

**INTERROGATIONS, SESSION 2, OCTOBER 17**  
**ENVISIONING REAL UTOPIAS SEMINAR**

Ofer Sharone

I want to focus on your argument about the how “work” under capitalism blocks human flourishing by providing meager opportunities for creative work. I agree with this point, but I think that there are two analytically distinct reasons why this is the case. You focus on one of these reasons, which is that capitalist firms organize work so as to extract maximum effort without regard for the worker’s exercise of creativity. But I think there is another structural feature of capitalism that blocks fulfilling work aside from how the work is organized or divided. It is a built-in bias to focus economic activities on areas which maximize profits, which in turn generates jobs that channel work activities towards projects that from the point of view of the workers are not necessarily meaningful, useful, ethical, fulfilling, etc. For this reason the problem is deeper than merely a “disparity in access to interesting and challenging work.” This formulation suggests that the “winners” in capitalism, professionals with high status jobs, are usually not blocked from flourishing because their work requires creativity. But, I would argue, use of creativity alone does not equate with flourishing work. Lawyers, tax accountants, corporate managers, and the like are engaged in very challenging work that requires creative solutions to novel problems, but because the kinds of problems they are trying to solve are driven by profit maximization, these workers are typically not feeling like they are “flourishing.” I think you are trying to argue both points here, but they are somewhat conflated. I can imagine that in an alternative system that is built around maximizing human flourishing, there would be whole different range of jobs than currently available.

**[This is an excellent and thoughtful point. You are right that I was just raising the issue of work as a site for the creative exercise of talents and skills, not as a site for the forging of meaning. You are right on target in saying that this is just as fundamental, and of course, the idea of a democratically controlled economy with serious forms of deliberation and participation involves deliberation about the ends of production not just the means.]**

Maybe this is a question for a later stage, but it comes up in this reading so I’ll ask it. It is often claimed that capitalism is the “best poverty reduction program ever invented.” This is supported with statistics about how many millions of people have been raised out of poverty in China and India by recent capitalist development there. You also acknowledge that capitalism has generated scientific progress that has improved health and quality of life around the world. If the goal is to minimize net suffering in the world, does your argument about the “eliminable suffering” caused by capitalism not need to also claim that the eradication of this suffering by an alternative system will more than offset any increase in suffering due to a presumptive slow down of scientific and technological progress? **[I think that with the productive capacity already achieved suffering in the sense I am talking about can already be eliminated even without further scientific and technical progress, so even if there was a slow-down in such progress, it would be a slow down in the growth of productivity beyond what is needed for the purpose of eliminating poverty and absolute deprivation. But also I**

**am not at all sure that overall there would be a net slowdown in scientific and technical progress. What is likely to slow down is the drive for increased output, but not so obviously for increased productivity. There will be many different forces in play here operating in different directions and it is hard to know where the net effects will be: more effort in socially-useful technologies and “science for the people”; less on militarized technical change; but less competitive drive for risk-taking innovation; etc.**

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Jennifer Seminatore

The points I would like to address in Chapter 2, “What is so Bad about Capitalism?” center around two interrelated critiques of the capitalist mode of production that I find the most interesting and salient: the bias towards consumerism and the environmental destructiveness of capitalism. The moral argument against the consumerist bias in capitalism is twofold: (1) Because of social institutions, people do not freely choose consumerism (i.e. over free time) and even if they could, the state would step in to promote consumption so as to alleviate collapsing markets, and (2) ever-expanding consumption is non-sustainable (“environmentally destructive”).

I would like to discuss the specific mechanisms through which the consumerist bias is reproduced in cultural institutions, as well as the possibility that any alternative preferences would have to be cultivated and reinforced through similar means and therefore not morally preferable in that they are also somewhat coercive. Also, why would the state step in to prevent the collapse of markets? **[The state would intervene for all sorts of reasons – the stagnation and decline of markets under capitalist conditions mean higher unemployment and widespread social disruption; capitalist interests would put enormous pressure on the state to do something as bankruptcies increase; and so on.]** How can the state be transformed so as to accommodate the transition away from expanding consumption? Finally, how are the arguments that capitalism is self-contradictory or irrational (non-sustainable, consumerism not possibly voluntary because other choices would mean the demise of capitalism itself, total commodification impossible) distinct from specifically moral arguments against the capitalist mode of production (e.g. commodification of some things morally reprehensible, competition creates winners and losers which is not desirable, etc.)? **[I think these are all in some ultimate sense “moral arguments” because they center on values. The specific issue of consumerism and the consumer bias, however, has a specific bite because freedom of choice as consumers – consumer sovereignty – is one of the lynchpins of the defense of capitalism and free markets, so if you show that consumerism is a biased outcome this undercuts this specific defense.]** Which set of arguments provides a stronger basis for critique and movement towards alternatives?

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Ana Villarreal

A thought on “flourishing”:

I kept on thinking about the "flourishing" question and the quest for the best term possible. I don't know if you know this French word *épanouissement* but I think it is perfect for the context. It literally means blooming, so it is similar to flourishing in sense, but not in practice. "Flourishing" seems a bit funny to read at first, not because it is not neutral, but because the term is not used in our daily conversations and it might be associated with self-improvement literature (at least that's the first thing that came to my mind when I read it, but I'm not a native English speaker, so other people may have other reactions). *Épanouissement*, on the contrary, is widely used in exactly the same sense you were suggesting. One says that one left this or that relationship, job, career, because one did not feel "*épanouie*"—the translation "I wasn't flourishing" seems kind of funny English. I wanted to tell you this because if you ever find yourself facing a French audience, *épanouie* would make perfect sense as a neutral term on unfolding ones potential.

### **Consumerism: sugar-coated domination**

After reading a chapter on many of the reasons why capitalism is bad for a large part of the population, the first question that comes to my mind is how does capitalism continue to seduce those who do not benefit from it? How does it pull off its discrete taken-for-granted form? Pushing point 6 further I would like us to think about how consumerism is central to capitalist domination, not only because it offers satisfaction and pleasure where there is dissatisfaction and misery, but because it makes profit in the process! Capitalists need consumerism, but what is so strong about it is that it has managed to convince workers that they need it as well.

If capitalism needs to push consumerism to survive, it seems that one way of undermining it would be to resist consumerism, but who would resist consumerism? An interesting sequel to ‘what’s so bad about capitalism?’ would be to ask ‘what’s so bad about consumerism?’ What’s so bad about choosing ones products and deriving pleasure and satisfaction from them, especially after all the hard work they represent? The question behind it would be, how is the pleasure/satisfaction derived from consumerism helping people cope with capitalistic oppression? **[There are some quite interesting discussions around these themes in what is sometimes called the “voluntary simplicity” movement: the self-conscious effort to reduce consumption norms as a way of enhancing individual freedom and autonomy. The emergence of the credit card as a device that escalates consumption and undermining norms around delayed gratification may be important here as well. It is noteworthy in these terms that the intensity of consumerism is not a cultural invariant in capitalism – the US is more of a consumption oriented society than Europe, as witnessed by the preferences for vacations and lower work hours there. The book by Juliet Schor *The overspent American* is a very good source on this. (Also her book *Do American Shop too Much?*).**

## Roi Livne

I found the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter's conclusive discussion of capitalism's ten criticisms highly compelling. Some of the propositions seem to draw much inspiration from classical Marxist thought; others address contemporary social issues such as the environmental crisis. I would buttress the critique presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter with an 11<sup>th</sup> criticism, which is relevant to capitalism in both its past and recent forms: capitalism, I think, propels wars and armed conflicts.

In short, this criticism relates to three main mechanisms through which the capitalist system leads to militarization and war:

1. Wars are an integral part of capitalism's expansion: from the early colonial era, capitalism spread through wars and occupations, which led to the expansion of existing markets. Further, the formation of trade posts (e.g. the East India Company) constituted an integral part of colonial control.
2. Capitalism enhances armaments, through developing weapon markets and harnessing technology to the creation of means of destruction.
3. The poverty that capitalism brings to underprivileged countries may bring to wars in many cases. Such poverty can be developed either through poor countries' direct exploitation in the world system or through indirect effects that other consequences of capitalism lead to. An example for the latter can be found in the recent conflict in Darfur, which was caused at the same time by Sudan's general poverty and the accelerating desertification in africa.

**[This is an important issue to think through. I have considered including imperialism and militarism as two additional elements in the critique of capitalism, and it is certainly the case that in the history of capitalism both of these have been devastatingly linked to capitalism and capitalist development. My uncertainty has been with the idea that these are inherent in mechanisms of capitalism as such – especially now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which capitalism is a fully globalized system – or is the result of the specific connection between capitalism as geopolitical aspects of the system of nation states. It could be the case that militarism, war and imperialism were inherent in the expansion and development of capitalism, connected directly to its dynamics, but now this connection is “historically contingent”: capitalism no longer requires militarism even if remains militaristic. In the other criticisms in order to neutralize the problem capitalism would have to become less capitalistic – the basic class relations and power of capital would have to be modified. It is not so clear that this is what a reduction of militarism would entail. Part of the problem here is that militarism is also an expression of what I call statism, and anti-militarism might even enhance the capitalistic – as opposed to statist – character of economic relations.]**

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## Jorge Sola

I would like to stress an issue which, although is related with some points (especially 8, 9 and 10), it doesn't appear so clearly: capitalism is also bad to create good citizens. It seems obvious that a fair and good society (with social and political justice) would need fair and good citizens. And these citizens should be strongly committed with these values and the institutions which support them. In this sense, the existence of good citizens has a double importance: an intrinsic one (whoever would prefer to live with supportive, honest and committed people) and an instrumental one (they are crucial to achieve and maintain a democratic and egalitarian society). Both points were likely underestimated by the Socialist tradition, which was more focused in structural problems. However, the Republican political thought (from Aristotle to Rousseau) was very aware of this issue, which they called the *virtue* of citizens. And they were concerned about what kind of political, social and economic institutions facilitated or blocked this central aim.

Does capitalism help to create good or virtues citizens? I don't think so, because of many reasons raised in this chapter: capitalist relations generate incentives for selfish behaviour, imply inequality and domination, erode community and values, make politics not a popular activity, damage common goods, etc. In sum up, capitalism is not a "school of virtue". In fact, most of its defenders recognize it but claim that virtue is not actually so important. In Mandeville's words: "private vices are public benefits".

The current rejection of virtue as a central category by many philosophers is anchored, in my opinion, in a sharply contrast between Modern and Classical world views. Let me illustrate it with a not very known Marx's quote:

"Do we never find in antiquity an inquiry into which form of landed property, etc. is the most productive, creates the greatest wealth? Wealth does not appear as the aim of production, although Cato may well investigate which manner of cultivating a field brings the greatest rewards, and Brutus may even lend out his money at the best rates of interest. *The question is always which mode of property creates the best citizens* [...] Thus the old view, in which the human being appears as the aim of production, regardless of his limited national, religious, political character, seems to be very lofty when contrasted to the modern world, where production appears as the aim of mankind and wealth as the aim of production." (Marx, *Grundrisse*)

Of course, I don't think that we must copy the institutions or world views of antiquity, but rather that we can take them as a source of inspiration to envisioning other worlds. If we think that virtue of citizens is an important issue, we would agree that capitalism doesn't create the best citizens. (The concept of virtue is, of course, a disputed and complex one, but we could define a virtuous citizen as one who is a free-rider neither with himself nor with the others.) There is an important corollary of this position: Should the political and social institutions of our good society be absolutely neutral with the different ways of life? Or these institutions should be committed with the creation of better citizens through an ethic and political education (*paideia*)? In my opinion, that is a complex question, which may be easier resolved case by case than in general terms. But

in general terms and with many nuances, I would choose the second option. In any case, it is more related with other chapters than with the diagnosis and critique of capitalism. **[Of course I agree with the basic thrust of your argument here – the capitalism does not nurture “virtue”. But I think it is also important to recognize certain ways in which, in fact, capitalism does instil certain kinds of virtues. Capitalism is corrosive of ascriptive status distinctions, for example, since such status ascriptions interfere with the free market. Marx and Weber both stressed this. The impersonality of the market encourages a kind of universalism in the treatment of strangers, which is also a virtue. Capitalism also, ironically perhaps, encourages a certain kind of honesty in dealings because of the importance of reputation within market transaction (and for all the reasons people speak about when they talk about the noncontractual foundations of contract and the importance of social capital in the functioning of the market). Now, one can say that these are not specific effects of capitalism qua capitalism, but they are deeply connected to capitalism. So like many other aspects of these problems, there are contradictory effects of capitalism with respect to virtue.]**

Postscript: The beautiful quote of Marx, which is related with the idea of “human flourishing” and the critique of capitalism, goes on:

“In fact, however, when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity's own nature? The absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a *predetermined yardstick*? Where he does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?”

In bourgeois economics -- and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds -- this complete working-out of the human content appears as a complete emptying-out, this universal objectification as total alienation, and the tearing-down of all limited, one-sided aims as sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end.” (Marx, *Grundrisse*)

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Heidy Sarabia

This chapter addresses the question of "What's so Bad about Capitalism?" The short answer is many things; the long answer is explained in ten points elaborated by Wright. Interestingly, however, I find that most of the examples used to explain the dynamics of capitalism and why it is so bad are based on the notion of the "factory worker," that is, the supposedly vision of the most exploited and oppressed worker by capitalism. I guess

we all experience capitalism differently depending on our positionality, experiences and trajectories, so I guess a relevant question to ask is who is the audience, and what are the purposes of the book? (why are most examples about imaginable "factory workers"?)

**[That is a very interesting observations – I certainly did not intend the examples and focus to be mainly “factory workers”. I wonder if you are really right about this? The eliminable suffering proposition applies to the poor very broadly, which is not limited to factory workers; the obstacles to flourishing argument applies to the vast majority of people, and I include the issue of hyper competitiveness among professionals as an issue; the freedom deficit thesis applies to everyone who works as an employee and is bossed around, which is probably 70% of the labor force; the public goods, efficiency, consumerism, environmental, democracy, etc. propositions apply to everyone, not just factory workers. So, I am not sure why you feel that most of the examples center on factory workers (although I do use such examples).]**

Since capitalism shapes our entire worlds in different ways—from the way we use time, to the way we interact with each other, I wanted to hear more about the human story that tells a tale of suffering, not only in the most extreme of the cases (those who are hungry, those who are brutally exploited), but also from the perspective of those who suffer but might not think of capitalism as the source. If we are imagining utopias, it would be interested to put forth a vision that includes and speaks to those who might not understand the extent to which capitalism influences/shapes our lives. **[This is certainly an important and something we can talk about in the session. In propositions 1 & 2 I was making a distinction between suffering in the strong and simple sense of real deprivations (proposition 1), and obstacles to a fulfilling and flourishing life (proposition 2). Deficits in flourishing can also be seen as a sort of suffering, an include such things as boredom, anxiety, insecurity]**

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Fidan Elcioglu

I really enjoyed reading chapter 2 and the neat effort to bring together ten propositions which succinctly summarize what’s so terrible about capitalism. Below are some thoughts that may add to this topic:

- Capitalism puts a premium on a wide range of what can be termed “unproductive” activities. Unproductive can be defined in many ways, of course. For me, it primarily means activity that does not and cannot contribute to human flourishing; activity that is predicated solely on cutting costs and making profit at someone else’s expense, and that is, in the long run, rather meaningless. I would place speculative activity in this category, along with marketing, advertisement and other forms of activity intended to manipulate human psychology for the purposes of consumerism. Much of business consulting is about figuring out ways in which firms can improve profit margins. Corporate litigation is also fits into this category. All these activities are intended to allocate large amounts of wealth to already privileged groups, and serve directly or indirectly to reproduce economic

- disparity. **[In discussions of capitalism the term “unproductive” is sometimes used in a somewhat more technical sense as activities that are paid for out of the social surplus but do not themselves directly contribute to production. All of the expenses and activities associated with the transfer of property rights in exchange have this character. (The contrast between the costs of paperwork around health care in the US vs the single-payer system in Canada is a good example: in Canada it is about 5% of total costs in the US around 20%. That additional 15% is “unproductive” – connected purely to the private character of the insurance mechanism rather than the necessary forms of record keeping for an efficient allocation of resources.)]**
- Capitalism undermines community by generated dire socioeconomic disparity across individuals as explained on p. 27. I think this is best exemplified by the violence and crime that is generated by segregated neighborhoods, and in the process of ghettoization. Loic Wacquant’s discussion of marginalized blacks’ circulation through the ghetto and the prison system would be a salient example of how capitalism can undermine community and any sense of an individual’s feeling of connection to others. **[It is important to be careful in any concrete analysis like this over what precisely is attributed to capitalism and its distinctive causal processes and various other kinds of processes which interact with capitalism. One view, of course, is that racism and racial cleavage are themselves direct effects of capitalism, so the “interaction” of class and race in shaping the ghettoization process is the interaction of two faces of capitalism.]**
  - On a similar note, capitalism necessitates large amounts of unemployment and underemployment **for its successful maintenance**. **[I think you should distinguish two versions of this claim: a) a certain level of unemployment is good for capitalism and capitalists, and b) it is necessary for its successful maintenance. The former is certainly true; the latter is not so obvious. Capitalism is a pretty adaptive system, and when class forces are such as to reduce unemployment, a low unemployment equilibrium is possible, even if it is not the preferred option by capitalists.]** Particularly of interest to me is the growing trend among firms in the US and Europe to use temp agencies to satisfy their labor needs. Job insecurity is built into temporary labor; moreover, permanent workers are increasingly feeling the threat of temp labor, which undermines any chance of worker solidarity etc. Related to the “unproductive activity” point above, increasing resources go into promoting and legitimating the idea of temporary labor among firms and workers. For example, temp agencies target mothers by arguing that temp work can provide the flexible schedules that mothers need and so forth. **[there is an excellent dissertation on this by Erin Hatton – Wisconsin, Sociology, 2007 – which you might look at if you’re interested in temp agencies.]**
  - Although there is some discussion about the effects of capitalism on democracy, we should also consider the link between capitalism and political/economic (neo) imperialism. How does American imperialism affect the daily lives of people across the globe? What does it do for the quality of politics? How might it



- undermine transnational political alliance across less privileged groups? How does it promote xenophobia, nationalism, nativism and other forms intolerant behavior? How does it promote war? **[see my comment on Roi's interrogation].**
- Finally, I wonder the extent to which technology can serve to counteract the negative effects of capitalism on democracy, or perhaps put more negatively, prolong notions that capitalism can in fact accommodate democracy. For example, the internet, instant text messaging and other forms of information technology hold the promise increasing the democratic access to information, mass mobilization and collective action etc. How much can this type of technology that may have important implications for political democracy, within the context of capitalism, serve to undermine or prolong capitalism? (Manuel Castells I believe discusses in one of latest books, how instant messaging mobilized a democratic force during a Spanish political election.) **[I don't know if I would frame this in terms of the problem of "prolonging capitalism", which implies that we already know that capitalism is being undermined and the problem is explaining what forces might help it "survive". In any case, I think that the new information technologies make a much bigger difference in the lives of workers, the poor, and ordinary citizens in terms of their potentials for organizing than it does for elites. The masses always face more difficult coordination and information problems, both because of numbers and because of costs. As Offe puts it, the power of collective workers depends upon the willingness of individual workers to *act* whereas the power of collective capitalists depends upon the willingness of individual capitalists to *pay*. The Internet facilitates coordinated action in a cheap and accessible manner and thus has a bigger marginal impact on popular forces than on elites.]**
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Abigail Andrews

First, the vision Erik lays out in Chapter 1 embraces a wide range of human emancipation on social, political and economic levels, yet he focuses on capitalism as the central problem. Given this analysis, how are we to think about other kinds of domination or oppression that, although they may articulate with capitalism, are not features of that system, per se, and might persist even if it were done away with? Obvious examples include domination based on race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, and so on. How do we reconcile the idea that the problem is capitalism but that the "solution" redresses oppression of multiple sorts, beyond capitalism? **[This is a very tricky issue both theoretically and ideologically -- ideologically because any discussion that seems to privilege "class" is often taken as a disparagement of the salience of other forms of oppression and human identity. In any case, the focus on class and capitalism here does not imply that there is a necessary sequence in the emancipatory struggle against multiple forms of oppression – and certainly does not imply that capitalism could be "done away with" without also significantly challenging other forms of oppression. That being said, I think there is something quite special about the**

**problem of class and capitalism with respect to the problem of realization of the radical democratic egalitarian ideals of justice, as I briefly suggested in the first seminar: Consider the problem of sexuality and sexual identity. No one who supports social emancipation with respect to sexuality believes that there is any inherent reason why a social system would become unreproducible in the absence of homophobia. No one who is a radical egalitarian with respect to sexual identity worries that somehow chaos or social disintegration might be the result of eliminating oppressive normative heterosexism. In contrast, people who believe in the ideal of a classless society do worry that such a society might not be viable – that it would contain self-destructive contradictions of various sorts. The issue here, I think, is that transcending capitalism triggers problems of large scale macro-coordination and social integration which are central to macro-social reproduction, whereas transcending oppression of disability, or gender, or sexuality do not. Now, maybe this claim is wrong. Suppose the following: because of neuro-biological foundations of human sexuality and biological reproduction, in a world in which both normative heterosexism disappeared and full-bore gender equality prevailed, the fertility rate would decline below the replacement level and we would face demographic collapse. Contrary to what feminists believe (and I believe!), in the absence of normative heterosexism and gender inequality, the cultural forms supporting having children will weaken to the point that too few women will voluntarily choose to have babies. Society becomes unreproducible. I think that is a far-fetched argument, but the parallel argument about eliminating class oppression and inequality is NOT farfetched. This is why, I think, the transcending capitalism problem has particular theoretical urgency.]**

Second, one point that struck me, explained in section 2, was that competition frames peoples' "success" in terms of other people, making most people, who don't "win," appear to be failures. Clearly, capitalism embraces and emphasizes competition and a particularly noxious way. Is competition particular to capitalism? This brings us back to the question from the end of our first session about what the fundamental presumptions are about human nature that guide this book. How do we imagine an anti-competitive social world? **[I think competitiveness is an intrinsic part of human nature as is cooperativeness and reciprocal altruism. The issue is the extent to which particular social forms hyper-develop some dimensions of our "nature" and under-develop others. I do not think it likely that we could have a society with no competition and comparative status evaluations, but we could have a society with more balance.]** It reminds me as well that I am still confused about how we can define what it means to "realize one's potential" when there will always be practical limits to any one person realizing his or her potential, particularly when we attempt to distribute the "capacity for realizing" with some evenhandedness. **[These are indeed important practical issues, particularly because some talents are more expensive to develop than others and there will undoubtedly always be constraints on this process. This means that there will be problems to be solved in a society committed to the ideal that all people should have equal access to the necessary means to live a flourishing life – to develop their potentials – and that those solutions are likely to involve trade-offs.]**

Sections 3 and 10 raise another question for me, about the difference between the rhetoric and justifications behind capitalism and the system itself. Indeed, the discourse of freedom and autonomy has proved one of the greatest hypocrisies promulgated by defenders of capitalism (among many!). Economic, social and political inequalities constrain people in precisely the ways the market supposedly makes them free. Clearly, there are multiple tensions between capitalism in practice and the economic, free-market discourse that often justifies or undergirds its expansion. I think in discussing these matters, we have to be clear whether we're engaging the ideal-type logic of capitalism or the empirical manifestations of this system. Delineating the differences and marking the slippages, where the promoters of capitalism have misnamed or misunderstood its empirical manifestations, can reveal points of weakness in the system and help guide or process of critique. **[What we really want to do is use the analysis of the ideal type logic of capitalism to better understand concrete capitalisms and their failures. I actually prefer to use a slightly different language for this problem: what we want to do is identify the causal *mechanisms* inherent to capitalism – which are identified in the ideal-type – and explore their effects. What we mean by concrete capitalism, then, is a capitalism that is combined with a variety of other mechanisms some of which may mitigate/neutralize the effects of the capitalist mechanisms, but also, some of which may intensify those harms. Racism, for example, intensifies the marginalization tendencies inherent in capitalism.]**

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Kate Maich

I really enjoyed this chapter, and found it useful to engage with your strong attempt to deconstruct the various tenets of capitalism and what actually makes it 'so bad'...

Echoing some of Ofer's thoughts on your section on work, I wonder too about not just the 'winners' of capitalism, but those in the secondary tier of the labor market, stuck in low-status, deskilled jobs with zero benefits. How is anyone truly 'flourishing' at work? Capitalism—and most capitalist workplaces—calls for committed, focused workers without family issues or any distractions who can devote her/himself entirely to creating surplus. How do workers separate out and leave pieces of their identity—gender, race, class—at home? It seems as though capitalism expects this of us, and exacts this from us.

Reading the section on the commodification of child care (23) and keeping in mind your discussion of the benefits of being an active, participatory father, Nancy Folbre's work comes to mind regarding the care economy and how it would be quite possible to socialize these [high] costs of care. Reproductive labor has long been overlooked by capitalism, though it is absolutely crucial to its perpetuation. How can we place a real value and priority on these kinds of activities and the labor involved in performing them well, without devaluing children's needs (23)? On state intervention around this problem, you note, "These problems in the quality of childcare services can, of course, be moderated by state licensing, quality standards and monitoring, but to the extent that these are effective, they interfere with the functioning of the market, restrict the operation

of the rights of private property and thus render the provision of the service less purely capitalistic,” (23).

Like Folbre asks, who should pay for the kids? One creative, on-the-ground example that highlights the complexities of attempting to grapple with childcare in the capitalist marketplace is SEIU’s work organizing women who provide in-home childcare, family childcare providers. In Massachusetts and other states, these women earn below the minimum wage when accounting for the costs of providing care and educational enrichment to the children they supervise in their homes each day, many from low-income families who cannot afford to pay more for childcare. However, under labor law, these women are classified as ‘independent contractors’ rather than ‘employees’, and so they cannot organize a union or else they violate anti-trust laws [originally intended for blocking huge corporate monopolies]. SEIU has resorted to trying name the state as an employer, and other complications have ensued [including this measure being voted down on the ballot in MA last November], but I think the example points to the difficulties in finding creative, productive ways to value workers who provide this important caring labor to capitalism’s future workers. The commodification of childcare is a pressing issue, and I wonder how we can work to find ways to provide and ensure good, quality childcare while also creating good jobs for people—with creativity and an ability to flourish—who do this kind of work. **[If you are especially interested in this issue – innovative ways of organizing childcare services – you might want to look at the Quebec system of social economy provision of childcare. I discuss this a little in the section of the social economy in chapter 6. Basically the idea is the state (province) subsidizes careworker co-ops who provide daycare services at a low flat fee to parents -- \$7/day – and then get a subsidy from the province to bring their earnings up to a living wage standard (which of course is a very contested level).]**

Also, I’m a disenchanted email recipient on a list for a group called ‘Moms Rising’ a subgroup of MoveOn.org, which tries to mobilize people around family-friendly workplace policies, etc—in connection with the Motherhood Manifesto book. Recently they had an email about ‘National Boss Day’, and included in the email was a card that you were encouraged to send electronically to your boss, thanking her/him for being so family-friendly. Babies and diapers were all over the card, and as I read it, as a single, non-mother, who is interested in and committed to these types of necessary changes, I felt quite uncomfortable about the assumptions embedded within this communication. Clearly, only a [at least] mid-level, skilled worker who interacts with her/his boss in a regular manner could have the kind of access and comfort in printing out a card and delivering it, or emailing it. What is this really doing, anyway, and in whose interest? Anyway, I apologize for this tangential thought, but it highlights to me the difficulties in attempting to ‘humanize’ capitalism and some of the ways well-intentions groups continue to reify class distinctions when working toward these small, slow steps in making work fairer, more equitable, more creative, and more dignified. I am increasingly convinced this is never truly possible under our current system. **[the “Mom’s Rising” perspective also suffers from reinforcing the mother-caregiver model even if it wants family-friendly workplace policies. I think it is important for egalitarian perspectives on caregiving to simultaneously provide strong social support for**

caregiving activities and to combat the gendered character of such work. I actually think that the goal should be a complete degendering of carework. What precisely this means is complex, since it does not necessarily imply that men and women will do the same amount of carework, but it implies that there are no structured *gender-differentiated norms that organize carework*. If you're interested in this theme, I have a paper on it called "Strong gender Egalitarianism", which is on my website at: [http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/Strong\\_Gender\\_Egalitarianism.pdf](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/Strong_Gender_Egalitarianism.pdf)

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Adam Goldstein

My question concerns the issue of class structure and class membership. The classic Marxist assumption seems to be that an individual is a member of a single class by virtue of that individual's (non)-ownership of economically productive resources. Although you acknowledge the complexity and variation of actual class structures (and discuss it explicitly in other work), the diagnostic discussion of capitalism's harmful effects proceeds under the more simplistic assumption of a class structure that is dichotomous and mutually exclusive vis-à-vis membership. This seems unproblematic for the immediate purpose of explicating the concept of exploitation, but such an assumption may mask certain interesting dynamics of capitalist reproduction. Of course there is the whole issue of the middle class, but I have in mind more specifically institutions like the 401k, which turn workers into capitalists. What does it mean when people who work also have an economic stake in the continued exploitation of themselves and others? On one hand this would seem to upset certain core premises concerning class struggles, but fleshing out an answer might help to strengthen claims about the intractability of exploitation in capitalism (independent of ownership concentration). Confronting this topic may also offer a basis for responding to schemes such as the Bush/Rove-inspired "ownership society." **[I do think these are relevant facts about the complexity of capitalist class relations and indeed this does help to explain somewhat the legitimacy and stability of capitalism. But this does not undermine most of the criticisms, since many of them center on the power dimensions of capitalism within which economic power remains very concentrated, and about the destructive side effects of capitalist dynamics. In any event, even for those aspects of the critique of capitalism which are most tightly linked to class relations – propositions 1 – 4 – the diffusion of stockownership is so limited that it does not really undercut the force of the criticisms with respect to eliminable suffering, obstacles to flourishing, constraints on autonomy, and inequality of opportunity.]**