

Journal of Social Sciences

Vol. 48 No.1 (2018):

<http://www.library.polsci.chula.ac.th/journal2>

Faculty of Political Science

Chulalongkorn University

Big Society, Free Economy, and Strong State: Bonefeld's Open Marxism and the Critique of Political Economy**

Watcharabon Buddharaksa*

Abstract

This paper introduces Open Marxism as a critical Marxist school of thought to a wider readership and constructs an Open Marxist theoretical framework to understand contemporary political economy. This paper argues that Werner Bonefeld's Open Marxism is a beneficial tool to understand contemporary political economy. It offers three distinct theories of the Big society, economic freedom, and the strong state. Bonefeld addresses the vitality of these three concepts in his critique of political economy, offering theoretical terrains for 'human agency' and rejecting determinist and positivist conceptions of society.

He posits that society should be a 'subject' of human social life and humans need to be the subject of their own conceptions of human social, economic and political destinies. For Bonefeld, society is the analytical point of departure. The economy and the state together play important roles in creating the human economy, a system that attempts to liberate humans from existing capitalist social relations, and achieving that aim is the task of ordinary human agencies, like us all.

Keywords: Werner Bonefeld, Open Marxism, critique, Big society, economic freedom, strong state, political economy

*Assistant Professor in Politics, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University, Muang District, Phitsanulok 65000. Email: watcharabonb@nu.ac.th

**This article is part of the research project entitled 'Werner Bonefeld: Open Marxism and the Critique of Political Economy' which received funding from Naresuan University.

Received June 5, 2017; Accepted July 11, 2017

วารสารสังคมศาสตร์
ปีที่ 48 ฉบับที่ 1 (2561):....

<http://www.library.polsci.chula.ac.th/journal2>

คณบดีวิชาศาสตร์
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

สังคมใหญ่ เศรษฐกิจเสรี และรัฐที่เข้มแข็ง: โบเนเฟล์ดกับการวิพากษ์เสรีนิยมแบบออร์โด**

วัชรพล พุทธวิรกษา*

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มุ่งนำเสนอแนวความคิดของสำนักคิดโอบเพ่นมาร์กชิสม์ และมุ่งสร้างกรอบทฤษฎีเพื่อทำความเข้าใจเศรษฐกิจการเมืองร่วมสมัย บทความเสนอว่าแนวคิดโอบเพ่นมาร์กชิสม์ของเวอร์เนอร์ โบเนเฟล์ดมีความสำคัญและช่วยในการทำความเข้าใจเศรษฐกิจการเมืองร่วมสมัยได้ และเสนอทฤษฎีสำคัญของโบเนเฟล์ดสามเรื่อง ได้แก่ แนวคิดเรื่อง “สังคมใหญ่” เศรษฐกิจเสรี และรัฐที่เข้มแข็ง โบเนเฟล์ดขับเน้นความสำคัญของแนวคิดดังกล่าวเพื่อมุ่งสร้างพื้นที่เชิงทฤษฎีที่รองรับ “ตัวแสดงที่เป็นมุขย์ธรรมดा” และปฏิเสธมุ่งมองเกี่ยวกับสังคมเป็นกลไกและปฏิฐานิยม

โบเนเฟล์ดเสนอว่าสังคมนั้นต้องเป็นองค์ประธานหลักของชีวิตทางสังคมของมนุษย์และมนุษย์เองต้องเป็นองค์ประธานหลักในการกำหนดความเป็นไปทางสังคม เศรษฐกิจ และการเมืองของมนุษย์เอง สำหรับโบเนเฟล์ดนั้น สังคมเป็นจุดตั้งต้นในการวิเคราะห์ ส่วนเศรษฐกิจและรัฐมีบทบาทสำคัญร่วมกันในการสร้างสรรค์เศรษฐกิจของมนุษย์ ซึ่งเป็นระบบที่พยายามปลดปล่อยมนุษย์ออกจากความสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมแบบทุนนิยม และการบรรลุซึ่งเป้าหมายดังกล่าวนั้นก็เป็นหน้าที่ของเราทุกคน ผู้เป็นมนุษย์ธรรมดา

คำสำคัญ: เวอร์เนอร์ โบเนเฟล์ด, โอบเพ่นมาร์กชิสม์, การวิพากษ์, สังคมใหญ่, เศรษฐกิจเสรี, รัฐที่เข้มแข็ง, เศรษฐกิจการเมือง

*ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ภาควิชารัฐศาสตร์และรัฐประศาสนศาสตร์ คณะสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร ดำเนินการ เมื่อ จังหวัดพิษณุโลก อีเมล watcharabonb@nu.ac.th

**บทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของโครงการวิจัยเรื่อง “เวอร์เนอร์ โบเนเฟล์ด: โอบเพ่นมาร์กชิสม์และการวิพากษ์เศรษฐกิจการเมือง” โดยได้รับทุนสนับสนุนการวิจัยจากมหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร

ได้รับความ 5 มิถุนายน 2560; อนุมัติให้จัดพิมพ์ 11 กรกฎาคม 2560

Introduction

The overwhelming theories of Liberalism, Neoclassical, Neoliberalism, Keynesianism, and Economic Marxism¹ have been the subject of discussion among mainstream political economists about political economy and international political economy. These orthodox schools of thought provide a disengaging account of a single aspect of society, state, and economic relationship². Alternatively from these conventional approaches, this paper sees that a radical and comprehensive framework about the society, state, and economy is required. Thus this paper contests traditional accounts of political economy by offering a critical theoretical contribution of 'Open Marxism' (henceforth-OM), looking, more specifically, through 'Werner Bonefeld's OM', as a challenging theoretical framework for understanding a neoliberal society.

This paper has two major aims. Firstly, it aims to introduce the British originated critical school of Marxism so-called 'Open Marxism' through the theoretical contribution of Werner Bonefeld³, one of the founders of this radical school of thought. Secondly, the paper aims to critically construct a radical and profound theoretical perspective that will increase understanding of contemporary political economy⁴. This study holds that Bonefeld's OM is an effective radically constructive idea to grasp the complexities of contemporary neoliberal societies. The paper argues that there are two crucial features helpful to that concern which are the concept of society and the relations between state and economy.

The paper will begin with answering the very foundational questions of why OM and why Bonefeld and then provide a brief overview of the so-called OM school of thought. The second section focuses on a critical 'point of departure' of the Bonefeld critique of political

¹By this I mean those who perceive Marxism as economic determinism and employ quantitative and positivist methods to analyse their political economic issues.

²On the failure of orthodox IPE theories see, for example, Burnham (1994)

³Bonefeld's profile can be read from here <https://www.york.ac.uk/politics/people/werner-bonefeld/> and a number of his works can be reached here <https://york.academia.edu/WernerBonefeldYork>

⁴The author defines the term 'contemporary' in relation to debates in the context of the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE) in the UK from the 1980s to the present, under the auspices of Capital & Class journal. In addition, the term 'political economy' employed in this article to the critique of relationship between state, society, mode of production, labour, and capital in the neoliberal era which are major discussions in the CSE and Capital & Class also.

economy which is the notions of society. In the recent years, Bonefeld has described his ideas about society appearing in two major aspects of society as a subject of a wronged world and the Big society as a mode of political governmentality. This section acts as a starting point to his related concepts of the state and the economy. Section three then offers relationships between Bonefeld's notion of free economy and the state. The section will deal with his idea of the strong state in relation to both the society and the economy. In terms of the economy, he means 'political economy' and this entails the interrelated features of human economy, politics of life, and contemporary political forces. In the final section, the paper provides overall concluding remarks, benefits, limitations, implications, and opportunities for employing Bonefeld's Open Marxism as a critical political economy framework.

I. Open Marxism, Openness, and Werner Bonefeld

This section aims to introduce the British originated critical school of Marxism so-called 'Open Marxism' focusing on its origin and major arguments of the school of thought. The section then explains why we should study works of Werner Bonefeld, one of the founders of this radical school of thought, and existing studies on Bonefeld in the field of political economy. Open Marxism, the name derived by Johannes Agnoli's position in a book that he published with Mandel (Bonefeld 2013b), is an internationally well-known school of thought dating from the late 1980s characterized by the 'closed' characters of Rational-Choice Marxism, positivistic Marxism, and deterministic structuralist position as influenced by Althusser and Poulantzas (Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis 1992, ix-xi). The OM demands 'openness' in both empirical research in political economy, and more crucially openness of the Marxist categories themselves. OM claims that openness could be seen as, for example, a dialectic of subject and object, of form and content, of theory and practice. However, what makes OM distinct is its view on the crisis-ridden characteristics of a social world and, for OM, crisis enunciates itself as critique (Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis 1992, xi; Bonefeld 1987). OM, in fact, is not an entirely new novel idea (Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis 1992, xii), but is a school of thought which shares broad theoretical values in terms of openness and critique⁵. In terms of critique,

⁵Although they share core theoretical stances among the Open Marxists, each of them has variety of focuses on their contemporary critique of political economy, for example, epistemology, dialectics, theory

OM is a critique of political economy and the unravelling of the genuine content of social contradictions behind the diversity of deterministic forms of contemporary political economy.

Existing works in the field of contemporary Marxism and radical social thought that have employed OM as their theoretical perspective can be found in various ways. For instance, Sutton (2013) develops his OM approach in order to cope with the hidden essence of state power in relation to the theory of imperialism. Likewise, focusing on the state, Tsolakis (2010) argues that the state, for OM, is seen as a contradictory organization of subjection, a necessary constituent of underlying production relations (Tsolakis 2010, 402). In addition, Gordon (2005) employs OM to explain the neoliberal state by arguing that the central role of the state exhibits itself in “public policing”, under the guise of law and order, through monetarist and neoliberal restructuring.

The OM approach has been widely regarded and been employed in various aspects of contemporary political economy such as the concept of class (Azeri 2015); on the matter of workers in the film history (Spence 2010); on the matter of spatial politics (Charnock 2010); political economy of Sino-American imbalance (Lee 2014); political economy of economic restructuring in Turkey (Erol 2016); and as a framework to cope with the politics of policy making in Britain (Rogers 2009a; Rogers 2009b). OM is not only welcomed and used as a theoretical framework, but it also opened up space for theoretical debates with several schools of thought such as network theory and autonomist Marxism (Soderberg and Netzen 2010), Foucauldian (Bruff 2009) and Neo-Gramscian approaches (Bieler, Bonefeld, Burnham and Morton 2006), and the discussion on the concept of social form (Roberts 2002).

Amongst a number of works using OM in a variety of forms, this paper argues that the systematic framework of a specific Open Marxist of Werner Bonefeld's is missing from contemporary critical Marxist literature. As one of the founders of the OM, Bonefeld, as a theoretical protagonist of the school, notions of his OM are crucial and should be critically scrutinized. Although there are voluminous works employing Bonefeld's ideas as theoretical tools to cope with contemporary capitalism, only a few focus on Bonefeld himself as a main subject of study. This paper argues that Bonefeld had already placed himself as a veteran contemporary Marxist thinker through his numerous life-long studies about OM and the critique

and practice, crisis, value theory, class, normative values, state theory, historical materialism, etc. (see Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis 1992a; 1992b)

of contemporary political economy in various aspects. Therefore, this paper aims to critically construct a radical and profound theoretical perspective based on Bonefeld's OM that will help in understanding contemporary political economy. This study holds that Bonefeld's OM is an effective, radical and constructive idea to grasp understand complexities of contemporary neoliberal societies. The paper takes Bonefeld's notion of society as a critical point of departure (Bonefeld 2014, 57) because society is the origin of social relations which, created by man, led to the creation of the state, the market, the rule of law, and everything. Then in the following sections, the paper will show his conceptions of the Big society, and the relationship between the free economy and the strong state as two distinct features of Bonefeld's critique of political economy respectively.

II. Society as subject and the Big society

Although this paper takes Bonefeld's concept of society as a point of departure to construct Bonefeld's Open Marxist theoretical perspective to cope with contemporary political economy, it is argued here that Bonefeld's notion of society cannot be considered separately from his conceptions of the state and the critique of political economy. In his Open Marxist dialectical perspective, he rejects the fragmentation of traditional social sciences and sees that rather than focusing on an isolated attribute, analysis should begin with the whole and then look for the substantive abstraction which constitutes interconnected social phenomena (Bonefeld, Brown and Burnham 1995).

Bonefeld's critique of political economy has been recognized for more than three decades. However, his earlier works from the late 1980s to the 2000s have rarely explicitly dealt with the notion of society. This paper argues that, for Bonefeld, the concept of society, as it has been more overtly presented in recent years, can be examined in two major categories; society as a subject of a perverted world and society as a mode of mental government which he named the 'Big society'⁶.

The first aspect of Bonefeld's notion of society is a 'society as a subject' of a perverted world. He argues that capitalist society is a false society and it is a perverted society. The capitalist society has been perverted for a reason because it has been created by men only.

⁶This term 'Big' here is capitalized by Bonefeld as it is his own concept. Therefore, this paper will follow him and use the term 'Big society' throughout the paper.

The conviction that society is false because of men is contrary to the positivist standpoint that perceives that human society appears in each historical form by natural evolution. Bonefeld intensely rejects naturalness of society (Bonefeld 2015a, 1). He argues that there are two approaches to society; traditional theory of society and critical theory of society.

For the traditional theory of society, society is reduced to be just a part of economic effect. In this view, society is a natural phenomenon and it is governed by invisible economic law of nature. That is, natural law is, in other words, a natural necessity. And because society is a result of natural needs, therefore in this perspective nature cannot be changed. Likewise, society as a result of nature cannot be changed freely by human actions. Within this worldview, the world of invisible natural economic forces, human agency is only an 'object' of an uncontrollable world and it is not the social subject of his/her own social reality (Bonefeld 2015a, 3; Bonefeld 2015b).

On the contrary, a critical theory of society sees that society is not only an abstraction to the individual but is organized and produced by men (Bonefeld 2013a). Bonefeld assumes this standpoint in order to explain his notion of society. He argues that within the limitation of traditional theory of society, its determinist explanation of economic forces or economic necessities over human society explains nothing. A critical perspective of society argues that society, especially the capitalist society we live in today, is socially constructed, not by nature. For Bonefeld, society is not an object of economic abstractions but it is a subject of a life-world of interpersonal relations (Bonefeld 2016c, 74). Critical theory of society denies positivist and determinist standpoints of society and provides a valuable theoretical position that includes human agency in its considerations.

However, what is the significance of knowing differences between traditional and critical theories of society? This paper has argued that society is a critical point of departure for grasping contemporary political economy. The implication of seeing society as a subject of human social relations is helpful as it 'opens up' space for class struggle. At one time, society was shaped by men and classes of people characterized as bourgeoisie, proletariat, money, profit, exploitation, etc. and were the products of men themselves. Bonefeld's notion of society as a subject of capitalist society points out a starting point in class struggle in order to subvert the perversion of invisible economic forces that govern all of us. In short, the first meaning of society for Bonefeld is based on the notion that society was made and is maintained by men

and not by nature. Society is not naturally governed by any law of economic need. The essence of economics is that society is men in relation to other men⁷ (Bonefeld 2015b).

The second aspect of Bonefeld's notion of society is that society is a mode of mental government. He names this the concept of 'Big society' (Bonefeld 2015d). Bonefeld's idea of Big society holds that the Big society is opposite to the small society. The Big society is not opposite of the small state as commonly known in liberalism (Bonefeld 2015d, 2). Small society, for him, is the society with the character of human spirit of creation, discovery and competition, which is suppressed by an all-pervasive state. The pervasiveness of the state is not a sign of strength, but a sign of weakness. Within a small society, the state is weak and it only deals with quantitative (not quality) aspects of social life. Bonefeld argues that the state of pure quantity does not govern society. It is, in fact, a state of ungovernability (Bonefeld 2015d, 3-4).

On the contrary, the Big society as an idea rejects the welfare state as it argues that the welfare state is not a Big society and that it is the false answer. The welfare state is the social appearance of not only a small society but also of a weak state that is incapable of maintaining its independence from welfare seeking workers. In the welfare state, individuals do not take responsibility for themselves but rather make the government liable to provide for their material interests and subsistence (Bonefeld 2015d, 5). Bonefeld contends that, in contrast to the small society which created quantitative civilization, the Big society seeks a qualitative civilization that is based on moral sentiments of civic-self responsibility, a culture of innovation, and high productivity (Bonefeld 2015d, 7). The Big society, thus, is also authorizing on a human scale. The Big society, for Bonefeld, contrasts significantly with a broken society of contention and conflict, greed and struggle, welfare dependency and irresponsible communities of the small society. The Big society is, therefore, a political practice of government (Bonefeld 2015d, 6). That is, the society as a Big society cannot take place independently of the state. These two social terrains are mutually interconnected.

⁷However, it should be noted that from the liberal political economy point of view, men are related to other men in various forms such as production, exchange, distribution, etc. However, what makes Bonefeld's conception of human relations distinct from liberal political economy is his negative critique which he derives from Adorno. Bonefeld's negative critique sees human social relations from a negative perspective, therefore, the existing human social relations from Bonefeld's point of view is perverted.

For Bonefeld, the Big society is more than just a desired form of social organization, and is a mentality of being that permeates over the consciousness of workers. The Big society provides chances for the worker to be able to acquire freely disposable funds and become a small capitalist and being given the opportunity of acquiring stocks or have a share in the profits (Bonefeld 2015d, 10). Bonefeld argues that instead of governing over society, the Big society governs through society, guaranteeing its mentality for enterprise and founding the self-responsible governmentality. He argues only a strong state is capable of constructing what he calls a Big society.

In conclusion, this section has dealt with the first feature of Bonefeld's framework of the critique of political economy. The section provides the two crucial meanings of Bonefeld's notion of society; society as a subject of a false world and a Big society which is a mode of governmentality. Grasping his notions of society are the crucial points of departure opening up connections to other features, the state and the economy, his critique of political economy. The next section will deal with the second feature of Bonefeld's critique of political economy which is his dialectical relations between the strong state and the free economy.

III. Free Economy and Strong State

In order to cope with the complexity of contemporary capitalism, Bonefeld's theory of society has been described as a point of departure to understand the interconnectedness of the three vital features of society, state, and economy. In the last section, it was argued that the Big society will be created only by a strong state. In this section it is argued that the strong state is also crucial in relation to the concept of the economy in Bonefeld's OM. This paper holds that the relationship between the state and the economy, for Bonefeld, should be uncovered through his recent critique of 'Ordoliberalism'⁸. Understanding the significance of the relationships between the economy and the state via the theory of Ordoliberalism paves the way for Bonefeld's vital notion of human economy which is directed by the Big society and the strong state. These alternative theories are helpful for considering current capitalism and what we should do to our human society.

Ordoliberalism, or the German ordoliberal tradition, is better known in the English speaking world as the Freiburg School or German neoliberalism or sometimes as the

⁸For further discussion on Ordoliberalism see Bonefeld's most recent book, Bonefeld 2017.

theoretical foundation of post-war German social market economy (Bonefeld 2012, 633). It dates to the end of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) in an uncertain social context of hyperinflation, depression, unemployment, politicized labour relations, political violence, social instability, and a politics of austerity. The protagonist theorists of the ordoliberal school are Walter Eucken, Alexander Rüstow, Wilhelm Röpke, and Alfred Müller-Armack (Bonefeld 2013c, 35). These German thinkers offer, among social uncertainties, that *laissez-faire* is not a principle on which a liberal society can be built. They see that liberalism tends more to dissolve things in society rather than to unite them. In order to make market competition effective, a sound political, social, and moral framework is required. The major argument of these ordoliberals is that economic liberty requires a 'strong state'⁹ to secure the internal integration of society as the foundation of a competitive economy (Bonefeld 2013c, 35).

The ordoliberals explain that for the sake of economic freedom, they demanded the strong state be rolled back from society (which makes a society big) to guarantee its liberal utility as a strong, market-enabling and facilitating state, thereby depoliticizing socio-economic relations, transforming contentious workers into responsible entrepreneurs of their own labour-power, and opening up cartels and monopolies to international competition to secure market adjustment on the basis of factor competitiveness and by means of sound money (Bonefeld 2013c, 36). However, the crucial concern is how the ordoliberals define their term of 'strong' state. Bonefeld argues that, for ordoliberals, the strong state is defined by its **capacity to limit** itself to the achievement of a free economy (Bonefeld 2013c, 36). A strong state, in other words, is a state that restrains competition and secures the social and ideological preconditions of economic liberty (Bonefeld 2012, 634). Compared to the welfare state, it is not a strong state as it tends to 'unlimit' the state by making it responsible for the well-being of society from the cradle to the grave. In addition, as regards *laissez-faire* liberalism, it does not entail a strong state as it does not concern itself with the moral and ideological aspects of the economy. Therefore, a strong state is a state that distinguishes itself from society and could prevent

⁹Although the concept of the strong vs. the weak state is not entirely new, Bonefeld's notion of the strong state is distinct to traditional perspective as it does not concentrate on aspects of power or interests of the state. Rather, Bonefeld's strong state does not govern in the interests of class society. The strong state governs for the system of liberty and it governs by means of supply-side policies, not from the demand-side as liberal political economy normally perceived.

government from becoming the prey of the many contradictory rent-seeking social interests. In its place, it establishes itself as the independent power over society and governs for the sake of a liberal economic constitution, maintaining rules of social conduct, providing economic engagement, and broadening forms of civility (Bonefeld 2015c, 4).

The ordoliberals posit Ordoliberalism as a 'third way' between laissez-faire liberalism and social democracy. They perceive the laissez-faire liberalism as it operates without considering the social and moral consequences of a free economy. The free economy itself demolishes its own social and moral preconditions and leads the society to lose its moral compass, social cohesion, and entrepreneurial vitality (Bonefeld 2013c, 36). As regards laissez-faire liberalism, it only pays lip service to the social and moral preconditions of market freedom which eventually fails to protect people and fails to create the socio-economic conditions that is fair for everybody. Social democracy, on the contrary, is seen as a political practice of a devitalized society of welfare seekers. Social democracy guides the society to the prospects of economic liberty in the wrong way (Bonefeld 2013c, 36).

Ordoliberalism, in offering itself as a third way, according to Bonefeld, sees the state as the political form of the capitalist social relations. As a political form, or an authority form, the state secures the society's freedom of its economy by its practice of government (Bonefeld 2014, 165-66; Bonefeld 2015c, 2-3). On this aspect of the state, Bonefeld's OM offers the concept of the state as 'market police' who control social conditions in good order (Bonefeld 2010). As this paper has argued earlier, OM rejects positivist and determinist conceptions of reality. Under this ontology, Bonefeld's OM explains that any social realities are not automatic and not created by nature, rather, they are socially constructed. Free economy/economic freedom also is a social construction. Bonefeld argues that free economy is a political practice and indeed it is a political decision (Bonefeld 2012, 647). He posits that there can therefore be no market freedom without 'market police'. Market police here implies an effort of the state in order to secure the social and moral preconditions for free economy. In other words, what we normally observe as the invisible hand regulating of the market, is indeed a political practice. As regards Ordoliberalism, not only does the free market economy demand a strong, market-facilitating state, but it is also dependent on the state as the coercive force of that freedom (Bonefeld 2010, 17).

In short, Bonefeld's critique of Ordoliberalism summarizes the relationship between the state and the economy and proposes that what is needed, as an alternative to existing capitalism, is a state that governs social interests and it must be a strong state that can guarantee the common wealth of the society. Economic freedom is not a natural phenomenon but indeed it does exist through order. Therefore, it is an ordered freedom maintained through the framework of state authority. In summary, neoliberal society does not require a weak state even if the state seems invisible in the free market. The appearance of free market economy is commonly seen as a stateless sphere. However, beneath the form of stateless terrain is a political creation of the strong state that sets the rules of freedom and enforces them. Therefore, Bonefeld's OM has distinctly argued that the 'economy' has no independent reality¹⁰. It is indeed a political economy (Bonefeld 2014, 177). Politics, economy, and society are three features that cannot be considered separately.

Nevertheless, for the ordoliberal tradition, there are things that are more important than a GDP, normally perceived to be so in neoliberal economies. For Neoliberal market economy, individuals are dependent on the law of economic necessity with the maintenance of the invisible hand. However, the worker under neoliberalism does not live the virtuous life. Workers have been influenced by 'workerization' and the proletariat has been influenced by 'proletarianization'. That is, they could not reach their own economic freedom. The neoliberal economy has been maintaining the class structure of society as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the ruler and the ruled. From the ordoliberal point of view, the workers are devitalized because they are not possessed by the ethic and spirit of the bourgeois. Bonefeld argues that the true social policy is the policy that empowers the worker as a 'citizen', as an entrepreneur of the free price mechanism (Bonefeld 2013d, 6-7).

However, Ordoliberalism views that behind the proletarian desires for material wealth such as employment and material securities, there are things that are more crucial than an economic indicator. What is more important is the aim to create the 'human economy' or 'vitalpolitik' (the politics of life), an economy that boosts individuals as self-provisioning, self-

¹⁰ However, what makes Bonefeld's approach to economy, society, and politics distinct from liberal political economy is in its Marxist critique of class antagonism which is not perceived by other approaches.

responsible, and self-reliant entrepreneurs. Röpke (cited in Bonefeld 2013d, 7), a protagonist German ordoliberalism, has succinctly offered a brief idea of the human economy that:

We need to eliminate the proletariat as a class defined by short-term wage-income. In its stead we have to create a new class of workers who are endowed with property and assets, and who are rooted in nature and community, self-responsible and able to sustain themselves by their own labour, and who thus become mature citizens of a society of free humanity.

Based on Röpke's ideas, Bonefeld argues that the ordoliberal social policy that could create an alternative human economy. Firstly, it should create a new social class with access to the means of production. Capitalism is an unjust structural system that separates a labourer from his/her means of production. Ordoliberalism on the contrary requires vitally satisfied workers with access to private property. Social policy, in this sense, is an attempt at establishing the connection between 'human beings and private property' (Bonefeld 2013d, 12). Secondly, ordoliberal social policy aims to end the process of proletarianization by asserting that the proletarian condition under neoliberalism is indeed the condition of dispossession. Workers need to gain access to independent means of subsistence outside the market to maintain themselves as vitally satisfied citizens. In order to deproletarianize, the social policy towards human economy should address the dispossessed status of the worker by restoring small property ownership to the worker (Bonefeld 2013d, 9). Lastly, Ordoliberalism aims to construct the citizens of free humanity. The most crucial objective of the ordoliberal tradition is to liberate the productive forces of capitalist society. Human economy should be the system that increases productivity of the workers who need to regain interest in their work, not for the sake of the capitalist. Social policy thus focuses on empowering workers as responsible market agents by means of the politics of life. That is, to boost up a capacity to face hostile conditions with courage, determination, and in a self-responsible manner. The ordoliberal human economy is a total life-style and is a transformation of proletarian personality into a

mentality of private property¹¹(Bonefeld 2013d, 8).

In summary, this section has dealt with the distinct features of Bonefeld's OM and the dialectical relationship between the economy and the state. Looking through the German Ordoliberalism, Bonefeld offers the conviction that there is no 'pure economy' without the 'political' and 'society'. Society, state, and economy are all socially related. The freedom of economy as a human economy therefore requires a strong state to direct and mentally govern.

Concluding Remarks: On the Vitality of Big, Free, and Strong

The paper has dealt with two major aims. Firstly, to critically introduce OM as a radical Marxist school of thought to a wider audience. Secondly, to construct an Open Marxist framework helpful in understanding contemporary political economy as a comprehensive account of the features of society, state, and economy altogether. In doing so, this paper has scrutinized Bonefeld thoughts and argued that Bonefeld's OM is beneficial to an understanding of contemporary political economy as he has offered three distinct theories of the Big society, economic freedom, and the strong state. The importance of learning these three concepts lies in the fact they offer theoretical terrains for 'human agency'¹². Rejecting the determinist conception of society, he offers that the society should be a subject of social life. Men need to be a subject of their own social, economic and political destinies. That kind of society is what he called the 'Big society', a mentality that the worker should assume in order to move against the existing capitalist social relations. For the conceptions of free economy/economic freedom and the strong state, Bonefeld offers the significance of the 'free and strong' economy and the state. His theories of the free economy and strong state show us that these two features are of

¹¹It should be noted here that even though it seems that Bonefeld aims to achieve a fairer or better society (Big society) through interventions of a strong state, in fact, his major argument is to critique German neoliberalism (Ordoliberalism) by looking at the dialectical relationships between society, political, and economic matters. Based on his life-time writings, Bonefeld's ultimate aim is what Marx called a 'classless society' or 'communism'.

¹²In Bonefeld's thought, human agency is the one who determines his/her own social relations. He argues that structuralism does not think in and through society but about society. What make Bonefeld's notion of human agency distinct is his critique of society which entails the constituted conditions of a given social relation. For his critique of Althusser's structuralist and anti-humanist position see Bonefeld 2016b.

the same coin. They cannot be conceived of separately. There is no pure economy but, in fact, political economy. Based on the concept of society as a point of departure, for Bonefeld, the economy and the state play along together with the ultimate aim¹³to create the human economy, a system that aims at liberation from the existing capitalist social relations. To achieve that aim is the task of us, the ordinary human agency.

References

¹³It should be noted here that Bonefeld's ultimate aim is not to achieve a fairer class society or a fairer mode of production. Rather, for him the critique of class society, i.e. neoliberal capitalism, finds its positive resolution only in the 'classless' society (Bonefeld 2016a, 7). For Bonefeld, communism is the only answer to overcome capitalism.

Azeri, Siyaves. 2015. "Marx's Concept of Class: A Reconsideration." *Critique* 43(3-4): 439-60.

Bieler, Andreas, Werber Bonefeld, Peter Burnham, and Adan David Morton. 2006. *Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour: Contesting Neo-Gramscian Perspective*. Basing Stoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bonefeld, Werner. 2013b. "Antagonism and Negative Critique: An Interview." *Viewpoint Magazine*. Accessed August 7, 2016. <https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/15/antagonism-and-negative-critique-an-interview>.

-----, 2016a. "Authoritarian Liberalism: From Schmitt via Ordoliberalism to the Euro." *Critical Sociology* 43(4-5): 1-15. Accessed October 1, 2016. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0896920516662695>.

-----, 2015d. "Big Society and Political State." *British Politics* 10(4): 1-16.

-----, 2015a. "Bringing Critical Theory Back in at a Time of Misery: Three Beginnings without Conclusion." *Capital & Class* 40(2): 1-12.

-----, 2015c. "Crisis, Free Economy and Strong State: On Ordoliberalism." *European Review of International Studies* 2(3): 1-11.

-----, 2013a. "Critical Theory, History, and the Question of Revolution." In *Communism in the 21st Century*, edited by S. Brincat. New York: Praeger Publishers.

-----, 2014. *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason*. New York: Bloomsbury.

-----, 2010. "Free Economy and the Strong State: Some Notes on the State." *Capital & Class* 34(1): 15-24.

-----, 2012. "Freedom and the Strong State: On German Ordoliberalism." *New Political Economy* 17(5): 633-56.

-----, 2013c. "German Ordo-Liberalism and the Politics of Vitality." *Renewal* 20(4): 35-39.

-----, 2013d. "Human Economy and Social Policy: on Ordo-Liberalism and Political Authority." *History of the Human Sciences* 26(2): 1-20.

-----, 2015b. "Letter to the Editor: On Economic Sociology and the Critique of Society." *Journal of Economics and Political Economy* 2(S1): 149-53.

-----, 2016c. "Negative Dialectics and Critique of Economic Objectivity." *History of the Human Sciences* 29(2): 60-76.

-----, 1987. "Open Marxism." *Common Sense* 1(1): 34-38.

----- 2016b. "Science, Hegemony, and Action: On the Elements of Governmentality." *Journal of Social Sciences, Naresuan University* 12(2):19-41.

----- 2017. *The Strong State and the Free Economy*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bonefeld, Werner, Alice Brown, and Peter Burnham. 1995. *A Major Crisis? The Politics of Economic Policy in Britain in the 1990s*. Aldershot: Dartmouth.

Bonefeld, Werner, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis. 1992a. *Open Marxism Volume I: Dialectics and History*. London: Pluto Press.

----- 1992b. *Open Marxism Volume II: Theory and Practice*. London: Pluto Press.

Bruff, Ian. 2009. "The Totalisation of Human Social Practice: Open Marxists and Capitalist Social Relations, Foucauldians and Power Relations." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 11(2): 332-51.

Burnham, Peter. 1994. "Open Marxism and Vulgar International Political Economy." *Review of International Political Economy* 1(2): 221-31.

Charnock, Greig. 2010. "Challenging New State Spatialities: The Open Marxism of Henri Lefebvre." *Antipode* 42(5): 1279-303.

Erol, Mehmet. 2016. "State, Crisis, Class: The Politics of Economic Restructuring in Turkey in the 2000s." PhD diss., The University of York.

Gordon, Todd. 2005. "The Political Economy of Law and Order Policies: Policing, Class Struggle, and Neoliberal Restructuring." *Studies in Political Economy* 75(1): 53-77.

Lee, Gyu Cheol. 2014. "The Political Economy of the Sino-American Imbalance." PhD diss., The University of York.

Roberts, John Michael. 2002. "From Reflection to Refraction: Opening Up Open Marxism." *Capital & Class* 26(3): 87-116.

Rogers, Chris. 2009b. "From Social Contract to 'Social Contrick': The Depoliticisation of Economic Policy-making under Harold Wilson, 1974-75." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 11(4): 634-51.

----- 2009a. "The Politics of Economic Policy-making under Harold Wilson and James Callaghan and the 1976 IMF Crisis." PhD diss., University of Warwick.

Soderberg, J., and A. Netzen. 2010. "When All That Is Theory Melts into (Hot) Air: Contrasts and Parallels Between Actor Network Theory, Autonomist Marxism, and Open Marxism." *Ephemera* 10(2): 95-118.

Spence, M. 2010. "Form, Fetish, and Film: Revisiting Open Marxism." *Capital & Class* 34(1): 99-106.

Sutton, Alex. 2013. "Towards an Open Marxist Theory of Imperialism." *Capital & Class* 37(2): 217-37.

Tsolakis, Andrea. 2010. "Opening Up Open Marxist Theories of the State: A Historical Materialist Critique." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 12(3): 387-407.