As the exposition of this discussion is beyond my aim, I confine myself to an analytical exposition of the distinction suggested above with a view to elucidating its influence on a critical understanding the need dynamics.

Roughly, a general abstraction refers to singling out the common elements of diverse phenomena from concrete circumstances. For example, the category of production as a general abstraction amounts to the common aspects of material production in different societies that might exist in different historical periods. Or similarly, labor as a general abstraction culminates in the category of labor as such,

⁴⁶ For a relevant discussion see, Fraser (1998) pp. 37-38 and pp.123-126.

which does not capture its specificity at a certain historical moment. Both Hegel and Marx are critical of a method of inquiry which starts out with a general abstraction and they argue that doing so, presupposes what they have to prove.⁴⁷ A method of inquiry that starts out with determinate abstractions, on the other hand, is an inquiry into the forms of phenomena and to their internal relations. “Determinate abstraction – the understanding of concrete forms as a contradictory unity, which we analyze to discover their inner connection – can expose this social basis”.⁴⁸ In “Notes on Adolph Wagner”, Marx makes this point:

I do not proceed from “concepts,” hence neither from the “concept of value,” and am therefore in no way concerned to “divide” it. What I proceed from is the simplest social form in which the product of labour presents itself in contemporary society, and this is the “*commodity*.” This I analyze, initially in the *form in which it appears*.⁴⁹

Ian Fraser notes that the general abstraction of wealth takes the form of commodity, which is “a determinate abstraction with further determinate abstractions in terms of use value and exchange value. Marx analyses the commodity because it is the ‘elementary form’ wealth takes in society.” Marx traces back the abstract in thought to its concrete determinations.⁵⁰ This gets most explicit in his treatment of the category of labor. Labor as such, Marx argues, as isolated from all its concrete content becomes real in capitalist societies. Labor takes an abstract form in concrete capitalist relations, meaning that its abstractness does not pertain to its representation

⁴⁷ For a further discussion, see the section titled “Theoretical Tenets of Immanent Critique” in Chapter V of the present dissertation, which discusses Hegel’s relevant criticism of natural law theorists for the same reason- namely that they presuppose what they have to prove. See also Fraser (1998), p.37

⁴⁸ Fraser (1998), p.34.

⁴⁹ Marx (1879), www.marxists.org

⁵⁰ Fraser (1998), p.38. We must also note that there is a distinction between the order of analysis and the order of presentation. Fraser argues that for Marx and for Hegel, the order of analysis moves from concrete forms to abstract; and in the order of presentation, he moves from the abstract to the concrete. See Ibid, p.39.

as an object of thought but to its particular mode of existence. In *Grundrisse*, the import of the distinction between determinate and general abstraction for the method of inquiry is expressed right at the outset. In the Preface, Marx warns us against understanding production as an ahistorical, technical process of transforming a material into something else undertaken by isolated individuals. Doing so, he argues, presupposes bourgeois society, where producers appear as isolated from social relations. Presuppositions that are acknowledged as given, independent of their concrete socio-historical particularity are not just theoretical presuppositions but they are reproduced steadily in concrete social relations. This means that presuppositions such as money, exchange value, abstract labor are posited as a consequence of the activity of production. In other words, the category of abstract labor as a general abstraction is reproduced and posited within the capitalist relations. To go beyond “production in general” and grasp it as a meaningful social phenomenon, we need to grasp the presuppositions that are thereby produced. This is similarly a call to grasp these categories as determinate abstractions. One point not to be dismissed is that Marx does not merely juxtapose determinate abstractions and general abstractions; but he traces general abstractions, which are presuppositions of classical political economy, to their ground in concrete social relations. Recognizing these abstractions as distinct and in a unity can expose some uncritical assumptions and in Marx’s words it can be regarded as an attempt to maintain a critical stance with respect to the extant society.⁵¹ The import of this lies in revealing Marx’s categories as categories of antagonism, such that they are the expressions of fundamental antagonisms

⁵¹ On a similar point, Fraser (1998) comments: “For Marx, it is through tracing the internal relations between phenomena that we can discover the antagonistic relationship between capital and labor. This antagonistic relationship always expresses itself in forms such as the state-form, value-form etc. Penetrating these forms can unearth the very social relations that they deny; so a relation between things can in fact be revealed as a social relation between people.” p.33.

inherent in capitalist relations. In virtue of this gesture, Marx can provide the contradictory movements of real human subjects in shaping and making their world. This is evidently reflected in his various employments of need concepts and the manner in which the capitalist dynamic of needs is regarded as the expression of antagonistic relations. I maintain that the ingenuity of Marx in this respect lies in his formulation of need concepts as the expression of fundamental social antagonism rather than as general abstractions devoid of historically particular content. Consequently, need concepts that we shall discuss in the following sections can be regarded as examples of expressions of historically particular social antagonisms.

Production and The Role of Needs

There are characteristics which all stages of production have in common, and which are established as general ones by the mind; but the so-called *general preconditions* of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped.⁵² According to Marx, political economists' failure to take into account material production as a determinate abstraction and formulating it in terms of its preconditions, which fails to grasp it as a real historical stage, is frequently coupled with a specific treatment of needs.

[...] in production the members of society appropriate (create, shape) the products of nature in accord with human needs...Production creates the objects which correspond to the given needs; distribution divides them up according to social laws; exchange further parcels out the already divided shares in accord with individual needs; and finely, in consumption, the product steps outside this

⁵² Marx (1999), p.3.

social movement and becomes a direct object and servant of individual need, and satisfies it in being consumed.⁵³

According to political economists, human needs operate as the starting point of production. Production is conceived as a technical process which has as its end the satisfaction of human needs, and human needs are treated as unproblematically givens which might be posited as a presupposition-free starting point. Moreover, as production is presented in isolation from distribution, exchange etc., the role of needs in these distinct spheres is similarly conceived in isolation. Qua production, a need is a starting point and gives production a purpose; similarly it is supposed to be the principle according to which exchange will be realized, and consumption is the final stage where the individual need has its object, which has been the motivating purpose of the whole process. It is noteworthy that such an approach leaves no room for considering the interrelation between production, distribution, exchange etc. as it fails to treat them in a unity⁵⁴ and the impact of doing so for understanding the operation and the movement of need forms. Instead of formulating needs as an aspect of social relations, this approach posits them outside of social relations. Evoking Marx's critique of Proudhon for seeking the origins of property in extra-economic source independent of production of wealth, we might similarly claim that political economists' approach displaces needs outside of social phenomena and is incapable of understanding their social status and origins.⁵⁵ Indeed, in *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx makes a similar charge against Proudhon's appeal to needs. Without

⁵³ Ibid., p.4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 10. "The conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity."

⁵⁵ For a further discussion of Marx's critique of Proudhon's formulation of property and his appeal to moral terms to criticize economic phenomena, see Chapter V of the present thesis.

acknowledging their historically particular forms, Proudhon takes needs to be the starting point for his explanation of production, division of labor as well as for explaining the antithesis between use value and exchange value in terms of needs.

In my capacity as a *free* buyer, I am judge of my needs, judge of the desirability of an object, judge of the price I am *willing* to pay for it. On the other hand, in your capacity as a free producer, you are master of the *means of execution*, and in consequence, you have the power to reduce your expenses.⁵⁶

For Proudhon, needs are things that we feel the need for, values are things that we attribute value to and “system of needs” depends on estimation. Accordingly, he takes the opposition between needs and exchange value as inevitable like the opposition between buyer and the producer insofar as free will exists. Hence Proudhon’s dialectic consists “in the substitution for use value and exchange value, for supply and demand, of abstract and contradictory notions like scarcity and abundance, utility and estimation, one producer and one consumer.”⁵⁷ In a similar vein, Proudhon explicates that higher order products can only be produced after all needs of the workers are satisfied – he completely ignores the historically specific antagonisms therein involved. In Marx’s ironic words:

It is like saying that because, under the Roman emperors, muraena were fattened in artificial fishponds, therefore there was enough to feed abundantly the whole Roman population. Actually, on the contrary, the Roman people had not enough to buy bread with, while the Roman aristocrats had slaves enough to throw as fodder to the muraena.⁵⁸

Marx tells us that among those who oppose political economists for prioritizing production and for taking it as an end-in-itself, it is common to argue that distribution is equally important. “This accusation is based precisely on the economic notion that the spheres of distribution and of production are independent, autonomous

⁵⁶ Cited in Marx (1955), p.14-15.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.16.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.25.

neighbours. Or that these moments were not grasped in their unity.”⁵⁹ As I shall further explore in the following sections and chapters, for a proper understanding of Marx’s approach to needs it is important to note that his discussion of needs always has totality of social relations as a backdrop. This has the consequence that need emerges as a concept of interaction, moving in different forms through production, exchange, circulation and distribution rather than a concept used for distinguishing between goods at the level of mere consumption or a principle that operates solely as a principle of redistribution. In virtue of capturing the concept of need as a concept of interaction, the dynamics of need can be explored as the site of antagonism, and the conflict between needs of capital and human needs can be revealed.

Critique of Political Economy and Critique of Needs in Capitalism

In view of these observations, let’s now turn to some need concepts as employed in Marx’s different works. Marx’s most explicit and most frequent references to needs are in *1844 Manuscripts*. One distinctive aspect of the *Manuscripts* is the way in which it brings together the critique of political economy and the critique of Hegelian speculative philosophy. Just on this point, Ernest Mandel quotes from Pierre Naville: “When he [Marx] read *Phenomenology of Mind*, *Philosophy of Right* and even the *Science of Logic*, Marx thus not only discovered Hegel but already through him, he was aware of that part of classical political economy which was assimilated and translated into philosophical terms in Hegel’s work.”⁶⁰ In the Introduction to *Early Writings*, L. Colletti similarly suggests that the “true importance of Marx’s criticism of Hegel lies in that it provides the key for understanding the method of political

⁵⁹ Marx (1999), p.5.

⁶⁰ Cited in Plant (1977), p.79.

economy.”⁶¹ Moreover, Marx pursues and develops this theme of the relation between political economy and Hegelian philosophy in different works such as the *Poverty of Philosophy*, where he is then critical of Proudhon as the metaphysician of political economy. Right at this juncture, we can ask the following question: How does Marx’s critique of political economy bear upon his treatment of needs?

In the 1844 *Manuscripts (EPM)*, Marx makes a rather unusual comment: “The fact that the multiplication of needs and the means of fulfilling them gives rise to a lack of needs and of means is proved by the political economist”⁶² How is it that political economists’ treatment of needs constitutes a proof of a fact about needs in capitalism? The sense in which their theoretical treatment of needs can prove a fact about capitalist society is far from clear. In order to answer this, we can first recall Marx’s comment on the science of political economy as ‘the science of asceticism’, for which self-denial, the denial of life and of needs is the principle doctrine.⁶³ Political economy is a science of asceticism insofar as it takes the limitedness of needs of the worker as a universal standard for the science of wealth that it claims to be. In other words, it reduces man to a worker whose needs are limited to bare physical maintenance.

This means that, according to the political economist, in capitalism, the worker can maintain himself only as a physical subject and only as a worker he can actually subsist. His needs as a human being are limited to needs that will allow him to be reproduced as a being limited to physical existence. Therefore as far as political economy is concerned, the requirements of the worker can be narrowed down to one:

⁶¹ Marx (1975), p. 24.

⁶² *EPM* in *Ibid.*, p.360.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.361.

“the need to support him while he is working and prevent the race of workers from dying out.”⁶⁴ In contrast to Marx’s conception of Man, the political economist acknowledges the world of capital as a world where man exists *only derivatively* as a factor of production, which might be subjected to adjustments for its effective use. From the perspective of political economy, then, any need that goes beyond the maintenance of the worker as a factor of production might be regarded as a luxury for the worker. “Any luxury that the worker might enjoy is reprehensible and anything that goes beyond the most abstract need – either in the form of passive enjoyment or active expression” appears to him [the worker] as a luxury.”⁶⁵ Obviously being a worker is a predicate of man and it does not exhaust the sense in which one is a human being. Nevertheless, political economy turns this predicate into a subject, hypostatizes it by isolating it from every other activity and presents it as an entity, as a subject in its own right. Worker becoming the subject implies that he is only *incidentally* a human being. This subject- predicate inversion is the crux of Marx’s critique of both political economy and Hegel. For the latter, Marx argues, universal or concept that is supposed to express the predicate of some real, concrete object is turned into an entity in its own right. Correspondingly, the subject of judgment, subject of real world is turned into a predicate, a manifestation of the Idea. Hence “the subject becomes a moment of mystical substance.”

Hegel makes the predicates, the objects, autonomous but he does this by separating them from their real autonomy, viz. their subject. The real subject subsequently appears as a result, whereas the correct approach would be to start with the real subject and then consider its objectification.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.335.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.360.

⁶⁶ CHDS in Ibid., p.80.

The subject-predicate inversion for Marx does not simply mean that Hegel's analysis is too abstract but, more importantly, that it uncritically affirms empirical reality. What is significant for our purpose is to understand that political economists are engaged in a similar inversion. Just like Hegel's hypostatization of predicates as entities, the political economists hypostatize economic categories that are the theoretical expressions of real historical relations. Real historical relations are then reduced to logical categories and once these abstractions are hypostatized, it is not too difficult to present real historical relationships as the objectification, the embodiment of such categories. In this hypostatization, there lies the danger of taking a historical moment as the determinant in *any* actual condition. In other words, it culminates in interpolating a historical moment as trans-historically valid.

Regarding the predicate of "being a worker" as a subject in abstraction from all other activities, powers, capacities as well as all historical relations and rendering him only incidentally a human being corresponds to the sense in which needs in capitalism are abstract. *Abstractness* does not refer to abstraction as a mental operation but to a *process* that takes place in reality. It defines an aspect of the social order, the process by which concrete work is transformed into the abstraction of equal or abstract human labor. The process of capitalist production produces man merely as a worker, whose needs are regarded as limited to his sustenance as a physical being. Once we acknowledge that abstraction designates a social process, we get the peculiar consequence that *abstract needs* are socially produced in capitalism. More precisely, *abstractness* refers to the concrete social relations by which needs of the worker are limited to subsistence needs. Stated rather paradoxically, socially produced abstract needs designate historically specific social mediation, whereby the needs of the workers are reduced to subsistence needs. Let

me for the moment note that the reduction of workers to subsistence needs

anticipates our discussion of contemporary radical needs in Chapter V.

It [political economy] can advance the thesis that, like a horse, he must receive enough to enable him to work. It does not consider him, during the time when he is not working, as a human being. It leaves this to criminal law, doctors, religion, statistical tables, politics and the beadle.⁶⁷

In a similar vein, Marx comments in *Poverty of Philosophy* that cynicism is not in Ricardo's language who expresses the sustenance of men on a par with the maintenance of hats but in the facts itself. It is in this sense political economy is a theoretical denial of needs; it grants the peculiar nature of needs as they pertain to the worker as a trans-historical truth valid for all situations. Having done so, it mystifies and makes unseen the historical processes and relations by which needs of the worker are posited as abstract, physical needs. In *EPM*, Marx does not explicitly introduce the distinctions between abstract / concrete labor and dead / living labor, which are central to his analysis in *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. But anticipating the distinction, we might say that abstract needs are the counterpart of abstract labor. Rather than the needs of a sensuous being, what is taken into account is the abstract needs that allow the worker to be reproduced as labor power. " 'Man' as 'man' ceases to exist in capitalism and instead becomes an abstraction. Political economy itself reflects this in seeing a human being not as a man but as a worker."⁶⁸ Hence it uncritically affirms the process of capitalist production as producing man merely as a worker and the dynamics of needs, which produce the abstract needs of the worker limited to survival.

⁶⁷ *EPM* in *Ibid.*, p.288.

⁶⁸ Fraser (1998), p. 125.

On the other hand, Marx complains that “political economist tells us that everything that is bought with labor and that capital is nothing but accumulated labor, but then goes on to say that the worker, far from being in a position to buy everything, must sell himself and his humanity.”⁶⁹ This amounts to saying that insofar as political economy cannot capture the historically specific character of labor in capitalism, it cannot reveal the peculiarity fundamental for capitalism: Presupposition of capitalist production is that labor *must* enter into the production process only via labor as a commodity. In other words, production is possible only if labor enters into the market as something other than what it is – *qua* commodity. This ontological peculiarity characterizes capitalist production: Everything *is* other than what it *is*. Abstract needs of the worker then can be regarded as the expression of this peculiarity *qua* needs.

Necessary Needs

Another important category in this regard is the category of necessary needs.

Necessary needs are frequently defined as referring to means of subsistence.

Nevertheless the sense of necessity involved in “necessary needs” is not confined to natural necessity, which is characterized merely in terms of the dictates of survival.

The passage below from *Capital* seems to support this:

...the number and the extent of his so-called necessary means of subsistence as also the manner in which they are satisfied, and depend therefore to a great extent on the level of civilization attained by a country; in particular they depend on the conditions in which and consequently on the habits and expectations with which the class of free workers has been formed. In contrast

⁶⁹ Marx, Op.cit., p. 287.

therefore, with the case of other commodities, the determination of the value of labor power contains a historical and moral element.⁷⁰

This passage demonstrates that “necessity” at stake in the “necessary means of subsistence” cannot be sufficiently comprehended with reference to the dictates of survival, but it involves “habits and expectations” as well as a “moral and historical element”. Hence what is at stake must be “social necessity”. On the other hand, in *Grundrisse* Marx exemplifies natural needs as food, clothing, fuel, housing which vary according to the climatic and other physical peculiarities of one’s country and in the 1844 *Manuscripts* hunger is given as an example of a natural need: “Hunger is a natural need; it therefore requires a nature and an object outside itself and which is indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential nature.”⁷¹ The key point here is that in the passage above, Marx links necessary needs with the mediation of labor power. This demonstrates that while “natural needs” as a general abstraction refers to common needs that have to be satisfied in order to exist, Marx is preoccupied with the determinate form that natural needs take under the relations of capital. As formerly mentioned, natural needs are captured in the form of necessary needs as the needs of the worker in capitalism that can only be satisfied through the sale of labor power in order to be reproduced again as labor power. In other words, the difference between natural and necessary needs is that the latter entails the form that natural needs take under the mediation of wage labor. Wage-labor is the sole means of need satisfaction in capitalism, which in turn delineates the scope of necessary needs. The value of labor power, on the other hand, is determined by the socially necessary labor time required for workers to reproduce themselves and this

⁷⁰ Marx (1990), p.275.

⁷¹ *EPM* in Marx (1975), p.390.

depends on “the level of civilization attained by a country” and specifically by the degree of the development of class struggle. According to the level of wage, what can be posited as necessary varies. Historical factors might change what counts as a necessary need; it refers to a standard of living in a particular setting posited as necessary by the workers as a consequence of the class struggle and Marx claims that this will be a “known datum”.⁷²

Marx develops a comprehensive account of the different aspects of wage labor in *Grundrisse*, yet his understanding of factors of social production as *relations* is central in *Manuscripts* as well and it is explicit in his formulation of wage in terms of a relation of subordination of the capitalist over the worker.⁷³ Unlike Marx, the political economists tend to conceive of them as “things” rather than as “relations” and identify wage with labor in general rather than taking labor in its historically specific form as a historical variable.⁷⁴ Once wage is characterized as including the

⁷² Marx, Op.cit.

⁷³ An important aspect of B. Ollman’s argument in *Dance of the Dialectic* is the centrality of a relational ontology: “The economists do not conceive of capital as a Relation. They cannot do so without at the same time conceiving it as a historical transitory, i.e., relative – not an absolute – form of production.’ This is not a comment about the content of capital, about what it is, but about the *kind* of thing it is- to wit, a relation. To grasp capital, as Marx does, as a complex relation that has at its core internal ties between the material means of production and those who own them, those who work on them, their special product, value and the conditions in which owning and working go on is to know that capital is a historical event, as something emerged as a result of the specific conditions in the lifetime of real people and that will disappear when these conditions do. Viewing such connections as external to what capital is – which, for them is simply the material means of production or money used to but such – the economists fail treating capital as a historical variable. Without saying so explicitly and certainly without ever explicitly defending this position, capital becomes something that has always been and will always be”. Ollman (2003), p. 69.

At this point, Marx does not yet use the terminology of “class”. Yet his characterization of wage as a relation of subordination anticipates his understanding of class as a relation, which implies domination. As E.M. Wood (1995) duly argues understanding class as a process and relation has important implications that are ignored by conceptions of class as a “structural location”.

⁷⁴ Seeing labor as the essence of man is something that political economy shares with Hegel. This is explicit in Marx’s reference to Hegel: “Hegel adopts the standpoint of modern political economy. He sees labour as the essence, the self-confirming essence of man; he sees only the positive and not the negative side of labour.” *EPM* in Marx (1975), p.386. Here Marx must have Hegel of *Phenomenology* in mind rather than Hegel’s works that we have mentioned, especially the *FPS* and *SEL*. Yet even when Hegel sees the positive and the negative aspects of labor, he explicates their movement in terms

manifold of internal relations between labor and capital, natural needs which are to be satisfied via wage are determined as necessary needs intertwined with the “relations of subordination” as Marx calls in the *Manuscripts*. This means that via the mediation of wage, one’s own conditions of life are separated from him and they become the means by which he becomes subordinated to the needs of capital.⁷⁵ This portrayal of subsistence needs discloses that subsistence can by no means be regarded as a “natural”, an apolitical phenomenon. Necessary needs can be understood against the background of the nexus reproducing the contradiction of capital and labor and in Marx’s treatment, they express the antagonistic nature of needs in capitalism. The determinate form of natural needs as necessary needs allows revealing the *difference* of the capitalist dynamic of needs and tends to explicate the intricate, conflictual status of needs in relation to capital. In virtue of this, major antagonisms can be posited right at the juncture of need satisfaction.

One important aspect of Marx’s radical break with the seventeenth and eighteenth century economists can be traced back to the difference in the employment of needs and his critique of political economy might provide insight for clarifying Marx’s appeal to different categories of need. Furthermore, classical political economists render needs as the starting point of their analysis, relate economic facts to needs as a pre-given set and tend to explicate production, distribution, exchange as stemming from the satisfaction of these needs and thus providing the ultimate explanation of those acts. Evidently, no critique of these acts

of the inner dialectic of society since he does not see that abstract labor, wage labor as moments of capital. For Marx, the negative and the positive aspect is not defined in terms of poverty and wealth but in terms of the internal relation between labor and capital. Moreover, in *Poverty of Philosophy* he criticizes Proudhon for trying to keep the “good sides” of production while getting rid of its “bad” sides. Marx (1955), p. 49.

⁷⁵ This theme reappears in *Capital* in Marx’s claim that wage labor does not only produce commodities but produces itself as a commodity. This means that it produces social relations of capitalism.

and relevant needs can ever be intended insofar as both these “acts and their outcomes are by definition the only possible acts within the scope of this science.”⁷⁶

I must add that this uncritical manner of thinking is not withered away but rather strengthened today, giving way to associating needs with aspects of culture and identity at the expense of acknowledging that conflicts and antagonisms are mediated through the different forms that needs take in capital. Let’s now turn to some need concepts that frequently appear in Marx’ works and see how they might be related with the need forms that I have mentioned so far.

Social Needs and True/False Needs

A. Heller (1974) draws attention to two common ways of interpreting “social needs”, both among Marxists as well as among the opponents of Marx. The first one formulates social needs as “a general system of needs, which so to speak, is ‘suspended above’ individual people and is at a higher level than the personal needs of the individuals who constitute society.”⁷⁷ In cases of conflict, it is suggested, the individual is expected to subordinate to social needs. The second one also adopts the same formulation, yet from this it concludes that social needs are the true, real needs of the individual people. Accordingly, it is presumed that social needs have as their background the distinction between true and false or genuine and artificial needs. These distinctions imply that people are unaware of their true needs and they need to be made conscious by those who are aware of them. This raises reasonable suspicions towards the category of social needs and is also the source of concern for

⁷⁶ Soper (1977), p.39.

⁷⁷ Heller (1974), p.67.

a “dictatorship over needs”⁷⁸ – the portrayal of a social and political organization where a central authority dictates and allocates the so-called “real needs” of individuals. However, it is hard to find in Marx’s works that will support these suspicions and doubts. Even though he sometimes speaks of real or imaginary needs, he refers neither to “unconscious needs” nor makes any declaration which would be suggestive of “educators” - as Heller calls – portrayed “above” the society, expected to dictate some needs at the expense of others. On the contrary, in the third thesis in “Theses on Feuerbach”, Marx himself expresses his discomfort about views that have the consequence of positing “educators” above the society.⁷⁹ He explicitly opposes to the “educators”, representing those standing over and above the society and this constitutes a fundamental aspect of his critique of the materialist tradition. Moreover, Marx nowhere provides a catalog of true needs or a criterion to distinguish a true from a false need. Hence it is not likely that Marx holds a true and false distinction as it is commonly attributed to him. Attributing a true/false distinction to Marx’s treatment of needs seems to be related to the revival of the concept of needs in the twentieth century by Herbert Marcuse and his explicit reference to true and false needs in relation to the longevity of capitalism.⁸⁰ The status of needs, then, was discussed in terms of the role they play in the reproduction

⁷⁸ As we shall see in the final chapter, Heller’s views on capitalist structure of needs radically change in her later works. *Dictatorship Over Needs* provides a forceful critique of East European state socialism which the authors – Feher, Heller and Markus – claim to be making a progress towards a dictatorship over needs rather than a classless society. They distinguished between a dictatorship over needs and the limitation of needs. According to the authors, the latter is a feature of capitalism and since it maintains at least the freedom of choice, the capitalist structure of needs is deformed rather than impoverished.

⁷⁹ For a detailed discussion and commentary upon “Theses on Feuerbach”, see Macherey (2008). Macherey’s comments on the Second Thesis (pp.61-81) about the use of *Wirklichkeit* and the relationship between praxis and objective truth might shed light upon some possible interpretations of true/real needs.

⁸⁰ Marcuse (1964), Chapter 1.

of capitalism. Focusing especially on consumer economy and the “second nature of man” bound libidinally to the commodity form, the discussions mainly revolve around true/false needs distinction. The needs generated by capitalism are regarded to be eminently stabilizing and conservative needs. However, the extent to which such an outlook actually inherits from Marx is a point to be questioned. Yet it is not difficult to see that this outlook undermines the dialectic between dependence and independence that marks capitalist need dynamics and such a distinction can hardly be held once the movement of need forms is acknowledged. Anticipating the discussion in the final chapter of the dissertation, I must further add that, taking the needs that emerge under capitalism *merely* as “false needs” undermines the concept of radical needs and the possible immanent moments of transcendence within the existing need dynamics.

The considerations mentioned so far reveal that attributing the true/false needs distinction to Marx in the sense explained above is rather ungrounded; hence the category of social needs cannot be interpreted adequately against the background of the distinction. Now, let’s turn to the other - distinct yet interrelated- senses of “social needs” employed by Marx.⁸¹

i. Needs created by society are social needs: Marx usually uses social needs in this sense by juxtaposing them to natural necessity. In this sense, expansion of social needs designate men’s ability to triumph over natural necessity. Heller reminds us that “socially produced” need in this sense is synonymous with human need, “where ‘human’ is not a value category. This seems to be the most frequent use of the category.

⁸¹ Heller, Op.cit., pp.67-73.

Capital's ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth drives labor beyond the limits of its natural paltriness and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as its consumption and whose labor also therefore appears no longer as labour but as the full development of activity itself in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared because a *historically created need* has taken the place of the natural one.⁸² (my emphasis)

Historically created need is a social need, which marks the ability to transform natural necessity.

ii.. The second sense as the “needs of socially developed beings”

Heller cites Marx in *Capital III*:

The expansion or contraction of production are determined by... profit and the proportion of this profit to the employed capital, thus by a definite rate of profit, rather than the *relation of production to social needs*; i.e. to the needs of socially developed human beings.⁸³

According to Heller, Marx compares the capitalist society with the society of associated producers from the standpoint of these needs of socially developed humanity. Although this depiction has some problems that will be elaborated in the final chapter, it suffices for the moment to note this sense of social needs. We might further add that “the need for society” that Marx mentions in the 1844 *EPM* is a social need in this sense.⁸⁴ Moreover, workers’ need for self-development that will be discussed in Chapter 4 might be regarded as a social need in the sense of a need of a socially developed being.

iii. A need is social in virtue of the way in which it is satisfied: These are needs which are themselves the offspring of social production and intercourse. This obscures any possible distinction between what might be termed as a physical need, a

⁸² Marx (1999), p.293.

⁸³ Cited in Heller (1974), p.70.

⁸⁴ See p.191, footnote 40 of the present thesis.

natural need and a social one. For example, Marx's reference to hunger is suggestive of this point: "Hunger is hunger but hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth."⁸⁵ Here Marx draws attention not to the different ways of satisfying hunger but to the fact that a particular need takes a different form in virtue of different forms of satisfaction. Accordingly, characterizing a need as a social one does not depend upon the object of need per se; but its mode of satisfaction indicates its degree of sociality.

iv. A fourth sense of social needs describes average needs for material goods in a society: In this sense, a social need corresponds to effective demand. Heller notes that Marx uses this sense in inverted commas. However, when the term is employed without the commas, she claims that it refers to those needs that are not and cannot be expressed in terms of effective demand. In other words, they are those needs that do not find expression in the market. Heller coins these needs that cannot find expression in effective demand as "true social need."⁸⁶ Accordingly a " 'social need', i.e. the factor which regulates the principle of demand, is essentially subject to mutual relationship of the different classes and their respective economic position."⁸⁷ In this case, effective demand is the form of appearance, which does not reflect true

⁸⁵ Marx (1999), p.7.

⁸⁶ Marcuse in *Reason and Revolution* (Part II, Sect.6) deals with the problem of social needs: "Marx summarizes this state of affairs when he says: 'The *need for commodities on the market*, the demand, differs quantitatively from the *actual social need*'. Even if the market were to manifest the actual social need, the law of value would continue to operate as a blind mechanism outside the conscious control of individuals. It would continue to exert the pressure of a 'natural law' (*Natugesetz*), the necessity of which, far from precluding, would rather insure the rule of chance over society. The system of relating independent individuals to one another through the necessary labor-time contained in the commodities they exchange may seem to be one of utmost rationality. In reality, however, this system organizes only waste and disproportion." www.marxists.org

⁸⁷ Marx cited in Heller (1974), p.70.

social needs. But on what grounds, then, can “true social needs” be established? In order to answer this question, let us now turn to the discussions concerning what amounts to a real social need. Heller equates “true social need” with the sociological, empirical concept of necessary need, which refers to the average of individual needs historically developed. It is an objective, yet not a static category; true social needs conceived as necessary needs are bound to change constantly. However, we have seen above that necessary needs are claimed to be “known datum.” Since true social needs cannot be expressed as effective demand, how can they add up to “necessary needs” as an empirical notion?

This point gives rise to discussions concerning the status of true social needs. Commenting on the same subject, M. Lebowitz in *Beyond Capital* acknowledges that true social needs are not known datum and he assumes that they exceed the level of necessary needs. For Lebowitz, the difference between true social need and necessary need indicates the level of immiseration in capitalism. We had mentioned above that through the category of necessary needs, Marx draws attention to the role of mediation of wage in need satisfaction. Given this, “true social needs” in Lebowitz’s claim that true social needs exceed the level of necessary needs must be expressing the needs of those who are actually wage-laborers.⁸⁸ However, what about the ones who are not included in the workforce; in other words the ones that cannot even reach to the level of necessary needs since they cannot sell their labor power? This raises a difficulty for Lebowitz, which I. Fraser’s approach seems to overcome. Fraser argues that true social needs contain both needs that exceed the level of necessary needs as well as those who want to reach the level of necessary needs. Following Fraser then, we might claim that true social need expresses the potential

⁸⁸ Lebowitz (2003), pp.40-45.

level of need that people could have satisfied if living conditions were different. Hence it appears that Marx does not ascribe any specific content or a catalogue of needs for what true social needs; yet he takes them to be the expressions of a real potential expressed in terms of a counterfactual.

These do not necessarily exhaust the senses of social needs in Marx's works but they give an idea of some of its major uses and provide some insight into some controversies that revolve around the notion. It is interesting to see that none of these interpretations seem to presume an understanding of social needs that expresses a structure of need "suspended above" the individual, which can be regarded as having priority in times of conflict and they by no means attempt to provide a catalogue of *true* needs. We can finish with Heller's comment on true social needs: "It [true social need] is not a question of contrast between conscious and unconscious, but as Marx says in *Poverty of Philosophy*, of a contrast between being and non-being, between realizing and not realizing, between what is satisfiable and what is not satisfiable."⁸⁹

Objectification and Human Needs

One need concept frequently employed by Marx is the notion of human needs especially in *1844 EPM*. In order to explore this notion, let's first turn to the relationship between the process of objectification and needs.

One might plausibly argue that the import of objectification in Marx's works evinces for his turn away from the classical subject-object paradigm that has been discussed previously and Marx's critical stance with respect to classical epistemology predicated on the notion of an autonomous subject in sharp distinction

⁸⁹ Heller, Op.cit. p.71.

from the objective world. Elaborating on the relation between the process of objectification and needs allows one to explore Marx's characterization of needs in terms of subject-object correlation. A need is always related to some object and to an objective activity, which reciprocally affect each other; the need and its object can be regarded as the moments of one and single complex. Moreover, needs considered in relation to the process of objectification provides insight into - what we might call - the *active* dimension of needs, whereby needs can simultaneously be regarded as capacities and passions – an idiosyncrasy of Marx's treatment of needs. The relevance and the impact of this last point with reference to the discourse of needs will become clearer in the discussion of radical needs - a major topic of the final chapter.

Labor as species activity is an activity of objectification, which for Marx has two interconnected aspects. Man forms objects in the image of his needs and in doing so, he transforms himself. In other words, the process of objectification both implies the creation of the objective world as well as the process of man's creation of himself. It is the portrayal of the world and man himself in a process of becoming via productive activity. The activity establishes the interrelation between the two terms. Objects are constituted, given meaning via subject's activity and via this activity, the object is no longer treated as external to the subject and the subject comes to know his capacities in the object by means of which he has created the object. Moreover, satisfaction of a specific need in turn creates new needs, by which man is transposed into a new human character.

For example, suppose the purpose is to get from one place to another quickly; the creation of an automobile satisfies this purpose. In addition, it opens up new modes of action and new opportunities by extending the regional limits of one's world and thereby the range of one's social contact. It gives rise to the feeling of freedom and control over one's environment. It also creates the requirement

for a new technology of road building, the problems of the destruction of the countryside and of pollution and the ubiquitous problem of traffic congestion, in which the original aims are thwarted. The agent is also transformed in this process, as anyone who drives an automobile can attest. For better or worse, a new human character is created.⁹⁰

This is the sense in which Marx talks of human objects in the *Manuscripts*. Similarly, needs are characterized in terms of the relation between the object and the subject; as relational properties of the subject. Human objects are the correlate of human needs. “It is only when man’s object becomes a human object or objective that man does not lose himself in that object.”⁹¹ Objectification describes the process by which subjectivity and objectivity are constituted as interrelated via production and it might further be regarded as a mode of emphasizing the constitutive power of human practice – as the world we inhabit is our world.

Marx defines senses, organs, capacities as man’s relations to the world; or the different manners in which he appropriates the world. This means that “relation” does not designate a passive establishment but an active commitment, an active engagement. It is an appropriation of the object; making something “mine”, giving it form, meaning and value. It is through the different manners of relating such as “seeing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving” that the subject can attain objectivity. Needing something is in this sense a manner of establishing a relation, an inner relation with the objective world and as such it can only be adequately characterized in terms of relational properties of man with the objects. This is evident in the claim that “only music can awaken the musical sense in man and the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical

⁹⁰ Gould (1978), p. 43.

⁹¹ *EPM* in Marx(1974), p.352.

ear.”⁹² Cultivation of the senses is interrelated with the production of new objects. In the course of history, interrelation of men in social productive activity and the products thereby produced and enjoyed become more complex. This means the corresponding development of needs, which Marx formulates as the cultivation of the senses:

[N]ot only the five senses, but also the so-called spiritual senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, the *human* sense, the humanity of the senses - all these come into being only through the existence [*Dasein*] of *their* objects, through *humanised* nature. The *cultivation* [*Bildung*] of the five senses is the work of all previous world history. *Sense* which is trapped by crude practical need has only a *restricted* sense. For a man who is starving the human form of food does not exist, only its abstract existence [*Dasein*] as food does.⁹³

The development of needs designate the interrelation between the subject, object and the activity of production. There is a two way relationship between the subject and object in terms of needs. The objects we produce depends on the needs we experience and conversely whether we experience a need and the manner of needing it depends upon the availability of the object and the manner in which the object exists for us. Human needs can only be satisfied by human objects, which imply the objectification of species activity. This is the sense in which man expresses himself, realizes himself through the creation of human objects – universal objects that can in principle satisfy needs and which can be related as the product of men’s powers and capacities rather than as something external to him as a subject. In this sense, human need marks the bond between men, their interdependence. As A. Chitty reminds us this is not to say that man becomes more altruistic, but that

[...] he experiences the creation of a universal object, one which can in principle satisfy the needs of any human being, as a need in itself, indeed as his

⁹²Ibid., p.353.

⁹³ Ibid., p.352.

overriding need. An inventor or a scientist could serve just as much as a present day example of expressive need as an artist.⁹⁴

Although the emergence of human needs is a real possibility only in capitalism, under the regime of private property, the different ways of making the objective world “ours” are to a significant extent reduced to a single relationship of “having”.

Human Needs as a Critical and Historical Concept

Marx invokes the concept of human need both in his criticism of political economy as the self-understanding of capitalism and in the critique of “crude communism”. As mentioned above, according to Marx, political economy denies human needs by uncritically accepting capitalism’s reduction of man to a bundle of abstract needs. On the other hand, crude communism is “turned against richer private property in the form of envy and desire to level down on the basis of a preconceived minimum. It has a definite, limited measure.”⁹⁵ For crude communism simply implies a community of labor and equality of wages. In other words, while the former starts from the “fact of private property” and takes it as a natural given, the other’s negation of private property is never a true appropriation since “it is the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilization and the return to the unnatural

⁹⁴ Chitty (1994), p.167.

⁹⁵ Marx, Op.cit., p.349.

simplicity of the poor.”⁹⁶ Oddly enough, we might say that these two different views share a common perspective with respect to needs: Though for different reasons and in different ways, they both acknowledge the “man with few needs”. While political economy takes the worker with abstract need as a self-subsisting natural entity, the latter wants to transform everyone into the status of the worker. Therefore, we can comprehend the category of human need as the tool by which Marx brings both of these perspectives under critical scrutiny. In other words, Marx sets the category of human need against two different perspectives: On the one hand, it is employed for opposing an unhistorical understanding of need, which negates the historical level of development. On the other hand, it stands against taking a historical moment as a natural given, which implies affirming the existing structure of needs without genuine criticism. Hence the category of human need must be both a *historical* and a *critical* conception and Marx provides a different ontology of wealth in terms of the wealth of human needs formulated as man rich in his needs: “the rich man and the wealth of human need take the place of the wealth and poverty of political economy.”⁹⁷ Marx explains human beingness by contrasting it to animals.

The animal is immediately one with its life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it; it *is* that activity. Man makes his life-activity itself into an object of his willing and consciousness. He has conscious life-activity. It is not a determination with which he immediately merges. Conscious life-activity

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.346. The role of human needs in Marx’s early writings is discussed in Berry (1987). He argues that the common factor of crude, animalistic needs is their egoism, while human needs transcend this perspective by having the other person as their object.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.356. Marx’s critique of needs in capitalism might be said to involve a critical ontology of the present: how we have become subjects of certain needs and not others, what constituted us and made us recognizable as subjects of certain needs. So it is a critique of the constitution of a certain mode of subjectivity and objectivity in capitalism. Human needs operates as the real possibility that the extant structure of needs can acquire a fundamentally different character. They are not just transhistorical criteria to be judge the extant needs but rather they refer to the possibilities, potentialities that exist within the existing structure. Hence they involve both an analysis of the present as well as the possibility of going beyond it.

distinguishes man immediately from animal life-activity. Only because of that is he a species-being ... Only because of that is his activity free activity.⁹⁸

Man is species-being (*Gattungswesen*), which has universality as its primary feature. *Gattung* means species, but also means type or kind. So, as Chitty (1994) reminds us, *Gattungswesen* can be translated as a 'type-being'; *wesen* means 'essence' and *ein Wesen* also means 'an entity' or 'a being'. Presumably it means specifically a being that has an essence, then "a being" must be understood as having an essence. It seems natural to assume that if a *Wesen* always means a being with an essence, then a *Gattungswesen* would mean "a being whose essence is 'species-ness', i.e. universality of some kind."⁹⁹ It is important to see that this does not refer to "humanity as a single collective entity or else to the essential property which characterizes this entity and makes it a single distinctive thing in its own right" as suggested by A. Wood.¹⁰⁰ In that sense, to be a species-being would mean something like, being conscious of oneself as a member of species and being aware that one has those features distinctive of that species.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, species-beingness has no determination other than universality. It primarily designates a being whose essence does not coincide with his particularity.

Man is a species-being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species (his own as well as those of other things) as his object, but – and this is only another way of expressing it – also because he treats [*sich verhält*] himself

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.328.

⁹⁹ Chitty (1994), pp. 157-158.

¹⁰⁰ Wood (1981), p.17.

¹⁰¹ This would also mean that Marx deals with human beings as such. However for Marx, production is always production at a definite stage of development by social individuals and taking sociality as distinct from a definite historical form is always to abstract it. In *Grundrisse*, he criticizes the view that there are human beings as such in society. According to Marx, "they are outside of society. To be a slave, to be a citizen are social characteristics, relations between human beings A and B. Human being A as such is not a slave. He is a slave in and through society." Marx (1999), p.239.

as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore a free being.¹⁰²

Species-being is species-activity and similarly universality is characterized with respect to species activity. More precisely, it is via species-activity that man proves himself as species-being. First of all species activity, i.e., productive activity is social. It involves producing for others and enjoying what others have produced. This constitutes one aspect of universality. Secondly, as species being, man does not directly merge with his activity. In other words his relation to it is not one of immediacy, he can direct his activity consciously in many different ways; “he can make it the object of his will and consciousness”.

Another related aspect of universality mentioned in the above passage concerns the way one relates to him/herself; in other words consciousness of oneself as a free being. Even when he is producing under the pressure of physical need, he cannot satisfy his need without at the same time creating new needs, which then become necessary for the gratification of his physical needs. Moreover, in producing he makes not only his species his object but treats other kinds as his object. As A.Chitty suggests, by acting on nature he does not relate to objects as particulars but as examples of different kinds.

Specifically this means that, when human beings act on things, they do not act on them as unique particulars, but *as examples* of the kinds (or species) under which they classify them using their general concepts. Their action on a thing is ‘mediated’ through their concept of the kind of which they are treating (or ‘relating to’) the thing as an instance... If I burn a log for warmth I am treating it as an instance of ‘firewood’, my action on the log is mediated through the concept of ‘firewood’, and the intentional object of my activity is the log *as* a piece of firewood.¹⁰³

¹⁰² EPM in Marx(1974), p.327.

¹⁰³ Chitty (1994), p.161.

Hence, man acts not only on nature but also on his own actions and constantly changes his nature in doing so. Marx distinguishes human beings from animals in terms of these different yet interrelated aspects of universality. Similarly, universality is the distinctive feature of human needs. Human needs are different from animal needs such that they designate a fundamentally different way in which one relates to others, to the world of objects and to himself. In this sense, human needs do not designate a specific list of needs or things necessary for human life. Rather they characterize the essential manner in which man acts upon himself, upon others and upon the world of objects.¹⁰⁴ They are a function of concrete historical social relations.

Qua human needs, universality implies the transformation of what were merely external needs originally at the animal level into conscious purposes. Marx describes this process as the transformation in which “external aims become stripped of the semblance of merely external natural urgencies and become posited as aims which the individual himself posits.”¹⁰⁵ Need *qua* universality implies man’s power to overcome his subjection to natural necessity. Becoming the objects of conscious purposes, natural needs come to acquire a human form and we might say that the need itself is constituted by the agents themselves. Not only that men produce the means of satisfaction but they constitute the needs themselves in a new form. This is exactly what Marx means in the afore-mentioned claim that “hunger is hunger but hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth.”

Significance of this passage is not in asserting that there are diverse ways of need

¹⁰⁴ Marx claims that it is only human beings that establish a relation - animals do not relate themselves to anything.

¹⁰⁵ Marx (1999), p. 7.

satisfaction but that the manner of need satisfaction actually constitutes the need itself in a new form and this human form is social. In this human form, the need takes more concrete, specific forms which in turn give rise to new social needs, i.e. knife and fork, cooking in a specific manner. This means new courses of action, new projections for the future, new possibilities opening up via human needs. As we shall take up in the discussion of radical needs, the form of human needs implies the moments of transcendence immanent in concrete socio-historical relations. Human needs are not pre-given trans-historical standards against which extant social conditions are to be judged but they are historically created out of men's interaction and can emerge only in capitalist society.¹⁰⁶

Universal exchange of products ...the exploration of the earth in all directions...the discovery, creation and satisfaction of new needs arising from society itself...[further, capital creates] a system of general exploitation of natural and human qualities...the universal appropriation of nature as well as the social bond by the members of society. Hence the great civilizing influence of capital; its production of a stage of society in comparison to which all earlier ones appear as mere local developments of humanity and as nature-idolatry.¹⁰⁷

In her insightful book, *The Problem of Civilization and the Problem of Human Needs*, P. Springborg claims that Marx employs two different senses of need – a normative and a descriptive sense. The first, she argues, is an ontological or normative conception designating human essence which prevails in *1844 EPM*. On the other hand, Springborg sharply distinguishes this from a purely descriptive conception of need as relative to society and history that she claims to be found in his later works. For Springborg, these two are mutually exclusive; while the former is a

¹⁰⁶ When workmen gather together for the purpose of propaganda, instruction, they at the same time acquire the need for society. Hence the transformation of what starts out as a means to an end. See Marx (1975) in *EPM*, p.365. This transformation takes place within the praxis of men, emerges out of the contradictions of social relations.

¹⁰⁷ Marx (1999), p.405.

normative notion, the latter, in virtue of its historical dimension, lacks a normative outlook. My proposal of an understanding of human needs as historical *and* critical does not sit squarely with Springborg's formulation. Unlike Springborg, I suggest that human needs emerge in a historical moment and describe a unique manner of interaction between men. The notion of human needs is *neither* purely normative nor purely descriptive; it is *both* normative and descriptive. "Human needs" designates the real possibility that the extant organization of needs can acquire a fundamentally different character.

However, they are not just trans-historical criteria for evaluation, preconceived register of what counts as human but rather they refer to the real possibilities within the existing structure and critically employ them to designate "what could be, but is not." Hence they simultaneously involve both an analysis of the present historical relations as well as the possibility of going beyond it. Human needs then do not simply designate needs that are common to all human beings but they lend us to the material ground of possibility of relating universally to other human beings, objects and to oneself. This possibility only emerges as an aspect of concrete historical relations and the contradictions that exist within praxis.

Heller regards the category of human needs as a theoretical construct and accordingly claims that they exist only in the mind of the philosopher. But this understanding of human needs is due to the failure to grasp needs via their movement, in terms of a historical process. Once we recognize this aspect of human needs, we are in a position to understand that human needs are not theoretical constructs that could exist only in the society of associated producers as conceived in direct opposition to capitalism. For example, Marx does not strictly oppose the necessary needs of capitalism with the human needs as exclusively pertaining to

socialism. Instead, he focuses on the moment of universality and transcendence as a real possibility that exists in concrete historical relations and processes. In other words, it is not the case that there are necessary needs of capitalism on the one hand and human needs that are qualitatively different needs on the other. Given what we have said so far, one of Marx's insights is to acknowledge that need categories are not mutually exclusive but are internally related to each other in such a way that the moments of transcendence exist in the actions of real historical beings and in the contradictions that thereby arise. Moreover, Heller's claim also undermines one major point in Marx's works that a theoretical concern is not to be regarded in isolation from a practical one. For Marx, aporias like subjectivism, objectivism, activity, passivity etc. can be resolved only practically and this is not merely a theoretical, epistemic question *per se*. The form of human need, as Marx seems to conceive of, is an outcome of the movement of different need forms through each other and the resolution of dichotomies such as natural vs. social, cultural vs. physical, necessary vs. free, want vs. need. This possibility emerges in concrete historical relations that define capitalist society.

CHAPTER IV

DISCOURSE OF NEEDS AND THE HISTORICALLY SPECIFIC CONFIGURATION OF ECONOMY AND POLITICS IN CAPITALISM

In the previous chapter, I have explored Hegel's and Marx's treatment of needs in terms of the social dialectic between dependence and independence, which in turn, paves the way for positing need satisfaction as the site of major social antagonisms. Nevertheless, the discourse of needs and characterizing need satisfaction in terms of the social dialectic of dependence and independence was an exception rather than the rule especially during the emergence of the market society. By then, the predominant discourse was the discourse of interests and acting out of interest was commonly portrayed as delineating a realm of independence on the part of the individual who was stripped off his communal bonds that had hitherto defined his social status. At the risk of overstating, one might even claim that the discourse of interest pioneered as the predominant human motivation marks the rise of industrial capitalism. Commercial society regarded to be formed as a result of human actions driven by self-interest was conceived as the *topos* of independence. The conspicuous articulation of the category of interest with the discourse of independence suggests that any allusion to the category of need within the paradigm of commercial society has been rendered redundant right from the early defenses of commercial society. This chapter starts off by exploring the central role of the discourse of interest and the association of self-interest with a discourse on independence that is claimed to characterize free market society. Association of the discourse of interest with the

discourse of independence, I argue, is marked by the historically specific configuration of economy and politics in capitalist society.

During the rise of the welfare state, needs have become an important aspect of the political discourse as a principle of social justice. Interestingly, in the second half of the 20th century, the discourse of dependency was commonly invoked in arguments against the welfare state. It was commonplace, especially in the US, among the opponents of the welfare state, to invoke the language of dependency and passivity with reference to welfare policies based on needs and to criticize what they call “welfare dependency”. One might as well claim that it is revealing to reflect on this imputation of dependence with respect to the welfare state as well as the articulation of the discourse of needs with the discourse of dependency against the historical background of the discourse of self-interest, illustrated in terms of independence. Doing so, I argue, paves the way for disclosing how the discourse of dependence associated with needs and welfare state shifts attention from the increasing dependence on capitalism itself as well as the increasing conflict between human needs and the needs of capital in need satisfaction.

Self-Interest and the Discourse of Independence

The free market of exchange is welcomed as the mechanism through which individuals are no longer bound up by the will of those who are of a higher social rank and status. Adam Smith is one of the first thinkers who have explicitly addressed the link between independence and the free market. Central to his defense of the market society is his appeal to the values of self-sufficiency and independence that it facilitates. Commercial society which was argued to be formed as a result of

human actions driven by self-interest was regarded as the *topos* of independence. How is the relationship between independence – and in what sense- and the pursuit of self-interest construed? In order to tackle this question further, we can first turn to Smith’s argument in the *Wealth of Nations* concerning the independence fostered in commercial society. Reflecting on this question anticipates a prior, basic question: How come “interest” came to be associated with the interest of wealth? While one might plausibly conjecture that economic interest designates only one passion of a person’s total aspirations, how should we understand its semantic drift to the terrain of economic activity and of acquisitive drive?¹ Inspired by these questions, the following is a modest attempt to shed light upon the historical specificity of Smith’s articulation of interest and the reasons that make his account paradigmatic in view of Albert Hirschman’s historical narrative in his brilliant book *Passions and the Interests, Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph*.

For Smith, the market of free exchange is the mechanism by which “individuals who are not directly motivated by each other’s needs, can still serve each other’s necessities.”² In the passage that addresses exactly this aspect of the market, the implicit distinction between interest and need is noteworthy.

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love and never talk to them of our own necessities but their advantages.³

¹ Analogously, Hirschman (1977) cites from Jean de Silhon, who deplored the evolution of the meaning of interest in *De la certitude des connaissances humaines*: "The name of Interest has remained attached exclusively, I do not know how (je ne sais comment), to the Interest of wealth (Intérêt du bien ou des richesses)." p.39.

² Reader (2006), p.80.

³ Smith (1776), Book I, Ch.2.

As the passage suggests, the pursuit of self-interest makes redundant any appeal to good will or to humanitarian considerations for the satisfaction of necessities. The peculiarity of action motivated by self-interest is that even though one is not acting out of a sense of duty or acting out of consideration for others' need, individual pursuit of self-interest eventually transforms into a social benefit. We can briefly note for the moment – to be taken up later – that the search for a “neutral” outlook on human conduct, which takes man “as he really is” free from the prescriptions of “moralizing philosophy and religious precepts” dates back to Renaissance and becomes a firm conviction during the seventeenth century. The answer was found in the category of interest, which was regarded to be a realistic basis for a feasible social order. As Smith's argument suggests, even though the individual is not led by the necessities of others, or by moral and religious duties or any sense of social solidarity, the pursuit of self-interest, even as a purely selfish motivation, is capable of forming the basis of a social order that is claimed to be beneficial for all. This almost magical metamorphosis from self-interest to social harmony brings in the well-known metaphor of the invisible hand of the market.

Although Adam Smith is the first to coin the term “invisible hand”, the idea that certain vices might be turned into social virtues has a long history. Hirschman notes that Montesquieu formulated the search for glory in a manner similar to that of the invisible hand such that the pursuit of honor, he argued, brings life to all parts of the body politic. Similarly, in the early 18th century, Giambattista Vico refers to ferocity, avarice and ambition as the three vices of mankind out of which the society “makes national defense, commerce and politics and thereby causes the strength, the

wealth and the wisdom of the republics.”⁴ Moreover Vico’s contemporary Bernard Mandeville in the *Fable of the Bees* exclusively stresses the passion for material goods and luxury as a private vice turning into a public benefit. Even though *modus operandi* of this transformation was usually left in the dark, the idea has been influential in the late 17th and 18th century.

For Smith, each individual seeking his own gain is led by the invisible hand of the market to promote an end – the end of public interest- that is not necessarily intended:

He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.⁵

Or again in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he asserts famously that

the landlords are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interests of the society, and afford the means to the multiplication of the species.⁶

Hence, we might say that the invisible hand provides an example for a positive unintended consequence.

Unfettered pursuit of personal private gain via the market forms a web of relations where mutual recognition as self-interested agents in the act of exchange provides the basis of independence. Self-interested agents who are endowed with the freedom of contract enter into the relation of exchange voluntarily as equal partners.

⁴ Ibid., p.11, pp.17-18.

⁵ Smith (1776), Ch.2.

⁶ Smith (2006), Ch.1 §11, p. 165.

Hence, the sense of independence at stake here takes its cue from every person's freedom of contract as equal partners in the relation of exchange. Similarly, the figure of wage-laborer as mentioned in the previous section owes its suggested independence in acting as a self-interested agent who voluntarily enters into a relation of exchange. The principle of self-interest is conceived to be operative as the organizing principle of society as a whole and the social harmony thereby created requires no allusion to an "external" notion such as "need".⁷

It was commonplace to think that the market society considered to be based primarily on the principle of interest is in no need of intervention from political authority. Smith warns that statesmen

who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had the folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it.⁸

Moreover, "when the natural inclinations of individuals are considered, they '*continually exert*' themselves to find the most advantageous employment for their capital, and Smith shows that in exerting themselves in this manner they may unintentionally prefer what is most advantageous for society."⁹ The individuals must be the sole authority for allocation insofar as they are the best judges of their circumstances and depiction if interest requires no central authority. "Smith believed

⁷ Heller (1974) argues that in Marx's works, "interest" represents the standpoint of the bourgeois society and private interest is the consequence of the "reduction" of needs. Her bold claim is that Marx never talks about working class interest but of the interest of wage labor insofar as "interest" can be rationally interpreted within the confines of capitalist relations. She further juxtaposes interest with radical needs. While class interest cannot be the motive of class struggle that goes beyond capitalist society, the latter – insofar as they demand transcendence – the true motive is radical needs. pp.60-63.

⁸ Smith, Op.cit.

⁹ Ibid.

this (most advantageous for the society) was best achieved by leaving people to find out which employment suits them best, i.e., individuals are the best judges of their self-interests and do not need central direction.”¹⁰ The individual is the only judge with respect to his interest and self-interest as a source of motivation suggests a sense of certainty that other fluctuating, inconsistent passions are claimed to lack.

Hirschman claims that the distinguishing assets of the category of self-interest over fluctuating passions, are constancy and predictability. Acting out of interest is considered to be the natural inclination of men, and as the maxim “Interest will not lie” suggests, the individual is the sole arbitrator concerning his interest; to the extent that he acts upon it, he will do himself good. Moreover, the “benefits of predictability loomed largest when the concept was used in connection with economic activities.”¹¹ In the pursuit of their economic interests, men are considered to be single-minded, calculative and customary as opposed to men blinded by their passions. It is in this vein that Hume calls the love of money an “obstinate passion” and comments that the desire of gain is a universal passion that prevails at all times. In virtue of the assets like consistency, universality and predictability, the principle of self-interest qua human action was regarded to be operating as a law of nature and was thereby championed in an era which established uncertainty and inconstancy as arch-

¹⁰ Kennedy (2009), p. 252. It is a contentious issue whether Smith has *unconditionally* defended a non-interventionist policy. Gavin Kennedy’s article “From Metaphor to Myth” provides an elaborate overview of the relevant historical controversies and argues that Smith’s successors has emphasized the metaphor of the “invisible hand” much more than Smith himself has done and that they promoted the metaphor into a “myth”. G.Kennedy argues that Smith identified the circumstances where specific government policies of Mercantile Political Economy, since the 16th century, were inimical to ‘progress towards opulence’ and which of these policies should be abandoned, but he never unconditionally stated that ‘any *interference with free competition by government was almost certain to be injurious*’.

¹¹ Hirschman (1977), p.51.

enemies.¹² Despite this association of subjective certainty with the principle of self-interest, the economic man is pictured as an individual who cannot have sufficient insight about social dynamics and who cannot have control over the objective conditions of life. The individual is characterized in terms of his limited knowledge with respect to social and political structures and processes. This image of the economic man is evidently enhanced by the principle of unintended consequences of human actions. As we have mentioned above, Smith used this principle- though he never seems to explicitly state it as a principle as such- primarily to link individual motivations to their benign social consequences. This in turn has the implication that men are equally ignorant of the consequences of social regulation or any purposeful intervention in the functioning of the social order.

The defense of free market society in the succeeding centuries inherited a great deal from the Scottish Enlightenment, yet especially the twentieth century defenses arguably accentuate liberal society as a spontaneous order – self-generated, self-maintained, purpose-independent structure – and underline that the impact of this principle maybe much more that its predecessors have actually done. Especially Von Mises’ and Hayek’s views on liberal society were significantly influenced by the idea of unintended consequences of “social engineering” that they claim to lead to the collapse of society. When political collectivity, they argue, tries to regulate a complex social system, it always operates with limited knowledge, which in turn, frequently results in unintended - and hazardous - consequences. Analogously, the

¹² Commenting on this point, Hirschman (1977) refers to an excerpt from Helvetius and claims that “the infatuation with interest as a key to the understanding of human action carried over into the eighteenth century when Helvétius, in spite of his exaltation of the passions, proclaimed: As the physical world is ruled by the laws of movement so is the moral universe ruled by laws of interest.” p.43. Similarly Adam Smith expresses hostility towards uncertainty. As S.Wolin cites, Smith claims that “a very considerable degree of inequality is not near so great an evil as a very small degree of uncertainty.”Cited in Wolin (1960), p.297.

economic man as portrayed by A. Smith is situated in a world over which he has no control.¹³

We can then say that the principle of self-interest operates at two distinct levels. On the subjective level, it is the locus of subjective certainty. Interest qua subjective certainty has ethical and political implications. It promotes a subjectivist ethical perspective, which rules out the possibility of a critical-ethical approach. Interest as the *topos* of subjective certainty has the peculiar consequence of undermining the belief that one can go wrong or simply be deluded about what is in his interest.¹⁴ This line of thought is similarly operative in more contemporary debates about needs, one of which is exemplified in A. Heller's claim that "what individuals are aware of to be their needs, it is real, it has to be acknowledged and satisfied."¹⁵ On the social and political level, the principle of interest brings a so-called "natural" limitation to people's sovereignty. In conjunction with the principle of unintended consequences, the principle of interest as the organizing principle of society implies a "natural" constraint to collective action and power to influence and transform social relations. Insofar as this is the case, it is claimed, collective benefit can only be gained via the pursuit of self-interest, and any attempt at the approximation of collective good, any

¹³ According to Jodi Dean, Foucault dwells upon a similar characterization of the economic man. For Condorcet and Adam Smith, Foucault points out, economic man is bound up in a world he can neither predict nor control. Economic man's interest and enjoyment depend on a series of accidents. The unknown actions of one have effects on others in ways none of them can know. Economic man's situation is therefore doubly involuntary, indefinite, and non-totalizable. (Dean, J. "The Communist Horizon" paper presented at the 2nd FORMER WEST Research Congress On Horizons: Art and Political Imagination, September 2010, ITU, Istanbul.)

¹⁴ See Silier (2010), pp.29-30 for a detailed discussion against the assumption of the impossibility of self-deception in these arguments and against the view that the claim to objectivity leads to paternalism with respect to needs.

¹⁵ Cited in Hughes (2000)..

attempt of having power over social and political processes is doomed to fail. This is, Foucault reminds us, what economic liberalism declares:

There is no sovereign in economics. There is no economic sovereign'. Economic man tells the sovereign: 'You must not.' But why must he not? You must not because you cannot. And you cannot in the sense that 'you are powerless.' And why are you powerless, why can't you? You cannot because you do not know, and you do not know because you cannot know.¹⁶

The so-called invisible hand sneaks up in this split between subjective certainty of interest and the limitation of collective action and power to control and change social and economic phenomena.

Economic Interest as the Paradigm of Self- Interest

So far, I have used the notion of self-interest interchangeable with economic interest. This juxtaposition might go unnoticed insofar as in our life-world, the latter is commonly regarded to be exhaustive of the meaning of the term "interest". In order to highlight some historical touchstones concerning the semantic shifts of the term and to stress Smith's idiosyncrasy in this historical narrative, I turn to Albert Hirschman's pathbreaking book, *Passions and Interest*. I shall not endeavor a through analysis of his views but attempt to shed light upon the significance of interest becoming paradigmatic for the explanation of human action and the rather curious association of self-interest with the pursuit of economic wealth.

Before we proceed, let me at the risk of oversimplifying, briefly touch upon the gist of Hirschman's argument in *Passions and Interests*. His argument provides a historical account of the motivational analysis of commercial society and

¹⁶ Dean (2010)

unrestrained capitalism and points to a completely different direction from the motivational analysis in contemporary theories of the market economy. Unlike mainstream economic theory, which makes powerful use of the assumption of full-blooded pursuit of self-interest, he draws attention to the fact that the category of self-interest was primarily employed to harness and block the fluctuating passions of men and that it was praised for being an impediment to the development of men's unpredictable inclinations.¹⁷ He further advances the thesis that capitalist forms "owed much to the desperate search for a way of *avoiding society's ruin*"¹⁸ because of precarious internal and external arrangements such as princely caprices, abuse of power, adventurous foreign policies. Interestingly then, Hirschman inverts the principle of unintended consequences of action, a principle which has been overstated and abused by the defenders of free market society; instead his account presents the "intended but unrealized effects" of capitalism such as preventing the abuse of power or society's ruin by the promise of a more consistent governance. He underlines the desired intended effects of free market society, which for Hirschman, are not only forgotten but actively repressed. In this vein he asks: "What social order could long survive the dual awareness that it was adopted with the firm expectation that it would solve some problems and it clearly and abysmally fails to do so?"¹⁹

At the beginning of the Christian era St. Augustine had supplied basic guidelines to medieval thinking and in religious and philosophical writings the

¹⁷ In the Foreword he wrote to Hirschman (1977), Amartya Sen draws attention to an interesting upshot of Hirschman's work for contemporary critiques of capitalism. Capitalism is frequently criticized for inhibiting the full-fledged development of human personality. However, Sen draws attention to Hirschman's comment that "capitalism was precisely expected to repress certain human drives and proclivities and to fashion a less multi-faceted, less unpredictable, more "one-dimensional" personality." In other words, this was both an intended and a realized effect.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.131.

private pursuit of gain was considered to be one of the most destructive vices along with the lust for power (*libido dominandi*) and sexual lust.²⁰ One question that motivates Hirschman is very similar to the question that Weber had previously asked: “How could something –love for riches- that was debasing in one era, come to be glorified in the other”? The heroic ideal of the love of glory, which then coincided with aristocratic ideals was praised for its power to suppress the desire of wealth: “Love of glory in contrast to purely private pursuit of wealth can have redeeming social value”.²¹ As mentioned above, Montesquieu had formulated the idea of an invisible hand with respect to the love of glory, which he claimed to bring vitality to the whole body politic. With the decline of the heroic ideal of glory along with the ideals of aristocracy, Renaissance relentlessly searched for a “scientific, positive approach” to the explanation of human motivation and the category of interest was the outcome of this long search. The category of interest, which was believed to lay the foundations for a more realistic approach to human action, was operational especially within the context of statecraft.

More precisely, appealing to interest cannot be traced back to the emergence of a new ethic; rather it is primarily linked to a theory of the state. Acting out of self-interest was regarded to be countervailing unruly passions and this connoted an improvement on how to run, expand and maintain power. In Renaissance moral philosophy was no longer trusted for restraining the destructive passions of men and interests were regarded as comparatively innocuous passions to countervail the other more dangerous, destructive ones. The idea that “nothing can retard the impulse of passions but a contrary impulse” was championed especially by Spinoza, Hume and

²⁰ Ibid., p.9.

²¹ Ibid., p.10.

Bacon. “The idea of engineering social progress by setting up one passion to fight another, became a fairly common intellectual pastime in the course of the 18th century.”²² Significantly, the discussions which passions were “wild” and which ones are “tamers” were incessantly discussed and the desirable effects of acting out of interest were contrasted with the unfavorable effects of following the passions. The notion of interest was taken to be so self-evident, Hirschman reminds us, that no one has ever tried to define it; nor was it discussed against the background of a predominant philosophical distinction – namely the distinction between passions and reason. Interest, then, seems to represent and partake in the advantages of each: “As passion of self-love upgraded by and contained by reason; reason is given direction and force by the passions.”²³

Hirschman notes that the economic meaning became dominant late in the history of the term. By the end of 16th century, the meaning of interest was not limited to material aspects of human welfare but interest referred to a totality for aspirations. Moreover, its first context of employment was entirely removed from material welfare; the employment of interests was primarily concerned with the improvement of statecraft. “Possibility of a mutual gain emerged from the expected working of interest in politics quite some time before it became a matter of doctrine in economics.”²⁴ Appraisal of the love of commercial gain came to be prevalent especially in the eighteenth century. At first, the appraisal did not imply a positive value that was intrinsically attributed to this interest. The evaluation was commonly that money-making pursuit is harmless and innocuous insofar as it implies a distance

²² Ibid., p.26.

²³ Ibid., p.43.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 50.

from the long-dominant aristocratic ideal, and in the course of the eighteenth century, money-making was considered to be a “calm passion”. As a calm passion, it involved calculative acts and rationally conducted acquisition of wealth, which –despite its calmness – was powerful to countervail “bad” turbulent passions.

Within this historical narrative, Hirschman singles out a distinctive place for Adam Smith. “Adam Smith abandoned the distinction between the interests and the passions in making his case for the unfettered pursuit of private gain; he chose to stress the economic benefits that this pursuit would bring rather than the political dangers and disasters that it would avert.”²⁵ Before Smith, interest of monetary gain was appraised by comparing it to turbulent, bad passions. In other words, the particular interest of commercial gain was assessed by juxtaposing it to other passions, hence its justification and its suggested advantages were then articulated only in a comparative manner rather than justifying it in its own terms – that is in economic terms. “The main impact of *The Wealth of Nations* was to establish a powerful *economic* justification for the untrammelled pursuit of individual self-interest, whereas in the earlier literature that has been surveyed here the stress was on the *political* effects of this pursuit.”²⁶

This, of course, does not mean that Smith completely disregards the relationship between material wealth and political power. Nevertheless, Hirschman points out, Smith’s discussion breaks with the previous manners of dealing with commercial gain since he no longer treats interest as countervailing turbulent passions but rather “the episode is better summarized as a victory of the passions (of cupidity and luxury) over the longer-run interests of the lords than as the taming of

²⁵ Ibid., p.69.

²⁶ Ibid., p.100.

the passions.”²⁷ Fascination with commercial gain and merchandise changed the relation between the lords and their tenants into a more business-like form, which in turn for Smith means a decline in the lords’ power and authority as they “became as insignificant as any substantial burgher or tradesman in a city.”²⁸ However, the decline in power, Hirschman reminds us, was not because the lords came to realize that their interest lay in not using it so wantonly as they are used to, but because they *unwittingly* relinquished their power as they wanted to take advantage of the new opportunities for their own consumption and material improvement opened up by the “progress of the arts.” Besides regarding economic development as not having any significant impact on central authority, Smith argued that economic progress is irrelevant for any improvement in the political circumstance. Hirschman elaborates on this point:

Smith affirms that that economics can go alone: within wide limits of tolerance, political progress is not needed as a prerequisite for, nor is it likely to become a consequence of, economic advance, at least at the level of the highest councils of government. In this view, very different from the laissez-faire or minimal state doctrine and still widespread today among economists, politics is the province of the “folly of men” while economic progress like Candide’s garden, can be cultivated with success provided such folly does not exceed some fairly ample and flexible limits.²⁹

Association of interest with the sphere of economics and its dissociation from the realm of political authority marks the peculiarity of Smith’s appeal to the notion of interest. This twist paves the way for self-interest to be associated merely with the pursuit of commercial gain and economic interest to be embraced as the paradigmatic human motivation. Especially in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith does indeed

²⁷ Ibid., p.102.

²⁸ Ibid., p.101.

²⁹ Ibid., p.104.

acknowledge the significance of non-economic motives behind the pursuit of economic advance like craving for dignity, respect and recognition. However, instead of treating them as two distinct categories – that is gaining goods and gaining recognition – he instead seems to collapse them into one. In Hirschman's words:

the drive for economic advantage is no longer autonomous but becomes a mere vehicle for the desire for consideration. By the same token, however, the non-economic drives, powerful as they are, are all made to feed into the economic ones and do nothing but reinforce them, being thus deprived of their erstwhile independent existence.³⁰

Eventually, the historical semantic shift of “interest” is from a political milieu to a strictly economic context and from a totality of aspirations narrowing down to the pursuit of commercial gain. The pursuit of self-interest interwoven with the sense of independence discussed above underlies the defense of market society. Similar to “interest” as the constitutive principle of social order operating at two distinct levels, i.e. fostering certainty at the subjective level and inability and lack of power over objective conditions of life, independence is likewise delimited to the subjective by precluding any sense of objective dependence that might be involved.

This has devastating political consequences. The different forms of dependencies in capitalism, details of which will be further discussed, and any struggle for collective freedom are rendered irrelevant for the lexicon of independency. It might as well be described as the absence of a systemic critique that leaves behind any aspiration for collective independence from capital. As we shall further explore in the following section, dependency figured as an individual trait or similarly the reverse case of wage labor regarded as the paradigm of independence obscures the antagonism between capital and propertyless, between the needs of

³⁰ Ibid., p.109.

capital and human needs as well as the antagonistic mechanisms of surplus appropriation that pertains to capitalism.

Discourse of Needs and Discourse of Dependence

Against the historical background of the discourse of interests, we can now turn to the charge of dependence with respect to the welfare state and a need-based politics in general. Discussions dwelling upon the significance of needs for political philosophy and the relationship between needs and politics have been received with suspicion. One reason for the ubiquitous uneasiness about granting needs a fundamental role in politics and the neglect of discussions concerning the status of needs in political philosophy is that a need-based politics would promote dependency.

As noted before, association of needs with dependency has been widespread especially in arguments against the welfare state in the US. It was common among the opponents of the welfare state who invoke the language of dependency and passivity with reference to welfare policies based on the principle of need in order to criticize what they call 'welfare dependency'. Since then marginalizing needs talk has been commonplace. Associating need claims with dependency and passivity has been so pervasive that it is not only the orthodox economists that adhere to this imputation, but even a defender of social justice, like Amartya Sen, ironically acknowledges it.

Needs is a more passive concept than 'capability'. The perspective of positive freedom links naturally with capabilities (what a person can do?) rather than with the fulfillment of their needs (what can be done for the person?) The perspective of fulfilling needs has some obvious advantages in dealing with

dependents (e.g. children), but for responsible adults the format of capabilities may be much more suitable.³¹

Dependency is a key term in debates especially about the welfare state and as a key term it demarcates a contentious field. Inspired by R. Williams' insight concerning the import of keywords, N. Fraser expresses that

a crucial element of politics, then is the struggle to define social reality and to interpret people's inchoate aspirations and needs. Particular words and expressions become focal point in such struggles, functioning as key words, sites at which the meaning of social experience is negotiated and contested."³²

Given that "dependency" as a key term does not only *describe* social reality but actively operates in shaping it, critically analyzing the direct association of needs with dependency becomes a compelling task. What are the presuppositions of the discourse of dependency? What are the political implications of the pejorative sense of dependence? Is there such a conceptual link between needs and dependency? Are we to take this imputed association for granted? This section seeks to answer these questions by reflecting on the presuppositions of the pejorative connotation of dependency with a view to revealing the historically contingent nature of the association of needs and dependency. Delineating some major historical shifts in the use of the term "dependence", hence contextualizing the discourse, allows bringing under critical scrutiny the taken-for-granted beliefs that might otherwise go unnoticed, which in turn paves the way for critically evaluating its political implications. Against this background, the incorporation of needs into the discourse of dependency emerges, I argue, as an aspect of *depoliticization* of the problem of needs.

³¹ Sen (1984), p. 514. For an interesting discussion about the welfare policies in U.S and its relationship with a sense of community and the need for belonging, see Ignatieff (1986).

³² Fraser, Gordon (1994), p.311.

Genealogy of a Keyword: Dependence as an Individual Trait

In their inspiring article titled “A Genealogy of Dependency”, Fraser and Gordon discern four senses of dependency historically operative: Social, economic, political and psychological. Differentiating different senses, the authors tell us, does not only serve analytical clarity but also helps to map out the import and the scope of the historical shifts that the meaning of “dependency” has undergone from pre-industrial usage to its employment in contemporary phase of capitalism. According to this classification, social dependency denotes a socio-legal status, which designates the lack of a distinct “legal or public identity as in status of married women created by coverture.”³³ However, economic dependency refers to the condition of being dependent upon another person or institution for the maintenance of subsistence. The third sense - political dependence - signifies subjection to political authority, more specifically to an “external ruling power” as in the case of non-citizen residents or the subjects of a colony. While there is a collective dimension involved in these three registers of “dependency”, psychological dependency is *strictly* construed in individual terms. It denotes an individual trait marked by lack of will power and designates what is regarded as a parasitic way of life - dependent individual in this sense is not regarded as having reached physical and psychological maturity.

In its pre-capitalist use, dependency characterized various forms of hierarchy and subordination that marked social relations without a significant differentiation between the different senses mentioned above. In other words, dependency then referred to the form of social relations where legal, political and economic realms

³³ Ibid., p.312.

were undifferentiated. It is noteworthy that despite the sense of dependency that emerges out of the intertwined legal, political and economic realms, the psychological register was completely absent from the pre-industrial use. Instead, standard social relations were characterized in terms of dependency and - although this might sound odd for a modern reader who is used to the pejorative connotations of the term- “some leading pre-industrial definitions were explicitly positive implying trusting, relying on, counting on another, the predecessors of today’s *dependable*.”³⁴ It is plausible then to claim that this sense of dependency, used mainly as a descriptive term, can be replaced with interdependency with no residue.³⁵ Moreover “independence” was identified with “living without laboring”, which implies the ownership of property – mainly land. In other words, freedom from labor was the mark of independence, which highlighted a privileged status as opposed to the commonplace dependence of laborer, serfs, slaves, children, women and men.

Gordon and Fraser argue that the rise of industrial capitalism brings radical semantic shifts in the lexicon of dependency; what used to be considered as the norm came to be a deviant condition. Through race and gender stratification, “certain dependencies became shameful while others were deemed natural and proper.” For white men, dependency was considered as shameful; yet it was normal for women and for “dark races”.³⁶ Following the racial and sexual imagery, dependency came to be conceived no longer primarily as a social trait, but also as an individual trait, predicate of an individual, which is pinned down by Gordon and Fraser as the birth

³⁴ Ibid. p.313.

³⁵ Gordon and Fraser also make this point by citing from a historian, C.Hill, that the feudal society was marked by the bond of loyalty and dependence between the lord and man. Dependency as such suggests a relationship that works both ways.

³⁶ For a detailed discussion of sexual division of labor in relation to dependency and its racial imagery, see Ibid. pp.324-329.

of the moral/psychological register. Moreover, civil and political rights of the white working men coincide with a change in the economic register of the term. Despite the identification of independence in the previous era with being free from labor, wage-labor was claimed to be the paradigm of independence. The wage-laborer man was declared as the heroic figure of independence. With this radical shift, wage-labor was dissociated from any sense of dependency and “independence” which was the mark of land-owners expanded to include wage-labor. But then how to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory figures- on the one hand, there is the property-owner which marks freedom from labor and on the other, the wage laborer - under the same label of “independence”? This is primarily, one might claim, due to the expansion in the scope of property, which has been associated with independence. In other words, in addition to property in land, labor came to be conceived as a form of property – that is property in one’s own labor power. As premised in Macpherson’s thesis of “possessive individualism”, independence can be said to be mediated by an individual’s property in one’s own labor. This shift in the meaning of independence as wage-labor has, of course, the crucial consequence that “it was precisely those excluded from wage labor who appeared to personify dependency.”³⁷ As the social order was more and more organized around the logic of the market, under its sovereignty, the scope of independence narrowed down to the iconic figure of the wage laborer and wage labor came to be conceived as “the natural course of events”. With this twist, the economic sense of “independency” came to be prevalent; the sense of impersonal (objective) dependency involved was rendered invisible. Not

³⁷ Ibid. p.316. Pauper, who lives on poor relief rather than on wages, is indicated as the first icon of industrial dependency. Second icon is the slave and the colonial native.

less important is the consequence that “dependency” and “independency” became increasingly individualized.

Gordon and Fraser remind us that by the end of 19th century, definition of “dependent” simply as “non-wage earning”, was divided into two – “good dependency” predicated of children and women on the one hand and “bad dependency” as the receivers of charity assistance on the other. By the end of the century, the deserving and undeserving poor distinction was intensified and it became almost impossible to receive assistance without being called a pauper. Nevertheless it is ironic, Fraser and Gordon tell us, that the term “dependent” was introduced as a substitute for pauper in order to destigmatize the receivers of help, who were primarily children and women as the “innocent” victims of poverty. In the early 20th century, the term was applied to adults, again in order to get rid of the stigma and it was not until the end of World War II that the pejorative connotations of the term were fixed. Rapid individualization of the sense of dependency and strengthening of its pejorative connotation opens way for the moral/psychological register of the term.

In the post-industrial phase of capitalism, the remnants of any positive or neutral senses of dependency withered away. By that time pejorative connotations were fixed and the scope of the term became more strictly individualistic, diminishing any emphasis on relations of domination. Construction of the dichotomy between dependence and independence in terms of the psychological register as a trait of character means that “social relations are hypostatized as properties of individuals or groups”- something foreshadowed in Marx’s emphasis on the significance of making visible impersonal “objective dependency”. When more individualized senses of dependence and its pejorative connotations are combined,

the result is dependence as a pathological disorder, which was officially declared as “Dependent Personality Disorder” by American Psychiatry Association in 1980.³⁸

Discourse of Dependency as the *De-politicization* of Need Discourse

A keyword like “dependence” is not just another terminology among others but as Fraser reminds us it delineates the dissentious space which involves socio-political struggles concerning the interpretation of “people’s aspirations and needs.” Hence, contextualizing dependency reveals the assumptions, the taken-for-granted beliefs surrounding it. This is fundamental for de-naturalizing current discourses, processes, institutions, which obfuscate the antagonistic nature of need allocation. Fraser and Gordon duly express that “unreflective uses of this keyword serve to enshrine certain interpretations of social life as authoritative and to de-legitimate or obscure others, generally to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinate ones.”³⁹ Keywords do not only have theoretical significance; their practical import lies in delineating the contours of what we can do. They challenge our taken for granted beliefs, valuations of dependency and independency, shifting the focus from “dependent individuals” to relations of domination in order to open the way for new emancipatory social visions.

The historical narrative concerning the operation of a key term, i.e. dependency, and its juxtaposition with the discourse of independence via the category of interest allows us to explore the rather contemporary association of needs with dependency as a mechanism of *de-politicization*. Given what we have said so

³⁸ Ibid. p.326.

³⁹ Ibid., p.311.

far, this de-politicization process might be said to be operating via two axes. First is the individualization of dependency, which entails a shift of focus from social relations to dependency as a character trait. This individualization coincides with a derogatory conception of need in merely individual terms and doing away with any sense of collectivity that might be associated with the term. Moreover, dynamics of needs is *not* formulated in terms of the dialectic of dependence and independence; rather these two are conceived as mutually exclusive terms. Resting on a duality between dependency and independency – something that is common for a modern reader yet unknown up until 19th century- this shift of focus completely effaces the dimension of dependency involved and the manner in which needs are the locus of dependence and independence.⁴⁰ Along with the prominent discourse of “self-sufficiency” of neo-liberalism, which conspicuously resembles 19th century discourses, “needy” in the sense of dependent is established as a pejorative term indicating traits like lack of will, immaturity etc. In this lexicon, sense of dependence that might involve any allusion to social relations is withered away and need claims are regarded as expressions of impotence, cries of victims and powerless– something that anticipates the import of radical needs as we will explore in the next chapter.

Second axis of de-politicization of needs concerns the historically specific emergence of economy as an autonomous sphere considered to be exempt from all relations of domination and exploitation. Thereby the capital-propertyless relation was considered to be exempt from relations of dependence. This undermines the mechanisms of appropriation and the extraction of surplus value in capitalism, which marks the historically specific separation of economics as an autonomous sphere in

⁴⁰ As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Hegel’s treatment of dependence and independence provides a good example of an approach where the two are not regarded as mutually exclusive.

capitalism. Once the struggle over the extraction of surplus is undermined, the antagonistic basis of need satisfaction in capitalism is obfuscated, which in turn opens the way for regarding need satisfaction as strictly an administrative or a purely economic problem rather than a political one.

Opponents of the welfare state have argued that welfare state nurtured dependence and that need discourse must be abandoned for similar reasons. It is commonly stated that with the decline of welfare state discussions concerning needs was effaced from political culture. Although there is a grain of truth in this claim, it is important to further qualify it. Insofar as the decline of welfare state marks the end of redistributive policies that might adopt need as a principle of social justice, its decline similarly implies the decline of need discourses. However this must not blind us to the fact that with the decline of welfare state and the rise of neoliberal capitalism, subsistence needs that were not even in the social and political agenda such as the need for water become a matter of dispute and conflict like it has never been in history. Hence, as I shall explore in the next chapter, which needs emerge as sites of conflict and antagonism is revealing about the phase of contemporary capitalism.

Historically Specific Configuration of Economy and Politics in Capitalism

The discursive milieu structured around the discourse of dependence and independence on the one hand and the category of need and interest on the other can be mapped unto the historical evolution of the relationship between economy and politics. The semantic shift towards economic interest as the paradigm of self-interest delineating the realm of independence and the recent articulation of dependency as

an individual trait via the naturalization of objective (impersonal) dependence correlate the historically specific relationship between economic and political realms in capitalism. In this section, my aim is to reflect on the historically specific configuration of capitalist societies in view of the considerations concerning the discussions of dependence and independence. What is the sense in which economic and political realms are separated in capitalist societies, what are the mechanisms that ideologically render this separation as politically irrelevant?

In her insightful book titled *Democracy against Capitalism*, E.M Wood argues for what she calls “political Marxism” which suggests that “the ultimate secret of capitalist production is a political one.”⁴¹ The book has the overall aim of formulating and reviving historical materialism as a critical, political project and one crucial tenet of such a project is spelling out the historical specificities of capitalism and to bring under critical scrutiny their political implications. Wood critically examines the separation of the political and the economic that reflects a reality pertinent to capitalism, while resisting the naturalization of this separation, which in turn obscures the idiosyncratic forms of power and domination. One theoretical tenet of this critical project is its focus on relations and processes, which allows treating economy “not as a network of disembodied forces but, like the political sphere, as a set of social relations”.⁴² Thinking in terms of relations makes it possible for Wood to draw attention to the peculiar interaction and configuration between economy and politics. Insofar as these relations are relations between appropriators and producers or capital and propertyless, focusing methodologically on relations allows locating relations of dependency and exploitation at the center of discussions, rather than

⁴¹ Wood (1995), p.21.

⁴² Ibid.

focusing on relative distributional advantages and disadvantages.⁴³ This gesture is not only a theoretical gesture *per se*. As it delineates the topography of struggle, it equally has practical import.

[...] relations of production are, from the theoretical standpoint, presented in their political aspect, that aspect in which they are actually contested, as relations of domination, as rights of property, as the power to organize and govern production and appropriation. In other words, the object of this theoretical stance is a practical one, to illuminate the terrain of struggle by viewing modes of production not as abstract structures but as they actually confront people who must act in relation to them.⁴⁴

Unlike previous social forms, a distinctive feature of capitalism is that extraction of surplus value is no longer mediated by extra economic means. A fundamental change in this respect is that in capitalist societies, property acquires purely economic form by eliminating all its former political and social associations. This culminates in the fact that production, distribution, allocation of social labor are detached from extra-economic factors like traditional bonds, social hierarchies, principles of conduct, custom, communal deliberation, duties, etc. Moreover, the extraction of surplus no longer requires any means other than the ones that are determined by the complete separation of the producer from the conditions of labor and the appropriator's private property.

[...] the transfer of surplus labor and its appropriation by someone else are not conditioned by such an extra-economic relationship. The forfeit of surplus labor is an immediate condition of production itself. Capitalism in these respects differs from pre-capitalist forms because the latter are characterized by extra-economic modes of surplus extraction, political, legal or military

⁴³ Wood gives the example of class understood as a hierarchal social location and class as a relation. For the former, class is "differentiated according to 'economic' factors such as income, 'market chances', occupation. In contrast to this geological model, there is a social-historical conception of class as a relation between appropriators and producers, determined by the specific form in which, to use Marx's phrase, 'surplus labour' is pumped out of the direct producers." The former which Wood claims to be exemplified in "Rational Choice Marxism" draws attention away from social relations of surplus value extraction to the distribution of assets and endowments. For a detailed account of class as relation and process, see *Ibid.*, Chapter 3, pp. 76-107.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.25.

coercion, traditional bonds or duties etc., which demand the transfer of surplus labor to private lord or to the state by means of labour services, rent, tax and so on.⁴⁵

This means that allocation of social labor and resources are realized via commodity exchange between ‘free’ producers – as judicially free and free from the means of production- and the appropriator who has private property over the means of production. The separation between the moments of ‘coercion’ and ‘appropriation’ is realized via commodity exchange. In other words, insofar as the extraction of surplus value takes up an economic form, which is conceived by classical political economist as the realm of non-ideology free from direct political intervention, the organization of appropriation is rendered as politically irrelevant. In Wood’s words, the means of surplus extraction is no longer distinguishable from the organization of production.

Perhaps no one has emphasized the peculiar configuration of economic and political realms in capitalism and no one has opposed the naturalization of this historically specific positioning as fiercely as Marx did.⁴⁶ What we are facing today in the era of neo-liberal capitalism is this specific configuration carried out to an extreme – or more precisely reaching the hitherto culmination in contemporary global crisis, or more precisely in the “depoliticized naturalization of the crisis”, whereby regulatory measures are claimed to be the imperatives of the financial logic rather than decisions grounded in political choices. Yet the question of the necessity of abiding by these imperatives is never raised. It is regarded as an imperative per se, something immune to critical scrutiny. In the face of this de-politicization, it is

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.29.

⁴⁶ In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi (1957) also forcefully argues that the market society is a unique historical phenomenon that witnesses the autonomization of the economic system unlike any other historical form. In the tribal, the feudal or the mercantilist social forms economic activities have been a function of the social order; in Polanyi’s words, economic functions were “embedded” in social institutions.

crucial to relentlessly emphasize that we are dealing with *political economy*, an insight of Marx that remains closely relevant for today. As Marx reminds there is nothing social that is not at the same time political and nothing political that is not at the same time social.⁴⁷

Relations of Objective Dependence and Personal Dependence

In *Grundrisse*, Marx formulates his discussion of different historical moment in terms of the distinction between personal dependence and objective dependence, which evokes the historically specific configuration of politics and economy in capitalism.

Relations of personal dependence are the first social forms in which human productive capacity develops only to a slight extent and at isolated points. Personal independence founded on objective dependence is the second great form, in which a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities is formed for the first time. Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth, is the third stage.⁴⁸

Like Smith, Marx celebrates the emergence of commercial society insofar as it frees men from the social relations of pre-capitalist society that are characterized by the individual's place in social totality, namely as a serf, as a lord, as a member of an estate etc. When men enter into relationship with one another only as individuals imprisoned within a certain definition, as feudal lord and vassal, landlord and serf,

⁴⁷ Marx (1955), p.80.

⁴⁸ Marx (1999), p.155.

this means that individuality is mediated by particularity; in other words, in pre-capitalist forms individuality is attained in virtue of the specific role and the concrete mode of fulfilling a function within the social whole. For Marx, pre-capitalist context was thereby characterized by relations of personal dependence while capitalist formation of personal independence is based on objective [*sachliche*] dependence. Like Smith, Marx too celebrates breaking free from this historically specific form of relations of personal dependence but unlike him he dwells upon the form of dependency that lies in the womb of this newly emerging independence; namely individual personal freedom within the framework of objective dependence.⁴⁹ In the section “Exchange Value as a Social Bond”, Marx calls this new form of independence “indifference” and further adds that “the reciprocal and all-sided dependence of individuals who are indifferent to each other forms their social connection.”⁵⁰ It is important to note that some commentators interpret this “indifference” as referring to the selfishness of individuals or people caring less about others in capitalism. Although there might be some truth in this comment, we can by all means claim that Marx’s reference to independence cannot be fully articulated in terms of “indifference” as a predicate of individual subjects; it rather characterizes the historically specific form of capitalist *relations*.

[...] certainly this objective connection is preferable to the lack of any connection or to a merely local connection resting on blood ties, or on primeval, natural or master-servant relations. Equally certain is it that individuals cannot gain mastery over their own social interconnections before they have created them. But it is an insipid notion to conceive of this merely objective bond as a spontaneous, natural attribute inherent in individuals and

⁴⁹ A corresponding characterization of these stages are: Internal relations that are concretely particular, and external relations that are abstractly universal. The communist society implies internal relations that are concretely universal. For a detailed discussion of the historical stages, see Gould (1978), Chapter 1.

⁵⁰ Marx, Op.cit.

inseparable from their nature (in antithesis to their conscious knowing and willing.) This bond is their product. It is a historic product. It belongs to a specific phase of their development.⁵¹

Specifically, Marx investigates the historical conditions that make this emergent independence possible and reveals relations of objective dependence that mark the new form of social bonds. As the excerpt above suggests, relations of dependency are always the function of a historically specific social order. This implies that there is no social dependence as such and it is never to be treated as an inevitable, individual attribute. By historicizing relations of dependency and independency and further presenting them as intertwined in a dialectical relation, Marx contributes to de-naturalizing the dependence/independence dichotomy. This gesture allows shifting the focus from “dependence” and “independence” as natural, inevitable attributes of individuals to conceiving them as indicators of the concrete ways in which men organize their relations at a certain historical moment. In the historical transformation from pre-capitalist to capitalist formation, dependence *per se* is not eliminated but it takes up a new form, it persists in an objective form. Via “objective dependence”, we might say, Marx seeks to grasp the nature of social mediation that structures capitalist society. Not only “objective” connotes impersonal dependence as opposed to personal dependence but it also registers the specific form of social mediation in capitalism, which develops into an objective, quasi- independent, thing-like [*sachliche*] system that increasingly structures human activities. What Marx calls “objective” dependence is social; it is “nothing more than social relations which have become independent and now enter into opposition to the seemingly independent individuals; i.e. the reciprocal relations of production separated from and

⁵¹ Ibid., p.153.

autonomous of individuals”.⁵² This constitutes a historically specific characteristic of capitalism such that its essential social relations exist as a peculiar form of sociality. On the same page, he further comments that “they exist not as overt interpersonal relations but as quasi-independent set of structures that are opposed to individuals, a sphere of impersonal “objective” necessity and “objective dependence”. The form of domination peculiar to capitalism is also described by Marx as the domination of people by production. “Individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists like a fate, outside of them but social production is not subsumed under the individuals and is not managed by them as their common power and wealth.”⁵³

Thereby as an aspect of totality of social relations, we might claim that the capitalist dynamic of need as well constitutes an aspect of this specific form of domination. People are dominated by the capitalist need dynamics of their creation which nevertheless appears to them as the realm of objective necessity confronting the producers as external and natural. Here we can say that the two senses of necessity – natural necessity and social necessity merge. More precisely, the dynamic of need that is specific to capitalism appears not as social but as natural, and the dynamic of need is such that “one’s own needs rather than the threat of force or other social sanctions appear to be the source of such necessity.”⁵⁴ This amounts to the naturalization of the dynamic of needs in capitalism, veiling its historically determinate character and presents it as natural necessity. The form of social necessity that pertains to the dynamic of need then appears as the “natural order of things”.

⁵² Ibid., p.160.

⁵³ Ibid., p156.

⁵⁴ Postone (1996), p.161.

The distinction between personal and objective dependence provides the conceptual tool for further revealing that the declaration of wage-laborer as the paradigm of independence obscures objective dependency as an aspect of historically specific social relations that Marx aims to reveal. According to the defenders of freedom of contract, wage labor does not involve a relation of dependency; hence the economic sense of dependency defined previously by Gordon and Fraser as being dependent for access to the means of subsistence is rendered invisible in this lexicon. What is obscured is that although the worker appears to be free to sell his labor power, he is never free *not* to sell it; for all the means of subsistence, he is dependent on the mechanism of the market. Gordon and Fraser suggest a similar point:

[...] the language of wage labor in capitalism denied workers' dependence on their employers thereby veiling their status as subordinates in a unit headed by someone else... There is a sense, then, in which economic dependency of the white working man was spirited away through linguistic slight of hand – somewhat like reducing the number of poor people by lowering the official poverty line.⁵⁵

This means that capital-labor relations were considered to be exempt from relations of domination⁵⁶ and socio-legal and political dependency diverged from economic dependency; in Fraser and Gordon's words "only the former seemed incompatible with hegemonic views of society." In other words, socio-legal and political dependence were considered to be paradigmatic of dependence as such, social relations of domination are rendered irrelevant. We have previously propounded that the principle of interest operates on the subjective level as the locus of certainty and

⁵⁵ Fraser, Gordon (1994), p.314.

⁵⁶ As we shall take up later, capital-labor relation can be grasped as immune to any form of dependence or exploitation only if the realm of exchange is regarded as strictly distinct and irrelevant to the realm of production. With reference to Marx in *Grundrisse*, we might say that prioritizing exchange at the expense of production implies focusing on CMC (commodity-money-commodity) and overlooking MCM, which refers to the commodification of labor power as the presupposition of the creation of surplus value.

on the objective level as lack of knowledge and lack of power over organizing social and political processes. An analogous modality can be said to be at work here with respect to independence; independence is similarly delimited to personal independence while objective dependence is treated as the natural course of events, which means overlooking the contradictions which have made the newly emergent form of independence possible and sidestepping the capacity to challenge them.

Objective Dependence: “Market as Imperative”
and “Market as Opportunity”

In *Origin of Capitalism*, Wood insists on the historical specificity of capitalism as an unprecedented form of need satisfaction. It is “a distinctive way of supplying material needs of human beings, so very different from all preceding ways of organizing material life and social reproduction. This distinctive way has existed for a very short time, barely a fraction of humanity’s existence on earth.”⁵⁷

In what sense is capitalism a distinctive form with respect to need satisfaction? In order to grasp what is at stake in this question, it seems necessary to go beyond the formerly discussed understanding of market as the locus of pursuit of self-interest, which in turn expands our understanding of the sense of objective dependence at stake. Hence, I suggest turning to Wood’s article “From Opportunity to Imperative: The history of the market” for the distinction between “market as opportunity” and “market as imperative”.⁵⁸

We must first see capitalism as a system in which a large proportion of society's work is done by propertyless who are obliged to sell their labour-power in

⁵⁷ Wood (2002), p.3.

⁵⁸ Wood (1994)

exchange for a wage in order to gain access to the means of life, which are in turn the product of labour itself. The process of satisfying needs is simultaneously and inseparably a process for the workers of creating profits for those who buy their labour-power. Yet more, the production of goods and services is subordinate to the production of capital and capitalist profit. This means that in capitalism supplying needs inevitably involves an irreducible contradiction between human needs and the needs of capital, hence the predicament of needs in capitalism must explicitly be formulated against the background of this specific antagonistic relation.

In capitalist society, people have been *forced* to enter into the market. Evidently, this representation of the market is fundamentally different than the one suggested by the classic model, where the market is portrayed as providing the *opportunity* to buy and sell, as exemplified in our previous discussion concerning the pursuit of self-interest. In the referred article, Wood (1994) writes:

This notion of *opportunity* is absolutely critical to the conventional understanding of the capitalist system, present even in our everyday language. Consider common usage of the word that lies at the very heart of capitalism: the 'market' Almost every definition of *market* in the dictionary connotes an *opportunity*.

E.M. Wood traces the understanding of “market as opportunity” back to the discussions concerning the origin of capitalism. From Wood’s analysis, we can depict two typical tendencies of the mainstream accounts aiming to explain the emergence of capitalism.

- i. Acclaiming an ever existing profit maximizing rationality and conceiving the emergence of capitalism as the moment where the obstacles of its manifestation are obliterated. (i.e. self-interest as monetary gain as explained above)

- ii. Natural progress of technological development, technological advance right from the early phases of humanity leading to the phase of capitalism.⁵⁹

Different and even opposing traditions of thought have commonly appealed to either of these two views for the historical origins of capitalism. Despite their differences, as Wood draws attention, their common assumption is to take the market as the locus of opportunity. While for the former view the capitalist market of exchange marks the optimal condition for the pursuit of self-interest in the form of monetary gain, the second one suggests that the natural progress of technological progress has found the prospect of developing without impediment in the market of exchange. Accordingly, “nothing more is required, then, to explain the 'rise of capitalism' than an account of how the many obstacles to its forward movement have been lifted sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly, with revolutionary violence.”⁶⁰ In a different context yet in a similar vein, Marx warns us against the tendency to regard previous social forms as stages in the course of development of the latest social form.

The so-called historical presentation of development is founded, as a rule, on the fact that the latest form regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself, and, since it is only rarely and only under quite specific conditions able to criticize itself—leaving aside, of course, the historical periods which appear to themselves as times of decadence—it always conceives them one-sidedly.⁶¹

Approaches that presume “market as opportunity” underline how people have been enabled to respond to the capitalist market. The implication is to regard this gesture as the acquittal of an ever-existing human nature, which has eventually been *allowed* to benefit from the market. However,

⁵⁹ Wood, Op.cit., pp. 4-6.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.4.

⁶¹ Marx (1999), p. 14.

[...] we have to understand not just how people have been *able* to respond to the capitalist market but how they have been *forced* to do so. Capitalism doesn't just *allow* people to avail themselves of the market in the pursuit of profit. It *forces* them to enter the market for the most basic conditions of survival and self-reproduction—and that applies to *both workers and capitalists*.⁶² (*My emphasis*)

The dominant characteristic of capitalist markets is neither opportunity nor free expression of preferences nor abundance but compulsion, it demands the understanding of “market as opportunity” to be replaced with “market as imperative”. In capitalist society, the market operates as imperative rather than as opportunity insofar as social reproduction is universally mediated only by the market. Everyone is *obliged* to enter the market for access to the basic means of life insofar as the relationship between needs and the means of satisfaction are mediated by the capitalist market with no exception. Hence, to understand the market as imperative is to understand people as market-dependent rather than as market-enabled and “this unique system of market dependence means that the dictates of the capitalist market – its imperatives of competition, accumulation, profit-maximization, and increasing labour-productivity - regulate not only all economic transactions but social relations in general.”⁶³ The juxtaposition of “market as opportunity” and “market as imperative” makes it clear that the latter makes central the extent of economic dependency and its decisive role in human life unlike the former, which leaves no room for relevant concerns. In a similar fashion, one might argue that the discourse of self-interest and independence presupposes the

⁶² Wood (1999). Although this might seem to be an obvious point for a socialist account, Wood notes that “what may not always be so clear, even in socialist accounts of the market, is that the distinctive and dominant characteristic of the capitalist market is not opportunity or choice but, on the contrary, compulsion.” See Wood (2002) for a detailed discussion concerning this tendency to underestimate to be the case even in Marxist histories of capitalism and for the “Brenner thesis” concerning the origin of capitalism.

⁶³ Wood (2002), p.7.

understanding of market as opportunity, which in turn leaves no room for problematizing the sense of dependency that circumscribes different aspects of human life.

“Market as imperative” further expands the understanding of objective dependence as it introduces an aspect distinct from (the sense of dependence that has been formulated in terms of) wage-capital relationship. It specifically accentuates the nature of capitalist society in terms of the conditions where the market has a historically unprecedented role in organizing human life and social reproduction – people being obliged to depend on the market for all their needs in an unprecedented way – hence their subjection to the imperatives of competition. This draws upon R. Brenner’s account of the historical origin of capitalism which in turn has significant theoretical implications. R. Brenner roughly defines capitalism as a system in which “economic units—unlike those in previous historical epochs—must depend on the market for everything they need.”⁶⁴ This definition accentuates one distinctive aspect of capitalism: it forces *all* economic actors to enter the market; in other words the main focus is not in capital-labor relationship. In the same article, Wood (1994) comments:

These imperatives require strategies that lead to success in market competition—specialization, accumulation, enhancing labor-productivity, adopting low-cost techniques, moving in and out of various lines in search of profit, and so on. The result, of course, is a uniquely dynamic system which has produced a historically unprecedented tendency to self-sustaining growth and constant revolutionizing of the forces of production. But—and here is the core of economic turbulence—that very same dynamic is the source of economic downturn and stagnation, a fundamental contradiction at the heart of capitalism.

⁶⁴ Cited in Wood (1999).

Market dependence in this sense indicates that there is an irreducible contradiction in the relation among capitals that is distinct and apart from the relation between capital and labor. Accordingly, this means ascribing to this aspect of market dependence an explanatory status distinct from the relation between capital and labor as well as emphasizing that not only the workers but also the capitalists can have access to the basic means of life only through the mediation of the market. They are *both* subject to market imperatives for self-reproduction. Adopting Wood's formulation in the article, we can claim market dependence to reveal that "human needs are always subordinate to capital accumulation and subject to all the crises and contradictions associated with an anarchic competitive market."

With respect to the historical accounts concerning the origin of capitalism, attributing this distinct explanatory status to the market means that even though competition and class exploitation are conceptually interrelated, "that is not the same as understanding what determines the imperatives of competition in the first place. It is not so easy to demonstrate that these imperatives are constituted by the relation between capital and labor."⁶⁵ In the passage below, Wood (1999) defends Brenner's historical account concerning the priority of market dependence:

The crucial point here is that market-dependence, and the imperatives of competition that went with it, did not depend on the complete separation of the producers from the means of production. The essential condition was separation from non-market access to the means of subsistence, the means of self-reproduction. A tenant could, for instance, remain in possession of land, but his survival and his tenure could nonetheless be subject to market imperatives, whether he employed wage labor or was himself the direct producer. This kind of market-dependence was a cause of complete dispossession, a cause, not a result, of the expropriation of the English peasantry. People in possession of land were driven off the land not just by direct coercion but also by the operation of economic forces, the forces of an increasingly competitive market. So a mass proletariat was the result, not the cause, of those market imperatives.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

However historical priority does not necessarily imply conceptual priority; hence it does not necessitate emphasizing market dependence at the expense of class exploitation. Rather, we might suggest that subjection to the imperatives of competition directly plays a role and is internally linked to class exploitation and capital accumulation. For our purposes, it seems plausible to claim that both the subjection to the market and the exploitative wage-capital relationship culminate analytically distinct yet interrelated aspects of objective dependence.

Implications of the Configuration of Economy and Politics for Needs

The discussion so far demonstrates the significance of relating capitalist need dynamics to the objective dependence of capitalism, which is ideologically overlooked in the controversy over the discourse of dependence evoked in welfare state discussions. Only if objective dependence is taken into account, I argued, it is possible to reveal the antagonistic nature of need dynamics, which can countervail the de-politicization of needs in the context of historically specific configuration of economy and politics.

One important consequence of this configuration for need discourse is the sway of orthodox economics paradigm of preference and demand based on the principle of interest that has gradually occupied the theoretical terrain especially with the decline of the welfare state. The framework of preferences exclusively focuses on circulation, hence on relations of exchange. This exclusive focus on circulation in isolation from production in turn obscures the relations of exploitation and subjection to market imperatives involved in need satisfaction. In *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique*

of State Form, Hardt and Negri argue that the almost hegemonic focus on circulation (and on distribution) with no reference to production indicates an “image of capitalist society as a machine that marched forward of its own accord, which does not look to labor as its social dynamic, breaking the social dialectic characterized by the continual conflict between capital and labor.”⁶⁶ We might as well draw an analogy here. Without any reference to the form of production and to the understanding of market as imperative, need satisfaction lacks the social dialectic that is characterized by the conflict between human needs and the needs of capital. Displacement of production to circulation is reinforced with the intensified mythology of the market, which thereby directs economic analysis to focus exclusively on circulation. This displacement, we might say, is equally a displacement of social antagonism and conflict from social arrangements. Preference framework operates at the exclusion of the mechanisms of surplus appropriation and the conflict between human needs and the needs of capital.

Within this framework, preferences are construed as subjective and particular to context. The legacy of utilitarianism has provided the theoretical support and philosophical underpinning for recourse to aggregation of preferences to become the predominant model not only for modern neo-classical modern science but also its dissemination to the theoretical terrain of ethics and political theory. The unconditional priority of preferences tends to reinforce a subjectivist understanding of politics, which conspicuously leaves out

any systematic political process of evaluation or transformation of preferences, that is, any account of how preferences are and ought to be transformed. And

⁶⁶ Negri, Hardt (1994), p.226. In Marx’s words, this image of society as a machine implies “real subsumption of labor” within capital. With reference to Marx, Hardt and Megri argue that real subsumption that Marx talked about has become a reality in contemporary capitalism. See pp.225-228.

this indiscriminate exclusion impoverishes our understanding of and control over the institutions and practices that do in fact determine, influence and transform our preferences, for example, existing state institutions and practices such as constitutions, legal practices and welfare provision, and extant market-related institutions and practices, such as consumption practices.⁶⁷

Preference, theorized as such, is to a significant extent an empirical, descriptive notion, which is apt to exclude from political analysis the appeal to normative considerations. Along with this tendency to prioritize preferences unconditionally by excluding systematic processes of evaluations or transformation of preferences as well as social antagonisms, the discussion of need satisfaction is placed strictly to the economic sphere considered to be “autonomous”.

It is common among modern theories of need to argue against the preference framework’s exclusion of normative considerations by formulating a purely normative conception of need generally formulated as a principle of redistribution. In such “thin theories of need” exemplified in Doyal and Gough’s account in Chapter II, the principle of need roughly operates as the principle according to which resources *ought* to be distributed. This purely normative conception of need is juxtaposed to the purely descriptive notion of preference. The urge to formulate a purely normative conception stems from the demand of a political intervention to distribution; in other words the demand is to bring in the state as an agent of distribution. Evidently, in their intentions and in their approaches to the problem of need satisfaction, these constitute two opposing pairs. Despite their radically different assumptions and concerns, the preference framework and the principle of need as a principle of redistribution similarly ignore the significance of production and totality of relations for need dynamics. Ironically, they share the presumption of

⁶⁷ Hamilton (2003), p.8.

excluding the impact of totality of relations for understanding needs. Hence, they tend to confine the discussion of needs by singling out only one aspect rather than regarding need as an aspect of totality of social relations – in other words as an aspect of production, exchange, distribution and consumption.

This will bring us to the significance of relentlessly emphasizing that we are dealing with *political* economy, an insight of Marx that remains relevant for today. Marx's critique of political economy is by no means an economic critique *per se*. Seeing these distinct aspects as a totality enables him to reveal the relations of exploitation and to place the mechanisms of surplus appropriation right at the center of economic theory. Need is then neither treated merely as an empirical notion nor as a purely normative one.

CHAPTER V

A CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF “RADICAL NEEDS” AND
RADICAL NEEDS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Need Forms and Totality

Formulating the capitalist dynamics of needs as an aspect of totality of social relations, we have argued, allows capturing need satisfaction and interpretation as the locus of conflict and antagonism rather than as the site where individual preferences can unproblematically be expressed. More specifically, the emphasis on dynamics of need as an aspect of totality of capitalist relations opens the way for grasping the movement of needs interdependently qua production, exchange, circulation as well as distribution without being confined to only one aspect, which in turn reveals the social dialectic characterized by the conflict between human needs and the needs of capital. It is then necessary that this conjecture to extend beyond economic determinants of supply and demand to a consideration of different aspects of need emergence, satisfaction and interpretation encompassed in the term “dynamics of needs”. In this case, we might say that “need” emerges as a concept of interaction between production, exchange, circulation and distribution rather than a concept used for distinguishing between goods at the level of mere consumption. In a similar vein, Kate Soper, in her critique of Heller’s book *Theory of Need in Marx*, comments that

to suggest as Althusser does that the only needs which play an economic role in Marx is effective demand is to attribute to Marx an understanding of the

economic that is similar to the classical economists. Yet Marx is not guilty of this. He takes the totality of the conditions of social reproduction.¹

Moreover, Marx's persistence to understand capitalist need dynamics in terms of totality of relations marks an important aspect of his radical break with the seventeenth and eighteenth century economists. Unlike economists who preclude the problem of needs by treating them as the starting point of analysis and the ultimate explanation of economic acts, Marx's treatment in terms of totality opens the way for their problematization and invites questions about the antagonisms that cut through historically specific need dynamics that otherwise would have been neglected.²

In his "Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*", Marx claims that totality is represented by concrete abstract as encompassing the dynamics of various present relations and their different forms of manifestation; hence as concrete abstract, totality is not posited as *a priori*. The concrete concept as an aspect of totality of relations

is concrete, because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation [*Anschauung*] and conception [*Vorstellung*].³

Following this insight, we might similarly propose that Marx's need concepts can be captured as concrete concepts that aim to capture the dynamics of various social

¹ Soper (1977), p.39. Despite her insightful comments, Kate Soper does not seem to acknowledge the prominence of Marx's insistence on totality in relation to his analysis of needs. She thereby appears to neglect that Marx attempts to grasp need dynamics via different spheres of activity and to capture the interaction between need forms.

² In the "1857 Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy", Marx expresses the difference of his analysis from that of the political economist in terms of totality. For a detailed account of the significance of the concept of totality in Western Marxism, see Jay (1984) and Lukacs (1971).

³ Marx (1999), p.11.

relations in their diverse aspects. This has the implication that rather than functioning as unproblematic starting points, they are the expressions of historically specific social relations,⁴ and as the expression of the historically specific capitalist relations, we must further note that they are the expressions of class struggle, as processes whose outcome will depend on the course of the struggle. Insofar as totality of relations is not regarded as a completed whole but conceived as open-ended and in a state of becoming, need concepts might be said to form the ground for the kernel of alternative structure of needs that exist as a possibility within the present – something we shall further discuss.

The concept of form is central for Marx's analysis of capitalism. His insistence on analyzing value and money as value-form and money-form is a central aspect of his critique of capitalism. This distinguishes him significantly from the political economists that he criticizes. In the first chapter of *Capital*, he writes:

Even Adam Smith and Ricardo, the best representatives of the school, treat the form of value as a thing of no importance, as having no connection with the inner nature of commodities. The reason for this is not solely because their attention is entirely absorbed in the analysis of the magnitude of value. It lies deeper. The value-form of the product of labour is not only the most abstract, but is also the most universal form, taken by the product in bourgeois production, and stamps that production as a particular species of social production, and thereby gives it its special historical character. If then we treat this mode of production as one eternally fixed by Nature for every state of society, we necessarily overlook that which is the *differentia specifica* of the value-form, and consequently of the commodity-form, and of its further developments, money-form, capital-form etc.⁵

One implication of understanding of “things” as social forms is to see the temporal nature of extant social relations and their historically transient nature. It is seeing what is regarded as permanent to be potentially transient and in J.Holloway's

⁴ It is also crucial to note that for Marx, an important aspect of grasping totality means understanding it historically.

⁵ Marx (1990), p.14.

succinct words - in his article “From Scream of Refusal to Scream of Power: The Centrality of Work” - this means,

to present that which seems to be positive as negative. To introduce the concept of form is to move from the photographic print to its negative. The shift from value to value form is an inversion of the whole perspective of discussion, the move from political economy to the critique of political economy.⁶

Analysis in terms of form is analyzing the internal relationship between social “things”; hence money as money form, value as value-form means regarding them as social relations and implies revealing their internal connections. Another distinct implication of speaking of totality of capitalist social relations, hence to speak in terms of form is to speak of antagonistic social relations. “To speak of money is a form of social relations is a form of class struggle; that its development cannot be understood as a logical process but only as a process of class struggle.”⁷ Positing struggle and refusal of capitalism as central for the understanding of some key concepts is evidently distinct from emphasizing their historical nature. Holloway succinctly reminds us that while for the latter, categories are the expressions of social relations as a historically specific form of domination; in the case of the former, they are “expressions not of objectified relations but of the struggle to objectify them”; hence the role of struggle operates as revealing the fragility of domination and exploitation. We must note at this point that the emphasis on form as addressing internal relations coincides with what I have argued in Chapter III, concerning the significance of understanding needs in terms of relations and processes.⁸ As we shall

⁶ Holloway (1995), p.165.

⁷ Ibid., p.167.

⁸ J. Holloway (1992) further adds that the implications of Marx’s emphasis on form are historicity, negativity and internality.

further see, the framework of relations and processes anticipates establishing need dynamics as containing as its central aspect the power to struggle against capitalism. Hence, establishing “form” as a central category of Marx’s analysis “tallies with Lukacs’s famous saying that ‘it is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality.’”⁹

Now, we are in the position to see the relationship between Marx’s methodological insistence on totality and his analysis of capitalist need dynamics in terms of need forms. Understanding needs via forms is necessary if we are to take seriously Marx’s persistence on totality of social relations which implies an appreciation of their relational integrity. Only then can we grasp the dynamics of need qua production, exchange etc., follow the different forms that needs take and the interrelations between them. This opens the way for tracing the social and political conflicts and struggles as inherent aspects of need satisfaction, as well as the emergence and the interpretation of needs. As we have discussed in Chapter III, Marx tries to capture the dialectical movement of need forms in historically specific relations and in virtue of this, he can posit the general abstraction of natural need mediated by labor power as a necessary need in a concrete form, which designates the position of the worker in relation to his productive activity in capitalist relations. Similarly, a necessary need might take the form of luxury need in the market depending upon the value of labor power, which in turn depends upon the level of class struggle and the level of social development. Hence what is once considered to be luxury might become a necessary need just like what is regarded as a necessary good may take the form of a luxury good. Evidently, these categories are not

⁹ Ibid, p. 166.

mutually exclusive but tend to move through each other. This circuit of need forms is forcefully argued by Ian Fraser to be the ingenuity of Marx's approach:

The need form in Marx's schema is therefore a 'concentration of many determinations.' They are contradictions within a unity. 'Luxury need' appears as the opposite to 'necessary' and 'natural', but can also take the form of 'natural' and 'necessary'. Hard and fast distinctions do not apply because the forms are in motion, 'natural' to 'necessary', 'Necessary' to 'natural', 'luxury' to 'necessary' – contradictions within a unity. Analyzing forms allows us to see the 'inner connection' between these concepts of need and relate them to the struggle of the worker's existence within capital.¹⁰

Importance of insisting on totality and needs as forms lies not only in the manner in which dynamics of needs thereby emerge as the site of antagonism between human needs and the needs of capital. It lies also in the relevant exploration of radical needs as the collective power against capitalism as well as the exploration of forms they take in contemporary societies, which constitutes one important theme of this chapter. Drawing upon Ian Fraser's emphasis on the significance of analyzing needs as forms, I advance the thesis that given the increasing pace of commodification of commons, even a basic need like the need for water takes the form of a radical need. My interpretation of a basic need in the form of a radical need implies that the need to shape the conditions of one's life, resistance against the increasing dependence on capital as well as the positive moment of constituting autonomous action, is ushered even in basic needs.

Establishing a need which is commonly associated with the realm of natural necessity and with subsistence like the need for water as a radical need diverges from the common tendency - exemplified as well in Ian Fraser's analysis- to characterize radical needs in terms of "higher needs". Instead, I argue that the emergence of a basic need in the form of a radical need is a consequence of the contemporary

¹⁰ Fraser (1998), p.138.

neoliberal capitalism. What does the emergence of a basic need in the form of a radical need tell us about the contemporary phase of capitalism? This will eventually take us back to the question that we have initially addressed as a major concern of this thesis and anticipate a manner of responding to it: What does it mean to raise the question of needs as a political question today – taken as “a historical conjuncture and an intellectual constellation”¹¹

Culmination of Capitalist Need Dynamics: Form of Radical Needs

Among the different ways in which Marx treats needs, the concept of radical need is noteworthy yet neglected in the literature. This neglect is to a significant extent understandable since “radical need” is not a commonly referred notion in Marx’s works and his discussion of it is scarce and scattered. The term appears for the first time in “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*”. In this short yet dense essay, Marx explores major problems that he further elaborates in his different works like the discrepancy between theory and practice, civil society and state, history and philosophy as well the relationship between human emancipation and limited forms of freedom. These apparently distinct problems are configured in their interrelation and they are mapped unto each other. Despite the infrequent appearance of the term, the concept of radical needs occupies this multifaceted theoretical terrain, where distinct yet interrelated themes critically converge. Agnes Heller was the first to undertake a reconstruction of the notion and a systematic exploration of the concept in her path breaking book *Theory of Need in Marx*. “Not

¹¹ Callinicos (2006), p.5.

only was this concept [radical need] at the heart of her book that brought her to international prominence but it has also served as a touchstone from which she has always taken her bearings.”¹² Before we turn to her treatment of radical needs and to more recent controversies on the import of radical needs, which are usually centered on Heller’s construction of the notion, let’s briefly conceptually analyze what it might mean for a need to be radical. Let us therefore ask: What does “radical” mean in this context? How should we understand the sense of “need” associated with radicality, which apparently deviates from its regular daily use? Let’s start by answering these basic questions for conceptual clarity, which in turn will orient us towards the versatilities of the notion and the intricacies involved therein.

Marx brings up the question of radicality in “The Contribution” within the context of the relationship between theory and practice. Tackling with the question of whether a theory is capable of becoming a material force, he claims that this might be the case insofar as it is able to take grip of the masses. In Marx’s words, “to be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But, for man, the root is man himself.” It must be clear by now that Marx cannot be taken as referring to “man” as a general abstraction; rather he grasps man in historically specific material, practical existence. Hence a theory can attain radicality if it is effective on man’s practical existence and for changing the material conditions of life. Something can be called radical insofar as it is capable of addressing and transforming men’s practical existence, which involves the “categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is debased, enslaved, abandoned.”

Hence the sense of need associated with the connotations of radicality must indicate a particular motivation or a power for transcending the material conditions.

¹² Grumley (1999), p. 54.

This is clearly a deviation from the daily use of the term “need”, which usually varies between a statement of want and preference. In Marx’s employment of the term, a radical need appears to imply urgency and an association with action, which can hardly be expressed in terms of wanting or preferring something. For that matter, need in a radical sense can hardly be expressed merely in negative terms i.e. lack, but acquires a positive aspect. In Chapter III, we had mentioned that Marx associates needs with capacities and powers; now we are in the position to claim that this association is not a conceptual confusion or imprecision on the part of Marx. As it will become clearer in the following sections, understanding need as power has substantial import and acquires its most poignant effect, its most adequate expression so to speak, in the context of radical needs, where the form of radical need is suggestive of the status of the propertyless as embodying power in and against capital. As radical, a need might be taken as signaling the power and the motivation to act towards freedom, to constitute practices and ways of being in opposition to capital. Given the sense of radicality and the proposed sense of need implied, one might argue that the question of radical needs can fruitfully be addressed within the context of the problem of transcendence.

A. Callinicos maintains that the problem of transcendence is both a philosophical and a political question.¹³ In a similar vein, we might suggest that the lexicon of radical needs characteristically occupies a philosophical as well as a political terrain which speaks to the transcendence of the extant capitalist order as a real possibility. The search for the real possibility of transcendence is the search for the future in the present, which as Marx reminds us, demands returning to struggle

¹³ Callinicos, Op.cit., “Introduction”.

Radical Needs as the Motor of Transcendence: *Theory of Need in Marx*

Sometimes a central notion or a major theme in a thinker's works becomes the signature of novelty and is unexceptionally associated with his/her name. The notion of radical need occupies this critical status in Agnes Heller's works. Especially in *Theory of Need in Marx*, Heller presents a reconstruction of the notion of radical needs, which she argues to play a key role in transcending capitalist relations and mobilizing the passage to the society of associated producers.

Heller discusses radical needs within the context of Marx's attempt to theoretically account for the transcendence of capitalism.¹⁴ She argues that radical needs operating as the motive for transcending capitalism constitutes one way of surmounting that "communism ought to be realized". According to Heller, it is possible to depict two distinct attempts of founding this normative dimension in Marx's works, which correspond to two distinct forms of "ought". One of them explains the course of capitalist society by adhering to a general law, which is valid for every social formation. The *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy* explaining the phases of capitalist development in terms of the initial correspondence and contribution of relations of production to the level of development of the productive forces, then their opposition and finally leading to their contradiction is commonly advanced as a general law of society exemplified in capitalist society. Heller claims that within this framework, "the capitalist mode of production brings about its negation with the necessity of a natural process."¹⁵ Even though the

¹⁴ For a discussion of the relationship between utopian thinking and Heller's formulation of radical needs, see Bernstein (1987).

¹⁵ Heller (1974), p.78.

collapse of capitalism does not come about automatically and is realized by the agency of the proletariat, its transformation is necessitated by the economic dysfunction. Nevertheless, as Heller maintains

Marx, in the Hegelian sense, objectivised “Ought” in social necessity, or rather in economic necessity, thus precisely removing its character as “ought” [...] The fact that the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production appears in every society is the historical demonstration of the necessity for capitalism to collapse.¹⁶

However, Heller claims that Marx’s emphasis both on the absolute impoverishment as well as the growing revolt of the proletariat might make room for the emergence of radical needs even in this conception of necessity. Even if it would be possible to locate radical needs within this conception of transcendence of capitalism, their impact would have been far from the normative force for overturning capitalist society.

Heller argues that the second conception of transcendence is founded upon contradictions specific to capitalism embodied in the commodity form – the embryo of the antinomies of capitalism. She claims that this approach which takes into account the agency of the proletariat contradicts any statement that the realization of the society of associated producers is a law of nature. Moreover, suggesting that the capitalist society operates under general laws functioning as laws of nature is itself regarded as a consequence of commodity fetishism, through which social existence becomes mystified, confronting human beings in the form of laws of nature. According to this conception, Heller maintains, the positive overcoming of commodity producing capitalist society cannot proceed as a purely economic process according to a quasi-law of nature. The scope of transformation goes beyond the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 79. For further Hegelian connections on the relevant topic, see Ibid., pp. 77-80.

confines of an economic process to a total social revolution and the motor of transcendence are the radical needs that tend to reach beyond the dynamics of capitalist society. For Heller radical needs follow from the specific antinomies of capitalism and especially from the antinomy between social wealth and social impoverishment - the unique antinomy that follows from others pertinent to capitalist society, which in turn renders radical needs unique to capitalism.¹⁷ In Heller's words, they are "the antinomies of the "pure" society in which economic development assumes the status of natural law and in which – to recall *Capital* once again- man is subordinated to the process of production and not the process of production to man."¹⁸ These antinomies are neither antinomies in thought or in social being in general but in commodity producing capitalist society in particular. In this case, "ought" "follows from the consciousness of contradiction and the need to fight it", which is stimulated at the maximum point of capitalist alienation. With reference especially to the passages especially from *Grundrisse*, Heller argues that in his second conception of transcendence of capitalism, Marx emphasizes that the "development of the capacities of the human species" will break through these antinomies. It is right at this juncture, she argues, that the significance of radical needs is revealed. She writes:

The "development of the capacities of the human species" is a much broader concept than the others ["centralization of the means of production" and the "socialization of labor"], which appear in the passage quoted from the first volume of *Capital*; and it is not, of course, a mere consequence of the centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor. Moreover, there is no question here of any "natural law" that leads to the society of the

¹⁷ Heller holds the antinomies between freedom and necessity, necessity and chance, teleology and causality, object and subject as specific to capitalism. Yet her argument suggests that from these follow the special antinomy between social wealth and social impoverishment that is characteristic of capitalist society and in which all the others antinomies culminate in. See *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.81.

future. The necessity of the “transition” is not in fact “guaranteed” by any natural law but by the *radical needs*.¹⁹

Heller regards radical needs as the outcome of the antinomies in which the capitalist social body finds expression. Hence they are unique to the capitalist society and arise from its functioning. Breaking through these antinomies where the structures operate interdependently as totality is not possible by getting rid of the “bad sides” and by keeping the “good sides” of capitalism.²⁰ Radical needs, for Heller, “guarantee” the transcendence of capitalist society by overcoming its characteristic antinomies such that their satisfactions tend to point beyond the extant social order and they become the motive for taking an action towards a future society. At this point, we cannot miss Heller’s accentuated remark about radical needs “guaranteeing” transition. With this emphasis, she appears to defend that the necessity embodied in radical needs is no less strong than the necessity implied by natural laws by holding them on a par with each other. She comments on the same point:

I have used the word “guarantee” deliberately: it is a guarantee in the factual sense of the word. Communism follows from Marx’s second theory of contradiction no less necessarily than from his first. In this second theory too, Marx has given Ought an objective existence: as we have said, not as natural law but as the collective Ought. Only the struggle of the collective subject is capable of bringing about the new society: its revolution is radical, from the root and total. But the collective Ought arises necessarily, for the social body of capitalism itself necessarily generates radical needs and their bearers.²¹

Given this passage, Heller’s insistence on the similar weight of two “necessities” appears to be due to confusing two distinct aspects of normativity. In the passage above, it appears that her defense that the necessity implied by two senses of “ought”

¹⁹ Ibid., p.84.

²⁰ As we shall see in pp.225-227 of the present work, Marx criticizes Proudhon’s similar suggestion for undermining the dialectical relationship between the different aspects of social totality.

²¹ Ibid., p.86.

are on a par with each other appeals to their objective existence: “Marx has given “Ought” an objective existence: as we have said, not as natural law but as the collective Ought.” Nevertheless, having objective existence is not necessarily the same thing as embodying the same sense of necessity. While one might claim the objective existence of social norms, this is not the same as proposing their normative force to be on a par with a law of nature. This, of course does not mean that one is more negligible than the other but that they refer to different aspects of human life and refer to distinct forms of necessity – a physical necessity on the one hand and a practical necessity on the other, which is intimately bound up with freedom. Heller maintains that capitalist social body necessarily generates radical needs and their bearers.

Although there is some truth in this comment since it acknowledges capitalism’s capacity to create its own gravediggers, in order for a need to become the motivation to act, it must as well be recognized by its bearers as a need. This brings in the significance of struggle for a need to be recognized as radical, something Heller seems to ignore. Without rendering struggles central to a conception of radical needs – as we shall turn to in the following sections- there seems to be nothing to prevent one from claiming that even though a need is depicted to take a radical form, it is not recognized as such by a collective subject and that capitalist alienation and ideology might not allow the emergence of a radical need in the form of a motivation even if it is a need unsatisfied within the confines of capitalist society. In other words, one might argue that even though something can be regarded as a radical need objectively, it does not subjectively attain that status.

Instead, I suggest that the necessity of radical needs and transcendence of capitalism can be addressed through the category of real possibility. Radical needs

exist as a real possibility in capitalism in virtue of the increasing contradiction between human needs and the needs of capital, and the practical necessity of transcendence that they embody is conditional upon the concrete historical struggles that will give them the critical edge they require. This practical necessity is not a goodwill, wishful thinking or a theoretical construct as Heller attributes to Marx.²² It is necessity from the point of view of freedom, which is to be found in men's power of shaping the world and constituting new practices. This makes it necessary to turn to concrete struggles, whereby the consciousness that exceeds its bounds exists as a real possibility. Radical needs present the objective possibility of historical transcendence; they are rooted in the actual conditions of society; yet if the historically possible revolutionizing does not come about, then a relapse into barbarism or the "common ruin of the contending classes" is also possible. In many respects Marx might as well be regarded as "a thinker of possibility". He is concerned with the dialectical relation between the modality of possibility and of necessity as early as in his doctoral thesis on the philosophy of nature of Democritus and Epicurus. He writes:

Chance, for Epicurus, is a reality which has only the value of possibility. Abstract possibility, however, is the direct antipode of real possibility. The latter is restricted within sharp boundaries, as is the intellect; the former is unbounded, as is the imagination. Real possibility seeks to explain the necessity and the reality of its object; abstract possibility is not interested in the object which is explained, but in the subject which does the explaining. The object need only be possible, conceivable. That which is abstractly possible, which can be conceived, constitutes no obstacle to the thinking subject, no limit, no stumbling block. Whether this possibility is also real is irrelevant, since here the interest does not extend to the object as object... Necessity appears in finite nature as relative necessity. Relative necessity can only be deduced from real possibility...real possibility is the explanation of relative necessity.²³

²² Ibid.

²³ Marx (1902), Ch. 3.

Given this passage, we might assert that radical needs are inscribed within the dialectic between necessity and real possibility as proposed by Marx²⁴. Lack of consideration of this dialectical movement as well as the distinction between different categories of possibility appears to have led to Heller's dubious claim that "radical needs *guarantee* transcendence". Nevertheless, only if radical needs are interpreted within the context of the dialectical interplay of real possibility and practical (relative) necessity, they might be regarded as delineating the horizon of concrete historical struggles. Evidently, the course of struggle is open-ended and hence the necessity at stake can never provide a "guarantee".²⁵ It is her neglect of the category of "real possibility" that seems to have led Heller to see radical needs as theoretical constructs existing in the mind of the philosopher.

Radical needs, according to Heller, imply consciousness that "exceeds its bounds", hence goes beyond empirical consciousness qua consciousness of poverty and misery; they are regarded by Heller as the need to overcome alienation. Heller presents Marx's discussion of the need for free time as characterizing radical needs adequately: it is produced by the contradictory character of capitalism and thus belongs to its functioning. At the same time, as Heller maintains, the need qua being radical mobilizes the working class into transcending capitalism. "The need for free

²⁴ Marx's dialectical treatment of these categories owes greatly to Hegel's views about the interplay of necessary and contingent, the movement from formal necessity to relative necessity. Despite some evident differences with Marx and Hegel, Kant's employment of modality of real possibility qua practical reason is noteworthy. Modality of "real possibility" is fundamental for Kant's critique of practical reason where the primary concern is freedom and real possibility is directly linked to action. In practical use of pure reason, modality of possibility is recognized as *real possibility*. Thus, according to Kant, the distinction between logical and real possibility as mentioned in the *Critique of Pure Reason* no longer holds for practical reason. This means that real possibility relates directly to action; it goes beyond logical possibility and involves a synthetic element. For an interesting discussion concerning Lukacs' adaptation of Weber's use of "objective possibility" by giving it an ontological and dialectical dimension, see Hearn, F. "The Dialectical Use of Ideal Types", *Theory and Society* 2, 4 (Winter 1975).

²⁵ For a detailed discussion of the uncertainty that Marxism embodies as a theory of struggle, See Psychopedis, K. "Emancipating Explanation" in *Open Marxism*, Vol. 3 (1995), pp.17-40.

time is in Marx's view an elemental one because it always thrusts beyond the limits of alienation. In the first Volume of *Capital* and elsewhere the struggle for more free time constantly appears within the focus of the proletariat."²⁶ Reduction of labor time forces the capitalist to constantly increase productivity and relative surplus value; nevertheless capitalism is capable of reducing the labor time only up to a certain point. This means that while the need for free time is the expression of its fundamental antinomies and it can only be satisfied by the transcendence of capitalism. Whether it can be argued that the need for free time takes the form of a radical need in contemporary phase of capitalism and the political implications of this ascription is a crucial discussion that we must not overstep if we are to search for the viability of the notion of radical need as a fruitful conceptual tool. To be taken up in the following sections, let me confine myself for the moment to claiming that current socialization of labor and the capital's tendency to extend its domination from the factory to the rest of society, transforming it into "social factory" seems to validate more than ever, the ascription of the need for free time as the form of a radical need.

The dynamism of capitalist society has partially been explained by Heller with the dominance of market and exchange value as well as the consequential quantification of needs. This shift to a quantifiable structure of need has a liberating function, Heller maintains, since it rescues people from pre-ascribed social positions by giving them the opportunity of equality of status in terms of the activity of exchange as well as the opportunity to shape their own need structures. She maintains that this gets evident in the concrete examples like the need for free time, artistic creation and personal development generated in capitalism. While it

²⁶ Heller (1974), p.91.

systematically generates these needs, it cannot accommodate their satisfaction, and hence a structure of need qualitatively different than the present form is required. Accordingly a radical need as illustrated by Heller is always in the register of a qualitative dimension - has as its object something that cannot be quantified. However in her later works, we see that Heller explicitly distances herself from the notion of radical needs and takes up the question of needs within the framework of modernity rather than exploring it as a peculiarity of capitalist society. She no longer ascribes quantification to commodity production and to market relations of exchange. Rather she argues that abolition of market relations in Soviet type societies did not alter the tendency of quantification; on the contrary the central power holders came to be the sole authority in need determination and satisfier allocation, leading to what a “dictatorship over needs”. Instead she regards the market as essential to modernity and

if one affirms modern society, one cannot reject what is essential to it. One simply has to acknowledge the quantification of needs on the level of social and political needs... That means that one must accept that in the case of social need allocation and attribution needs come in quantitative bundles and they are distinguished by being more or less (more or less power more or less fame, more or less money).²⁷

She defends that quantification and monetization provide a certain sense of independence, which demonstrates her neglect of the dialectics of the formation of new dependencies. The actual system of needs of individuals or groups is of a register different than the quantified social and political level. In Heller’s words, quantitative allocation does not decide what individuals or groups are going to do with this quantity. Changing the same quantity into qualitative terms is possible. On the same page, Heller claims that “the same amount of satisfiers can be allocated to

²⁷ Heller (1974) pp.24.

A and B, and still A and M could conduct a different kind of life". Heller regarded the "dissatisfied society" as the essential dynamism of modernity, which is constituted by the fact that it generates more needs than it can satisfy. "Although structure of needs oriented towards quantitative satisfaction will manifest the hallmarks of alienation, she argues that dissatisfaction is not the sign of a systemic dysfunction to be removed or fixed but the motor of the dynamic called modernity."²⁸ Sacrificing historical vision and transcendence, dissatisfaction signals a positive social dynamic; or more strongly, in the new framework that she adopts dissatisfaction emerges as a denial of transcendence.

This leads Heller to a view fundamentally different than the one she had defended in *Theory of Need in Marx*. She comes to defend that the project that this world can be transcended must be abolished. Instead, she argues that the question must be shifted to the question of the limits of growth and the limits of quantification involved in modern societies. Correspondingly, she no longer characterizes radical needs as the motor of transcendence but delineates them as needs that demand qualitative satisfaction; in this sense radical needs do not constitute a special category. In line with her commitment to pluralistic democratic politics, she regards radical needs to constitute the uniqueness, the idiosyncrasy of single people or of communities, which exemplify utopian forms of life. Communities which choose to live upon shared spiritual and cultural values aiming to do away with the relations of subordination are proposed by Heller as the locus of the possibility of alternative social imagination, in which radical needs are rooted in. Even though Heller attempts to relocate radical needs in her approach to modernity, we must note that they seem to have lost the critical edge and the political import that they formerly had. The

²⁸ Grumley (1999), p.68.

immanence of radical needs is much less emphasized and characterized very vaguely they are reduced to a choice of a lifestyle of a minority. Heller's insistence on establishing the existence of radical needs on empirical grounds can be explained by her hesitation towards what she takes to be the Marxist imputation of needs, which she argues to give way to paternalist practices. In virtue of this, she wants to close the gap between empirical needs on the one hand and radical needs on the other. Nevertheless, it is impossible to miss that despite her intention to maintain the notion of radical needs in her later works, "sociological credentials of radical needs are weakened and they drift towards pure normativity."²⁹ In other words, taken out of the context of capitalism, radical needs have lost their respective critical potential. We can for the moment briefly note – to be taken up later – that this is to a significant extent due to her failure to develop radical needs as an aspect of an immanent critique of capitalism. Since Heller does not conceive the capitalist dynamics of needs through dialectical relations, she takes the notion of radical needs out of the context of capitalism and employs it almost as a purely normative notion that applies to the modern society as such. Similarly, she does not emphasize that needs are to a significant extent rooted within particular struggles in capitalism. By isolating radical needs from the totality of capitalist relations and by shifting them towards the context of modernity, Heller diverges from her former emphasis on the significance of totality for the emergence of radical needs in *Theory of Need in Marx*. Not only in her later works but also in this book, despite her reference to totality, Heller does not pursue the consequences of formulating radical needs against totality of capitalist relations, which is evident in her neglect of the antagonisms involved in need

²⁹ Grumley (1999), p. 71.

satisfaction as well as the link between needs and the form of production rather than taking need as an aspect of mere consumption.

By situating radical needs as those needs that cannot be satisfied in capitalist society and which functions as a motivation for workers to politicize their struggle, Heller has undertaken the worthwhile attempt to defy the objectivist as well as the voluntarist interpretations of Marxism. Nevertheless, she tried to keep distant from the notion of radical needs especially in her works either by regarding them as theoretical constructs that merely exist in the mind of the theoretician or the mere expression of a future revolutionary faith. Her revision of the notion of radical needs and her outlook on needs as a whole in her later works can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid what she regards as their possible political consequences such as paternalism or “dictatorship over needs”. However, as J. Grumley expresses “her reconstruction has only been partially successful as the concept remains awkwardly straddled between normativity and weakened factuality.”³⁰ Before we go on with the discussion of radical needs, let me briefly address the rather recent concern of paternalism or authoritarianism associated with the principle of need in the distribution of goods. Scepticism about the appeal to a politics of need is to a significant extent rooted in the worry that the need principle “involve[s] a commitment to some form of objectivity about human flourishing that allows for some distance between what a person believes is good for her and what is good for her.”³¹ It is claimed that the objectivity of needs as opposed to subjective wants or preferences opens the way for experts or authorities to impose upon the individual

³⁰ Ibid., p.53.

³¹ O’Neill (2006), p.77. O’Neill refers to Feher, Heller and Markus’s (1983) *Dictatorship Over Needs: An Analysis of Soviet Societies* for a relevant discussion concerning the authoritarian tendencies of a need-based politics.

what they take to be in his interest. In virtue of these features, it is argued that the need principle is incompatible with autonomy, which implies an individual's capacity to formulate his/her own conception of good life and to make relevant life choices. The charge is that the objectivity associated with needs tends to undermine the subjective preferences of the claimant and leads to the imputation of needs by a third person authority. This argument is usually tied up with the defense of free market economy, claiming that the market which is directly responsive to individual preferences is consistent with autonomy. Hence "a market order responsive to the wants of individuals is to be preferred to a social and political order that is responsive to their needs."³² Even though the doubt that a policy based on the principle of need might lead to unduly paternalism is not always ungrounded, there is no inherent relation between objectivity as such and paternalism, just as there is no reason to suggest that prioritizing subjective preferences would necessarily lead to non-authoritative policies.³³ Of course, we must note that these doubts are the expressions of a specific historical context and presently they are not as widely and loudly expressed. On the contrary, in the present phase of neoliberalism it is widely argued that the so-called free market economy is compatible with authoritarian regimes and undemocratic policies.³⁴

³² Ibid., p.78. O'Neill cites the principle of Preference Autonomy that is formulated by J.Harsanyi as relevant for the discussion: "The principle that, in deciding what is good and what is bad for a given individual, the ultimate criteria can only be his own wants and his own preferences."

³³ Note that on pp.58-60 of the present thesis, I had argued that the formulation "A needs X in order to Y" neglects the dissentious nature of need interpretation. This equally means that attempting to formulate objective needs through such formulas tends to overlook important political dimensions of need interpretation. Hence even though I claim that there is no inherent relationship between the suggested objectivity of need claims and autonomy, I equally maintain that the sense of objectivity at stake in the formulations above is similarly inadequate. As previously discussed, neither Hegel nor Marx operates with a strict objective-subjective distinction. See pp.56-61 and Chapter III of the present thesis.

³⁴ For a brilliant discussion, see Wolin (2008).

Radical Needs and the Process of Production in *Beyond Capital*

M. Lebowitz is one of the few scholars who have dwelled upon the role of needs in Marx's works. His works deserve special attention since he situates the question of the workers' need for development right in the middle of major controversies among Marx scholars and pursues the consequences of the neglect of the problematization of needs in capitalism for some fundamental questions that arise with respect to Marx's works. So let's first turn to the theoretical controversy among Marx scholars that Lebowitz addresses in terms of workers' needs for development – an aspect that he takes as not being sufficiently emphasized among Marx scholars.

The name of a chapter in Lebowitz's *Beyond Capital* is titled "The Missing Book on Wage Labor". The name of the chapter addresses directly the discussions concerning the limits and the opportunities of Marx's *Capital* as an unfinished text. Some scholars argue that *Capital* is an unfinished text and that Marx had the intention of complementing it with a book on wage labor. In *Limits of Capital*, David Harvey reminds us that in the 1857 Outline of the book, Marx has expressed his intention to write six books. In these books, Harvey adds, Marx intended to deal with capital, landed property, wage labor, the state, foreign trade, the world market and the crises. Similarly, in his critique titled "On the Limits of *Limits of Capital*", Bob Jessop refers to *Capital* as an unfinished text and comments that

The chosen order of presentation corresponded to his method of analysis, which moved from abstract-simple objects to the reproduction of the totality as a concrete-in-thought. In this context, the world market and crises would be the 'rich totality of many definitions and relations' and must therefore await the introduction of the other elements. Controversy continues over the completeness of the first three of the proposed books (especially that on wage labour); but all agree that Marx left no more than sketches and hints about the final three. *Limits to Capital* builds systematically on the first two projected –

but all agree that Marx left no more than sketches and hints about the final three.³⁵

Jessop notes that opinions differ on the “missing book on wage labor”. While some believe that it was included in the Volume One of *Capital*, some, i.e. Lebowitz, argue that *Capital* “is one-sided because it examines capital’s need for valorization and neglect workers’ need for development. Marx had written to Engels that, in order to focus on the nature of capital, he would initially assume that wages are at their minimum. But he added that ‘movements in wage themselves and the rise and fall of the minimum will be considered under wage labor.’”³⁶

This interest about the suggested book on wage labor is not merely a historical one concerning the chronology of texts; it rather turns upon the important discussion concerning what it means labor power to be a commodity like others and Marx’s treatment of the value of labor power – namely wage. Now if we take labor power as a commodity like any other and apply to it Marx’s account of value, we end up with the conclusion that the value of labor power is equivalent to the labor time socially necessary for its reproduction – in other words, it equals to the value of the objects of needs such as clothes, food, education, housing so that they are capable of performing the work that they are hired to do. Yet, it is traditionally argued that with the increase in the productivity of social labor, the quantity of labor required for producing a given set of commodities decreases; which in turn leads to a reduction of the value of labor power. This traditional argument for the declining real wages assumes a constant set of use values in the subsistence bundle. Although this assumption is completely irreconcilable with the significance of the diversification

³⁵ See Jessop, B. “On the Limits of *Limits of Capital*”, published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University.

³⁶ Ibid., p.2.

and expansion of needs that Marx notes in his different works, one of his major works – *Capital* – is conspicuously silent on this matter. Moreover, again in *Capital*, Marx refers to labor power as having fixed physiological requirements, which Lebowitz claims to have been a source of great confusion.³⁷

It is far from clear how this attitude of referring to labor power as having fixed requirements in *Capital* fits in with the significance attributed by Marx to the diversification and expansion of needs as a function of the expansion of capital in other works. In order to see how Lebowitz responds to this difficulty, let's first turn to his characterization of the role of workers' needs. Lebowitz argues that Marx's insistence on the importance of the expansion and diversification of needs testifies that for Marx labor power is not a commodity like any other. As we have afore mentioned, Marx always rejected the tendency of the political economists to treat workers' needs as unchanging and determined. Jessop notes that in *Theories of Surplus Value*, he similarly criticizes the Physiocrats for conceiving the subsistence level as an unchangeable magnitude without taking into consideration the stage of historical development. Marx's description of capitalism as the constant striving of capital to constantly go beyond its barriers implies the expansion of the sphere of circulation. For the realization of surplus value always demands creation of new needs. Workers' needs expand as a function of the growth of capital and capitalist

³⁷ An important aspect of Marx's critical stance towards Proudhon's formulation of wage involves the manner in which he treats labor as a commodity like no other. Marx (1955) expresses Proudhon's formulation in the following remark in *Poverty of Philosophy*. "Labour, being itself a commodity, is measured as such by the labour time needed to produce the labour-commodity. And what is needed to produce this labour-commodity? Just enough labour time to produce the objects indispensable to the constant maintenance of labour, that is, to keep the worker alive and in a condition to propagate his race. The natural price of labour is no other than the minimum wage... It is the same reasoning that makes him confuse cost of production with wages. What are wages? They are the cost price of corn, etc., the integral price of all things. Let us go still further. Wages are the proportionality of the elements which compose wealth." (p.22)

consumption set the social standards and the level of satisfaction for workers; hence “Marx argued that even if wages were to rise, the rising social standard would limit any gain in satisfaction.”³⁸

Evidently, social needs of the workers that are the outcome of social production and intercourse, which are in turn “the contemporary power on which capital rests” cannot simply be associated with the constant standard of necessity that is claimed to underlie the value of labor power. Moreover, Marx always points to the inability of workers to realize their needs. Lebowitz claims that for Marx it was inherent in the nature of capitalism that there are needs which are not satisfiable. “This is the identification of a critical failing in capitalism – the existence of capitalist limitations on the satisfaction of needs.”³⁹ It is exactly this feature of capitalism which allows him to speak of social needs that designate the “level of needs of the worker as a socially developed human being at a given point”.⁴⁰ Although social needs are “hidden from the surface of society”, we must briefly add that they are not theoretical constructs yet are present in the workers’ practical existence.

There is a level, then, of needs which is *hidden* – needs which conform to the requirements of ‘socially developed human beings’, needs whose realization is required for ‘the full development of individuality’. It is a level of needs not manifest on the surface at any given point. Hidden from the surface of society, Lebowitz

³⁸ Lebowitz (2003), p. 37.

³⁹ Ibid., p.40.

⁴⁰ It is important to note that social needs [*gesellschaftlichen Bedürfnisse*] as the needs of a socially developed worker are distinct from the sense of “social need” as effective demand [*soziale Bedürfnisse*]. The former does not refer to needs with a specific content but they are the expressions of real potentials, which only exists within capitalist society. See pp. 106-112 of the present thesis for a detailed discussion of social needs.

argues that these social needs are nevertheless part of the very nature of those workers. Not to satisfy those social needs does not only produce dissatisfaction, but as Marx formulates in *EPM*, it implies a denial of self.

“*This* gap between social needs (SN) and necessary needs (NN), then, is a measure of the misery of the worker, a measure of his deprivation and poverty; and we can define ‘the degree of immiseration’ as the relation (SN-NN)/NN.”⁴¹ The gap between social needs and necessary needs, for Lebowitz, indicates the measure of deprivation and poverty. This is not a gap, however, between a customary standard of life and an infinite level of wants. At any given point, social needs are regarded by Marx as finite. “Use value in itself does not have the boundlessness of value as such. Given objects can be consumed as objects of need only up to a certain level.”⁴² Evidently, social needs are not constant. As Marx articulates in the Chapter “Relation of Wage Labour to Capital” in *Wage Labour and Capital* 1847,

The rapid growth of productive capital brings about an equally rapid growth of wealth, luxury, social wants, social enjoyments. Thus, although the enjoyments of workers have risen, the social satisfaction that they give has fallen in comparison with the increased enjoyments of the capitalist, which are inaccessible to the worker, in comparison with the state of development of society in general.

Lebowitz maintains that the existence of unfulfilled social needs underlies the workers’ need for higher wages and the value of labor power depends on historically developed social needs - what we might call the historically necessary needs. In Marx’s words, historically developed social needs become second nature. What determines the movements in the value of labor power is the intensity of struggles bound up with the level of social needs.

⁴¹ Lebowitz, Op.cit. p.41.

⁴² Marx (1999), p.403.

Despite this explicit emphasis on the expansion of workers' needs, *Capital* does not incorporate this change in the level of necessities and its consequences. Lebowitz notes that whenever Marx notes that the value of labor contains a historical and a moral element, which is suggestive of its peculiarity as a commodity, he also notes that in a specific country at any given time, the level of subsistence for the workers might be treated as a constant magnitude. Lebowitz maintains that the constant set of necessities is a critical assumption for Marx since in *Capital*, he tried to explain the nature and the movement of capital.⁴³ Lebowitz argues that this was not an unusual procedure for Marx to hold a critical factor as constant for the purpose of his method and that he employed it throughout *Capital*.⁴⁴ As he explains in his letter to Engels cited by Lebowitz, making the assumption of constant level of necessities "is the only way to avoid dealing with all relations when discussing each particular relation".⁴⁵ In *Capital*, the changing level of necessities is the only factor that Marx did not take into consideration in its effect on the value of labor power. According to Lebowitz, this was the case since Marx's intent was to develop the book on wage labor-which eventually remained unwritten- where the assumption of the level of necessities as a constant could be dropped out. Only then the movement of wages and the consequences of diversification of needs as well as the historically necessary needs, that Marx claims to have become a second nature, could be examined. This discussion testifies to the twofold status of the expansion of the workers' needs – while they are a function of the expansion of capital, they tend to politicize the

⁴³ Rubel proposed that the unwritten book of wage labor was "destined to reveal in detail the historical and dialectical process of the negation of capital". Cited in Lebowitz (2003), p.51. Having similar considerations about *Capital*, Negri in a similar vein argues that the theme of that missing book is "from the wage to the subject, from capital to the class struggle. He tries to find the corrective of objectivism of *Capital* in his reading of *Grundrisse*." Ibid.

⁴⁴ Lebowitz (1977), pp.444-445.

⁴⁵ Lebowitz, Op.cit., p.46.

struggles for need satisfaction. Struggles set the stage for the emergence of needs that are likely to set a limit to the expansion of capital and bring about the possibility of transcendence. Even though the needs that they initially fight for are not in themselves needs that go beyond capital, the process of struggle which operates as the ground for the formation of new people, “transform them into people with a new conception of themselves- as subjects capable of altering the world.” Every struggle then is a process of self-change, which is intertwined with recognizing the importance of collective struggle for need satisfaction and any larger movement depends upon this recognition. Lebowitz takes struggle as a process of producing the working class as One, through which he attains the awareness that the fight is against capital as the mediator of the society and provides the workers with the self-understanding that they are the producers of social wealth. More stringently, Lebowitz conceives the process of struggle as *a process of production* – it is a “process of purposeful activity in which they produce themselves in an altered way”.⁴⁶ Struggle as a process of production implies acquiring a new need on the part of the workers – the need for society, which Marx has claimed to become an end in itself for the workers. While acting collectively is initially regarded as a means for satisfaction of their material needs, within the process of struggles the need for society emerges as an end in itself. Lebowitz notes that only the struggle of workers as wage laborers directly poses the alternative of workers as their own mediator.

One important aspect of Lebowitz’s view for our purposes is that the struggles for material needs tend to create people with radical needs that point beyond capital. Unlike Lebowitz’s emphasis on the significance of struggle as a process of production of a new sense of self, Heller detaches the concept of radical needs from a

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.180.

concept of struggle. In doing so, we might add, she detaches radical needs from praxis as well as their link with different processes of production and thereby undercuts their impact that she had tried to maintain in the first place. Disassociating the force of radical needs from praxis denotes undermining their role in men's material existence, which in turn seems to have easily led to Heller's view that radical needs are mere theoretical constructs and exist only in the mind of the workers. However, one might argue that it is necessary to acknowledge the role of radical needs in order to regard man as a practical and a self-creative social being. Lebowitz's views concerning the significance of struggles is noteworthy for our purposes for a second reason, relevant to the first. The emphasis on struggle demonstrates that it is not as easy to delineate qualitative and quantitative needs as Heller suggests – at least not at the expense of precluding the role of struggles for the satisfaction, interpretation as well as the emergence of needs. The strict distinction between quantitative and qualitative needs and associating radical needs only with the latter as Heller does seems to overlook the practical existence of radical needs. The locus of radical needs is men striving for the satisfaction of their material needs, moreover in their actions that resist the insinuation of capital to almost every aspect of life. However, formulating the quantitative and the qualitative as a binary opposition tends to overlook the mechanisms by which one might transform into the other and how they move through each other. In his critique of Heller's book, Lebowitz is explicitly critical on this point. He claims that Heller's strict distinction between quantitative needs as material needs and the qualitative needs like the need for universality, need for free time, the need for self-realization on the other hand leads her to undermine Marx's emphasis on the significance of focusing on concrete, determinate beings and consequently their strivings to realize their, material

particular needs. This means that by ignoring the centrality of productive activity, Heller fails to root her analysis in determinate beings. Similarly, he adds, this is evident in Heller's neglect of relations of needs and production. Lebowitz writes:

Consideration of production and relations of production as the point of departure and the dominant moment in the relationship between production and needs, which is central to Marx's concept of needs, is missing. Heller's stress on the primacy of radical needs over quantitative, material needs flows from her conception of a society of associated producers, a conception in which material needs - indeed, the entire realm of material production - are matters appropriate to the realm of necessity, not to the realm of freedom. Heller thus tends to distort the concept of needs in Marx's work and instead of analyzing the relation between needs and praxis under real conditions, she presents a critique of all that exists as not truly human.⁴⁷

Heller's neglect of the relation between needs and production that Lebowitz draws attention to is rather unexpected given the role that she claims to attribute to totality. In the previous section, we had mentioned that Heller does not sufficiently pursue the consequences of her emphasis on the import of totality for grasping the capitalist structure of needs. Lebowitz's remark about Heller's neglect of the relations between production as an aspect of totality of capitalist relations and needs might as well be regarded as supporting this point we have made earlier. Similarly, in the beginning of this chapter, it has been argued that in Marx's treatment, the concept of need is articulated in terms of the interaction between production, exchange, circulation and distribution rather than a concept used for distinguishing between goods at the level of mere consumption. Nevertheless, the failure to track the consequences of regarding the structure of needs as an aspect of totality of capitalist relations seems to have led Heller to overstep an understanding of needs in terms of the interaction of these different aspects.

⁴⁷ Lebowitz (1979), p. 350.

The Movement of Need Forms and the Emergence of Radical Needs

As we have seen in the second chapter, Ian Fraser's emphasis on the significance of the movement of forms in Hegel's and Marx's treatment of need structures opens the way for tracing the dynamics of needs to major social conflicts. Even what Fraser names as "higher needs" emerge out of the need to satisfy natural needs; for example, the need for self-realization emerges out of men's interaction with each other and with nature in the process of satisfaction of physical needs. "The need for self-realization develops and manifests itself in different forms through humans' activity and their relations to nature ... Such needs are historically created from particular needs – the universal arises out of the particular."⁴⁸ We might say that the emphasis on need forms would lead Fraser to criticize Heller's attempt to delineate quantitative needs from qualitative ones. Instead of starting out with pre-determined categories and distinctions such as this one, Fraser insists on the significance of the manner in which natural needs take different forms and their interrelation as well as their conflictual nature. This has the implication that rather than demarcating quantitative and qualitative needs, Fraser is keen on bringing forth the significance of the dialectical continuity between the two. In his words, "qualitative and quantitative inform one another- distinctions in a unity."⁴⁹ Against Heller's view that only qualitative needs can be characterized as radical, Fraser maintains that her understanding of radical needs as distinctly qualitative cannot be supported by Marx's texts. On the contrary, Fraser points out that every time Marx makes

⁴⁸ Fraser (1998), p.152.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.158. Also see Marx's 1843 Introduction to the "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*".

distinctions such as practical need/theoretical needs he is keen on emphasizing that the latter must be rooted in men's practical existence and take a practical form.⁵⁰

According to Marx, Fraser reminds us, the chains of necessity in the German case are attached to the proletariat and as such become 'radical chains'. Therefore material needs are at the root of revolutionary action. This gives us, according to Fraser, two interrelated aspects of radical needs; the need for human emancipation and need to change the material basis- the means by which needs are satisfied. Hence radical needs cannot be posited merely at the level of qualitative needs, distinct from material considerations.

According to Fraser, Heller's split between quantitative and qualitative need is similarly reflected in another distinction operative in her work. Following Lebowitz, Fraser argues that Heller's preoccupation with consumptive activity leads her to overlook the relationship between production and needs. This being the case, it is easy for her to drop the workers as the agent of radical needs in her later works; as we have seen she completely dissociates production and radical needs while regarding the students, different communities as the agent of radical needs, who will refuse to consume according to measures of the capitalist structure of needs. Fraser notes that in conceiving needs primarily in relation to consumption, Heller adopts a standpoint contrary to that of Lebowitz. While the former relates need to consumption, the latter prioritizes the relationship between needs and production. Even though Fraser follows Lebowitz in his opposition to Heller's emphasis on consumption, he does not take sides with him either, emphasizing that Lebowitz emphasizes production at the expense of consumption. He argues that "the validity of Lebowitz's criticism does not hide the fact that both are one-sided in their analysis.

⁵⁰ Marx (2005).

Marx is not emphasizing production over consumption but wants to understand them as contradictions in a unity.”⁵¹ Although Fraser’s criticism of Lebowitz as “one-sided” is rather contentious given that focusing on the need for development on the part of the workers, as Lebowitz does, does not *necessarily* imply emphasizing production at the expense of consumption, we might agree that focusing on the movement of need forms allows Fraser to reach a fuller understanding of the capitalist need structures qua consumption as well as production:

The movement from production to consumption is the movement of the need form through ‘natural’, ‘necessary’ and ‘luxury’ to satisfaction. Disconnecting these moments in production and consumption and not grasping them as a totality, separates the form a need takes in exchange from the social relations of production.⁵²

Having formerly argued for the significance of formulating the dynamics of need against totality of social relations, I am adopting a critical stance similar to Fraser’s. As mentioned before, only from the perspective of totality of social relations, need emerges as the concept of interaction between production, exchange, circulation and distribution rather than a concept used for distinguishing between goods at the level of mere consumption. Capturing the peculiarity of capitalist need dynamics requires keeping in view the interrelation of the moments of consumption as well as production, which in turn allows positing it as the site of major conflicts.

Let me end with one further comment on Heller’s characterization of radical needs as qualitative. Regarding only the need for self-realization, the need for universality, the need for free time as radical, Heller seems to have attributed political significance to some needs while precluding others – which she classifies as quantitative. Given that radical needs are regarded by Heller as the motor of

⁵¹ Ibid., p.155.

⁵² Ibid.

transcendence and influential in the politicization of struggles, this demarcation seems to demonstrate that Heller regards some needs as inherently political while refraining from characterizing some others with this title. Evidently, declaring some needs as inherently political without considering their historically particular forms and the importance of their *political economy* seems to be far from Marx's approach to needs. We might further add that there is nothing inherently political about a need but it is the antagonisms involved in particular satisfactions and interpretations that render them political. Moreover, trying to *predetermine* which categories of needs are inherently political and which ones are not seems to ignore that what is political and what is apolitical is a matter of struggle that cannot be settled merely on a meta-political basis.⁵³ Hence categories of needs cannot be ontologically demarcated as political and as unpolitical without referring to the historically specific context and the particular forms they take.

A Critical Reconstruction of "Radical Needs"

So far, I have explored the critical questions that Marx addresses within the context of radical needs, Heller's approach and some major criticisms raised against her. As mentioned previously, "radical needs" is not thoroughly developed and it can hardly be counted among the most operative concepts in Marx's analysis of capitalism. Hence one might be tempted to regard it as an "outdated" notion which might be relevant only for very specific aspects of Marx's analysis and which is otherwise completely superfluous, especially for addressing the critical problems of contemporary capitalism. So before advancing our exploration on radical needs, my

⁵³ See Fraser (1989) for a detailed discussion of this view.

principal concern in this section is to propose an explanation of the various ways in which the notion of radical need is conceptually fruitful for shifting our attention to moments *within* and *against* capitalism which reveal the fragility of its domination. In doing this, my aim is neither to provide *a priori* yardsticks nor to propose an exhaustive definition; this examination provokes a brief reconstruction of the distinct yet interrelated dimensions of radical needs in view of the conceptual lexicon and the discussions afore mentioned.

Radical needs are exclusively situated within the context of human emancipation, which renders them politically and philosophically interesting. What does it mean for a need to be emancipatory or what is the sense in which a need can be regarded as the ground for emancipation? In “On the Jewish Question”, Marx writes:

Every emancipation is a *restoration* of the human world and of human relationships to man himself. Human emancipation will only be complete when the real individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as social powers so that he no longer separated his social power from himself as political power.⁵⁴

This dense passage presents human emancipation in terms of the dissolution of bifurcations characteristic of capitalist society. As already mentioned, in Marx (1970) bifurcations such as theory and practice, civil society and state as well as political and human emancipation are similarly dissolved. The notion of radical need is formulated within the context of these junctions; it addresses the possibility of theoretical (speculative) needs to become practical, the possibility of transforming the critique of religion into a critique of the material conditions of life and of

⁵⁴ Marx (1975), p.234.

juxtaposing *merely* political emancipation with human emancipation. Radical needs are those needs whose satisfaction would call for the resolution of bifurcations inherent to capitalism such as the separation of state from civil society and the political citizen from man in his practical existence. Marx discusses the problem of freedom within the context of social relations that are implicitly declared as apolitical in the liberal discourse. Conversely in his controversy with the utopian socialists who opt for egalitarian distribution, he likewise insists that domination, exploitation and alienation involved in capitalist relations cannot be eliminated at the level of distribution. Therefore, we can further speculate that radical needs represent the moment in which questions that are implicitly declared as natural and apolitical can be exposed as politically significant and questions that are conceived as solely political can be depicted equally as questions pertaining to political economy. Insofar as Marx's understanding of human emancipation cannot be contained within the liberal discourse, we might similarly claim that radical needs which designate the power to constitute human emancipation tend to go beyond the liberal discourse. Radical need claims, then, can neither be sufficiently articulated as mere economic claims at the expense of political significance nor can they be addressed as a strictly political issue without transforming the conditions of practical existence.

In the beginning of this chapter, I briefly discussed that Marx's association of needs with capacities and powers is not a confusion or negligence on his part; on the contrary the manner in which they are conceptually related gets more evident within the context of radical needs. In *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx claims that as labor loses its specialized character, the need for universality "as the tendency towards an

integral development of the individual begins to be felt.”⁵⁵ Need for universality is a radical need in the sense that it emerges out of the very nature of capitalism as the expression of the antagonism between human needs and the needs of capital; yet it cannot be satisfied within the confines of capitalist relations. Given this characterization, the universality in question is the universality of capacities and powers. In other words, the form of universality as a fundamental dimension of a radical need refers to the capacities and powers of man, whose full development is hindered in capitalist society. As discussed in Chapter III, Marx provides a different ontology of wealth in terms of *man rich in his needs*: “the rich man and the wealth of human need take the place of the wealth and poverty of political economy.” This is an attempt to formulate – not to mention it as an attempt to establish it as *the* form of wealth- an understanding of wealth which cannot be captured by the theory of valorization pertinent in capitalism, which implies the way in which “capital subordinates, transforms and utilizes human productive activities for its own purpose: endless command over society.”⁵⁶ The wealth at stake can be defined as the totality of capacities, knowledge, needs in society – wealth that exceeds the bounds of capitalist social relations, striving to open up a space that cannot be measured in terms of the theory of value that pertains to capitalism. Yet, “man rich in his needs”- figurative of this wealth- exists as a real possibility in the extant society. Note that Marx does not seem to intend it as a figure of speech but its import lies in highlighting the role of needs not only qua production of objects but also qua the

⁵⁵ Marx (1999), p.65.

⁵⁶ Cleaver (1992), p.115. in Bonefeld et al. (1992). Cleaver argues that Marx's theory of valorisation is at the core of his theory of capitalism. 'Valorisation' (*Verwertung*) designates the complex process through which capital is able not only to put people to work, but to do so in such a way that the process can be repeated on an ever greater scale. Technically, valorisation involves all of the steps included in Marx's circuit of productive capital.'

production of subjectivities. Hence one needs to go beyond the identification of a radical need as “a need that cannot be satisfied within capitalist social relations.” More precisely, this claim seems to be too broad to capture the import of radical needs, insofar as one might come up with a variety of reasons for the failure to satisfy a need within capitalism like the lack of required technology or the inadequate level of productive forces. In other words, inability of satisfaction by itself does not sufficiently address the radicality at stake. Hence we might further add that a need dissatisfied can take a radical form if it designates the formation of common wealth exceeding the bounds of capitalist determinations as real possibility.

Lebowitz’s example of the workers’ need for development is relevant at this point. He claims that the workers’ need for development serves the “ought” that drives beyond capital. He proposes that as the result of the immiseration of workers, there is a point when capital will be recognized as no longer compatible with the worker’s own need for development. Consequently, one might argue that what Lebowitz calls the “thesis of primacy of need” grasps the need for development as a radical need, which operates as a force against capital.

In his article “Inversion of Class Perspective”, H. Cleaver argues for the significance of the theoretical content of the concept of *disvalue*- developed by Ivan Illich, who is a follower of Karl Polanyi in his critique of market society - as an inversion of valorization of capitalism and its impact in shifting attention to the processes of *disvalorization* in capitalism.

As a process, disvalorisation can be seen to express precisely the counterpart of valorisation. That is to say, if *valorisation* denotes the capitalist subordination of human productive activities to capitalist command, then *disvalorisation* expresses people's loss of those abilities which are absorbed by capital... Although what capital absorbs are carefully and narrowly defined abilities (...), Illich's treatment shows us that what people lose is much broader; *they lose the very fabric of the self-construction of their lives. Those 'abilities' or 'skills' that*

*they lose are integral moments of their own self-determined interconnections with the world, of the sinew of people's lives which give them form and hold them together.*⁵⁷ (My emphasis)

The import of *disvalorization* for us lies in its emphasis on the broad scope of what the absorption of powers and capacities by capital might mean. In view of this, we might regard the figure of “man rich in his needs” and the form of wealth formulated in terms of needs as a response to *disvalorization* for reconstructing the fabric of life and of establishing a wholly different relationship to the world. Within this context, radical needs that point beyond capitalist society acquire a fundamental status in their demand for a criterion of wealth incommensurable and irreducible to the theory of valorization. Moreover, they point to the constitution of forces emerging against capital and to the potential power to found alternatives. Hence, the form of universality in question is more than the universality of a priori principles or a formal property of generality; form of universality qua radical needs might be argued to be inhering political impact insofar as it is understood in terms of capacities and powers that demand a moment of rupture in the existing social order. A need taking a radical form emerges as the need to institute a world of shared wealth, to expand the capacities for collective production and self-government. As such, it can only be articulated and satisfied collectively. In the second chapter, we have seen that the organization of free market around the principle of self-interest to a significant depended upon the limitation of collective power and ability to organize social life. Similarly, the neoliberal phase of contemporary capitalism is astonishingly similar to its nineteenth century version in this specific respect, i.e. of restricting the force of collective action and the commons. Contrary to this current, radical needs might be

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 120.

said to emerge in the form of collective force of people as a reaction to their exclusion from their own substance. Radical need as a positive moment of transcendence is to be found in capitalism; it arises out of actual social antagonisms and in turn reacts to them, which requires turning to concrete struggles and antagonisms existing in the present.

Radical Needs in Contemporary Context

Radical needs as I have attempted to reconstruct as a moment of capitalist need dynamics suggests that we turn to historical antagonisms and focus on contemporary struggles in order to shed light upon the scope of radical needs. Besides, I have formerly discussed the drawbacks and the implications of demarcating qualitative needs as opposed to quantitative ones and of characterizing radical needs only with the former. These discussions demonstrate not only the difficulties involved in making such a distinction but also reveal that a particular need cannot be adequately characterized as radical in virtue merely of its object. In other words, the scope of radical needs cannot be determined in terms of the object of need; i.e. self-realization expressed in the need for self-realization, leisure as expressed in the need for free time. Moreover my emphasis on the understanding of needs as processes and relations similarly forces us to shift our attention to domains and categories of needs which are not typically characterized as radical need. Rather than demarcating a need as radical in terms of its object, I propose to characterize in terms of the particular forms it takes in specific historical conditions, concentrating on the dialectical relationship between how a particular need might take a universal form as a radical need. As discussed in Chapter III, I follow Ian Fraser's emphasis on the dialectical

movement of need forms in order to further argue that the increasing pace of commodification of the commons in neoliberal capitalist societies opens the way for regarding the need for water – a natural need – as the form of a contemporary radical need. The crux of my argument in this section is that while the contemporary context of neoliberal capitalism serves as a background against which the need for water takes a radical need form, natural need qua the form of radical need might in turn operate as a conceptual tool to confront the current state of capitalism. Even though I adopt Ian Fraser’s emphasis on the movement of need forms, my argument differs from his in that the contemporary radical need form is not a “higher need” so to speak; on the contrary even a need, which is defined within the scope of natural necessity, emerges in a radical form, meaning that the positive moment of constituting autonomous activities is ushered even in basic physical needs. Moreover, the example of the need for water in the form of a radical need brings out the significance and adequacy of emphasizing the dialectic of dependence and independence involved in need dynamics rather than adopting a developmental understanding, which similarly adopts a developmental understanding of the course of history.

Formation of The Need for Water as a Contemporary Radical Need Form:

The Bolivian Case

The last two decades have witnessed social and political restructuring under neoliberal policies on a global scale. The commodification of natural resources and the privatization of the natural resources sector responsible for the reorganization of allocation have become strategic policies for the global spread of the neoliberal

model to national governments after the 1980's. Natural resources are not separate entities but they are "interlinked and riddled with multiple cultural, economic and historic meanings."⁵⁸ Hence the radical change in their status from commons to a commodity has devastating implications for the social fabric as a whole.

Notwithstanding the interrelation between natural resources such as land, forests and air, water is commonly attributed a distinct status. "Not only does life depend on water, but all productive and most reproductive activities require it on a daily basis."⁵⁹ Besides being inevitable for the maintenance of life, both in its domestic use as well as its use in irrigation, the management of water is deeply embedded in and intertwined with daily practices and in people's differentiated responsibilities in different settings such as the household, the community and the workplace. Especially in rural areas control of water demands some level of collective management, folk knowledge and involves participatory processes.⁶⁰ Hence the commodification of water does not only imply an impediment for access to a water source fundamental for life, but by subjecting the principles of distribution to economic efficiency, it equally implies a hindrance for collective government and the exclusion of people as a collective force. "Control over water is important because water for irrigation is a resource associated with great power and is therefore highly contested. All over Latin America, social groups can be found struggling not just over the physical control over water and irrigation systems but also over the right to define and organize these systems."⁶¹ Besides characterizing man's dependence

⁵⁸ Ahlers (2005), p.58.

⁵⁹ Poblete&Rico (2005), p.38.

⁶⁰ Zwartveen &Bennett (2005), pp.13-30.

⁶¹ Ibid. p.20.

upon natural necessity, water marks the mutual constitution of nature and society as well as the intersection of social and cultural practices of a community. For example, in Bolivia,

the concept of cosmovision has a strong influence on the organization of water management. Water is not perceived as a mere substance, either public or private, but as a living entity. It is believed to be the origin of life and respected and treasured...From this perspective, water is not only essential for material life but also for spiritual sustenance: natural and human resources are regarded as an integral whole. Indigenous communities throughout Latin America have strongly contested the fragmentation of water resources into individual segments captured in property rights. They fear that this will undermine shared responsibility and tear apart collective decision making necessary for effective resource management[...]⁶²

The 1992 Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment for the first time declared a global consensus in defining water as an economic value in all its competing uses, and that water should be recognized as an economic good. This paradigm shift towards seeing water as a commodity has shaped global water policies ever since and in almost every region of the world today water has become a strategic resource whose control is a source of power and conflict. The scope and the intensity of the effects of this paradigm change is striking. “As recently as 1990, few people in the global South received their water from US or European water firms. But just 10 years later, more than 400 million people did, with that number predicted to increase to 1.2 billion people by 2015, transforming water in Africa, Asia, and Latin America into capitalized markets as precious, and war-provoking, as oil.”⁶³ Even though the social uprisings against the commodification of water are worldwide

⁶² Ahlers, p.67.

⁶³ Goldman (2007), p.786.

and are not limited to struggles in one part of the world, the Bolivian case is paradigmatic for the purpose of my exposition. The uprisings over the commodification of water in Bolivia known as the “Water War” provides a powerful narrative about how the struggle for decommodification have become the site for expression of the need to restore the relation with the world and with each other as well as the need to institute a world of common wealth – namely, how the need for water has acquired the contemporary form of a radical need.

Cochabamba is a region characterized by the lack of water, where only fifty-five percent of the urban and forty-six percent of the rural population has access to drinking water and sewerage systems (Bolivia Public Expenditure Review, World Bank 1999b).⁶⁴ The shortage of water has made this region the site of conflicts for years, which in turn has heightened consciousness over water use and management. The narrative of what has come to be known as the Water War in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 2000 establishes the degree and the form of mobilizations against the privatization of the central water supply operator SEMAPA, by which the Bolivian government gave the concession of SEMAPA to an international consortium – “Aguas del Tunari- headed by the multinational engineering firm Bechtel. Following the privatization of SEMAPA, Law 2029 was enacted. Law 2029 regulating the provision of drinking water and sewage services bestows exclusive rights to private companies in the provision of sanitary services and in the use of water for forty years. Agents that operate in water management such as water committees, cooperatives and communal systems would have a non-exclusive and therefore

⁶⁴ Bustamante, Peredo, Udaeta (2005), p. 73. The authors comment that because SEMAPA cannot provide service to the entire city, the population of the urban periphery generally satisfies the need for water by directly participating in the cooperatives, associations and committees managing the groundwater sources. Ibid. p.75.

temporary license for five years. A further provision passed shortly after guarantees the sanitation sector unlimited rights over water resources without any criteria and obligations and permits the expropriation of water resources as needed.⁶⁵ By these acts of privatization, the government fulfilled its commitment to the World Bank as a condition for a twenty-five million dollar loan, but it could never convince the people that water is a commodity.⁶⁶ In response to these governmental actions that imply the dispossession of people not only from a fundamental resource for life but also from their common wealth as well as from their capacity for collective governance, the first road blocks were carried out in November 1999 and the mobilizations continued in January 2000 with roadblocks on the highways of main axis of the country. The social movement organized around the Coordinating Committee in Defense of Water and Life (Coordinadora) brought together people from different social classes, “who in daily life had little to do with each other became part of a single group in the streets...” “Water Warriors,” street brigades of men and women from the ranks of unemployed, the poor, youths, and vagabonds, formed and these demonstrated incredible discipline, in the process often giving new meaning to their lives.”⁶⁷ After the first confrontation with the military and the police force, the negotiations between government ministers and the leaders of the Coordinadora gave way to an agreement

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.78.

⁶⁶ We might call water a “fictitious commodity” besides land, labor and money. See Polanyi (1957) for the definition of a “fictitious commodity”. Ahlers (2005) comments that water in virtue of being a natural common resource resists commodification. “Water as a common pool resource demands some level of collective management; as such it has a long tradition of collective decision making processes shaped by historically and culturally specific frameworks on the one hand and bureaucratic, state-induced processes on the other. Furthermore, as a common pool resource, water defies easy commodification. Not only does its collective use and fluidity cause third part effects, its multiple uses and values are resistant to a commensurable exchange value[...] Capturing the value of water solely in economic terms results in a destructive fragmentation of the social and the natural landscape.” p.60.

⁶⁷ Op.cit., p. 80. For a brilliant discussion of the role of women in Water Wars, see Bustamante, Peredo, Udaeta (2005) and for the relationship between gender and water policy in general, see (Eds.) Bennett, Poblete, Rico (2005).

for provision of water, peaceful coexistence and respect for human rights, which involved the establishment of a working committee for revision of the contract signed with the Aguas del Tunari consortium and the laws (especially Law 2029) that benefited private firms at the expense of cooperatives and committees. Nevertheless, the negotiations broke down during the revision phase and the Coordinadora organized “peacefully overtaking the city of Cochabamba” on February 2000, which was violently repressed with the result of a number of wounded and arrests. The government promised to freeze water tariffs at 1998 levels until an agreement was finalized. Apparently, this was far from what the public demanded. In order to continue its pressure on the government, the Coordinadora organized a poll, which asked if people agreed with the privatization of water.

Nearly 50,000 people participated and the results led the Coordinadora to demand that the contract with Aguas del Tunari be annulled and that Law 2029 be immediately modified. As negotiations continued at an impasse, the Coordinadora called for a total work stoppage and the “takeover of the city of Cochabamba” on April 4. Thus began the final battle in the Water war, the two most dramatic weeks in recent Bolivian history.⁶⁸

Faced with unprecedented solidarity and unstoppable rebellion, the government finally announced the cancellation of the contract with the consortium and signed an agreement committing to the return of water management to SEMAPA under the supervision of a board with both governmental and non-governmental organizations and labor organizations. On the basis of the poll carried out by the Coordinadora, the board was authorized to revise the previously enacted Law 2029 and to bring long term solutions to water management. The new version of the law was approved by the Parliament after two weeks.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.86.

The immense struggles in the Bolivian case brought together different people from different social classes, men, women and children as well as people from the urban periphery, the city center and the rural population. Evoking my discussion of the different aspects of radical need forms, this collective participation is to be regarded as the expression of the need to institute a world of shared wealth, to expand the capacities for collective production and self-government. With reference to Lebowitz's views, I had argued for the significance of associating struggles and the new sense of self that thereby emerges with the framework of radical needs. The case of women protestors in the Water Wars provides a perfect demonstration:

In the case of Cochabamba women irrigators, however, a process of self-valorization, in which they recognized the importance of their roles with respect to water, took place by leaps and bounds precisely because the April actions placed them in the eyes of the storm. As one of them pointed out "we have begun to have value, value ourselves". Some women underwent even more profound processes, asking questions about their role as leaders and as activists. Their experiences in the "Water War" generated greater commitment to their organizations increase expectations regarding their roles within those organizations.⁶⁹

A Contemporary Radical Need Form: The Need for Water

The gesture of regarding the need for water as a radical need might seem highly contentious on the commonly acknowledged presupposition that radical needs are only of "higher needs". For example I. Fraser explores radicals as a subtitle in the chapter titled "higher needs". He duly asserts that radical needs are a form of human needs:

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Consequently, radical needs are the modes of existence of human needs that are indicative of heightened class consciousness. For instance the human need for self-realization takes the form of a radical need when its satisfaction poses a threat to capital; that is when a worker is engaging in self-valorizing activity and not the valorizing of capitalist system.⁷⁰

Although Fraser and Heller differ in their interpretations of the need for free time, they both—presumably inspired by Marx’s discussions especially in Chapter 10 of *Capital* - give the need for free time as an example of a radical need “that can inflict severe damage on the capitalist production process.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, conceding that a need does not attain a radical form merely in virtue of its object coined as a “higher need” opens the way for shifting our attention to contemporary struggles and antagonisms involved in the satisfaction and the interpretation of needs. This perspective expands the scope of those needs that might take up a radical form without limiting them to a set of predetermined “higher needs” and allows exploring some needs that are usually regarded as delineating the realm of natural necessity in the form of a radical need. Evidently, an approach that begins with predetermined, mutually exclusive categories would not provide the opportunity of designating a subsistence (natural) need like the need for water as a radical need. For example, neither Maslow’s hierarchy of needs nor Doyal & Gough’s basic needs approach has the conceptual tool for exploring the movement of needs and the form they might take in concrete social antagonisms. Nevertheless, as we have seen in Chapter III, focusing on the movement of need forms through particularity and universality opens the way for shifting our attention to concrete historical conditions and to major social antagonisms. In a previous section, we have seen the difficulties involved in Heller’s distinction between quantitative and qualitative needs as well as her ascription of a

⁷⁰ Fraser (1998), p.159.

⁷¹ Ibid.

radical status only to the latter. In addition to the implications of this distinction for her approach to needs and the hindrances it gives rise to, her insistence indicates that Heller does not pay sufficient attention to the movement and interaction of needs through the forms they take in concrete social relations. Taking the dialectical movement of need forms into account shifts our attention to their mutability and their interrelation. This does not only point to the difficulties involved in making a distinction and its drawbacks for a comprehensive grasp of need dynamics; it also forces us to question the plausibility of categorizing needs and employing strict distinctions in terms of their objects, without any reference to the concrete particular forms they take in the movement of capital. Rather than an analytic depiction of a need merely in terms of its object, we must turn to the particular forms of satisfaction as well as major antagonisms that thereby arise in order to register a need in its radical form. Therefore, we might argue, besides the need for self-realization and the need for free time, the need for water which habitually denotes subsistence, takes up a radical form in its concrete particular form in contemporary capitalist societies. The increasing pervasiveness of the conflict between the needs of capital and human needs through the process of commodification in contemporary societies gives way to the emergence of new forms of radical needs and the expansion of their scope.

In *EPM*, Marx identifies “eat, drink, buy books, go dancing, go to the theatre, theorize...etc” as human needs without bringing in a hierarchy in terms of their objects. Since we share some of these needs with animals, what makes them distinctly *human needs* cannot be explicated in terms of their objects. Rather what makes some needs distinctly human is the form in which they are satisfied. Men transform the crude need of eating or drinking into a human need through concrete forms of interaction with other human beings and with nature. In other words, human

needs emerge from men's interaction with each other and with nature.⁷²

Nevertheless, in another passage Marx maintains that “

Both have the need to breathe; for both the air exists as atmosphere; this brings them into no social contact; as breathing individuals they relate to another only as natural bodies, not as persons. Only the differences between their needs and between their productions give rise to exchange.⁷³

Here we see that for Marx not all natural needs take the form of a human need in the sense previously explained in Chapter III; what distinguish human needs are the different manners of need satisfaction and the manner in which people, unlike animals, come into contact via production and exchange in virtue of their different needs. However, the need for fresh air, according to Marx, brings people into contact only as “natural bodies”. Hence from the perspective of his need for fresh air, a man is considered as a natural body who is imprisoned in his particularity, a being who cannot go beyond himself and his own needs. From the perspective of his need for fresh air, Marx regards man as a “natural body” as opposed to “personhood” which includes interactions that involve property relations as subjects of property.⁷⁴

Moreover, he seems to assume that the need for fresh air gives no reason for bringing men into social contact insofar its satisfaction is possible without getting involved in

⁷² Ibid., p.151.

⁷³ Marx (1999), p.241.

⁷⁴ Andre Gorz refers to the nature of the modification and diversification of natural needs for explaining the dependence that capitalism incessantly reproduces. His example is from the need for air: “ ‘This is true for air, which is immediately apprehended as the need for vacation, for public gardens, for city planning, for escape from the city which becomes the need for tasteful, comfortable housing protected against noise.’ In these examples, Gorz reminds us that ‘the need in question is not a new and rich need, which corresponds to an enrichment of man, it is merely a biological need which now demands “rich” means of satisfaction because the natural environment has become impoverished.’” Cited in Lodziak, Tatman (1997), p.41. A major thesis that Gorz advances is that capitalism creates new needs by constantly changing the conditions necessary for the reproduction of labor power.

exchange and in production. This passage seems to imply that the need for air can be sufficiently characterized within the confines of the sphere of natural necessity.

However, such a characterization is flawed given the contemporary processes of commodification of commons and the permeation of capital to every aspect of life, which are frequently compared to what Marx calls “primitive accumulation” as it refers to capital accumulation outside of the sphere of social production. These developments characteristic of neoliberal phase of capitalism force us to reconsider the status of natural needs like the need for water. In other words, through the mediation of capital, even a basic need like the need for water emerges as a site of antagonism and brings people into social contact via their struggles for decommodification whereby satisfaction of a need as basic as water can hardly be maintained within the confines of its particularity. Hence the claim that the need for air -or similarly the need for water - brings people into contact only as natural bodies does not hold today given the increasing pace of commodification of resources. Qua the subject of the need for water, one can no longer be considered to be a natural body; on the contrary, the processes of commodification of the commons posit the subject of a subsistence need as the “propertyless” excluded from his/her own substance.⁷⁵ As capital commodifies natural resources, it might be said to increase our dependence on capital as it dramatically controls the conditions under which we can produce ourselves. The commodification of basic resources like water implies more and more acquisitions for the satisfaction of a subsistence need and more strikingly it thereby manipulates and expands the realm of natural necessity.

In view of our claims so far, let’s now explore the different dimensions of what it means for the need for water to take the form of a radical need. We might roughly

⁷⁵ Žižek (2009).

recapitulate the reconstruction of radical needs in terms of three interrelated aspects: radical needs as the milieu of human emancipation, the dimension of universality embodied in radical needs and radical needs as collective force against capital. As previously stated, universality of a radical need does not designate a priori principles or a formal property of generality; it does not exist above and beyond particularities, rather it inheres in particularities and animates them to develop beyond themselves. Moreover as a practical category, it arises out of social antagonisms, hence requires turning to concrete conflicts and impasses that the existing social order creates. The universality at stake embodied in a radical need then arises from the struggles as the awareness that the present system creates and it cannot resolve by itself. When we suggest that the need for water takes the form of a radical need, this does not only designate the impossibility of its satisfaction in extant social order. It rather implies establishing the satisfaction of a basic need as the site of a major impasse, a major social conflict. Therefore, regarding the need for water as taking the concrete form of a radical need implies attributing this dimension of universality to the satisfaction of need for water. In its historically particular form, the need for water emerges as inhering in the moment of universality. In contemporary neoliberal capitalism, struggles for its satisfaction necessarily go beyond the particular need for water; they are constructed as struggles against capital and for the creation as well as the manifestation of a common wealth. Commodification and enclosure of the commons exposes the intense antagonism between human needs and the needs of capital through which the need for water attains a radical form. Going beyond the demand concerning the satisfaction of the particular need for water, need for water as a radical need goes beyond its particularity and opens up to a moment of universality as the struggles for its satisfaction represent a moment of rupture in the existing

social structure. Struggles for the satisfaction of the need for water emerge as possible sites for the formation of capacities and powers, which make a claim on the creation of common wealth and the expansion of the capacities for self-government against the increasing dependence upon capital.

Another related dimension of radical needs is that they operate as the milieu of human emancipation. As we have formerly discussed, an important aspect of human emancipation is the inextricability of social and political dimensions of freedom. From this perspective, radical needs - as formerly stated- can neither be sufficiently articulated as needs whose satisfaction is a purely economic matter without any political significance nor can they be addressed in purely political terms without transforming the conditions of man's practical existence. Moreover they enforce an understanding of politics which cannot be contained with an understanding of politics in terms of "providing goods and services" but enforces it as the domain in which "conflicts can be productively articulated and addressed, a domain in which citizens can be transformed by their participation."⁷⁶ The need for water in its particular form as radical becomes inseparable from the need to be free from the increasing dependence of life upon capital and its status as *the* mediator between one's needs and their satisfaction. Struggles for the decommodification of water become the sites for the rising awareness of the import which might be regarded as the expression of the need for restoring men's relationship with the world and with each other.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Žižek (2007).

⁷⁷ The empirical case of Bolivian water wars is an excellent example for this case. Until the Water War, Bolivia was an example for the World Bank and the IMF. During fifteen years Bolivia witnessed the privatization of nearly all the companies and services: electricity, air transportation, hydrocarbons, mining, forest resources, telecommunications, etc. A great social conflict in the city of Cochabamba and other big battle in September of that year in La Paz stopped the privatization processes. A great

The formulation of the need for water as a radical need seems to have an important consequence for the distinction between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom that has been a matter of dispute in the literature. We might say that formulating the need for water in a radical form designates the transition between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom; more specifically it requires that these two realms are not exclusive. Granting that the need for water which represents man's attachment to natural necessity in its most basic form might emerge in the form of a radical need appears to be an explicit demonstration that moments of transcendence exist within the realm of necessity. Earlier, we discussed that the increasing pace of commodification of basic resources expands the sphere of natural necessity. Nevertheless, from the perspective of radical needs, the expansion of the domain of natural necessity and the increasing dependence on capital is not a source of despair since we simultaneously witness the emergence of the form of radical needs, which designates the positive moments of transcendence within capitalism.

Need for water in its concrete radical form can only be demanded and satisfied collectively. Being radical, it is no longer a need for individual access to water but makes a claim on instituting a world of shared wealth, to expand the capacities for collective production and self-government, which arises out of actual social antagonisms and in turn reacts to them. This reaction is not only about setting a limit to capital but involves the collective production of dispossessed as one against

social conflict in the city of Cochabamba and other big battle in September of that year in La Paz stopped the privatization processes. The agents of the struggles were peasant communities and indigenous groups - the propertyless so to speak- and they appealed to the specificity of water as a subsistence need characterized within the realm of natural necessity: "what happens if one loses the access to water? He dies!" For a detailed discussion, Shiva, Vandana. *Water Wars - Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*, South End Press, 2002 and Barlow, Maude. *Mavi Sözleşme*, Yordam Kitap, 2009.

capital. Radical needs stimulated in the propertyless bring people together into a collectivity. The production of collectivity via radical needs does not only aim at setting a limit to capital but it is the manifestation of a collective force for organizing life, for creating common wealth exceeding the bounds of capitalist determinations. In doing so, radical needs force a radical restructuring of capitalist need dynamics. Marx had announced the bearer of radical needs as the workers and he foresaw that capitalism will lead to the split of the society into two classes: property owners and the propertyless workers. Yet it is plausible to say that the major antagonisms of today like ‘the enclosure of the commons, the ecological crisis with the potential of annihilation of humanity itself, imply a process of ‘proletarianization’ of those who are thereby excluded from their own substance; a process that also points towards exploitation.’⁷⁸

Before ending this section, I must address a possible criticism that may be raised against my formulation of the need for water qua the form of a radical need. An important aspect of what I have argued for so far, is that formulating needs in terms of general abstractions is an ineffective way of addressing the problem of need satisfaction and interpretation as it tends to divert attention from their antagonistic nature. However, one might raise a critical question: Isn’t establishing the need for water as a radical need a way of appealing to a general abstraction? Doesn’t this amount to employing both “need for water” and “radical need” as general

⁷⁸ Žižek (2009). The insinuation of capital to different aspects of life has brought the discussions over the formation and the meaning of class into the agenda. In a similar vein, Mario Tronti claims that production is no longer in the factory but that society as a whole has turned into a social factory: “Mario Tronti’s analysis of the tendency of capital to extend its domination from the factory to the rest of society, to transform society into a ‘social factory’ . If such theoretical considerations had indicated that the ‘reserve army’ was not really in reserve at all but actively put to work in the circulation and reproduction of capital (and thus part of the working class), the rebellious self-activity of ‘unwaged’ students and housewives convinced the Italian New Left that they were integral parts of the working class for-itself as well and the analysis of class composition must include the totality of the working class.” Cleaver (1992), p. 115.

abstractions? As a response, let me first recall that my treatment of the capitalist dynamics of needs has followed the movement of need forms through universality and particularity. Hence the question that has guided us with reference to the need for water is: what concrete particular form does the need for water as a general abstraction take in contemporary capitalism? Even though the need for water as a general abstraction is not explanatory insofar as it undermines some important questions as I have formerly mentioned in Chapter II and III, focusing on the movement of forms allows us to capture the need for water in its concrete form and trace the consequences of this need form to major social conflicts. Since distinct need categories are not regarded as mutually exclusive but captured in their movements through each other, we can argue that the general abstraction in its concrete form takes up the form of a radical need. Moreover I do not propose the different dimensions of radical needs as *a priori*, universal principles beyond particularities but rather turn to particular sites of antagonisms for the emergence of these dimensions; hence I derive them from actual human practices and from contemporary struggles. Understood through the movement of needs, radical needs arise out of actual social antagonisms and in turn react to them. Hence, unlike general abstractions, they lend us back to concrete historical antagonisms shaped around the conflict between human needs and the needs of capital.

In the nineteenth century Marx formulated radical needs in terms of needs such as the need for self-realization, the need for free time etc., commonly defined as “higher needs” by commentators. He regarded them as designating men’s need to overcome the realm of natural necessity and evidently he does not reflect on subsistence needs as taking a radical form; this means that he did not consider possible emancipatory potentials to be embodied in a subsistence need like the need

for water. This is also the case for Ian Fraser's account concerning need forms, which I have pursued to a significant extent. Even though I agree with Fraser on the significance of focusing on the movement of need forms, his account does not encapsulate the formulation I suggested of a subsistence need emerging in the form of a radical need. In the contemporary context, a natural need directly takes the form of a radical need in its relation to capital, without having to follow the pattern of movement suggested by Fraser. Nevertheless, needs that contemporarily emerge as sites of major antagonism and the forms they take as radical needs are suggestive of the processes of capital accumulation and the intensity in which capital absorbs human life. The need for water taking the form of a radical need is a phenomenon that pertains to the present-day configuration of capitalism. Looking at which specific needs become a matter of dispute at a certain moment in history is revealing; even in the era of the establishment of industrial capitalism which is commonly regarded by many as its most barbaric phase, presumably a subsistence need taking a radical form would have hardly been imagined. However, with the intensity of neoliberal accumulation of capital today, we are led back to a discussion of survival needs, which brings us face to face with the fact that economic imperatives operate only at the price of social dislocation.⁷⁹ This is not merely a source of despair. What is important is that we can find therein different emancipatory and critical potentials. Therefore, tracing the movement of need forms through radical needs demonstrates both the subversiveness of the contemporary form of capitalism whose degree of destructiveness is easily comparable to its nineteenth century counterpart as well as

⁷⁹ In the chapter titled "Habitation versus Improvement" of *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi illustrates the social dislocation that has taken place in the establishment of the institution of market economy. It can only be established at the price of social dislocation.

the ruptures it embodies for a radical transformation. As such, radical needs constitute the fragility of capitalism.

Normativity and Radical Needs as an Aspect of Immanent Critique

This section argues that the methodological significance of radical needs lies in providing a conceptual tool for an immanent critique of capitalism. Regarded as an aspect of an immanent critique of capitalism, radical needs in turn render the critique of the capitalist dynamics of needs as an inherent aspect of a critique of capitalism. This has the implication that a critical stance with respect to the dynamics of needs requires positing need satisfaction and interpretation as sites of social antagonisms pertinent to capitalist societies. This being the case, the question of needs cannot be raised only as questions of culture or a matter of pure economy without contextualizing need dynamics within the dynamics of capitalism.

Marx's most explicit criticisms against juxtaposing norms against facts and morality against economic phenomena can be found in *Poverty of Philosophy*, where he severely disparages Proudhon's views on political economy. We must note that it is not only Proudhon that is the target of Marx's criticism. One of his targets is the utopian socialist tradition presented by Saint Simon and Fourier, which Marx argues to replace dialectics with the moral language of vices and virtues. Another target is the philanthropic tradition, which he accuses of denying the necessity of antagonism involved in the categories expressing capitalist relations. Finally, he is also critical of the humanitarian school which he, in a similar vein, charges for retaining the belief

in the possibility a more “humane” order of capitalist production.⁸⁰ Although Marx expresses controversial views about morality in different works, it is in this work that he most explicitly objects to resorting to moral considerations in the explanation and the critique of social and economic phenomena. Appealing to extra-economic considerations, according to Marx, is connected with the failure to account for historically specific conditions. This opens the way for taking a historically specific social condition for a natural phenomenon that is valid for all historical epochs. As an example we might turn to Marx’s critique of Proudhon’s understanding of property. Marx cites from Proudhon: “The origin of rent, as property, is, so to speak, extra-economic: it rests in psychological and moral considerations which are only very distantly connected with the production of wealth.” (Vol. II, p. 265)⁸¹ In the following lines, Marx comments:

to try to give a definition of property as of an independent relation, a category apart, an abstract and eternal idea, can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence.... So M. Proudhon declares himself incapable of understanding the economic origin of rent and of property. He admits that this incapacity obliges him to resort to psychological and moral considerations, which, indeed, while only distantly connected with the production of wealth, have yet a very close connection with the narrowness of his historical views.

First this does not achieve a thorough explanation of a historically specific phenomenon and secondly, the critical stance that it tries to maintain with respect to existing social conditions is far too feeble for a “ruthless criticism”. Failing to explain concrete social conditions, it remains at a level which merely prescribes

⁸⁰ In the article titled “The Protectionists, The Free Traders and the Working Class” published in the Belgian paper *Atelier Démocratique*, September 29, 1847, Marx is critical of the proposal for protective tariffs given by List and Gülich, who Marx calls “sincere philanthropists”.

⁸¹ Cited in Marx (1955), p.70. Yet in his book titled “Quest-ce que le propriete?”, Proudhon argues that every epoch has its own institutions, processes that it is falsely acknowledged as natural phenomena. Similar to slavery and monarchy that were considered to be natural in previous historical epochs, he argues, property acquires this status in capitalist society. Yet Marx does not refer to this work and his critique of Proudhon is confined to his views in *Philosophy of Poverty*.

without providing any emancipatory vision. This is evident in his charge that Proudhon's application of the Hegelian dialectic to political economy transformed the dialectic into pure morality:

For him, M. Proudhon, every economic category has two sides – one good, the other bad. He looks upon these categories as the petty bourgeois looks upon the great men of history: *Napoleon* was a great man; he did a lot of good; he also did a lot of harm. The *good side* and the *bad side*, the *advantages* and *drawbacks*, taken together form for M. Proudhon the *contradiction* in every economic category.⁸²

Consequently, for Marx, the moral standpoint eliminates history and overlooks the antagonisms pertaining to capitalist society as well as failing to see the historical emancipatory potentials that are pertinent. By eliminating history out of his account of property, Proudhon, like the political economists who passes off capitalist relations and institutions as natural, renders present day relations as eternal rather than capturing their transitoriness.⁸³

Marx's controversy with Proudhon is one of his most explicit objections to the application of moral terms to economic phenomena. He objects to the application of moral terms to economic phenomena for a couple of reasons: First, it fails to address historical particularity, second it undermines the significance of antagonism and third it tends to eternalize what is historically constructed. We might further add that these all culminate in pure prescriptivism which cannot provide emancipatory vision rooted in actuality. The lack of historical specificity is reflected in the lack of search for emancipatory potentials within existing conditions. Given these reasons, we are

⁸² Ibid., p.49.

⁸³ Concerning this attitude of representing feudal institutions as artificial as opposed to naturalization of capitalist relations, Marx's ironic comment that "Thus, there has been history[since there were the institutions of feudalism], but there is no longer any." is shockingly relevant for the discussions concerning the "end of history".

compelled to ask whether a historical account must necessarily preclude normative considerations. In other words, can we retain the accent on historical specificity only at the expense of normative considerations?⁸⁴

Theoretical Tenets of Immanent Critique

In the critical evaluation of some influential need approaches in the previous chapters, recall that I have elaborated on the shortcomings of starting to think about the social world ‘by an ideal theory of ethics’. I have argued that historical specificity which enters into the analysis only at the level of application of an ideal theory to the present society tends to overlook the contextual and the conflictual nature of need dynamics and undermines questions pertinent to contemporary form of capitalism. In view of these considerations that have informed the thesis right from the beginning, this section elaborates on the possibility of retaining a critical stance without abandoning historically specific need forms and the antagonisms that thereby arise. More specifically, it explores the notion of radical need both as a descriptive *and* a normative notion, which facilitates an immanent critique of capitalism and capitalist need dynamics. So, let’s first turn to how immanent critique is distinct from a critique as a purely normative enterprise and discuss the normative foundations of the latter.

It is not too far fetched to say that the philosophical significance of the concept of “critique” attains its most salient form in the Enlightenment, which has its self-understanding as “the age of criticism to which all must submit” and more

⁸⁴ See Sayers (1998) for a relevant discussion. The crux of Sayers’s argument is that a historical account does not preclude a critical stance.

specifically in the works of Kant, all of whose major works has “critique” in their titles. Undertaking the task of a critique of pure reason, Kant proceeds by setting the tribunal of reason where reason is both the convict and the judge, which assures its lawful claims and dismissing its illegitimate pretensions.⁸⁵ By submitting only to its own laws, set again by the court of its own design, reason comes to its own. Hence the process of critique, for Kant, is a process of self-knowledge. Then Hegel extends this understanding of critique as self-reflection to its ultimate form by bringing under critical scrutiny not only the presuppositions of objective experience but also the constitution of subjectivity and the act of critique itself. This leads him to reveal the constitution of objectivity and subjectivity in their reciprocal relation - a task undertaken in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. For Hegel, due to its formalism, the Kantian critical enterprise fails to posit reason in its operation of forming and transforming “the given”; thereby the tenets of Kantian critique are conjectured outside of the object it criticizes. Nevertheless, according to Hegel, critique must not stand outside the object it criticizes. This is one fundamental tenet that Marx seems to have inherited from the Hegelian critique, a tenet that he appears to have carried to its radical consequences. In *Norm, Critique and Utopia*, S. Benhabib comments that the transformation of the philosophical significance of “critique” from Kant to Marx “can only be understood in the light of Hegel’s rejection of ‘mere criticism’ as practiced by Kant and the Enlightenment.”⁸⁶ Since it is beyond our purpose to provide a thorough clarification of the connection between Hegel and Marx with respect to their understanding of “critique”, let’s briefly switch to what, for Hegel, amounts to mere criticism and to his opposition for the purpose of situating the

⁸⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Benhabib (1986), Introduction.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.21.

normative foundations of immanent critique in Marx's works as framed by Benhabib.

Hegel's essays on *Natural Law* specifically provide a methodological critique of procedures of normative argumentation. One crucial aspect of Hegel's critique concerns the use of "contrary-to-fact" thought experiments, like the "state of nature". As Benhabib notes, Hegel finds the employment of state of nature implausible since it presupposes what it actually must attempt to prove – in other words, it is a *petition principii*. This is argued to be the case insofar as the process of abstraction involved in the presupposition of "state of nature" never spells out the assumption by which the abstraction process is carried out. In other words, the criterion- what is regarded as a part of human nature and what is not, what is considered to be necessary and contingent - is left unjustified.⁸⁷ However, theorists must explain in the light of which criterion they have maintained the counterfactual abstraction; otherwise, one might plausibly argue that the state of nature which is claimed to explicate what is necessary to human nature, is nonetheless a reflection of the present day conditions. In this context, Benhabib reminds us of Hegel's comment that the underlying principle for the *a priori* is *a posteriori*. More specifically, what is presupposed as *a priori* illustrates the human condition in the capitalist society, which means that the condition of modern bourgeois society sets out the tenets of how humans are in the state of nature and what they ought to be.⁸⁸ By doing so, the natural theorists eternalize the current state of society; they tend to take the specific

⁸⁷ This is a part of Hegel's critique of the opposition between formalism and empiricism. Hegel concludes that empiricism is dogmatism since it proceeds from givens for which it cannot provide a criterion for. "What was supposed to portray the 'natural condition of mankind' turns into an image abstracted from the condition of individuals as they are in contemporary society." Ibid., p. 24.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.25.

historical moment as expressing an eternal, unchangeable state of human beings. For Hegel, this is not merely a methodological point. He insists that such abstractions tend to destroy genuine conceptions of ethical life since “individuals are seen to be complete outside of the bonds of the ethical, as long as their nature is juxtaposed to life in society, the relations between the individual and totality remain accidental.”⁸⁹ This implies a bifurcation between individual against universal, economics against politics and morality against ethical life. Hegel argues that natural theorists then attempt to provide a link in this bifurcated life by organizing the interactions of men and their external relations in terms that are not regarded as essential to collective life.⁹⁰ This critique is part of Hegel’s critical stance with respect to the opposition between formalism and empiricism. Hegel concludes that empiricism is dogmatism since it proceeds from givens for which it cannot provide a criterion for. “What was supposed to portray the ‘natural condition of mankind’ turns into an image abstracted from the condition of individuals as they are in contemporary society.”⁹¹ By contrast, an immanent critique opens the way for showing that what is regarded as a “theoretical assumption” such as the state of nature expresses a *truth* about bourgeois society. Hegel is similarly critical of Kantian formalism. Formalism of the Kantian law of freedom, he criticizes, cannot create content but is operative only on the content given to it. For Hegel, Kantian moral psychology illustrates reason as the capacity of abstracting from the given content devoid of the capacity to transform and shape it. Hence both empiricism and formalism are criticized by Hegel for

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Hegel is equally critical of Kant’s and Fichte’s formalism. The formalism of the Kantian law of freedom, he criticizes, cannot create content but is operative on the content given to it. Hence in the Kantian moral psychology Hegel argues, reason emerges as the capacity of abstracting from the given content without the capacity to transform and shape it. See Ibid., Chapter 1.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.24.

creating bifurcations, which in turn, operate as their background. Immanent critique might then be regarded as Hegel's response to both the natural law ontology and Kantian prescriptivism.

Marx is similarly a cornerstone of the age of criticism, pondering upon both its theoretical tenets as well as its practical implications; similar to Kant, in most of his major works he sees his task as undertaking a "critique". In "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing", written as a letter to Ruge, Marx articulates that a critique is ruthless in two senses: A critique must not be afraid of its own conclusions and it must not to be afraid of being in conflict with the powers dominant in the present day society. Marx does not regard critique merely as a theoretical enterprise *per se* and identifies it with real struggles. However, what might not be as evident - yet what I take to be as fundamental- is that for Marx a radical critical stance appears to comprise an ethical stance in its demand for readiness and the responsibility to disclaim and abolish itself as the manifestation of its own radicality, which presumably involves a unique sense of commitment and openness.

In its Hegelian origins, inherited by Marx, the procedure of immanent critique is revealed as the critique of the unexamined givens. It is a procedure for revealing the uncritical relation of the knower to the conditions out of which knowledge emerges. As in the case of the critique of natural right theories for Hegel, or the in Marx's critique of the Robinsonades of the political economists, the immanent critique provides the opportunity to take the norm back to its ground in actual bourgeois society. Immanent critique is then undertaken as primarily a critique of dogmatism and formalism,

that is the critique of the myth of the given and of the juxtaposition to the given of a formal principle to which the former must be subordinated. Both content and form, the given and the "ought" are reflected to their ground and

shown to be products of a form of consciousness embedded in a form of life bifurcated and alienated.⁹²

As we have mentioned in the previous paragraph, this is not solely a methodological point. It involves what Benhabib calls the “defetishizing critique”⁹³. To the extent that immanent critique is a procedure whereby the given is shown not to be a natural fact, it undertakes revealing that the existence is historically and socially constructed and thus a changeable reality. By doing so, it demonstrates that social necessity is the result of praxis and shifts our attention to the real possibilities of transcendence that exist in actuality. These equally render immanent critique a critique of utopianism as it refrains from projecting pure prescriptivism which does not have its roots in actuality. Unlike a purely normative notion, immanent critique searches for the possibility of “ought” in “is”. The task of immanent critique is to show that the actual is not merely the given but “to understand the given as actuality”, which is also to criticize it by showing what it could be but is not.⁹⁴

Benhabib suggests that Marx unfolds two aspects of immanent critique – the categorical and the normative. The categorical aspect suggests that Marx does not juxtapose his own definitions and categories with the terms of political economy. Rather, he starts off with the categories of political economy and attempts to show how they turn into their opposites. “Through an internal exposition and deepening of the already available results of political economy, he shows that these concepts are

⁹² Ibid, p.42.

⁹³ See Ibid., Chapter 2, pp.44-70 for a detailed discussion.

⁹⁴ Benhabib refers to Hegel’s controversial claim that “reason has always existed but not always in a rational form” to explain the import of the category of actuality and to differentiate it from the given. This implies, she argues, that reason is not only principle of thought but it must externalized, embodied in the external world. Reason can only be in the world by being embodied in it. Also see Sayers (1998) for a similar account of immanent critique.

already self-contradictory.”⁹⁵ The unity of labor and property as posited by political economy provides an example. Even though political economy postulates labor as the only title to property, the capitalist mode of production is based upon their radical separation and labor provides no title of property to the products of labor. Benhabib cites another example:

If capital is defined as self-expanding value and if the increase for the value of capital is sought only in the sphere of exchange of commodities, then either the exchange of commodities violates the principle of equivalence or the self-expansion of value of capital becomes unintelligible...If one accepts the traditional definition of exchange value then one cannot explain the increase in the value of capital.⁹⁶

With the recognition that the increase of value of capital cannot be explained within the limits of the exchange of commodities, one is forced to consider the internal relation between exchange and production process and regard them as the moments of the realization of capital. Therefore, immanent critique does not evaluate political economy by introducing external criteria, but forces it to confront the consequences of its own terms. The example, of course, demonstrates the significance of totality of relations for immanent critique as we have previously mentioned. Immanent critique operates through the totality of relations since this allows revealing the discrepancy of actuality and its self-understanding. For example, if exchange and production were not regarded in their unity as the realization of capital, then it would not be possible to show that categories turn into their opposites on passing from exchange of commodities to the production process.

With respect to the normative critique, the shift from the moment of exchange into the labor process evinces the change in the social meanings of the norms of

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.106.

equality and freedom as they pertain to bourgeois society. The shift itself sets the stage for the normative aspect of critique. “When the norms of bourgeois society are compared with the actuality of social relations in which they are embodied, the discrepancy between ideal and actuality becomes apparent. This juxtaposition of norm to actuality is the second aspect of immanent critique.”⁹⁷ Once we acknowledge that the ideals and norms are embodied in social practices and that these norms in turn legitimize the extant society, we can then see that the critique of political economy is a critique of society’s self understanding. Hence the normative foundations of immanent critique are rooted in the gap between actuality and ideality expressed as a certain self-understanding - a form of consciousness.

Radical Need as a Neglected Component of Immanent Critique

The link between radical needs and immanent critique appears to be neglected both in need theories and in critical theory. On the one hand, theories that draw attention to radical needs fail to relate them to the theoretical lexicon of immanent critique while the ones that investigate the possibility of immanent critique of capitalism do not regard radical needs as its inherent aspect. From a critical standpoint, construing this link provides an understanding of need which can be operative in the mediation of “ought” by “is”. Such a critique does not start by juxtaposing a purely normative conception of need against facts but intends to capture unrealized needs as potentials that emerge through the opposition between human needs and needs of capital.

Given the theoretical tenets of immanent critique, we can advance the thesis that radical needs as we have formerly discussed provide the conceptual tool for an

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.107.

immanent critique of capitalist dynamics of needs. Understanding radical needs as an aspect of immanent critique requires an understanding of “need” that is both descriptive as well as normative. Immanence of critique requires that “need” does not operate as a purely normative notion, prescribing how the society should be organized or ought to be transformed. In other words, need is not regarded as a norm to be juxtaposed to facts as part of a “criteriological inquiry”. On the contrary, analyzing the movement of need forms that culminates in the emergence of radical needs implies tracing major social conflicts and exposing need satisfaction and interpretation as sites of contemporary antagonisms. Unlike a category of need commonly formulated in purely normative terms to be juxtaposed to wants and preferences, a radical need might be regarded as the expression of antagonistic relations pertinent to capitalist society. Nevertheless, radical need is not a purely descriptive notion, which uncritically acknowledges existing need dynamics. Rather radical needs embody the “ought” that is immanent in capitalist need dynamics and in the antagonisms that thereby arise. They involve the critical standpoint of the struggles for the future that demand the transfiguration of capitalist society. We might claim that radical needs emerge out of contemporary struggles as forces that in turn react to them and they embody the moments of transcendence in capitalism. Hence they do not merely designate contemporary antagonisms that demarcate the social limits of capital but they designate the power of constituting an alternative future “in, against and potentially beyond capital”. While they have their roots in the practical existence of contemporary capitalist societies, they are characterized by their immanent world-disclosing potential. From the critical standpoint, this might be regarded as an attempt to demonstrate how the “ought” is mediated by the “is”. Immanent critique, through radical needs, aims to show that this society contains

within itself the unrealized potential for expressing the most developed social relations and the creation of social wealth uncontainable within capitalist relations, which appears through the opposition of human needs and needs of capital.

Although Heller's formulation of radical needs seems to open the way for regarding them as an aspect of immanent critique, her view that there is a radical separation between the society of associated producers and the present capitalist society and that they do not admit *any* continuity seems to testify just the opposite. Similarly, her demarcation of radical needs in terms of a qualitative nature, which for her distinctly characterize the need structure of the society of associated producers at the expense of capitalist need structure might be said to endorse this view.

The system of needs under capitalism belongs to capitalism. But it is precisely this "pure" society which by developing the productive forces sufficiently to overcome the division of labor, can and does create needs that belong to its being but do not belong to its system of needs. Thus only radical needs enable man [...] to bring about a social formation which is radically, "from the root", different from the previous one, a society in which the radically new system of needs will be different from all earlier ones. It is therefore absurd to try to use the current, existing structure of needs as a basis for judging the system of needs which is Marx's precondition for the society of associated producers.⁹⁸

In her critique of Heller's *Theory of Need in Marx*, Kate Soper rightly comments that any attempt at a theory of need must raise the question of the relationship between the evaluative thrust of Marx's critique and its factual content. Granting that historical materialism does invite questions about needs, and that Heller's formulation of radical needs has critical import for the attempt to reconcile the objective and the evaluative aspects of Marx's analysis of capitalism, Soper criticizes Heller for ascribing radical needs an ambiguous ontological status. She maintains that Heller fails to account for the practical existence of radical needs and to give

⁹⁸ Heller (1974), p. 99.

concrete legitimization to the concept. Evidently, Soper's concern with the ontological status of radical needs that she expresses as "radical needs *qua* unfulfilled belong to capitalism and *qua* fulfilled belong to society of associated producers" is intimately related with the insurmountable gap that Heller introduces between the capitalist structure of needs and the needs of the society of associated producers. In this context, Soper asks: "Why is it so absurd to use capitalist system of needs as a standpoint from which to judge the socialist? What other base do we have anyway?" Addressing to Heller's account of radical needs in a similar context, Ian Fraser likewise argues that Heller fails to recognize the positive moments of transcendence within capitalism, which might be regarded as reflecting her failure to see the continuity between the present and the future society as well as the respective status of radical needs. Heller wants to suggest that a 'radical need' can only be radical if is not satisfied in any way within any given society. By definition, this implies that a "radical need" can only exist in the heads of the people or workers. How then does such a "mental need" arise? Heller suggests that the development of productive forces creates needs which belong to capitalism's 'Being' but not to its system of needs."⁹⁹

Fraser draws attention to the fact that, given Heller's view, free time, which Marx regards as allowing people to transform themselves into new subjects, would emerge as a theoretical construct or as existing only in the minds of the workers. Nevertheless, "transcendence of capitalism is present not simply in the heads of the workers, but in their everyday actions in capitalism through resisting the imposition of work and constituting their own autonomy...the positive power to constitute new

⁹⁹ Fraser (1998), p.154.

practices within capital has no place in Heller's analysis."¹⁰⁰ Given her neglect of the role of struggles for radical needs along with the gap she posits between the present day and the future society, Heller does not open up any theoretical space for interrogating the practical existence of radical needs and the moments of transcendence within capitalism, which in turn leave her with the choice of ascribing them the status of theoretical constructs or mental states. This might be one reason for Heller's moving away from the idea of radical needs in her later works and her persistence to remain at the level of empirical needs to avoid any imputation of needs.

By contrast, Marx has emphasized that the seeds of the future are to be found in the present. In the *Communist Manifesto*, he writes that "within the old society, the elements of a new one have been created." His refusal of utopian projects is to a significant extent based on this idea expressed in the well-known passage: "Communism is...not a state of affairs which is to be established, as ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise."¹⁰¹ However, the insurmountable gap that Heller conceives between the present day and the future seems to prevent her from seeing the moments of transcendence within capitalism. As the expression of the potential of transcendence, radical needs are not theoretical constructs but they designate real possibilities that arise from actual antagonisms. Heller's failure to appreciate the significance of this point with respect to radical needs seems to be due to her failure to acknowledge the significance of dialectical movement of need forms, their status

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.155.

¹⁰¹ Marx (1969).

with respect to the relation between theory and practice, the different ways in which needs are the sites of dependence as well as emancipation and the import of understanding them as an aspect of totality of social relations. What is more, once we construe radical needs as an aspect of totality of capitalist relations; and thereby as an internal aspect of an immanent critique of capitalism, we can further see the implausibility of regarding capitalist dynamics of needs as “false” or of reducing the capitalist need dynamics to “mere having” as it was the case with Heller’s account.

As we have suggested, constituting a link between radical needs and immanent critique does not only highlight the hitherto neglected role of radical needs, but it might further facilitate an immanent critical standpoint. Exploring a particular need in the form of a radical need might further be evocative of the different contexts and struggles that the motivation to act collectively and the possibility of human emancipation emerges a real possibility within historically particular relations. In contemporary capitalism where human life becomes increasingly encircled by capital, “we have reached a stage where it is easier to think of the total annihilation of humanity than to imagine a change in the organization of a manifestly unjust and destructive society.”¹⁰² Hence having the conceptual apparatus that shifts our attention to the concrete sites of creation of new meanings, to the exploration of the changes in visions pointing towards beyond capitalist relations and the immanent moments of rupture that take place in contemporary struggles is essential for expanding our critical space. In virtue of their world disclosing potential within capitalist relations, radical needs might be said to expand our possibilities for an immanent critique of capitalism.

¹⁰² Holloway (2010), p.7.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

“What does it mean to raise the question of needs as a political question today?” This question that traverses the present thesis is fundamental yet relatively unexplored in contemporary political philosophy. Not only neoliberal theories and the prevalent economic paradigm regard questions concerning need dynamics as insignificant but also their opponents do not see the critique of capitalist need dynamics as an inherent aspect of a critique of capitalism. What is more, the existing attempts that speculate on needs, for different reasons fail to capture the historically particular nature of capitalist need dynamics and to reveal need satisfaction and need interpretation as a contentious space. If the argument and the exposition I have provided is cogent, then Hegel and Marx’s critical inquiry into the dialectical movement of need forms provides a backdrop against which we might begin to frame the question of needs as a political question. A theoretical treatment of the dialectical movement of needs provides the conceptual tools for grasping need concepts as concepts of interaction moving in different forms through production, exchange, circulation and distribution and for conjecturing on capitalist need dynamics in terms of the social dialectic between dependence and independence. However, an attempt that emphasizes the import of historical particularity for a properly critical approach must be able to address the historically particular problems that pertain to contemporary context in order to be consistent. Similarly however, this must not hamper its claim at a critical edge with respect to capitalist need dynamics. In other words, the challenge is to break the dichotomous mode of thinking between addressing historical nature of

needs on the one hand and the critical attitude with respect to capitalist need dynamics.

In view of these considerations and as a response to our initial question, I have attempted to reconstruct the unexplored notion of radical needs as a moment of capitalist need dynamics. Radical needs, as I argued in Chapter V, facilitate our understanding of contemporary need dynamics, the distinct forms in which the conflict between human needs and the needs of capital emerge. Marx's — though infrequently — refers to radical needs within the context of human emancipation. This in turn has allowed me to further claim that radical needs represent the moment in which need claims can neither be sufficiently articulated as mere economic claims at the expense of political significance nor can they be addressed as a strictly political issue without transforming the conditions of practical existence. Representing a moment of rupture within the existing order, radical needs as a real possibility within capitalism set before us the horizon of transcendence of existing order. As I have argued in Chapter V, this further allows us to retrieve “radical needs” as a powerful tool for immanent critique.

The critical examination and a reconstruction of the notion of radical needs opens up a novel theoretical space in the discussion concerning the possibility of raising the question of needs as a political question today. My theoretical treatment goes beyond emphasizing the historically transient nature of a particular need dynamics. Eventually, I have argued that struggles against capitalism and for the creation of a common world are central for understanding needs. Accordingly, radical needs are not only the expression of objectified relations but they are also the sites of struggles to objectify them. Hence, a need taking a radical form is the

embodiment of collective capacities and powers that demonstrate the real possibility of a world that exists within the present.

In Marxist scholarship, radical needs are usually regarded as “higher needs”, whose satisfaction is not possible within capitalism, which in turn operate as “the motor of transcendence”. Against this tendency to associate radical needs as a higher need form, my argument has aimed to demonstrate the need for water, which is commonly labeled under the general category of subsistence needs, as a radical need form. My intention was not to suggest it as *the sole* radical need in contemporary context, but I do intend to accentuate the import of formulating a need that is usually ascribed to the realm of natural necessity in a radical form for highlighting the peculiarity of neoliberal capitalist need dynamics. Especially through the commodification of the commons, we witness the expansion of the realm of natural necessity and are led back to discussions of subsistence, which dialectically reveals the moments of rupture within the existing order. Let me note that this theoretical gesture hints at a possible further study: an exploration of the notion of radical needs as a powerful conceptual tool within the discussions concerning the commodification of commons in the sense of natural resources as well as “common” – employed by Hardt and Negri- in the sense of social practices we establish, languages we create and the different modes of sociality, etc.

In his article “Future of The Commons”, D.Harvey alludes to J.Rancière’s understanding of politics: “Indeed, “politics” as J. Rancière has remarked, is the sphere of activity of a common that can only ever be contentious.”¹ Analogously, a political discourse of needs reveals discussions over needs not merely as discussions

¹ Harvey (2011), pp.102-103.

of “providing services” but delineates need interpretation and need satisfaction as a contentious space.² Framing the discourse on needs as a political discourse in view of radical needs aims to reconfigure the very terms and the terrain in which the conflicts over needs are represented. Radical need discourse does not presuppose the position of the subject of needs as the victims or the powerless, or hear need claims as “cry for help”, sufferings. On the contrary, it reveals need claims as powers and capacities in opposition to a pre-given logic of the social order. A political discourse of need formulated in the terms I have presented intends to make visible transcendence as a real possibility within the world that it bespeaks from and to expand our present possibilities for critical thinking.

² For a detailed discussion of J. Rancière’s views concerning politics, see Rancière (2001), Rancière (2007) and Deranty (2003). For the application of his views to a politics of need and for a relevant formulation of radical needs, see Schaap (2009).

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