

MODES OF PRODUCTION AS TRAJECTORIES OF POWER

THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

Can I Live with Dignity Anywhere?

From freedom of movement to the freedom to live: scarcity, social classes, symbolic constraints and cybernetic abundance.

The fundamental condition for living with dignity, here or elsewhere.

A historical essay on understanding human relations.

H.G.H. and AI · October 2026

THE ORIGINAL QUESTION

“Can I live with dignity anywhere?”

A short question, an immense history

Freedom of movement means more than the absence of chains, passports, barriers or tolls. It exists fully only when someone can choose where to live, settle without humiliation, and possess the means of leading a dignified life. “With dignity” does not mean complying with a code of respectability: it denotes dignity that cannot be purchased through submission.

Starting from this question, the present essay seeks to understand how relationships of domination arise and reproduce themselves, before reducing them to a checklist. It brings together hunter-gatherer societies, settled life, restrictions on movement, clothing that disciplines the body and the cybernetic order of production. It also examines contradictions, counterexamples and the limits of analogies.

Its central proposition is simple: a society may be abundant yet dominating, poor yet egalitarian, mobile yet captive, settled yet free. To understand class divisions, we must study how the conditions of existence become—or cease to be—means of commanding other human beings.

GUIDING THESIS

The freedom to refuse is paramount: being able to say no to domination without losing the means of living with dignity. Abundance and mobility are emancipatory only when they make that refusal effective.

Method: not merely establishing facts but understanding the human relations those facts reveal. Symbolic analogies are interpretive avenues, not proof of original intentions.

OPENING — ESTABLISHING IS NOT UNDERSTANDING

Knowledge of facts and understanding of human beings are two distinct acts.

“We seek not only to establish, but to understand.” Establishing means determining what happened, what sources attest and what remains uncertain. Understanding asks something else: why can a constraint seem honorable? Why might someone accept having to request permission to leave? How can a protective institution become a power that holds them back?

We can establish that foot binding, workers' identity booklets, passes and food sharing existed. These facts alone do not tell us what it meant to inhabit a constrained body, to fear losing employment by leaving, or to receive help without humiliation. Research must make the lived experiences and the contradictions of the relationships producing them intelligible.

A symbol is not its origin

MODES OF PRODUCTION · THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

Interpreting the necktie as a leash, the bow tie as partial freedom or the high heel as impeded walking does not mean claiming their inventors intended those meanings. The object's origin is a historical question; the metaphor opens a human question: who leads, who follows, and who can refuse and still live with dignity? Etymology cannot disprove a metaphor, and a powerful image cannot prove historical intention.

A framework of control, appropriation and dependence reveals mechanisms but does not replace people's own voices and experiences. Understanding requires openness to divergent interpretations.

METHODICAL DISTINCTION

Establishing tests our grasp of reality. Understanding investigates the relationships and contradictions that give reality meaning. They nourish one another without becoming identical.

AI may compare traces and propose interpretations, but does not possess the lived experience of the human beings studied. No classification dispenses with listening to people and revising hypotheses.

CONTENTS

1. Abundance is not a quantity
2. Sharing even amid scarcity
3. Settling is not becoming captive
4. From controlling things to controlling people
5. When clothing governs movement
6. Controlling routes, holding workers back
7. Free to travel, forbidden to live
8. Four freedoms, one dignity
9. Solidarity without dispossession
10. Freedom becomes infrastructure
11. Machines can produce; who will be able to live?
12. Passions, the last field of appropriation
13. The conditions of a classless society
14. Testing the model through crises

Reading guide: numbered references document facts and scholarly debates. The figures are thinking tools, not stand-alone historical proof.

PART I — ABUNDANCE DOES NOT EXPLAIN CLASSES

Scarcity, mobility, storage and the first forks in the road

CHAPTER 01 — ABUNDANCE IS NOT A QUANTITY

Why scarcity does not explain everything, and why a wealthy society may remain captive.

The familiar account portrays poverty as humanity's normal original condition: hunger supposedly made command necessary, while abundance eventually made freedom possible. A long anthropological tradition complicates that

MODES OF PRODUCTION · THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

sequence. Marshall Sahlins proposed an “original affluent society” based not on unlimited production but on a relatively favorable relationship between needs and socially accessible resources [1].

The thesis is disputed: estimates of limited time spent acquiring food in some studies do not encompass every task, eliminate famine or care work, or represent all hunter-gatherers. Nevertheless, the key theoretical insight remains: abundance is relational. It cannot be reduced to the volume of accumulated goods.

Societies living in harsh environments may sustain substantial material equality. Others with highly productive resources may establish tribute, hereditary ranks and slavery. A comparison of 89 hunter-gatherer societies along North America's Pacific coast associates institutionalized inequality with the concentration of particular aquatic resources and the ability to control access to them [5].

The question is not “How much do we own?” but “Who may access necessities, and what must they give in return?” Beyond counting reserves, one must understand what it means to ask for food from someone empowered to humiliate, exclude or coerce. When food, tools and hospitality are accessible, a person can reject submission to a wealth-holder. If a minority controls the only available resource, even abundant production may coexist with dependence. Scarcity may therefore be ecological or socially engineered through monopolies, prohibitions and prices.

TWO OUTCOMES OF AN AVAILABLE RESOURCE

Available resource → shared access and a viable exit → obstacle to class formation.

Available resource → monopoly and blocked exit → possibility of a class.

GUIDING QUESTION: Abundance does not abolish classes; it frees people only when access to it is not made conditional on obedience.

CHAPTER 02 — SHARING EVEN AMID SCARCITY

Mobility and sharing can protect autonomy without eliminating the hardships of life.

James Woodburn describes immediate-return hunter-gatherer groups whose patterns of sharing, relative autonomy and ability to change associations restrict durable power [2]. Some Hadza and Ju/'hoansi communities have been studied in this connection. Their equality should not be idealized: tensions, inequalities by age or gender, misfortune and scarcity persist.

Uncertainty in hunting or gathering may encourage reciprocity. Someone with plenty today may lack tomorrow. Sharing reduces collective vulnerability and may prevent individual success from becoming political rent. The decisive factor is not universal human goodness but whether others can demand, criticize, leave, refuse authority or rebuild alliances.

Christopher Boehm showed that egalitarian practices may involve active group resistance to personal claims to command: potential subordinates unite to prevent a chief from becoming a master [3]. Equality is not always social innocence; it may be a balance of power against hoarding.

Leaving is a social power

If a person can join another camp and live there, obedience ceases to be the only possible answer. Reception and perfect equality are not guaranteed, but that possibility constrains a local leader's ambitions. Walking is not the same as being able to leave: movement emancipates only when a break permits a viable relationship elsewhere.

Egalitarian societies amid scarcity refute any historical necessity that sharing must await general enrichment. They also reveal the limits of programs expecting technology alone to bring autonomy.

CHAPTER 03 — SETTLING IS NOT BECOMING CAPTIVE

Why permanent residence, reserves and agriculture do not prove the existence of classes.

MODES OF PRODUCTION · THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

Archaeology rejects the simple causal story that sedentarism was humanity's first prison. Natufian settlements show lasting or semi-lasting occupation before domesticated agriculture. Remains, however, do not directly reveal whether residents could leave, nor do they establish absolute equality.

At Neolithic Çatalhöyük in Anatolia, Katherine Twiss and colleagues' 2024 analysis found no evidence of persistent institutionalized economic or social inequality despite houses, farming and prolonged settlement [4]. Differences between households existed, but there was no simple trajectory of resource concentration. A sedentary society therefore need not have an identifiable exploiting class.

Likewise, every storehouse should not be treated as a seed of tyranny. Reserves may help people through winter, feed children and sustain cooperation. They become instruments of class when a minority monopolizes distribution and makes access to life depend on obedience.

The threshold of appropriation

Class formation is better understood as conversion: the technical, military or material advantage of a group ceases to be a function and becomes a durable right to command others. Mobility may slow this conversion but does not always prevent it. Historically mobile pastoral societies have also had aristocracies, captives and subordinate groups.

James C. Scott emphasizes devices by which early agrarian states counted, extracted from and detained producers [13]. His synthesis is stimulating, although several generalizations remain contested; it does not establish one origin for every state or settled society.

GUIDING QUESTION: Captivity is not living in one place for a long time. It is having one's departure, residence and livelihood decided by others.

PART II — PATHS OF DISPOSSESSION

Bodies, signs, permissions and borders

CHAPTER 04 — FROM CONTROLLING THINGS TO CONTROLLING PEOPLE

The relational core: control, appropriation, dependence and reproduction.

A skilled fisher, a respected healer or a reserve administrator possesses particular expertise. This asymmetry is not yet a social class. Class relations arise when a group converts control over resources and the conditions of existence into privileged extraction from others' activity, maintains their dependence and reproduces its position.

Four analytical dimensions are retained: asymmetric control of vital decisions; asymmetric appropriation of resources or capacities; dependence that makes refusal difficult; and reproduction of these arrangements through institutions, families or technology. These dimensions are interconnected without being interchangeable.

THE FOUR INVARIANTS OF CLASS RELATIONS

C — Control; A — Appropriation; D — Dependence; R — Reproduction.

These functions exist everywhere; their lasting asymmetry characterizes class.

A bridge toll used for maintenance is not necessarily a class relation. It may become one if an exclusive gatekeeper imposes uncontested levies for personal benefit. A hierarchy of skills may be necessary in a hospital without giving anyone the right to exploit patients or caregivers.

Class relations exist among human beings: a tool, bridge, field, platform or file is only a mediator. To appropriate another person's means of living, one must be able to control access socially.

Three operations of domination

Alongside appropriation, history brings prevention: preventing departure, refusal, remaining, union or speech. It also brings reproduction: perpetuating extraction and obstruction, sometimes invoking tradition, protection or technical necessity. Resistance by the dominated is internal to the relationship; it may be fragmented, repressed, negotiated or transformed into new guarantees.

CHAPTER 05 — WHEN CLOTHING GOVERNS MOVEMENT

Bound feet, heels, neckties and bow ties: between constraint and metaphor.

Foot binding in Chinese history illustrates an intense form of bodily constraint. It permanently altered feet and could make movement more painful; it was associated with marriage norms and ideals of femininity. Yet the claim that all women with bound feet were confined at home is contradicted by Laurel Bossen and Hill Gates: many rural girls and women worked in textile production [6, 7].

Bodily alteration can limit some forms of action while remaining compatible with sustained productive work. The material organization of labor and symbolic norms reinforce each other without being identical.

Western high heels alter gait without being equivalent to binding. Before becoming mainly feminine, they signaled aristocratic male status [8]. At Versailles, Louis XIV kept part of the nobility near the court through etiquette, honors and the expectation of favors. The sign of elevated status accompanied political immobilization: nobles could leave but risked their position with the king. The heel did not cause this immobilization; it belonged to the symbolic universe that made it honorable.

THREE OBJECTS, THREE READINGS OF MOVEMENT

Heel / gait; Necktie / direction; Bow tie / bond.

The necktie as a leash: understanding an image

The image is striking: a necktie encircles the neck and hangs down the front like a visible tether. The leash metaphor invites reflection on Western men bound to professional functions, without reducing the garment to that meaning. A bow tie, without the long downward strip, could represent partial freedom: the sign of a bond remains, but not its elongated image.

The historical origin of the tie, notably linked to Croatian military scarves [19], is a question of fact; the leash is a question of meaning. Showing that the object was not invented as a leash does not refute what its use might reveal about the individual and their role. A bow tie may itself be demanded by strict dress codes: the metaphor poses a question, not a verdict on every wearer.

The task is not to declare the wearer dominated but to ask what the garment means to them and what happens if they refuse it. The occupational, social or marital consequences of refusal reveal more about constraint than its shape alone.

GUIDING QUESTION: A symbol does not prove power; it can reveal how power becomes visible, acceptable or contestable.

CHAPTER 06 — CONTROLLING ROUTES, HOLDING WORKERS BACK

Tolls, workers' booklets, internal passports and protecting privileges.

Bridges, ports, mountain passes and city gates reveal the political economy of movement. Passage fees may finance collective services or become monopolies of extraction. Who controls the passage, who pays, who receives the money, and can one contest or take another route?

In nineteenth-century France, the livret ouvrier connected identity, employment and circulation. Introduced earlier, made compulsory in 1803, and abolished in 1890, it functioned as a police and occupational-subordination document [9]. Its abolition expanded certain freedoms without ending the economic need for employment.

MODES OF PRODUCTION · THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

Under South African apartheid, pass laws governed where Black populations could reside and work. On 9 August 1956, roughly twenty thousand women demonstrated in Pretoria against expanded requirements [10]. Productive mobility could be permitted while residential freedom was denied: people could be wanted as workers but rejected as residents.

A restriction can serve movement

Domination does not always require keeping people stationary. It can expel them from land, transfer them where labor is needed, displace families or limit residence to productive periods. Immobilization and forced relocation belong to the same family of appropriation of mobility. The invariant is loss of the power to choose.

Proportionate safety rules must be distinguished from selective or exploitative restrictions. Analysis must nevertheless look beyond official reasons to how rules are experienced by those able to challenge them and those left without recourse.

CHAPTER 07 — FREE TO TRAVEL, FORBIDDEN TO LIVE

Economic and administrative boundaries to settling.

Migrant workers governed by employer-sponsorship arrangements, often known as kafala in parts of the Middle East, face a sharp contradiction. Initial travel may be voluntary and undertaken for improvement, yet the ability to change employer, keep residency or leave an abusive relationship may be severely limited. The ILO identifies such restrictions as risks for exploitation and forced labor [11].

In China, massive internal migration has shown that people may work in a city without automatically receiving the same public services as locally registered inhabitants. Reforms of hukou have been gradually changing the system, but unequal residence rights remain significant [12].

Physical movement is insufficient in both cases. The issue is the right to rebuild a dignified life elsewhere—with housing, healthcare, education, legal security and social relations, without arbitrary power by an employer or administration.

A JOURNEY IS FREE ONLY IF ARRIVAL IS FREE TOO

Right to move → access to resources → dignity of living.

Travel counts as freedom only if living is possible upon arrival.

The meaning of “anywhere”

It does not mean that anyone may occupy any place regardless of ecosystems, reception capacity or other people's rights. It expresses a moral principle: dignity should not depend on assignment to a territory, occupation or birth group. Existing law recognizes movement within a state, departure from any country and return to one's own; it does not guarantee an unconditional universal right to settle in every country [15]. This legal limit separates an emancipatory aspiration from an inaccurate description of current law.

PART III — THE CONDITIONS OF A DIGNIFIED LIFE

Leaving, staying, settling, contesting and not being tracked

CHAPTER 08 — FOUR FREEDOMS, ONE DIGNITY

The true measure of mobility is human capability, not distance traveled.

Visible movement says little about freedom: a captive may cross a continent, while a free person may choose never to leave their village. Four capabilities therefore matter: leaving, remaining, settling, and moving without arbitrary surveillance of one's routes.

MODES OF PRODUCTION · THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

Freedom to leave protects against powers of detention; freedom to remain protects against dispossession, eviction and forced relocation; freedom to settle ensures that a journey can become a viable life. Freedom from generalized tracking allows people to move without constantly reporting to a power.

FOUR CAPABILITIES OF FREE MOBILITY

LEAVE · STAY · SETTLE · WITHOUT TRACKING

Freedom must be judged by capabilities, not kilometers traveled.

Albert O. Hirschman distinguished exit from an organization and voice in challenging its operation [14]. The distinction is helpful but insufficient: leaving a relationship offers no protection if every alternative relationship is governed by the same dominant coalition. Nor should leaving be the only response to abuse; people who cannot or do not wish to leave must retain an effective capacity to change their conditions.

Living with dignity is more than surviving

Food and housing are indispensable but do not exhaust dignity. It also entails freedom from humiliation, the ability to learn, love, speak, associate, obtain care, access culture and participate in decisions organizing one's life. Articles 12, 13, 23 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights safeguard some of these dimensions without guaranteeing the whole classless society envisaged here [15].

A dignified life is neither a privilege awarded to the “deserving” nor forced adherence to a model of virtue. Its demand extends to someone who rejects the dominant group's values, dress or opinions.

THE COMPLETE QUESTION

Can I leave? Can I stay? Can I settle? Can I live with dignity without surrendering my choices, my body and my conscience to those controlling the necessities of life?

CHAPTER 09 — SOLIDARITY WITHOUT DISPOSSESSION

Can a powerful organization remain at the service of the people who created it?

Cooperation is essential in the face of monopolies. Dominated people form associations, unions, cooperatives and mutual aid systems. They discover their power to produce and decide together. Yet organization can produce leaders who control information, budgets and access to the necessities of life.

The risk does not disappear by multiplying institutions: several centers may form a coalition, divide privileges among themselves and deprive others of agency. Elinor Ostrom's work on polycentric governance nevertheless shows possible alternatives to centralized monopoly, provided institutions and oversight truly remain accessible to participants [16].

Solidarity without dispossession requires more than declared democracy. Representatives must be replaceable, accounts reviewable, knowledge open, dissent possible, and material security sufficient to prevent disagreement from costing people their livelihood.

THE SAME SOLIDARITY, TWO POSSIBLE PATHS

Solidarity and organization → autonomy of members / capture by leaders.

The freedom to refuse also protects the collective

An institution that forbids members to criticize it because criticism would weaken “the cause” begins turning solidarity into discipline. By contrast, organized disagreement, appeals and possibilities for reconstruction may keep leaders from confiscating collective power.

The freedom to leave must not mean abandoning the vulnerable. Children, older people, those needing care and those with few resources require guarantees independent of any particular protector.

CHAPTER 10 — FREEDOM BECOMES INFRASTRUCTURE

Material access and multiple paths matter more than declarations.

A society might proclaim every resident free while allowing one group to control electricity, food distribution, housing or communications. Freedom of movement would be fragile because cutting off an essential service could restore dependence.

Infrastructure is not politically neutral equipment but materialized social relationships. Who has the right to shut it down? Who can inspect its operating rules? Who may repair, replace, connect or establish an alternative? A network managed by the same officials can appear plural while functioning as a monopoly.

Graph theory offers a useful language: several independent paths between a person and a resource make it harder for the capture of one passage to block access. Yet multiple technical routes are insufficient if one coalition owns them all. Real independence is institutional, material and social as well as topological.

The right not to be tracked

Digital controls can offer valuable services: outage alerts, rescue coordination, route safety and better distribution. They can also record movement systematically and condition access to life on a conformity profile. The requirement is therefore not to eliminate information but to separate transparency of power from privacy of persons.

A classless society may need to audit public decisions. This does not automatically entitle it to track every resident permanently. Technical and legal privacy protections are, in this model, constitutive of collective autonomy.

PART IV — THE CYBERNETIC TEST

Productive abundance or captivity of existence

CHAPTER 11 — MACHINES CAN PRODUCE; WHO WILL BE ABLE TO LIVE?

The relative end of coerced labor does not automatically mean the end of classes.

Industrial automation, robotics and artificial intelligence make it possible to produce growing shares of goods and services with less directly necessary human labor. It would, however, be premature to claim that all non-passionate human tasks will be automated. The ILO estimated in 2025 that approximately one job in four had some exposure to generative AI, with job transformation more likely than complete disappearance [17].

The proposed development is thus a long-term hypothetical trajectory: nearly automatic production could free human time and reduce the need to sell one's labor to survive. It might also concentrate productive means that are increasingly complex, expensive and interconnected.

TWO FORMS OF CYBERNETIC ABUNDANCE

Automated production → captive abundance: conditional access / free abundance: guaranteed access.

Captive abundance means high production with access conditioned on ownership rights or control mechanisms.

Emancipatory abundance would require access to necessities regardless of imposed employment or managers' approval.

Material conditions must be accompanied by the ability to challenge collective decisions governing infrastructure.

Cybernetic abundance remains materially grounded: machines need energy, metals, networks and viable ecosystems. In its 2025 reference scenario, the International Energy Agency projected global data-center electricity use of about 945 TWh in 2030, more than twice its 2024 estimate [18]. These are projections, not certain destiny.

The old freedom of flight changes character

In certain mobile groups, departing from an abusive leader could be enough to escape. In a world where payments, housing, movement and access rights run through interconnected infrastructure, moving elsewhere no longer guarantees escape from control. People need the capacity to use or create systems that are not exclusively dependent on the challenged coalition.

The ultimate issue of the cybernetic mode is therefore not automated production alone. It is the human status of people living amid it: autonomous beneficiaries, or profiled elements conditioned by the systems supposedly serving them?

CHAPTER 12 — PASSIONS, THE LAST FIELD OF APPROPRIATION

Can a materially comfortable society nonetheless be governed from within?

Domination does not vanish once people are fed. It can survive as the power to shape choices, information, reputation and possibilities of association. The cybernetic mode is understood through a guiding hypothesis: on an inherited industrial and bureaucratic base, it can exploit passions, attention, emotions and human relationships at scale.

It would be excessive to call every socially learned preference false consciousness or to claim algorithms can read emotions perfectly. Technology first captures traces of activity and generates approximations. Yet even approximations can suffice to distribute rewards, incentives and penalties or establish rankings.

The necktie as leash and bow tie as partial freedom find a new translation here: domination might no longer need a visible leash. It might manifest in access pathways, reputation systems and dependencies that everyone learns to navigate for themselves. The old impediment becomes a term of use; the term of use presents itself as convenience.

A pleasant society may remain dominating

The hardest trap is a society providing comfort, leisure, transport and affordable goods while reserving decisions about life's general conditions for a minority. People might move freely among places where they cannot challenge the systems governing their lives.

Autonomy has a dimension irreducible to consumption or safety: being a subject of social life rather than a variable in a prediction circuit. It entails a right to dissent, legitimate privacy and human relationships not wholly converted into instruments of value.

CHAPTER 13 — THE CONDITIONS OF A CLASSLESS SOCIETY

Eight complementary safeguards to make the primordial freedom to refuse real.

These comparisons suggest an architecture of non-domination. It depends neither solely on abundance or mobility nor on a supreme authority allegedly defending people against all other authorities. It seeks to maintain capacities to refuse, live with dignity and cooperate that cannot be permanently confiscated.

CONDITION — PURPOSE — TYPICAL FAILURE

Access to essentials — Live without purchasing dignity through obedience — Monopoly of vital goods.

Leave, stay, settle — Preserve several ways of inhabiting one's life — Captivity or expulsion.

Genuinely multiple avenues of access — Avoid compulsory bottlenecks — Coalition controlling all routes.

Oversight of delegated power — Keep a function from turning into privilege — Managerial oligarchy.

MODES OF PRODUCTION · THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

Transferable knowledge — Challenge technical decisions — Expert caste.

Protected private life — Preserve autonomy beyond surveillance — Reduction of persons to data elements.

Material counter-powers — Make contestation effective — Rights that exist only on paper.

Institutional reconstruction — Change rules perpetuating abuses — Permanence of a new class.

These eight requirements are not historically validated, mathematically necessary and sufficient conditions. They form a normative and comparative framework. Experiments may take different forms according to each community's resources, culture, size and risks.

One danger cuts across all eight: control systems may achieve perfect equality among their leaders while rendering everyone else entirely dependent. Equality among institutions is not equality among people. We must examine the most dependent person's situation and whether they can escape arbitrary power.

PRIMORDIAL PRINCIPLE

A classless society first requires effective freedom to refuse: to reject subordination without losing the means of living with dignity, here or elsewhere.

CHAPTER 14 — TESTING THE MODEL THROUGH CRISES

War, catastrophe, migration and emergency: moments when safeguards may fail.

An architecture of autonomy may seem solid in peacetime yet collapse during catastrophe. War sometimes justifies rapid centralization, an epidemic limited restrictions, and scarcity exceptional distribution rules. These constraints are not class relations by definition. They become dangerous when duration, selectivity or opacity converts collective necessity into privilege or arbitrary punishment.

Controls must therefore be proportionate, transparent in purpose, time-limited and contestable. We must also understand how exceptions gradually seem natural, then indispensable, both to those subject to them and those administering them. Above all, criticizing a measure must not indefinitely deprive someone of access to vital resources. Organizing survival must not become a way to absorb every capacity for free living.

Four tests of truth

A crop failure: does emergency distribution protect dignity or permit officials to extract loyalty? A war: does forced mobilization remain subject to limits and remedies, or establish permanent privileges? Migration: can arrivals work without becoming captive to employers? Digital failure: can people access necessities without being authenticated by a single identifier?

These examples do not resolve every difficulty of collective action. They offer a method: observe what happens to freedom to refuse precisely when institutions are tempted to suspend it.

Understanding crises from the viewpoint of those living through them

When governments announce measures “for everyone,” resource-rich people may wait, circumvent obstacles or move away. Those living from day to day have fewer options. Understanding a crisis means attending to concrete lives, not only formal rules. The question is not merely whether a restriction existed, but how the same decision can protect some while dispossessing others. Solidarity, distrust or renewed domination may arise in that gap.

GENERAL CONCLUSION — WHY THE FREEDOM TO LIVE REMAINS TO BE WON

Hunter-gatherer societies show that relative equality can exist amid scarcity; archaeology shows that permanent settlement is insufficient to create a class; workers' booklets and pass laws reveal powers seeking to detain those whose activity they appropriate. Foot binding, high heels and dress codes remind us that mobility may be controlled through bodies and symbols before any traveler reaches a checkpoint.

These facts matter insofar as we understand their effects on relations among persons. Human freedom is not just the ability to travel. Bodies capable of walking can still be directed by obligations, while those choosing to remain still may be entirely free. The decisive criterion is effective command over one's capacities, relationships and means of existence.

Automated abundance would be a magnificent achievement if it loosened material life's dependence on imposed labor. It could instead support perfected domination if shared infrastructure became machinery of sorting and permissions. The goal is neither to abolish organization nor glorify the absence of rules, but to build organization without permanent dispossession.

CONCLUSION — THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

“Can I live with dignity anywhere?” means, first of all: “Can I reject what others seek to impose on me, leave or remain freely, without losing my dignity or means of living?”

A classless society would not eliminate all differences. It would effectively prevent differences of knowledge, function, wealth, place or condition from becoming permanent rights to command other humans. Establishing a rule's existence is necessary; understanding why some experience it as protection and others as captivity reveals the relationship it can reproduce. The questions of abundance and mobility meet here: being able to live with dignity without life's pathways belonging to a master.

APPENDIX — TWO DEMANDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Analytical tools and their limits before human experience

A. The freedom to refuse and four invariants

Four invariants describe class relationships: control (C), appropriation (A), dependence (D), reproduction (R). Effective freedom to refuse is the primordial criterion of non-domination, not a fifth descriptive invariant. It requires being able to reject imposed appropriation without losing dignity or a livelihood. Legitimate shared rules remain possible.

B. Free mobility

We distinguish leaving, staying, settling, and moving without arbitrary surveillance. A preliminary qualitative formalization denotes these capacities (P, R, I, N). An aggregate index—for example, the minimum of four normalized components—is merely exploratory: it measures neither love of place, full dignity nor reception constraints.

C. The coalition problem

Multiplying institutions is insufficient if they coordinate their monopoly. Freedom requires independent avenues of access and capacities to create new organizations where a dissenter does not lose essential resources or fundamental rights.

D. Establishing, explaining, understanding and proposing

Establishing describes reliable traces; explaining seeks causal mechanisms; understanding interrogates the lived meaning of human relationships; proposing formulates a possible horizon. They inform each other without becoming interchangeable. Historical demonstration of origins does not exhaust symbolic interpretation. Symbolic intuition never excuses unverified factual claims.

STATUS — CONTENT

Documented observations — differently stratified hunter-gatherer societies; Çatalhöyük; bound feet; workers' booklets; pass laws; kafala; hukou; changes brought by AI.

Proposed explanations — passage from control of resources to control of humans; effective exit capacity; collective capture through coalitions.

Understanding meaning — necktie as “leash” and bow tie as “partial freedom” question movement, acceptance and refusal without presuming designers' intentions.

Normative horizon — living with dignity anywhere under legitimate common rules, without class submission or dispossession.

E. Limits

Legal archives record prescriptions and penalties but not always enforcement. Archaeological remains reveal homes and material distributions, rarely subjective freedom to leave. Ethnography is situated and must not transform studied peoples into timeless symbols. Technical evolution is uncertain: neither complete automation nor the abolition of classes may be treated as accomplished.

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Autonomy, institutions, rights and cybernetics

MODES OF PRODUCTION · THE FREEDOM TO REFUSE

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Revised edition: established facts serve the understanding of human relationships without confusing documented history, symbolic interpretation and normative horizons.