# *The Competitive Constraint*

## A Critique of Capitalist Domination

BY

Lillian Hall Cicerchia

(Draft: Please do not circulate)

# Contents

*"They tell us that we live in a great free republic; that our institutions are democratic; that we are a free and self-governing people. This is too much, even for a joke. But it is not a subject for levity; it is an exceedingly serious matter."*

- Eugene Debs in "The Canton, Ohio Anti-War Speech," printed in *The Call,* June, 1918.

## Goodbye, Political Economy!

I was born in 1991 – Two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and one year after Iris Marion Young published *Justice and the Politics of Difference.*[1] In that book, Young introduced the concept of social groups to explain why the concepts of domination and oppression are better concepts for understanding injustice rather than redistribution. Young wrote against the grain of a dominant liberalism that thought about justice primarily in distributive terms. She distinguished "between an approach to social justice that gives primacy to having and one that gives primacy to doing."[2] The main problem with the former distributive paradigm is that obscures the institutional context, the decision-making procedures, and the social norms in which distribution takes place. Domination and oppression are concepts that can better capture the scope of injustice in the world, thereby politicizing social processes in the service of subjecting them to collective decisions. The concept of a social group is important to displacing the distributive paradigm because it helps to identify the fluid and shifting relationships between people – the process – that generate disparities in life chances, resources, social esteem, and influence.

This argument was influential on the left of liberalism. It is now commonplace to talk about social groups and disparities among them. For liberalism's left, it is now widely accepted that it is wrong to reduce questions of justice to those of distribution. Resources do not solve all the important problems and it is wrong to reduce social justice to demands for more of them. What is less widely accepted is an analysis of the historical context in which this perspectival shift took place. Indeed, there is underappreciated irony in that moment. Young's text opens by asking the following questions,

[1] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
[2] Ibid., 8.

> What are the implications for political philosophy of the claims of new group-based social movements associated with left politics – such movements as feminism, Black liberation, American Indian movements, and gay and lesbian liberation? What are the implications for political philosophy of postmodern philosophy's challenge to the tradition of Western reason? How can traditional socialist appeals to equality and democracy be deepened and broadened as a result of these developments in late twentieth-century politics and theory?[3]

What is ironic is that Young thought that displacing the distributive paradigm was a way to deepen traditional socialist ideals, when one can only assume that the socialist project was collapsing in real time as she sent the manuscript to print. Now, she may not have lamented that fact and assumed that the collapse of "really existing socialism" did not entail the collapse of socialist ideals across the world. Perhaps, as many socialists in the Eastern Bloc hoped, there would be a revival of socialism in a democratic form. Alas, one can see in retrospect that it was not to be. The anti-capitalist left (state socialist or otherwise) suffered a complete and utter defeat in most of the world, with the notable exception of the Pink Tide in South America. It was the first time in capitalist history that this happened and it is in the context of its ideological reverberations that political philosophers received and adapted Young's intervention.

Nineteen-ninety-one is important because it is when the post-socialist dust began to settle. My birth year means that I have never known political philosophy to be lacking Young's intervention. I know that liberalism had a distributive focus and that in some (now less) mainstream corners it still does, but it's far from obvious that the distributive paradigm is as dominant as before, let alone the "difference blind" version that preoccupied Young.

[3] Ibid., 3.

When I first encountered John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, for example, I had already read Young. I would simultaneously read Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* and Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract*, both of which make critiques of liberalism's constitutive blind spots regarding the historical injustices perpetrated against women and the victims of Western colonialism. I was taught from the beginning that the real politics of liberalism, that master theory of moral universalism, individual autonomy, social cooperation, and consent, very often justify partiality, violation, antagonism, and coercion. I have only seen this critique continue to flourish in philosophy and among intellectual historians.[4] In my experience, radical criticism of liberalism is part and parcel to liberal discourse itself.

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In one way, this liberalism-critique is consistent with earlier socialist ones. Socialists have always claimed that liberalism is bourgeois, biased, and hypocritical. The difference lies in how far removed today's critiques lie in historical time from such forbears and the self-evident lack of an alternative toward which one can direct one's theoretical energies instead. To put the matter bluntly, the tacit appeals to socialism coming from an earlier generation of liberalism's critics sound hollow to the ears of mine. There is now skeptical rumbling among us that these critics are not doing non- or anti-liberalism. It seems that most radical critiques of liberalism are ways to deepen it and make it more attentive to structures, groups, and difference, but that this argument has a reached a point where it is among friends. What exists now is a *radical* liberalism that shares a set of common commitments. These are,

1. Synergy between facts and norms,

[4] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1988) and Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); see also Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2011) (first published in Italian in 2006).

2. Moral skepticism of causal claims,
3. Moral pluralism,
4. Strategic agnosticism

Together, these commitments sit comfortably within the liberal paradigm as jointly consistent claims in the post-socialist historical context. For radical liberals, it is not possible for the theorist to distinguish between facts and norms. The theorist necessarily organizes facts according to norms that they uphold either explicitly or implicitly. Moreover, norms evolve within social structures. It would be an act of uncritical hubris to assume that one can maintain an objective stance over and against these epistemic constraints. Theorists are in some sense responsible for creating their object of analysis, which means that they cannot simply take norms and apply them to facts. The norms themselves must also be subject to criticism. What follows from the synergy between facts and norms is moral skepticism of causal claims. If a theorist claims that patriarchy causes gender oppression, for instance, then they also make a value judgment about what is important to the analysis that should itself be subject to further criticism.

Now, it is not necessarily the case that moral skepticism of causal claims turns into their unequivocal rejection. In principle, causation can be a topic for empirical investigation and philosophers certainly speculate about causation all the time without it (usually in the form of a metaphor), but it does mean that causes are not a part of radical liberalism's meta-normative perspective. Radical liberals insist on militant pluralism at the level of discerning which injustices are better, worse, or commensurable with others. As Young writes,

> "In that abstract sense all oppressed people face a common condition. Beyond that, in any more specific sense, it is not possible to define a single set of criteria that describe the condition of oppression of the above groups. Consequently, attempts by theorists

and activists to discover a common description or the essential causes of the oppression of all these groups have frequently led to fruitless disputes about whose oppression is more fundamental or more grave."[5]

This passage shows that, for Young, discussions of essential causes are necessarily proxy debates about the kind of oppression that is not only more causally fundamental, but more morally important or severe. Thus, she opts for a typology of social group oppression that is thoroughly agnostic about causation. One can see a similar trend in discussions of the concept of intersectionality, wherein the most central, common commitment of the theorists is that all oppressions are equally important, incommensurable, albeit causally related in an unspecified way.[6] Under-specification is a feature and not a bug of the radical liberal perspective. It follows from the refusal to separate facts and norms and the subsequent skepticism of causal-cum-moral claims. Finally, radical liberals hold a line of strategic agnosticism. If (1)-(3) are sound commitments, then (4) follows. There can be no institutional node in society that is of greater strategic priority either. To make a claim about what strategies are viable would require some analysis of how remedies for oppression address its causes, which is out of radical liberalism's meta-normative purview.

There are two intellectual-historical trends that attract political philosophers to radical liberalism:

(1) The Death of the Subject of History

[5] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 40.
[6] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016); Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger are particularly explicit about this commitment in *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 73-8.

The first is directly related to the historical context that I described. The Soviet Union's collapse transpired in rough coincidence with the career maturation of the youngest cohort of the New Left generation in the academy. This generation was in the business of disavowing "really existing socialism" and accounting for the failures of socialist ideals to prevail in advanced capitalist countries in North America and in Europe, as well as in the anti-colonial projects in Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and South America. This process of bringing socialism to account involved a particular, sustained, and laser-focused critique of the Marxist tradition in thought and politics. For the New Left, Marxism has two fatal shortcomings, first in I theory of class conflict and second in its notion of base and superstructure. For them, these features of Marxist social theory generate a moral deficiency that is a mirror image of liberalism's own blind spots.

The New Left contended that Marxism posited a homogenous class interest to the working class by reducing interests to the purely economic. This Marxian perspective, so the story goes, is a metaphysical prejudice for which morals and culture are downgraded to the analytical status of superstructure; they are a pale reflection of the ideological dispositions of the dominant class within the economic base. As a result, Marxism is constitutively blind to the moral life of the new (now old) emancipatory social movements of feminism, civil rights, human rights, and sexual liberation. This constitutive blindness is the main line of attack on the Marxian notions of economic interest as a political motivation for class struggle and the claim that the economic structure constrains and determines the direction of social change. Indeed, class differences are always culturally mediated, so there is no redistributive, class axis of politics that reflects economic interest, since such interests are always culturally interpreted and thus include racial, gendered, and ethnic interests as well. To the extent that Marxism *prioritizes* class oppression and puts it into a *privileged* analytical axis, it is repeating non-radical liberalism's mistakes. In other words, the base and superstructure

model (and thus Marxism) is implicitly politically conservative.[7] It is this weighing of causal priorities that implicitly betrays exclusive and partial moral commitments, which generates the counter-commitments reflected in (1) and (2) above.

Put differently, and to weave in the relevant Marxian jargon, there can be no "subject of history" the proletariat is uniquely positioned to carry out the historical mission of universal human emancipation because it is in a position to see the capitalism's use of the productive forces as irrational. Labor will see that the capitalist economic structure has become a shackle on realizing this preferable alternative, so they will wage a struggle against capital to transform the economic structure and to make a different use of the productive forces. Their behavior is functionally explained by its effects on humankind's ability to put the development of the productive forces to more rational use. This view is one of technological determinism in the direction of social change. Workers can cohere as a collective political agent because their employers depend on their labor and because capitalism's productive forces organize workers into workplaces where they can then organize themselves. They will therefore increasingly find that it is in their interests to initiate a transition away from capitalism and toward socialism because capital has organized them in such a way that they have the capacity to leverage collective power to such an end.[8]

The Frankfurt School, for instance, had assumed that the working class was that subject, even as the pushed the boundaries of Marxian social theory to develop psychoanalytic and cultural accounts of advanced capitalism. It was not long into the 20th century before even they began to doubt that the orthodox theory of history corresponded to political reality. The failure of the working class to be the agent of revolutionary change that orthodoxy predicted,

[7] Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural?", *Social Text* 52/53 (1997): 268; Linda Martín Alcoff, "Fraser on Redistribution, Recognition, and Identity," *European Journal of Political Theory* 6(3)(2007): 255.
[8] G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 175-215.

in combination with the devasting rise of fascism, made it imperative for critics of capitalism to ask what that the orthodox theory had missed. They understood this political failure as a theoretical failure to understand this subject. They argued that what orthodoxy had missed is that the subject of history would sublimate itself culturally and aesthetically to the productive forces, thus becoming incapable of revolutionizing those forces. Their skepticism that workers *would* initiate a transition from capitalism to socialism turned into a thesis about whether they *could* do so. They flipped orthodoxy on its head: Workers *would not* because they *could not*. The post-New Left generations of critical theory would turn to liberalism after reaching a consensus that they *should not*.

In *Class and Civil Society*, Jean Cohen argues that Marx fetishized class, which lead him to relegate all non-economic human activity to a secondary "superstructural" status determined by the class structure.[9] Marxism is either utopian or totalitarian in its anti-capitalist ambitions because it not only places undue emphasis on the economy, but it denies politics, which is the realm of human contestation, communication, and diversity. Succinctly, Marxism effectively denies the pluralism that democracy requires. Many critical theorists then turned to civil society (the media, schools, non-governmental organizations, etc.) as a source of political contest and resistance, instead of class conflict.[10] For the contemporary Frankfurt School, then, Marxism is essentially a "philosophy of identity" because it is a theory of how the subject of history can know itself as the agent of social transformation. It rejects from the outset the unreconcilable diversity in human life, which leads to erasure of social difference, since complete identity can only exist beyond politics.[11] It also leads to

[9] Jean L. Cohen, *Class and Civil Society: The Limits of Marxian Critical Theory* (Amherst, MA: Massachusetts University Press, 1983).
[10] Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT PrEss, 1992); Michael Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument," in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso Books, 1992), 89-107; Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, "Bad Civil Society," *Political Theory* 29(6) (2001): 837-65.
[11] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London and New York: Verso Books, 1985); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University

erasure of the interpersonal relations that establish freedom in politics.[12] Thus, not only is technological determinism wrong and the proletariat not a universal agent of social transformation, it also politically dangerous to think that they should be. As Seyla Benhabib put it succinctly in *Norm, Critique and Utopia*, "The critique of political economy no longer serves as a paradigm for the Frankfurt School."[13]

## (2) The Birth of Rawlsian Liberalism

The second influence that makes radical liberalism attractive is the rejuvenation of liberal thought in general at the end of the twentieth century. John Rawls argues in *A Theory of Justice* (1973) that justice requires that a society organize itself with respect to two principles; (1) A scheme of basic rights and liberties for every individual that is compatible with the same scheme for all individuals and (2) That social and economic inequalities satisfy the conditions of fair equality of opportunity in occupations and positions that are open to all and that they are to the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society.[14] Rawls appeals to radicals because the first principle addresses the social fact of pluralism and the second is amenable to egalitarian interpretations. Although today there are as many radical critiques of Rawls' blind spots as there are of liberalism itself, they have not succeeded in

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Press, 1993); Dana Villa, "From the Critique of Identity to Plurality in Politics," in *Adorno and Arendt: Political and Philosophical Investigations*, ed. Lars Rensmann and Samir Gandesha (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 57-77.

[12] Axel Honneth, Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser," in *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christian Wilke (London and New York, Verso Books, 2003), 110-97; Seyla Benhabib, "Another Universalism: On the Unity and Diversity of Human Rights," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 82(2) (2007): 7-32.

[13] Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 180.

[14] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 52-77.

undermining the attractiveness of his core project. For the most part, they have expanded it and attempted to make it more inclusive.

Indeed, Rawls has exactly the virtues that Marx appears to lack. Rawls may be myopic in his treatment of the holder of basic rights and liberties as implicitly male and white, but unlike with Marx, the radical can push Rawls toward inclusion.[15] Liberalism, however, is unlike Marxism in that it is normatively capacious. The trouble lies in articulating a form of liberalism that balances its moral focus on individual freedom with the appropriate level of equality through a corrected, inclusive lens.[16] Mills helpfully summarizes the main general objections to this inclusion-driven liberal project and then offers a rebuttal that serves the purpose of a critique-and-rescue. The usual objections are the following ones.

First, liberalism has an asocial, atomic individualist ontology that prevents it from recognizing groups and group oppression. Even when it does, it cannot recognize how group oppression shapes the individuals who are its fundamental moral subject. Even further, liberalism is naïve about whether there is such a subject at all, given the historical genesis of this subject via just the power relations that one should suspect of injustice. Second, liberalism's normative values are intrinsically partial and exclusive rather than accidentally. Their use also tends to be idealistic insofar as focusing on these norms and making them more inclusive eludes important questions of how social change happens. We cannot simply debate our way to inclusion given the social structure in which we live or rely on existing state and legal systems that are biased against the excluded. They are also biased against the poor, which is good reason to doubt liberalism's credentials as a force for redistributing

[15] Susan Okin, *Gender, Justice, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[16] Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs*, 13.

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wealth. Last, liberalism is anti-socialist, so it cannot be radical. At best, it is ambivalent about capitalism and, at worst, it apologizes for its rampant inequality.

I find Mills' responses to these objections to be convincing. It is not at all clear that radical liberalism cannot develop accounts of social structure and social group oppression while simultaneously construing these injustices as fundamentally unjust for how they harm the individuals within structures and groups.[17] With a corrected, inclusive lens, one can develop a typology of structural harms both historical and contemporary, then show how they undermine liberal ideals. Even if radical liberals make some ontological assumptions about the rights-bearing subject to make this argument, it may well be worth it. Such assumptions are worthwhile as it's also not clear what the alternative program would be to correct for these injustices, at least in the medium-term. So long as the alternative is not forthcoming, it may be unwise to demand that the project of corrective justice wait around in the meantime. In other words, let us finally put all of the radical critiques of liberalism to good use and have a radical liberalism that tends to groups and thereby emancipates the individual.

As far as a long-term emancipatory project goes, socialists themselves have found Rawls to be sympathetic in recent decades. In fact, liberal socialism is what arose from the ashes of orthodoxy's class partisanship. Young, for instance, makes one of her first interventions by saying that Rawls is wrong to arbitrarily separate economic from political equality.[18] G.A. Cohen is a founder of the school of "analytical Marxism" who came to defend a luck egalitarian model of distributive justice that does not rely on controversial claims about political subjectivity. Cohen developed his view by conceding that the struggle for equality is no longer the reflex movement of a particular subject, so socialist values have

[17] Ann Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[18] Iris Marion Young, "Self-Determination as a Principle of Justice," *The Philosophical Forum* 11(1) (1979): 30-46.

indeed lost their mooring in the capitalist class structure. He pushed Marxists to go "from facts to norms," toward claiming that inequalities arising from any form of involuntary disadvantage are illegitimate – a morally arbitrary product of luck.[19] Therefore, the socialist challenge to Rawls is fundamentally about whether justice demands equality or only an approximation of it. In his last book, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (2008), Cohen critiques Rawls for falling short of egalitarianism while admitting that if one should call him a left-Rawlsian, then he should not dislike it.[20]

Rawls, for his part, does not concede to Cohen's egalitarian critique, but he does concede that capitalism is incompatible with liberal justice. He concludes that neither laissez-faire capitalism nor welfare state capitalism satisfy the condition of fair equality of opportunity in a robust way. Welfare state capitalism is not sufficient over and against the problem of fair equality of opportunity because it does not satisfy the condition that social and economic inequality is to the advantaged of the worst-off despite attempts to provide for basic needs. Rawls implies that dependency on the welfare state might undermine basic rights and liberties by making people less politically independent, thus undermining their fair value. He also concedes to feminists and philosophers of race that such injustices are also incompatible with liberal justice. Rawls claims that one requires a "nonideal" theory of injustice to understand how class, gender, and race create undermine liberal justice.

In sum, the analytical gap between left-liberals, socialists, and other radicals began to close. One can be dissatisfied with Rawls' lack of interest or time to develop a theory of social group injustice, but what became clear to many in these debates is that liberalism is not

[19] G.A. Cohen, "Equality: From Fact to Norm," in *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 101-115.
[20] G.A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 12; See also William A. Edmundson, *John Rawls: The Reticent Socialist* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and Lea Ypi, "The Politics of Reticent Socialism," *Catalyst* 2(3) (2018); Martin O'Neill, Social Justice and Economic Systems: On Rawls, Democratic Socialism, and Alternatives to Capitalism," *Philosophical Topics* 48(2) (2020): 159-202.

intrinsically hostile to emancipation. Rather, it all depends on who is using it and why. By contrast, Marxism did not appear to share such promise, given its anti-pluralistic economism. If you want it, the liberalism that emerged in the years after 1991 has proven itself to be a potentially radical and capacious analytical partner in the emancipatory effort.

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All the same, I believe that there are good reasons to not want it. Despite radical liberalism's many virtues, it has not come up with convincing arguments for why oppressed groups have an interest in solidaristic behavior toward the end of emancipation. When such arguments are made, they are speculative, gesturing vaguely at the need for diverse coalitions of people who find their way toward solidarity, always keeping in mind social difference and militating against homogeneity. Where radical liberalism does specify priorities, it tends to put the interests that lead emancipatory politics in order of the least advantaged and most marginalized. If one follows those people, then everything else will fall into place; if the most marginalized get free, then so will everyone else. Freedom is a domino effect that unties the ties that bind the oppressed to structures of oppression. At its worst, the latter model is a paternalistic politics of deference. At its best, it leaves one wondering at the shared interests that oppressed people presumably have in common, or what "freedom" is supposed to mean for them concretely relative to those interests. If there are no common criteria for freedom, then the view is not so much radical as it is one of interest-group agitation that aligns comfortably with mainstream intuitions of how liberal democracies are supposed to work.

This book develops a different point of view by (re)constructing a normative argument for why some groups – workers, women and their dependents, and minorities – might share a common normative horizon of freedom beyond traditional concerns with distributive justice. More specifically, the book blends together a philosophical critique of

political economy and a subaltern interpretation neo-republicanism that is consistent with feminist, abolitionist, and labor republican thinking about freedom. It uses the republican principle of "freedom as non-domination" to develop an analysis of capitalist domination that unites such a republican normative framing with contemporary social scientific analyses of capitalist competition, the labor market, and social group differentiation. "Domination" here is a structural capacity for exercising arbitrary power.

I am thereby able to reach a common conclusion where class, race, and gender meet, which is that the social relationships and conflicts at the heart of market competition grant capital arbitrary power in the lives of these groups. For workers, that power is reflected in capital's capacity to invest irrespective of workers' interests and the unequal capacity for collective action that workers have. For women, it is the arbitrary power that capital has to subordinate the demands of reproduction and care to those of production. For minorities by race or ethnicity, it is the structural asymmetry of capital's relative mobility compared to labor, as well as attempts by non-minority groups to protect themselves from market precarity. Interest in restricting the scope of this arbitrary power and expanding the scope of democratic freedom is a basis for solidarity among each of these dominated groups.

I begin in Chapter 1 by distinguishing an approach to social group oppression that gives primacy to disparate outcomes and one that gives primacy to the organizing principles of the society that generates them. Contemporary theories of social group oppression are dominated by a disparity paradigm, which tends to focus on the problem of social inclusion.[21] Like the distributive paradigm that was the subject of Young's critique, the inclusion focus of the disparity paradigm tends to obscure a specific type of institutional organization at the same time that it assumes it as given. That institution, I argue, is the economy. My central claim is that Marx's "hidden abode" of production is as hidden as it ever was and that no

[21] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 16.

analytical discussions of capitalist exploitation have made much of a difference in making it the normative subject of critical inquiry. The problem is that the social theory of radical liberalism models the economy in a way that is basically neoclassical in its assumptions about what the economy is and how it works. I argue that these assumptions distort the issue of democratic inclusion.

A paradigm, according to Young, is, "a configuration of elements that define an inquiry: metaphysical presuppositions, unquestioned terminology, characteristic questions, lines of reasoning, specific theories and their typical scope and mode of application." Radical liberalism has all the makings of a paradigm. It tends to give moral primacy the effects of the processes that produce inequality, despite its awareness that these effects are the results of causal mechanisms that involve decision-making in an institutional context. The ambivalence of radical liberals about causation shifts their moral focus onto disparate outcomes and then on how to correct them. Thus, the dominant terminology is that some groups experience certain forms of inequality *disproportionately*, that they are *disadvantaged*, and that they are *marginalized* – or, excluded. The principle normative axis upon which radical liberalism turns is between the two poles of inclusion and exclusion. Social group exclusion entails disproportionate disadvantages and marginalized political and cultural narratives.

In this paradigm, the persistence of disparities is the primary indicator that there is oppression at work. Given the great scale of economic inequality in capitalist societies, disparities among social groups have much to do with the economy. Thus, some radical liberal theories explicitly seek to push the discussion of disparities into the economy as a way of finding redress for class inequality.[22] Serious conceptual confusion results, however, from attempts to extend the concept of disparity and its normative axis of inclusion and exclusion

[22] Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

beyond phenomena such as racial and gender oppression and to those of class. The logic of disparity treats social classes as bundles of advantages and opportunities that some social groups can wield to exclude others in a pattern that takes as given the conditions that make such advantage and opportunity-taking possible. This perspective obscures class domination as an answer to the question of "Disproportionately disadvantaged and marginalized relative to what?"

Disparities are certainly important and advantages and opportunities will remain important in my account, too. But these social group patterns cannot remain bound to a liberal framework that obscures class domination. Liberalism's problem is that it blurs together distinct normative registers that are needed for analyzing the class character of social group oppression and the extent to which capitalist competition explains persistent disparities. Chapter 2 develops the book's normative agenda in conjunction with a different way of thinking about "the economic." In the political philosophy of social groups, the economy is normally viewed as a limit category; it is something that one must "go beyond" as opposed to examine more deeply. Instead, I aim to break down all dualisms between the "economic" and the "non-economic" so as to get a closer, stylized look at what is going on inside the economy.

I argue that the disparity paradigm sits comfortably alongside a neoclassical economic theory and that it is normatively impoverished as a result. Then, I introduce the republican concept of domination alongside its notion of virtue in a more pragmatic social theory. What republicanism can do that liberalism cannot is diagnose the organizing principles of capitalist economies as forms of arbitrary power. It can also illuminate the contests over the terms the arbitrary power that become sources of social group differentiation. Moreover, the notion of virtue helps to diagnose how some characteristic patterns of conflict systematically block processes of social learning that are needed to resolve contradictions within the economy.

The pragmatic social theory is a way of examining the social practices at the core of capitalist economies without idealizing them. I turn from neoclassicism to neo-pragmatism to support my claim that it is possible to abstract but not idealize, thereby capturing more of real life in a systematic way.

Chapter 3 dives more deeply into the problem of exploitation. This chapter is Marxian insider baseball, in a way, but it serves an important analytical purpose. It explains why the traditional way of developing a critique of political economy is through the concept of exploitation, then goes on to explain why this way of developing that critique has not turned into a generative research project for understanding social group inequality. Indeed, I am most keen to address a series of misunderstandings and challenges about this concept that have made theorists of social groups inequality predisposed to think that the concept of exploitation is narrow in explanatory scope and of limited normative importance. Both proponents and critics of exploitation see it as primarily a problem of distribution, it pertains only to privileged forms of labor, or it can be rectified with more democracy in the workplace. In contrast, I argue that exploitation is neither simply a matter of distributive justice, nor of democracy. Rather, inequality and autocracy (especially in the workplace) are downstream effects of structural practices of domination, which exploitation helps to explain. As a result, I re-politicize exploitation by describing it as a dividend of domination, then go on to show why my account is more capacious than alternatives.

I conclude Part I with an account of domination in Chapter 4. I expand on the republican claim that domination is a capacity for people to interfere arbitrarily in the lives of others, against critics who find the definition of republican domination too restricting. I explain how the labor process creates incentives for agents to intentionally produce structures that have unintended, yet dominating effects, and in turn, how the intentions of agents are conditioned by their social positions. In brief, the labor process is a normatively structured

social practice to which people intentionally relate. I conclude that, so conceived, one can see that domination in the labor market is both agential *and* structural rather than impersonal because it is structural. Arbitrary power is a capacity that is not reducible to power held by discrete individuals, but it is a constitutive part of the social position of individuals. It is also a power to which other institutions are vulnerable. States and civil societies share a deep dependence on the profit rate of capitalist firms, which entails having to prioritize their interests as the general interest of society when making concrete political decisions.

Part II applies my account of domination to social groups. Chapter 5 is about why class matters. It argues that capitalism undermines capacities that are necessary, if not sufficient, for working people to exercise self-determination as a group. Workers are subject to shared constraints and norms that inhibit solidarity, which I understand as a collective capacity. The problem of domination is one of unequal capacities for collective action between capital and labor. Thus, workers are collectively vulnerable to the arbitrary prerogatives of employers. Importantly, I argue that social differences are constitutive of who and what the working class is but are not reducible to another independent variable like racism and sexism. This point is the key to understanding the class character of both racism and sexism. Regardless of what the original cause of the latter are, and what a "total theory" of domination would entail, class matters because it creates distinctly capitalist conditions for persistent racial and gender inequality.

Chapter 6 argues that race concepts arise immanently from the norms of market competition and the expectations that people have of the state to protect them from it. I remain agnostic about which race concepts emerge from this process, but I nonetheless claim that the process is suitable for their durability. Market success or failure is commonly attributed to virtuous or non-virtuous character under conditions of relative equality. It is a short step to claiming that there are differences in natural kind when market failures persist

systematically. “Race” in a capitalist context is a form of character essentialism that tracks historically distinct patterns of vulnerability and what people think they can expect from one another. It is a perceptual map that rationalizes social differences. Simply put, race is an ideology. My system-level critique is that racial ideology distorts social learning about the conditions for both economic and political scarcity that are endemic to market competition. Mine is a non-functionalist, republican twist on the classical claim that racism obscures class domination.

Chapter 7 expands on insights of socialist feminist theory for explaining the contradictory “antinomies” of feminist politics under capitalism. It analyzes how capitalism creates opportunities to recognize sexual and gender diversity, while simultaneously undermining the social basis for reproductive freedom. It creates opportunities, but also constraints that create conditions for persistent anxiety over fertility and family form. These most intimate aspects of modern life are essentially contested territory given the contradictory normative expectations that people have of them and the state’s role in mediating these expectations. The unequal capacity of collective action between capital and labor is a problem in this area as well. As recent feminist scholarship argues, capitalism subordinates the demands of reproduction to those of production, which I translate into a normative claim about the arbitrary power of capitalist profitability to superimpose itself on processes of social reproduction.

The conclusion is a justification for class politics. It uses the concept of hegemony to describe the balance of political forces between capital and labor. In normal circumstances, what exists is the political, social, and economic hegemony of capital over labor. Class conflict can shift this dynamic in labor’s favor, which requires class solidarity in collective action. I respond to the many critiques of the limited nature of this classical socialist position by recasting the goal of solidarity as expanding the principle of freedom as non-domination.

One need not think that the labor movement, for instance, will in itself resolve the endemic problems of racism and sexism to claim that anti-racist and feminist movements should prioritize an alliance with labor and ingratiate themselves within the labor movement. Indeed, I accept radical liberalism's pluralist claim that there are incommensurate injustices that affect social groups, which cannot be reduced to the arbitrary power of capital. Nonetheless, this point is immaterial to my claim, which is that there is a social basis for solidarity in the face of domination, over and against such differences. It is this normative framing that radical liberalism lacks to the detriment of a critical theory with emancipatory intent.

# Part I: Social Groups and Market Freedom

# Chapter 1: Putting Disparities into Perspective

This chapter argues that social groups are center stage in political philosophy such that there is a dominant way of thinking about the harms that accrue to them and how to address those harms. I survey the philosophical accounts of social groups that I understand to be the contemporary common sense for the kind of thing that group-based discussions of inequality are talking about. I show that these discussions revolve around a common normative axis, which is that of social, political, and economic inclusion and exclusion and its attendant normative language of disadvantage, marginalization, discrimination, and disproportionality.

I then argue that this "disparity paradigm" obscures the economy. This claim is simultaneously obvious and oblique, so I support it at some length with social theoretic analysis. In brief, there is a particular conception of the economy that is at work in radical liberalism's understanding of the economic dimension of social group inequality. This conception is highly idealized and it makes some aspects of economic processes salient while obscuring others. It is a case of salience idealization, which involves placing undo emphasis on those aspects of a phenomenon that have a positive normative valence. Without it, the fit between the economic influence on social group inequality and normative axis of inclusion is far less comfortable. In fact, there are good reasons to think that class does not fit at all and that the disparity paradigm instead presupposes it.

Finally, I argue that what is needed is a more realistic conception of the economy that challenges the prevailing common sense and that illuminates, rather than obscures, the economic dimensions of social group inequality. Such a conception does not require eschewing moral pluralism, but it does demand that one disambiguate among different

normative registers that radical pluralism blurs together. Moral pluralism is important because disparities are real, but the disparitarian harms are not mutually convertible with those of the organizing principles of the economy that contribute to their reproduction. My normative shift is from inclusion and exclusion to freedom and domination, which I claim is more appropriate to a critical understanding of what the economy is and how economic processes influence one's judgments about justified and unjustified forms of social group inequality.

## *The Disparity Paradigm*

The disparity paradigm sees disparities in the outcomes of social groups along the lines of economic, social, and political status as the primary indicator that a group-related injustice is being done. The groups between which there are disparities are taken to be the groups that are in relation to one another. It is thereby and therein those relations in which group members who bear more or less responsibility for their group's dominance perpetuate patterns of discrimination, advantage, and conversely, disadvantage and marginalization. The disparity paradigm defines justice as the morally proper inclusion of social groups within social, political, and economic institutions. It is, therefore, a pluralist ideal of liberal democracy in the broadest sense of the latter term so that it includes different and competing imaginaries about the institutions that could make it up. Institutional ideals vary, but in each case, social justice and inclusion are coextensive concepts.

Theories of social group inequality typically fall into the category of "non-ideal theory," which eschews ideal theorizing about what justice is in favor of figuring out what is wrong with an unjust world so that it might become more just. If one asks, "To what end?"

then the answer, insofar as non-ideal theorists of social group inequality provide one, is to eliminate the barriers to achieving a morally proper inclusion of social groups by standards of liberal normative criteria that are revised in such a way that they are sensitive to the social differences that have resulted from historical patterns of exclusion. Indeed, non-ideal theory is a corrective response to the distinctively liberal "ideal theory" posited by Rawls and Rawlsians that did not develop useful accounts of injustice while in pursuit of their theory of ideal justice. As Elizabeth Anderson writes, "For when we assess whether a society is deviating from ideal justice, we still assess it from the standpoint of representative positions in the ideally just society."[23]

A review of how some major theorists define justice and injustice relative to social groups makes apparent the conceptual identification of justice in non-ideal conditions with inclusion. Young also notes much earlier than Anderson that, "the liberal commitment to individual freedom, and the consequent plurality of definitions of the good, must be preserved in any re-enlarged conception of justice" that refers to institutional conditions. For her, social groups are "collectives of persons differentiated from one another by cultural forms, practices, or ways of life" that express social relations as a result of particular histories. Groups are not aggregate individuals, nor do they exist apart from individuals, nor are they voluntary associations.[24] They are what Ann Cudd later calls "nonvoluntary" groups in which members "share social penalties and rewards consequent on their being so

[23] Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 5. See also Charles Mills, "'Ideal theory" as Ideology," *Hypatia* 20 (3) (2005): 165-84; Amartya Sen, "What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice," *Journal of Philosophy*, 103(5)(2006): 215-38; Georg Sher, *Approximate Justice. Studies in Non-Ideal Theory* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); John. A. Simmons, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 38(1)(2010): 5-36.
[24] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 42-8.

grouped."[25] Individual members of social groups are group members by virtue of the fact that they share common institutional constraints with other group members.[26]

The way that the disparity paradigm treats social groups from the standpoint of non-ideal theory is, as Tommie Shelby writes, not to try to describe the political principles that oppressed groups should embrace in a fully just political order, but to consider how one might ought to relate to polities that are plagued by persistent "[racial] discrimination, unjust economic disparities, and unequal opportunities" that disproportionately effect certain groups that are, in his writing, racially stigmatized.[27] The moral claim here is that is it unequal relations between groups that give rise to disparate outcomes, so those relations are proper objects of normative assessment in a theory of justice. This assessment may be of the principles, rules, processes, or norms through which one group interacts with the other, avoids them, or acts in such a way that effects their interests and their autonomy. These relations may cause severe disadvantages, like exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, violence, or cultural imperialism, or less severe disadvantages like discrimination, limited political influence, or fewer opportunities to develop their talents and to qualify for positions of authority.[28]

Ultimately, social group oppression is harmful because it restricts the autonomy of the individual group members in a way that violates principles of justice more or less specified in ideal theory, i.e., social group oppression is incompatible with a schema of basic liberties, fair equality of opportunity, and maintaining only those inequalities that are advantageous to the worst off. It is also harmful to democracy. Indeed, social group inequality is intrinsically

[25] Ann Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 41-6.
[26] Cf. Iris Marion Young, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective," *Signs* 19(3) (1994): 713-38.
[27] Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 12.
[28] Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, 17-21.

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threatening to democratic norms because it undermines the scope and depth of social inclusion within democratic processes – some individuals have fewer choices, are unintegrated into the political process, are unrecognized as social peers, or are (in other words) denied opportunities for self-realization, participation, or recognition. Individuals qua individuals *may* be unequal for justified reasons, like differences in talent, skill, or work ethic, but the persistence of inequality for individuals qua groups signals that unjustified and moral arbitrary inequality persists. Relative to similarly situated members of society (like those with similar talents, skills, and work ethic) social group members suffer undo institutional constraints.[29]

Thus, disparities signal an injustice in the social relations between groups, which in turn signal a democratic deficit that is not justifiable by the criteria set by ideal theory. Anderson continues, "Group inequalities arise when a group has acquired a dominant position with respect to a critical good such as land or educations and practices of social closure to prevent other groups from getting access to these goods, except on subordinating terms." Most philosophical studies of social group inequality are explicitly left-liberal in character, act as correctives to ideal theory, and importantly, center their normative analysis on discrimination, disproportionality, marginalization, and disadvantage relative to a plurality of goods that constitute the conditions for social equality. What is "radical" about this non-ideal liberalism is the scope and plurality of the goods that the measure of inequality may be relative to. The aim is to eliminate all morally inappropriate exclusions, keeping only those that are morally appropriate as determined by inclusive democratic processes.

Interesting ambiguities arise at the intersections of socialist and non-ideal liberal thinking about social groups. Indeed, "class" is one social group with which socialists have

[29] Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 85.

been historically preoccupied and many of the unjust relations that the disparity paradigm describes are those of class, like exploitation, the absence of employment and career opportunities, and having a lack of opportunities to develop talents. Indeed, most of the disproportionate disadvantages that the disparity paradigm describes are relative to some good that is obviously economic, although they are careful to not reduce inequality to economic factors and insist on cultural dominance, negative stereotypes, lack of respect, and the absence of moral reciprocity as key facets of the experience of social group inequality, as well as what may unite a social group as a group in the absence of economic factors. For instance, what unites women or racial and ethnic minorities together as a group across class divisions are the institutional constraints of social stigma and prejudicial normative expectations of individuals within those groups. If socialists tend to be preoccupied with economic inequality, then one can interpret the disparity paradigm as a "Yes, and…" rejoinder to that preoccupation. As with Young, the idea is to broaden the scope of justice beyond the economy through more inclusive normative criteria.[30]

At the same time, the "Yes, and…" posture is too easy. It insists on a prior agreement about economic equality that does not exist. Anderson, Cudd, and Shelby, for instance, all disavow socialism as their ideal. For Shelby, justice does not require socialist equality.[31] The others explicitly distance themselves from socialism, Marxism, or both, offering explicit arguments in favor of capitalism against alternatives to address the joint problems of class, race, and gender, which are understood as social groups within hierarchies of power, control,

[30] Iris Young, "Unruly Categories: A Critique of Nancy Fraser's Dual Systems Theory," *New Left Review* 222(1997): 153. See also Linda Martín Alcoff, "Fraser on Redistribution, Recognition, and Identity," *European Journal of Political Theory* 6(3)(2007): 255 and Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 28-36, 285-290.
[31] Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 35-8.

and resource closure.[32] Young, too, does not unequivocally distance herself from this inegalitarian line of argumentation. Although she argues that class is a paradigmatic structural relationship between groups starting from a broadly Marxian notion of an exploitative interdependency between capital and labor, she also claims that class *segregation, not economic inequality as such* is a threat to democracy. She sympathizes with the stronger view of equality, but nonetheless writes that segregation is a better framing of what's anti-democratic about inequality. The latter position is a symptom of pessimism, to be sure, but it nonetheless militates against the idea that people who care about social group inequality are intrinsically egalitarian along class lines. The argumentative strategy itself betrays the opposite as more likely to be true.[33] Inclusion becomes a way of reframing matters of social group inequality to avoid making controversial claims about the basic structure of the economy.

Most theorists take it as a given, then, that non-ideal justice is about inclusion within ideal justice. The disparity paradigm denies that there is a single normative good that inclusion is relative toward, but it does assume that all goods can be modeled through disparities and that inclusion is the way to rectify them. Such a model implicitly assumes, then, that social class is unexceptional in this regard. The class problem is the same normative problem as with race, gender, disability, age, and sexuality, which is the morally arbitrary basis upon which they generate inequality. As such, class inequality remains justifiable in the radical liberal interpretation of social group inequality insofar as it is *not* morally arbitrary. A non-arbitrary form of class inequality would mean that it is not in excess and its effects do not bleed over into politics or create group disparities in a way that

[32] Anderson, *Private Government*; Ann Cudd, "For Capitalism as Feminist Ideal and Reality," in *Capitalism, For and Against: A Feminist Debate* with Nancy Holmstrom (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[33] Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 215-6.

undermines political equality. Often, radical liberal argumentation regarding class inequality seems circular because it tends to see class inequality as structurally unjust when it produces disparities along these other axes. Class disparities in themselves, however, are not *ipso facto* an indicator of unjustifiable social group inequality. Radical liberalism retains that much from the regular kind of liberalism.

With respect to non-ideal theory, it is ironic that Rawls – the ideal theorist himself – moved in the opposite direction by the end of his career, as he reconciled with many of his left critics and eschewed capitalism and its class divisions by virtue of the fact that they are unreconcilable with liberal principles of justice. By contrast, the disparity paradigm has come to represent economic inequality in a more problematic way. I find that there are two important problems: First, it tends to ignore, at the same time that it presupposes, the logics of social action that are at the heart of market competition. Second, when extended to social class, the logic of disparities tends to misrepresent the central injustice that is at stake.

### *The Disparity Paradigm Obscures and Presupposes the Competitive Market*

Much of the theorizing about social group inequality is about how dominant groups capture or wield economic and political influence by hoarding resources like financial capital, social capital, education, credentials, and respect. These resources, in turn, facilitate patterns of power and social hierarchy that recursively reproduce those resources, like segregation in housing, labor markets, and schools. The main questions concerning non-ideal justice are, first, how this hoarding process emerges from inter-group relations and why the outcome of that process unfair due to injustices having been perpetuated within it. Second, how are the

solutions sensitive enough to the historical pattern identified by non-ideal theory so rectify them in approaching ideal justice.

This approach is evident in the more applied theoretical discussions about affirmative action for racial and ethnic minorities, for instance, as well as in debates about the disproportionate effects of colonialism and climate change. In the former case, affirmative action is a policy that rectifies past discrimination by offering preferential treatment to qualified minority candidates for entrance into schools and jobs. Often these policies receive criticism because they are not applied directly by their beneficiaries, so there is much emphasis put on community control and more direct, political paths to democratic inclusion. The notion of reparations either domestically (in the U.S.) or globally to post-colonial countries largely presumes that the problem is that subordinate groups and nations have not had the opportunities that whites or the West have had to develop economically and that what is needed is disproportionate efforts to employ and invest in those areas – not under the control of the advanced capitalist countries – such that they can avoid paying, say, the disproportionate burdens of climate change.

There are good reasons to focus on these issues in this way. In a society in which disparities are evident on a national and international scale, any conception of justice must have an answer for what to do about them. In today's world, it is far from obvious that there is an alternative strategy for redress beyond aside from doing what the disparitarian view suggests, which is to take from the privileged to give to the underprivileged. Given the existing political limits, it may be worthwhile to change the constitution of the social and economic elite to achieve better representation at the top that (hopefully) trickles down to the bottom to benefit the worst off in the oppressed group or, indeed, nation.

At the same time, an analysis of the latter sort sees some of the existing political limits and not others. Here are some other questions that bear upon the issue of rectifying disparities: Do the opportunities for employment and investment actually exist? Is the economy dynamic enough to absorb corrective policies on a wide scale? Can it sort disadvantaged groups into the labor market? Are there mismatches in skills that require active labor market policies to correct them? Is the path forward one of capitalist development or some other kind? Public or private investment? On capital's terms or on labor's? If it's the latter, is it a market economy, a planned economy, or some combination of both? My point is that the basic logics of action that are at the heart of market competition remain the background conditions in which these disparity-eliminating strategies must intervene. If one wants to change them, then one must confront them to transform them. If one wants to keep them, then one must also confront them to reform them.

What are these basic logics of action? Subsequent chapters are preoccupied with identifying these logics in some detail, so I will first say what they are uncritically before I do so critically. The neoclassical view of market behavior has three pillars: (1) its decision-making model, (2) its model of perfect competition, and (3) its model of market failures.[34] The latter is controversial among mainstream economists, but I include it anyway, since it is part and parcel to the more self-critical neoclassical theories that would be likely to concern themselves with social group inequality. For instance, it takes for granted that markets can undersupply public goods and that there are moral hazards within markets that incentivize immoral behavior, like resource closure and pollution. Thus, they support state intervention and there is no market *versus* the state dichotomy in this view.

[34] This representation of the neoclassical view is taken from CORE Economy, which is a source that builds the idea of market failures into its framework. It is, therefore, a representation of this tradition that neglects to explore the parts of it that would deny that markets can fail: www.core-econ.org.

For neoclassicals, decision-making is a process that reveals preferences and markets emerge when many people seek to realize gains from trade. The market provides opportunities for individuals to calculate trade-offs among their preferences, mediated by prices. Prices are fundamentally a way of making values commensurate with one another so that individuals can make trade-offs based on what prices are signaling to them about what other people value. In other words, prices offer a way of comparing the value orientation of many people through a single measurement.

The model of perfect competition scales up from the micro to the macro-economic level. It assumes that all buyers and sellers in the market are forced to act a price-takers, which means that there are many sellers and buyers of goods, that all sellers act independently, and that all the buyers know the prices of all the sellers. Moreover, all consumers are expertly well-informed about the available commodities and their prices. As a result, buyers and sellers must compete with one another: Sellers do not have a reason to sell for less to a buyer who would pay less than their price, but they must adjust their prices to the demand of buyers who can discriminate between seller prices. Consider a seller of a used textbook on E-Bay where there is high demand for the textbook due to low supply of cheap textbooks. If there are other sellers of the same thing, the seller must match their prices based on consumer knowledge of other options. So long as the price exceeds its value to the seller, gains from trade will accrue to the seller. The buyer also realizes gains from trade so long as the used textbook is cheaper than a new one. An equilibrium is when both could not have done better if the exchange took place at a difference price, or if one would not have traded at all.

Market failures reflect imperfect competition. Rectifying or avoiding market failures involves bringing the externalities "in" to the marginal cost-benefit calculation. The most straightforward example of a market failure and a strategy for rectifying it is pollution. A plastic-producing firm may not calculate the costs of its pollution, so it may generate plastic

waste in nearby oceans and streams. The costs may fall on a nearby fishing village whose fish are strangled by the waste in the sea, which are unknown costs to the firm. One might resolve the fish strangulation problem through taxes that make pollution costly, passing fish sustainability laws, or compensating the fishing village for its loss. Consumers could negotiate a trade-off between their demand for plastic and village's prosperity, which means getting clearer about their preferences. The firm can now internalize these costs and adjust to demand accordingly, finding a new equilibrium.

The argument advanced by non-ideal inequality theorists mirrors the one advanced by the more self-critical market failure economists. Non-ideal theory, like imperfect competition, presents the unjust world as a sort of fall from grace. Like the fall of Eve, liberalism has sinned against itself and it must atone by non-ideal means before it can be redeemed. In the presence of racism, sexism, and the colonial past, the mirror of liberal, democratic inclusion looks back at an ideal conception of itself and likes less and less of what it sees. It continues to fail to incorporate all of the dimensions of justice that are at issue, thereby repeating a pattern of exclusion that is systematically flawed. Likewise, market failures reflect inadequate knowledge about our preferences such that they have not been revealed through the price mechanism. In a perfect market, all our values will have been accounted for and the price would reflect the costs of the damage that we have done to one another and our planet. In neither case is the aim of non-ideal theory or economics to change the prevailing logic of action. The point is to include what has been heretofore excluded.

Other non-ideal theorists issue critiques of the narrow construal of human rationality and preference ordering in the neoclassical model. Amartya Sen, for instance, argues that what is needed is to eliminate the asymmetry between different group of people who change over time (group plasticity) and who have a plurality of sustainable reasons for doing what they do. One simply must evoke more than the pursuit of gains from trade arising from rational

self-interest to make sense of human behavior and, indeed, the interaction between groups. According to Sen, there are social implications of having established rules of behavior that are asymmetric in favor of more powerful actors. What seems like mutual benefit and "gains from trade" may reflect constraints that are not self-imposed and a complicated way of negotiating many values. One ought to think beyond mutual benefits, about "[h]aving effective power and the obligations that can follow unidirectionally from it," if one wants to understand what is reasonable for people to do. Liberal value pluralism demands more than revealing one's preferences in self-interested market interactions.[35]

Whereas approaches that focus on building capabilities that facilitate democratic self-determination are promising, they are simultaneously too narrow and too vague. On the one hand, the dominant capabilities approach is narrowly focused on having the right preconditions for market behavior. In a human rights-oriented capabilities approach to justice Martha Nussbaum tries to identify what is a robust floor for market actors to be able to flourish and to avoid as much as possible the coercive effects of having to play meaningful values off of one another.[36] Instead of correcting for imperfect markets from the top down through state policy, one can think of the capabilities approach as correcting them from the bottom-up. Given sufficient capacities, actors can take advantage of markets, given that they are not starting at a structural disadvantage. It does not inquire into the social relationships that drive market competition once that floor has been set, or once each individual has endowments that facilitate fair, more perfect competition.

The capabilities approach is also too vague, as are deliberative democratic approaches to social group inequality that tend to emphasize not only a floor but genuine capacities to

[35] Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 194-207.
[36] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

influence the political process. The idea here is that historical patterns of exclusion would not be possible if the oppressed groups had more economic and political agency in liberal democracies. There is truth to this, but it is too vague because it fails to specify the way that people make decisions, given adequate capacities to do so. For instance, one might assume, in the context of a capabilities approach, that working class people in advanced capitalist countries have both an adequate floor and sufficient political voice through labor parties and trade unions. Why then, one might ask, does one observe "democratic backsliding" in the same countries, where many working people do not feel that they are so capable, continue to persist? The qualitative features of decision-making that include conflicts and changes relative to historically specific constraints within capitalist markets are notably absent in this approach. One must articulate how people exercise capacities and under what conditions they deliberate about their use.

The general criticism that I am making of the disparity paradigm is that the overwhelming focus on intergroup relations within a non-ideal market setting is that such a focus ignores and tends to obscure the market setting itself as a reason for social group differentiation. There is a line of reasoning that runs parallel between ideal and non-ideal theory and perfect and imperfect competition. What is non-ideal relative to economic goods is generally taken to mean what is imperfect about markets as they currently exist due to lack of opportunities, discrimination, or historical disadvantages. Thus, there are actually specific institutions that the disparity paradigm presupposes as the background conditions for what is harmful about disparities, and indeed what is causing them, despite radical liberal commitments to moral pluralism and its agnosticism about causation. If competitive markets can be redeemed, then it is not their endogenous logics of action that are causing the problem. Rather, the morally inappropriate disparity is a deviation from what is possible in principle in

a market economy. At least that much causal reasoning operates through the idea of a disparity, which I call a "logic of externalities" vis-à-vis the market.

*Overextending the Concept of Inclusion*

One might think that the idea of a "group relation" addresses the concerns that I raise here. It is general enough to extend the disparity paradigm to include class groups. After all, it seems that Young does just that in her analysis of exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness. She disambiguates that exploitation coerces some people to work for the purposes of others, but "powerlessness" pinpoints complexity by distinguishing between skilled and unskilled workers, or professionals and nonprofessionals. The unskilled and the nonprofessional are powerless because they lack control over their labor. There is also marginalization, the subjects of which "are the people the system cannot or will not use."[37] I have three problems with including class within the disparity paradigm, which I address in turn in this section.

First, the idea of a "relation" is not immediately an analysis of the type of relation that dominates capitalist markets. Interdependent relations like the one between capital and labor are different from unidirectionally dependent relations and vertical relations are different from horizontal relations. In the case of working people, they are not on the whole excluded from the economy by virtue of the fact that their bosses depend on their labor. In some sense, yes, they may be excluded by relative lack of political influence. However, the reason for their political exclusion is not itself a form of exclusion. Quite the contrary, they are *not*

[37] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 53.

excluded in a crucial sense, which is that workers are at the center of the economy rather than at the margins. This form of exclusion is a function of a more contradictory social status than what the folk usage of a concept like "marginalized" refers to. Indeed, the folk use of this term is a misleading way of talking about workers because their social position involves an interdependent social relationship with employers who are at the center of the economic process. It is moreover misleading to talk about what is going on with a social *majority* of people as being marginal. It is odd to posit that the normative problem with class is that it is on margins if the relevant constituency is at the center and the majority.

Among workers, one can certainly say that there are patterns of exclusion in which some are marginalized by being unemployed or underemployed, or made powerless by being deskilled, but inclusion and exclusion may not be the right normative axis here either. At least it's not the only one, nor is it obviously the most apt to capture the process through which these disparities emerge. Disparities in outcomes of skill, credentials, and employment are the results of processes that are not reducible to the unfairness of the opportunities that are given to each worker and potential worker. One must first assume that sufficient opportunities exist to begin with, that the economy is dynamic enough to generate technological innovation while reshuffling the deck of employment, that growth rates are high enough to reabsorb labor, and many other things besides. Capitalist development is not a static process upon which the human moral failures of bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination intervene to generate undesirable outcomes.

Second, any discussion of including people of "lower socio-economic status" in a capitalist economy is question begging the problem of inclusion. One must take as given the moral permissibility of at least some forms of exclusion for inclusion to make sense as a solution to the problems that are at stake here. On the whole, liberalism is a property-discriminating political philosophy. I appreciate the persistence of certain liberal egalitarians

who resist this trend by advocating for universal basic income, capital grants, property-owning democracy, or some other way of ensuring that each individual in a liberal society has access to property, but this trend is not the dominant one.[38] What is dominant is that liberals see private property specifically as a matter of individual right and it is therefore fraught for liberals to decide who can take what away from whom to redistribute wealth or to the change hands of control over the conditions of economic production. There is, in other words, a rather infamous set of trade-offs between liberty and equality within liberal political philosophy that starts with the property question. Without challenging the moral appropriateness of this trade-off, no discussion of social groups is going to be able to do much besides adjust for disadvantaged groups within the confines its analytical constraints on thinking about human freedom.

Further, I am not satisfied that the more egalitarian liberal schemes have a response to the problem of social group inequality, despite their attempts to undercut the preconditions for economic inequality. For instance, giving each individual an endowment of either income or property is not *ipso facto* a critique of the social relationships in which they find themselves in afterwards. For instance, if one endorses universal basic income, what becomes

[38] This debate on basic income has been extensive. See Phillipe Van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income," Philosophy & Public Affairs 29(2)(1991): 101-131; Parijs, "Basic Income Capitalism," *Ethics* 102(3)(1992): 465-284; Richard J. Arneson, "Is Socialism Dead? A Comment on Market Socialism and Basic Income Capitalism," *Ethics* 102(3)(1992): 485-511; Gijs van Donselaar, "The Freedom-Based Account of Solidarity and Basic Income," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 1(1998): 313-333; Philip Pettit, "A Republican Right to Basic Income," in Basic Income: An Anthology of Contemporary Research, eds. Karl Widerquist, José A. Noguera, Yannick Vanderborght, Jurgen De Wispelaere (Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), 26-31; Stuart While, "Liberal Equality, Exploitation, and the Case for an Unconditional Basic Income," Political Studies 45(1997): 312-326; David Casassas, "Basic Income and the Republican Ideal: Rethinking Material Independence in Contemporary Societies," *Basic Income Studies* 2(2)(2007): 1-7; Koen Raes, "Basic Income and Social Power," Ethiek & Maatschappif 14(102)(2012): 39-52; Tobey Scharding, "Income Inequalities in a Context of Political Equality: Guaranteed Basic Income, No Guaranteed Income, or Guaranteed Work Opportunities," *Social Theory and Practice* 40(1)(2014): 99-122;

For the debate on property-owning democracy see Amit Ron, "Visions of Democracy in 'Property-Owning Democracy': Skelton to Rawls and Beyond," *History of Political Thought* 29(1)(2008), 168-187; Martin O'Neill, Liberty, Equality and Property-Owning Democracy," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 40(3)(2009): 379-396; Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson (eds), Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2012); Andrew Lister, "The Difference Principle, Capitalism, and Property-Owning Democracy," *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 5(1)(2018): 151-172;

cause for speculation is whether it will prevent firms from raising prices and therefore the cost of living to remain competitive in a basic income world. Labor market competition may ensue anyway in response to changing costs. Likewise with property-owning democracy or universal capital grant schemes, which advocate for an endowment given to each individual when they come of age to do with as they please.[39] One ought to ask whether such alternatives will not devolve into capitalist competition once more, after the big firms have bought out the capital of enough regular individuals and thereafter taken primary control over investment. In a word, endowment-oriented fixes have an unaddressed transition problem, so they may be sideways of a real concern with market competition by trying to blunt its rough edges in the hopes that it fades away.[40]

Third, class divisions are a fundamental stumbling block for rectifying disparities among other social groups. Due consideration of the first and second objections above makes clear why class presents an obstacle to social group inclusion on the whole. The predominant way of explaining the relationship between class and race, class and ethnic minorities, or class and gender, is that class inequality affects these groups disproportionately. Emphasizing disproportionate effects puts the normative weight on how economic processes affect the most vulnerable people disproportionately, rather than on a claim that they are unjust, so they affect the most vulnerable disproportionately. Indeed, some of the difficulty in being inclusive of social groups along axes that are not "strictly" economic has to do with the moral ambivalence that theorists have about economic inclusion itself. At the risk of making a Platonic point, unjust things are less likely to arise from just things, but they do tend to arise from things that are already unjust. If one presumes that the market is just in principle and

[39] John Cunliffe and Guido Erreygers, " 'Basic Income? Basic Capital!' Origins and Issues of a Debate," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 11(1)(2003): 89-110; Joseph R. Blasi, Richard B. Freeman, Douglas L. Kruse, *The Citizen's Share: Putting Ownership Back Into Democracy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013); Erik Olin Wright, "Eroding Capitalism: A Common on Stuart White's 'Basic Capital in the Egalitarian Toolkit,' *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (2015): 432-439.
[40] Cf. Claus Offe, "Basic Income and the Labor Contract," *Analyse & Kritik* (1)(2009): 49-79.

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that social group inequality is a deviation from it, then one is caught in a contradiction if challenging the normal operation of the market is what justice demands.

Changing the existing division of labor is a common suggestion that theorists make to try to rectify disproportionately disadvantageous social roles. For instance, women still do more household and care labor than men, so one way of creating parity between the genders is that men do more of their share of that work. Further, women and other minority groups, like migrants, tend to do most of the menial service work in capitalist economies because that labor is most flexible and hires at low wages. One might propose valuing these jobs more by attributing to it a higher wage and more social esteem, so one can decrease inequality and marginalization by changing the nature of work itself. But this program does not necessarily address the obstacles to inclusion when confronting formal labor market mechanisms that are themselves a reflection of broader macroeconomic pressures to invest and make more productive certain sectors and not others.

Without additional information about how to simultaneously address the macro-economic conditions that would be necessary for revaluing work, it is not clear what to make of the social pressures that incentivize certain patterns to reproduce themselves within capitalist economies. Pressures that militate against caregiver parity between partners in a household, for instance, include the competitive pressures of the labor market on all genders as a member of an economic unit, which is what incentivizes a gendered division of labor in the first place. Any discussion of altering the division of labor as a means to rectify disparities must address the general situation within the economy, at least if one wants to aspire to more than shuffling around the proportions of who does what unpaid or low paid work. These are issues that I will address at greater length in Chapters 6 and 7 on racism and sexism.

*Problems with Talk of Expanding Opportunities*

I have argued that talk of inclusion for social groups obscures market competition as its institutional basis. In this context, a theory of social justice that aims to rectify disparities faces unacknowledged obstacles. These obstacles result from presuppositions regarding the nature of the market and, therefore, the nature of social group inequality. Some theorists might respond to my criticism of the disparity paradigm as follows: What is at issue is indeed the social relations at the heart of the competitive market, but one can address these relations indirectly by expanding economic opportunities. Indeed, social group inequality is related to economic inequality insofar as some groups hoard opportunities at the expense of others. One might even say that this really what class divisions are all about – capitalists, high level managers, investment bankers, etc., are opportunity hoarders. They monopolize goods that should be more equitably distributed by closing off opportunities for others, which distorts market outcomes. So, at bottom, the normative issue at stake is indeed exclusion.

Common though this strategy is, I believe it to misconstrue the meaning of opportunity by neglecting an equally important face of the problem: Constraint. Simply put, opportunity talk without constraint talk is always an instance of *salience idealization.* It makes some aspects of social practices normatively salient, implicitly giving them a positive normative valence, then disavows other, less ideal aspects of the practices as inessential to one's understanding of what the practice is. As Charles Mills writes, idealization is not the same as abstraction.[41] All social theory uses abstraction to model reality to the best of its

[41] Charles Mills, "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology," in *Black Rights, White Wrongs* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 72-90.

ability given finite knowledge and with respect for the virtues of scientific parsimony. But in doing so, one makes choices about what to emphasize, which can (depending on one's social and political commitments) idealize as well as abstract. My claim here is that opportunity talk fails to make constraints salient, which idealizes market competition. Therefore, the economy itself becomes a black box for critique. The unfortunate consequence of this black box approach to economics is that it mystifies an important source of social group inequality and the distinct normative stakes that pertain to it. It is therefore a significant obstacles to understanding social group inequality on the whole.

Recall that for neoclassical economic theory, a perfectly competitive market aggregates real preferences at an equilibrium point. By contrast, imperfectly competitive markets will fail to account for real preferences inside the model. There is an anthropological claim buried in this idea that merits further attention. This claim is that preferences exist in such a way that, once an opportunity presents itself, they will take advantage of it to realize this preference to the best of their ability. This advantage-taking goes on without a hiccup if it is not unduly constrained. What a perfectly competitive market does is provide an opportunity structure for agents to reveal preferences that they have anyway. So, market competition allows people to be who they are and its price mechanism gives each individual information about what others value as well.

The anthropological claim also goes deeper than a theory of preference ordering and their relationship to the market. It's also a historical "metanarrative" that people have *always* had a propensity to "truck, barter, and exchange" but were unduly constrained by unnatural political forces like feudal or religious social hierarchies. The historian Robert Brenner calls this view the "neo-Smithian" way of thinking about economic development. Adam Smith famously argued that capitalist economic growth took off in Europe as the continent began to throw off its feudal fetters. Expanding markets reflected a new sense of social freedom that

more and more people took advantage of, which lead to economic growth. The controversy here is that the Smithian view implies the existence of a transhistorical human interest in capitalist growth, which is what makes it the ideal setting for acting on opportunities to reveal preferences. Indeed, the overwhelming emphasis of neo-Smithians is on how people take advantage of market opportunities, which is then understood as the most salient thing about competitive markets.

The neo-Smithian view represents a pervasive sort of idealization of opportunities, which hides from view the remarkable fact that capitalist transition requires a change of incentives brought on by changes to social property relations. Whereas Smith pegs preferences to market incentives, feudal social property relations were dominated by the opposite impulses. In peasant-producing societies, direct producers produced for subsistence, not for exchange. Peasant possession of land was not market dependent, they had direct access to the factors of production, and lords extracted their surplus through coercion if they wanted to raise labor productivity. Peasants, therefore, could engage in market exchange, but they did not *need to* because there were not under pressures to produce competitively. Lack of market dependency generated "safety-first" avoidances of becoming heavily dependent on market exchange. Having access to the means of production was a shield from competition, so peasants did not simply leap at the chance to engage in it. That people are not disposed to truck, barter, and exchange is what helps to explain the feudalism's historical longevity.

If one does not presume that capitalism is an expression of human nature and thus has always already existed in embryo in the natural preferences of human beings, then the historical puzzle is why people stopped responding to one set of constraints and began responding to another. This historical puzzle is of theoretical interest for a couple of

reasons.[42] First, it suggests that competitive markets are more than an opportunity structure; they are also a constraining structure. Second, emphasizing opportunities over constraints is likely to presume too much about what people value rather than get an accurate representation of it. Third, the idea that expanding opportunities is a way to reduce disparities is only a partial answer to the question of whether the opportunity structure is just. Again, the way that opportunities present themselves is a qualitative and not just quantitative issue. For example, hiring women and minorities into positions of corporate leadership may not prevent them from cutting labor costs and therefore jobs of members of those same groups in order to do their job well. One may create opportunities that carry with them incentives to eliminate other opportunities.

One might put the issue differently by saying that what people are being excluded from are opportunities to participate in determining the conditions of their actions. By expanding opportunities to participate, one need not fall victim to neoclassical assumptions about preference ordering. In this version, exclusion is most fundamentally about democratic deficits and society's failure to extend democratic norms to the economy. Democratic participation is undoubtably important for reforms to competitive markets or to an economic alternative to them. It is also, in my view, functional for each, as well as being required by democratic normative criteria. But more participation is only an indirect way of opening the black box of the economy. To see why, consider the following two examples of a long tradition of liberal socialist critiques of capitalism whose core normative claim is that capitalism is undemocratic. The first is that the wealthy systematically exercise political

[42] See Robert Brenner, "Property and Progress: Where Adam Smith Went Wrong," In *Marxist History-writing for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Chris Wickham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Other contributions to the transition debate include T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Robert Brenner and Chris Harman, "The Origins of Capitalism," *International Socialism* 111(2006): http://isj.org.uk/the-origins-of-capitalism/ (Accessed July 12, 2022);

domination through undue influence on politics. The second critique is that capitalism structurally occludes widening the scope of democracy to all spheres of life.

Reflecting on disparities of democratic influence, Young writes that,

> "Inequalities of power and resources frequently lead to outcomes such as these, where some citizens with formally equal rights to participate nevertheless have little or no real access to the fora and procedures through which they might influence decisions. External exclusions of this sort occur in all existing democracies. When political outcomes demonstrably result from an exclusive process, where those with greater power or wealth are able to dominate the process, then from the point of view of democratic norms that outcome is illegitimate."[43]

According to Young, they maintain an arbitrary distinction between the political and non-political, or public matters and private ones, which undermines the right to self-determination that one takes as normative in the official political institutions. Non-socialist liberalism is in error for arbitrarily restricting the scope of liberal rights and norms of democratic governance.[44] Nancy Fraser, likewise, argues that capitalism systematically precludes participatory parity among democratic peers. The material conditions of such parity are that "the distribution of material resources must be such as to ensure participants' independence and 'voice'," which precludes forms of levels of economic dependence, exploitation, deprivations, and gross disparities in wealth and income.[45]

Fraser claims that the problem with capitalism is that it "truncates democracy by restricting the political agenda" in an historically specific way. Capitalism creates gaps in

[43] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 54.
[44] Young, "Self-Determination as a Principle of Justice."
[45] Nancy Fraser, "Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition," *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2013), 164.

between private and public matters, political and economic institutions, or productive and reproductive spheres, which limits the terrain over which a democratic public could realistically have control. Thus, it restricts public autonomy in the sense that it hinders one's ability to participate in decisions about how the collective life process ought to transpire. Fraser calls this the "boundary problem" in which capitalism disavows the interdependent nature of all of these areas of life.[46] Call these objections the deliberative democrat's critique of capitalism.

Two examples illustrate why I find the deliberative democrat critique insufficient for opening the black box. Capitalist societies tend to provide healthcare in one of two ways. They either requiring that employers provide healthcare for their employees, or they provide it as a public good through the state. If one assumes that funding is adequate and the quality of healthcare services is equal, it may not matter to an individual receiving care whether funding is provided by employers or by the state. Both facilitate participatory parity or self-determination by undermining deprivation. Second, there are three major strategies to expand workplace participation in capitalist firms, by organizing them (normally in trade unions) on a firm-by-firm basis, as a sector, or nationally through a union federation. All increase participation or self-determination in bargaining or wages, better working conditions, and benefits. If one assumes that each is equally well-organized at the individual firm level, democratic, organizing without employer interference, and bargaining over the same issues, then it is unlikely to matter to any individual worker at any given moment who represents them in negotiations.

The difference lies in how each type of participation affects the relationship between groups of workers and their employers. If employers pay for healthcare, workers are more

[46] Ibid., 154.

dependent on their employer than they were before. If the state provides it, workers are less dependent on their employer. In the case of workplace participation, a firm-by-firm organizing strategy has to target the most powerful firms that set the wage floor for whole industries if they do not want to push themselves out of employment by undermining the competitiveness of their firm. A sectoral or national strategy can set the wage floor by getting many or all capitals to the bargaining table at once. In healthcare, one changes the capitalist incentive structure, the other does not. In the workplace, one is more effective at changing that structure than the other.

If one were to claim that the reason one ought to prefer one strategy over another is that they create better opportunities for participation, one is not necessarily giving reasons to endorse one opportunity structure over another. Participation alone is not sufficient for conceptualizing the normative stakes of each alternative. It is, therefore, only an indirect way of talking about constraints on economic equality, even if one grants that it is a necessary part of an emancipatory effort to expand the scope of democracy.

### *Identifying the Problem of Organizing Principles*

Because disparitarian models of economic inequality work so badly, disparities between social groups along the lines of gender, race, disability, sexuality, and so on, must be put into a different perspective regarding their economic dimension. This dimension is poorly served by a model that accepts some justifications for inequality within it that it would not accept along other dimensions. For instance, most philosophers agree that women should not be poor because they are women, but they do not agree that they should not be poor at all. Even if philosophers do agree on the second part, they may simply revise their position to say

they should not be so poor that the individual involved cannot live a good life by their own criteria. Unfortunately, these sorts of qualifications depend on keeping the black box of the economy closed, implicitly attributing to it good normative characteristics rather than bad ones. So, sexism is bad, but economic inequality may be okay so long as it is independent of sexism.

The disparity paradigm greatly narrows the scope of justice as it pertains to how philosophers imagine rectifying disparities. Absent a robust defense of an economic alternative, they are really just that – an argument for rectifying disparities under either prevailing or somewhat better economic conditions. Contemporary political theory has abandoned the notion that part of its mandate is to denaturalize and therefore to interrogate those prevailing conditions. If the economic alternative is not immediately obvious in the post-socialist world, then what theory can do is peek one's interest in why it may be desirable, necessary, or both. If one is completely convinced that there is no alternative, then intellectual integrity demands that one explicitly defend this system as the best possible one. Liberal hegemony is not a point in its favor, but a symptom of atrophy in the political imagination.

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I argue that what radical liberalism misses are the varying normative stakes of the economic issues that not only affect but play a causal role in social group inequality, despite its commitment to moral pluralism. Discrimination, for example, is a problem that oppressed groups face on the labor market. But it is nonetheless not the same problem as having a stagnant rate of economic growth that inhibits investors from creating the jobs that those groups are seeking. While both are important in the life of any particular individual who is trying to survive in a capitalist economy, I believe the arm of normative critique becomes weaker when one insists that they are interchangeable. All the cats become grey, as the expression goes.

nice example:

To continue the example, the justification for creating more employment on the whole may be a different but related justification for anti-discrimination laws. To the extent that one fails to see that these normative stakes are distinct, then – given the state of the existing discourse – the result is normally that disparity talk obscures its background conditions. I find this outcome to be unfortunate and self-undermining for critical theory, although it is regularly reinforced by the militant pluralism that currently dominates the critical tradition. There is a common sense that reductionism is antithetical to inclusion and that expansion is always better than refinement. Any alternative, the argument claims, reflects a *de facto* moral posit that nothing else is important. This reflexive conclusion is a *non sequitur*. What is at stake is not exclusion of important issues, but whether critical analysis effectively equips one to identify and work on different normative registers.

The scope of importance of the economy is much wider than many contemporary political philosophers think. It concerns the justice of fundamental practices that preoccupy much of our lives, how they set us in relation to one another, and the boundaries of what we think is possible. These processes affect everything that is political. Some social phenomena are more or less directly related to it, but the economy is the background condition for all politics. It is rarely the case that challenging the injustice of any institution does not at least require a rather ambitious program of economic reform. A proper appreciation of this fact is solely lacking in theories of social group inequality and oppression when they, too, presume that the economy is of limited practical importance and of narrow normative importance. I will take issue with this attitude throughout this book in order to claim that it is, in fact, a narrow and normatively impoverished idea of what the economy is that reinforces these theoretical prejudices.

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identity

Some writers agree that disparities are the wrong focus for theorizing about social group oppression. They inveigh against identity politics by pointing out some of the same problems

that I have raised here but in a different way and against a broad (and conceptually difficult to pin down) political model that currently dominates politically active milieus and academic circles. However, I will not be using the word "identity" or "identity politics" at all in subsequent chapters. While I am sympathetic to these critiques, I make a different intervention. By the extended conclusion of this book, what readers will find instead is a normative argument for class solidarity and working class politics. *My central claim is that class politics has a necessary, distinct, albeit not singular role to play in an emancipatory, counter-hegemonic political project.* I encourage my critics who are partisans of identity models to make competing arguments for an alternative with due consideration for the economic constraints that I elaborate upon here at great length.

forms of life

Other philosophers engage in a critique of "forms of life" that is broader than what I am offering here. This type of critical theory seeks to make ethical critiques of why whole forms of life can be wrong given the expectations that people have of them and their inability to provide resources for solving problems that arise immanently within them.[47] I am sympathetic to this theoretical enterprise as well, and I engage with its social theoretical positions throughout my discussion of economic practices. Indeed, it has been helpful to me to conceptualize the economy as a set of practices along neo-pragmatist lines.[48] At the same time, I deploy more standard forms of normative argumentation than the idea of "immanent critique" suggests. My strategy is to say that there are normative criteria – republican ones – that are particularly apt for describing and evaluating the economic dimension of social group inequality. These criteria illuminate what the disparity paradigm does not. I do not offer a further methodological argument in favor of my strategy.

[47] Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).
[48] Rahel Jaeggi, "A Wide Concept of Economy," in *Critical Theory in Critical Times: Transforming the Global Political and Economic Order*, ed. Penelope Deutscher and Christina Lafont (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 160-80.

The normative criterium that I use is the neo-republican concept of freedom as non-domination. In a word, I use the republican concepts of freedom and domination to put disparities into perspective. Neo-republicans define domination in relation to their concept of freedom. Freedom is the absence of someone having the capacity to arbitrarily and intentionally interfere in one's life. For republicans, someone is dominated if another person has the capacity to arbitrarily interfere in their life, even if the other does not exercise the power that capacity grants them. Interference can result from negligence, manipulation, or creating unreasonable obstruction costs for someone to make a choice. If one has the ability to exercise arbitrary power in someone else's life, then one need not take the needs, interests, and desires of that person into account. One can thus subject others to one's will in a capricious way.

Neo-republicans argue that the arbitrary and intentional interference conditions make their idea of freedom different from the liberal one. They claim that liberals endorse a principle of non-interference, rather than of non-domination, and they argue that the principle of non-domination contributes a unique set of expectations for political institutions. The neo-republican non-domination principle sees freedom in terms of a free society that actively discourages domination, whereas the liberal non-interference principle sees freedom in terms of individual rights. Neo-republicans claim that their principle of non-domination entails removing incentives and opportunities for individuals to interfere with others by having institutions and norms that guard against interference, whereas the liberal concept of non-interference only goes so far to protect people from interferences as they occur. The neo-republican position purports to be an alternative, more stringent set of restrictions on domination than its liberal counterpart.

I use the republican concept of domination as a capacity for arbitrary interference to identify the organizing principles of particular social practices. As I understand it, an

organizing principle is the dominant logic of action in a structural process. What makes a social process "structural" is that the agents who reproduce it are subject to constraints that generate imperatives to act in a qualitatively specific way. Capitalism, I claim, has such a dominant logic. Market competition is its main regulatory mechanism and what people have to do to get what they want or need in this context, which has a great effect on their relationships with other people and, indeed, processes of group differentiation. The burden of my argument is to show that these constraints create imperatives and thereby dominant logics of action that fulfill the republican criteria for domination. Needless to say, I aim to stretch the neo-republican concepts of domination and freedom to different ends than they have been put thus far by arguing that capital dominates working people, women, and racial minorities. Not unlike radical liberals push liberalism to more expansive heights, I intend to push republicanism into areas with which it is not yet familiar.

Thus, the specific perspective that I am putting social group inequality into is one that emphasizes organizing principles of social processes rather than only on their outcomes or on aspects of social group relations that stop short of opening the black box of the economy and what about it presents an obstacle to human freedom. I focus on capitalism's "competitive constraint" to show how historically specific logics of action affect social groups and organize the process of their differentiation in a way that is unjust. My aim is not to undermine a robust understanding of the many injustices that one finds in this world, but to make clear how and why they have a class character that requires urgent attention, at least if there is to be anything resembling equality and solidarity in our future. I now turn to the task of opening that black box by rethinking the economy in a way that creates the conceptual space that is needed to look at it through a wider normative lens.

# Chapter 2: Rethinking What's Wrong with "The Economy"

This chapter has two goals. The first is to reconceptualize what the economy is, in service of the second, which is to develop a more robust normative analysis of what is wrong with it as it pertains to social group inequality. The former is a social-theoretic argument that then dovetails with normative criteria in the end. In brief, I develop a neo-pragmatist account of the economy to open the black box and then I use republican criteria to show what might be wrong with what is inside it. I will use this framework to develop my account of structural domination in Chapter 4 and then its relationship to specific social groups in Part II.

As it is not easy to weave social theory and norms together, so I begin by saying why I believe it is necessary. My reason it that the economy is an enigma in political philosophy, by which I mean that it is self-evidently central to it and its qualitative texture nonetheless remains obscure and out of analytical reach. What I argue below that one reason for the economy's enigmatic representation is that writers too often presume that it is empirically distinct from other social practices for the wrong reasons, which narrows its normative importance and keeps the black box firmly shut. However, there are social-theoretic resources available that can help to reverse this trend, which have been hitherto unmined in philosophical discussions of either distributive justice or social group inequality. I introduce the notion of structural practices to open the black box by way of what I call a "pragmatist's historical materialism" and a diagnosis of domination.

## *The Black Box Problem*

Before opening the black box, I explain where it comes from and why (despite much talk about distributive justice in political philosophy) the economy remains enigmatic. As I explained in the previous chapter, the core problem is salience idealization. The reason the economy is enigmatic (as in difficult to interpret and understand, somehow mysterious) is that philosophers tend to represent it in theory in a way that is not only abstracted but idealized. This form of salience idealization has its origins in social theory and, in particular, the uncritical inheritance of neoclassical economic theory by political philosophers who range in style, tradition, and emphasis. I argue that the trademark of a social theory that idealizes the economy is that it sees it primarily as an opportunity structure rather than as a constraining one.[49] It is, moreover, due to this particular way of conceptualizing the economy that many theorists perceive it as a limit category – something to go beyond by considering the "non-economic" – that the black box remains shut.

## *Most Obviously, Liberals Idealize the Economy*

The reason I say that liberals "most obviously" idealize the economy is because they tend to align themselves with the notion that private property is both an expression of human nature and that rights to it are basic enough as to be inviolable. The trade-off between equality and liberty in liberal philosophy revolves around just how fundamental and inviolable the liberal theorist takes private property to be. But the affinity between liberals and idealized thinking about the economy is more than this supposed trade-off lets on. It is also a social theory about what the economy is to begin with and what its conditions of

[49] Cf. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism: A Longer View* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999).

possibility are. As Lionel Robbins put it, "Economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternatives uses."[50] Choice between alternatives is the basic principle underlying all economic activity and it is exercising choices within an opportunity structure that makes the activity economic.

In 1920, Robbin's colleague Ludwig von Mises made a seminal refutation of socialist economics in *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth.*[51] Writing against the idea of a planned economy, Mises argues that the only economy that is possible – indeed, the only arrangement that can be called an economy at all – requires private property and market competition. However, I am not interested in that foreground question. I am instead interested in the background question of what Mises thinks the economy is. For Mises, the economy is a distinct sphere, both empirically and normatively. Economic rationality is something different entirely than the sort one uses in other spheres of life, and importantly, it must be that way for the economy to be rational at all.

Recall that neoclassical economics is famous for its distinct modelling of human rationality as a set of fixed preferences that are completely transparent to individual agents with full knowledge of the benefits and costs of each possible outcome of their actions. Individuals are aware of the outcomes that give them utility, which is a numerical value that they place on any given outcome, and the opportunity costs therein. They are, therefore, able to calculate trade-offs (or their marginal rate of substitution) between each available alternative and, in retrospect, are aware of the net costs and benefits of those that are foregone. The rationality model and the neoclassical economic model are intimately related. The former facilitates decision-making that in turn facilitates economic calculation. It is not

[50] Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Human Science* (London: MacMillan, 1932), 16.
[51] Ludwig von Mises, *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth* (Auburn, AL: Mises Institute, 1990).

possible, according to Mises, for individuals to calculate social costs in the absence of socially significant cardinal numbers (prices) attached that are rooted in the minds of each individual and yet transcend each individual. Prices must be obtained through the medium of money, which creates a value equivalence among the alternatives that the rational actor knows that they can choose between.

Importantly, market competition in the context of private property ownership is the social precondition of the price mechanism that brings the economy into existence. The main takeaway of Mises' argument is normally that it is only market competition that can send price signals to producers about what inputs to use, in what quantity, and how to arrange them. Even if a central planning board could estimate the quantity of desired consumer goods that producers should produce, one would inevitably be "groping the dark" to come up with similar estimates of capital goods used in the production process.[52] There is always an infinite number of substitutions that one can make into any complex production process, and a planned economy would have no internal pressures to make one decision over another, or to create a rationale for trade-offs. There would be no mechanism for managing conflicts of interest among the various parties that value the opportunity costs of trade-offs differently.

Mises argues that managing social conflicts requires a universal equivalent of exchange to calculate economic value. He writes, "The human mind cannot orient itself properly among the bewildering mass of intermediate products without such aid."[53] Only a capitalist firm that is engaging in market competition can respond to price signals because it is internally unified by its ownership structure and singularly motivated by the profit motive as a result of that structure. It alone can determine what is rational because the profit motive is de facto a motive respond to price signals as well. Mises concludes that, "Without economic calculation

[52] Ibid., 23.
[53] Ibid., 16.

there can be no economy. Hence in a socialist state wherein the pursuit of economic calculation is impossible there can be—in our sense of the term—no economy whatsoever…."[54] If Mises is right, then what is startling about his conclusion is that it is also a working definition. Mises defines "the economic" as the ability to make values commensurable through a single unit of measurement so as to calculate inputs and outputs in a rational way. Central to this definition is that this ability arises from a process of quantifying opportunity costs through pricing.

In liberal political philosophy there is also broad identification of "the economy" with a distinct type of rationality whose basic feature is opportunity-taking within an opportunity structure. What it means to talk about the injustice of the economy is to say that its effects or distribution are unjust, so the economy ought to be constrained by another type of (democratic or moral) rationality so as to achieve a fairer opportunity set. One can also claim the reverse, which is that the economy is unjust because it is too beholden to political, democratic, or moral constraints, so it cannot play its role in organically creating opportunities to satisfy preferences. Either way, one can argue for or against the justice of economic outcomes without doubting that the economy is the distinct form of rationality that Mises identified in 1920. What I call "the neoclassical formula" maintains that the economy is normatively and empirically distinct from the non-economic such that what justice requires is a lessening or tightening of constraints on it from its outside.

The neoclassical formula is the theoretical basis for the idealized abstraction that I discussed in Chapter 1 with reference to the disparity paradigm. What is important about the neoclassical formula is that it generates a *logic of externalities*, which is the idealizing mechanism within the formula. In principles, liberals perceive whatever is imperfect or

[54] Ibid., 18, 23.

negative about the economy as exogenous to it. They tend to use negative data points to suggest that markets are being distorted by greed, hypocrisy, corruption, or an unjustifiably unlevel playing field for market competition, rather than think negative outcomes point to an indictment of the market itself. The liberal notion of "the economic" is conceptually connected to perfect competition and to the notion of an externality to explain imperfect competition. What goes wrong with the economy as largely due to distortions wrought by the incomplete knowledge and the irrational prejudices of imperfect human beings. The market, however, has no such human failings on its own.

My claim is this: As a general rule, when liberal philosophers make use of this framework to suggest a rationale for distributive justice, their modal form of reasoning is an expression of this logic of externalities. What the economy *is* is an opportunity structure and constraints are derivative of the historical process of opportunity-taking, not their foundation. Consider some representative examples that I draw from the most egalitarian liberals. I leave out libertarian figures like Robert Nozick, for instance, as such figures would be unlikely to object to my charge of salience idealization, given that they do not object to the kind of inequality with which I am taking issue. With that is mind, here is Rawls writing that,

> "Perfect competition is a perfect procedure with respect to efficiency. Of course, the requisite conditions are highly special ones and they are seldom if ever fully satisfied in the real world. Moreover, market failures and imperfections are often serious, and compensating adjustments must be made by the allocation branch. Monopolistic restrictions, lack of information, external economies and diseconomies, and the like must be recognized and corrected. And the market fails altogether in terms of public

goods. *But these matters need not concern us here. These idealized arrangements are mentioned in order to clarify the related notion of pure procedural justice*."[55]

In this passage, Rawls is setting up a parallel between pure procedural justice and perfect competition, by which I mean that he wants to analogize the process for deciding what is just in ideal terms with the neoclassical way of using perfect competition as a method for determining what an optimal market should look like. He goes on to say that when markets are truly competitive, firms do not engage in price wars or other contests for market power.

Ronald Dworkin argues that a just society should operate with a principle of equality of resources, auctioning off insurance for different risks that people want to take in a context of such equality. The idea is that an insurance auction will allow people with different values regarding what to do with their resources to negotiate against one another to satisfy preferences within reasonable constraints. He argues that an auction would help to correct for market externalities by creating a mechanism for bargaining outside the price mechanism to measure "true opportunity costs."[56] Dworkin writes that one could make the auction effective toward this end by adopting regulatory constraints on it that help to ensure that, "the results of the superimaginary pre-auction we are now contemplating, in which all motives are transparent, all transactions are predictable, and organizational costs are absent."[57] The goal is also to have a procedure for justice that adjusts for externalities, which Dworkin later states explicitly helps to ensure as far as possible that the economic environment "has the shape it would have if resources were fairly distributed and markets are perfect."[58]

[55] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 240 (emphasis mine).
[56] Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 157.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 214.

In both cases, it is with reference to perfect competition that ideal justice within the market obtains. Both Rawls and Dworkin attempt to analogize perfect competition as a procedure that can model distributive justice. Will Kymlicka explains why markets are attractive to liberals in this way. He says that markets help to assess the costs to others of an individual's choices. If it can do so, then it can approximate an ideal of fairness by way of a measurement of preferences that makes them commensurable so that one can then compare them and decide what is fair in a liberal system.[59] If one can approximate fairness in such a system, then whatever differences emerge are due to people's choices and become their own responsibility given adequate information about their costs and consequences.[60] In this method, the only constraints that are subject to the interrogation of justice are legal, not arising from the market itself, since the market is defined as a neoclassical ideal.

Indeed, David Gauthier goes so far as to say that exploitation is impossible under conditions of perfect competition, since any distortions of the market are by definition externalities. He argues that the absence of externalities is a condition of perfect competition. Externalities arise whenever an act of production or exchange or consumption affects the utility of some person who is not party, or who is unwillingly party, to it. Externalities can be beneficial or harmful. The market itself is absent of moral value, so its developmental twists and turns are the product of human error, not its own logic. Thus, exploitation is always undue advantage taking when labor markets do not clear. [61] The only moral considerations worth having in a theory of justice are regarding the external forces to impose on markets. The logic of externalities posits an inside-outside logic to the market that is uncritical of the market as such even when the theorist is adopting egalitarian principles of justice.

[59] Will Kymlicha, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), 186.
[60] Ibid., 186.
[61] David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), 87.

## *Neo-Republicans also Idealize the Economy*

Neo-republicans claim that their idea of freedom differs from the liberal one in a significant way. Domination is their master normative category because it's opposite, freedom as non-domination, is a more stringent criteria for human freedom than their liberal counterpart. One way of stating the difference between republicanism and liberalism is that republicans view freedoms as the condition of a free society that actively discourages domination as a precondition for individual liberty. By contrast, liberals see freedom as more or less equivalent to individual liberty, which means that the precondition for a free society is that it secures individual liberty. These different concepts of freedom are not mutually exclusive, but they do have alternative orders of normative priority and, consequently, diverging ideas of what a free society is like. They do not, however, diverge in their basic understanding of the economy as an opportunity structure.

republicanism:

liberalism:

Neo-republicans use the example of the benevolent slave master to explain the difference between their idea of freedom and the liberal one. Slavery is a state of dependence, servitude, and therefore domination, even if the slave master is a benevolent one who does not coerce the slaves to do anything that they do not want to do. According to Quentin Skinner, the primary problem with slavery is not just coercion or the active interference of the master in the life of the slave, as a liberal argument might claim, but rather the uncertainty of depending on the good will of someone else to exercise one's capacities.[62] Thus, the problem with slavery is that the slave master could exercise arbitrary power over the slave even if they

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[62] Quentin Skinner, "The idea of negative liberty," in *Philosophy of History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, eds. R Rorty R, JB Schneewind JB and Q Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 193–222.

choose not to exercise that power. The master-slave scenario is the paradigmatic example of what it means to lack republican freedom because of its intuitive force and its implicit connection to the state as the guarantor of freedom. One is unlikely to challenge the claim that slaves with benevolent masters are unfree despite not having been interfered with.

Neo-republican normative reflections on the economy diverge from their liberal counterpart in the sense that they are less burdened by the inhibitions that state intervention can impose on individual liberty. Republicans concern themselves not so much about whether one can justify state intervention in the economy, but about the extent to which it is necessary for preventing a *market economy* from turning into a *market society*. Of paramount importance is protecting equality of political status and of citizenship. One can readily see in republican thought that the master-slave scenario does not have an immediate connection to to wealth inequality and that its concern with wealth inequality derives from its concern with political equality. To republicans, not all wealth inequality arises from inequalities of political status, so wealth inequality is not necessarily domination. Philip Pettit, for instance, argues that a free state may admit wealth inequality.[63] Whereas equality in political status is a good in itself, material equality is not.

Pettit's influential concept of domination helps to understand the neo-republican order of normative priority. He argues that domination is not only an exercise of arbitrary power in a capricious way that need not take the interests of others into account, but also intentional. Pettit explains domination by contrasting it to natural accidents, brute accidents, or accidents of fortune:

> "The worsening that interference involves always has to be more or less intentional in character: it cannot occur by accident, for example as when I fall in your path or

[63] Philip Pettit, "Freedom in the market," *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* 5(2): 141-144.

> happen to compete with you for scarce goods; it must be at least the sort of action in the doing of which we can sensibly allege negligence. Were nonintentional forms of obstruction also to count as interference, that would be to lose the distinction between securing people against the natural effects of chance and incapacity and scarcity and securing them against things that they may try to do to one another."[64]

In Pettit's view, the intentionality condition provides criteria to use in judging moral responsibility. Morally responsible agents can be individual persons or groups of persons, but structures cannot hang above individual agents to perpetuate domination. Structures cannot have joint intentions and beliefs, so they cannot intend to dominate in the same way that some groups and all individuals can. Ultimately, the problem with holding structures responsible for domination is that we risk losing the distinction between accident and intention that makes domination a serious moral harm. In other words, "the economy" cannot dominate; only economic agents can dominate.

Pettit argues that if we start with the assumption that the market does not license or issue from any form of domination, then the market economy cannot be a source of domination on its own terms. He argues that if we make that assumption, then a property regime allowing inequality:

> "[C]an have the aspect of an environment akin to the natural environment ... [I]t will not be a source of domination so far as it is the cumulative, unintended effect of people's mutual adjustments, where that history of adjustments may or may not have begun in government initiatives."[65]

[64] Philip Pettit, *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 52-3.
[65] Pettit, "Freedom in the Market," 139.

While Pettit admits that there may be complaints that people can raise about how the unintended effects of market interactions affect the ease with which they enjoy their non-dominated political status, he maintains that the market, in principle, is not a form of domination. In sum, Pettit argues that structures are not agents and that wealth inequality, assuming that no arbitrary and intentional interference takes place, may be more akin to a natural accident than to domination.

Nonetheless, neo-republicans suggest that theirs is a more critical attitude toward markets than their liberal counterpart. Although they hold that markets are not inherently unfree and immoral, the principle of non-domination entails that states curtail the extent to which markets encourage pursuing private interests at the expense of public goods.[66] This rationale for curtailing the reach of markets provides the basis for an alternative "post-socialist" critique of markets on the basis of ensuring equal citizenship, not on the basis of traditional socialist concerns about markets failing to produce prosperity or being chaotic and wasteful. As socialism has not been proven to work better, it is a superior strategy to reject market societies, but not markets themselves. Neo-republicans argue that this position is consistent with the classical republican one held by figures like Rousseau, who value private property as a means of securing material independence but recognize the danger of market power and market culture spilling into other areas of life.[67]

In sum, neo-republicans favor a constrained market economy so that the market is governed with an eye to the public good and so that state can promote effective political citizenship. Despite the reversal of normative priority from the liberal equation of freedom ;) with negative liberty, critics have argued that the practical difference between liberals and

[66] Gerald Gaus, "Backwards into the future: Neo-republicanism as a post-socialist critique of market society," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 20(1)(2003): 63-4.
[67] Richard Dagger, "Neo-republicanism and the civic economy," *Philosophy, Politics & Economics* 5(2)(2006): 157-61.

neo-republicans is not so great. They point out the implicit, but unjustified, social theory within the neo-republican framework, which ends up implicitly accepting much of the liberal view that it criticizes. Neo-republicans may challenge the liberal principle of noninterference, but they do not challenge the set of liberal assumptions that social power is primarily rooted in political institutions, that the state is a neutral institution that can arrange a just social order without being significantly modified in a process of changing the social structure, and that wealth itself can be understood independently of the historical process from which it originates. The outcome is that neo-republicans conceptually evade forms of domination that arise from divisions within society itself.[68]

I find these criticisms of neo-republicanism compelling. In my view, however, what gives rise to the neo-republican myopia regarding social domination is more than an undue emphasis on political freedom. What is consistent between the liberal and neo-republican positions is the neoclassical formula and its consequent logic of externalities. For republicans, what is normatively salient about markets that go wrong is their excess. Market excess, as in the presence of a market culture or society, happens without a strong state. Like liberalism, republicanism's solution is to approach markets from the outside so as to constrain them with alternative values, laws, and morals. But it is nonetheless definitionally true that a market economy need not become an economic society. The normative focus on excess can be misleading, since its corollary commitment is the idea that what is *not* salient about market competition is endogenously generated tendencies toward excess and market pressures on society (or the state).

[68] Young, "Self-Determination as a Principle of Justice," 96-116; Graham Maddox, "The limits of neo-Roman liberty," *History of Political Thought* 23(3)(2002): 418–431, esp. 421-5; John P. McCormick, "Machiavelli against republicanism: On the Cambridge School's 'Guicciardinian moments'," *Political Theory* 31(5)(2003): 629–636; Patchen Markell, "The insufficiency of non-domination," *Political Theory* 36(1)(2008): 9–36, esp. 25-7; Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Why it matters," *London Review of Books* 30(18)(2008): 3–6; Eric MacGilvray, *The Invention of Market Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 110-111.

Some liberals are inspired by republican ideals to advance more in-depth critiques of social relationships "inside" the economy. They note that labor contracts, which set the terms for employment, are circumscribed within a production process that exceeds their boundaries. The labor contract leaves out normatively critical features of contemporary workplaces because anything that it does not specify is left up to the decision-making power of employers and management. The existing legal framework takes for granted that the labor contract is an "openended agreement to follow orders" for what falls outside of its explicit terms. In most cases, what goes unspecified includes important issues like the duration, intensity, and speed of work. Consequently, workers implicitly relinquish control over decision-making along with the right to contest decision-making by managers and bosses. Capitalist property relations confer owners and management the power to govern workers by fiat. Therefore, there are myriad ways for employers to take advantage of the implicit bias of laws in their favor to arbitrarily interfere in the lives of those over whom they have a structural advantage without considering their interests.[69]

Their critical emphasis on default legal advantages is important. From the perspective of this more in-depth criticism of capitalist property relations, the problem is that the law does not intervene adequately enough to prevent certain morally suspect forms of advantage-taking. The market is creating perverse incentives through a biased opportunity structure that some can take advantage of at the expense of others. The solution is to have a fairer opportunity structure within the firm or the workplace as regulated by law. Undue constraints on workers are derivative of incomplete recognition by the law as well as incomplete knowledge within the labor market of the opportunity costs of labor contracts. One can

[69] Elizabeth Anderson, "Equality and freedom in the workplace: Recovering republican insights," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 31(2)(2015): 48–69; Anderson, *Private Government*, 1-71; Nien-hê Hsieh, "Survey article: Justice in production," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 16(1)(2008): 72–100.

demand more legal protections, democracy, or both, but the idea is to create more and better opportunities because that is what market competition fundamentally does. Said otherwise, the problem is imperfect competition, its solution is more perfect competition, and the state, law, and democracy are a means to that end.

## *Counterintuitively, Critical Theorists Idealize the Economy Too.*

By "critical theory," I mean the attempts to conceptualize, historicize, and criticize capitalism within the Frankfurt School. I begin with Max Weber's way of conceptualizing the economy to demonstrate neoclassicism's influence on major figures within this tradition. Weber's distinction between technical and ethical rationality, which emerges out of an explicit endorsement of neoclassicism, lives a long and twisted life in critical theory. Indeed, the section title above is a bit misleading. The problem with the Frankfurt School is not so much idealization of the economy but accepting a neoclassical foundation from which to launch their critiques of capitalism. The consequence of this approach ends up being much the same; the argument that technical or instrumental reason is bad turns into an argument that it is benign, so the black box remains intact.

In *Economy and Society*, Weber relies on a distinction between "technical" and "ethical" matters to argue in favor of social reform against socialism. In doing so, he takes sides with Mises on what the economy is and what makes it rational affirming that rational economic calculation is only possible in the production process through the price mechanism.[70] But for Weber the sociologist, rather than for Mises the economist, what is at

[70] Ibid., 107.

stake is his fundamental distinction between the "economy" and "society" that emerges in opposition to the more radical elements of the labor movement that justified their socialist program "on *ethical* postulates or other forms of absolute value."[71] According to Weber, the middle ages had no distinction between formal rationality in economic calculation and substantive rationality pertaining to social welfare. Thus, there was not yet a distinction between the economy and society. This distinction emerges under capitalism and it is a good thing. Weber adopts neoclassical language to conclude that what distinguishes capitalist markets is that,

> "What is to be produced is thus determined, given the distribution of wealth, by the structure of marginal utilities in the income group which has both the inclination and the resources to purchase a given utility."[72]

And he continues to say,

> "Formal and substantive rationality, no matter by what standard the latter is measured, are always in principle separate things, no matter that in many (and under certain artificial assumptions even in all) cases they may coincide empirically."[73]

Weber's political conclusion is that maintaining the distinction between technical/ethical concerns and substantive/formal rationality is good because it prevents the uniquely technical and formal aspects of economy the from penetrating too deeply into society, like in the family.[74] Indeed, he argues that the precondition for having an individual personality that engages with questions of absolute values (i.e., ethics, the good life) lies in not subordinating "extraordinary needs" to "everyday needs," which he sometimes reformulates as a distinction

[71] Ibid., 104.
[72] Ibid., 108.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 374-84.

between ideal and material needs. Individuals must be able to give meaning to instrumental routines, which is why one cannot permit those routines and their distinctive formal type of rationality to attain a position in society that subsumes one to the other.

The labor movement, which Weber perceives as taken hold of by formal rationality, is an anti-social threat if it gets out of hand. Weber's reasons are normative; it is important for Weber that individuals be able to imbue the instrumental routines of everyday economic life with non-technical value judgments, the latter of which should not come from the economy itself. Instead, non-technical value should come from society through social reform. Weber saw state-driven social reform as an antidote to the democratic demands coming from the labor movement, which threatened to break down the distinction between the economy and society. Put simply, Weber thought that democracy in the economy could not go too far without destroying society. He hoped that the state could absorb democratic demands by providing social welfare. A social reform program could be carried out by a political elite with a sense of responsibility, thus guaranteeing both social welfare and political stability.[75]

wtf weber!

Like republicans, Weber charges the state and the political sphere with constraining the market, which in his case more explicitly arises from a commitment to the neoclassical formula. The market and the technical rationality that one finds within it is presumed to be normatively good unless is takes over society. Centrally, what makes it good is that it is an opportunity structure for those with the inclination to take advantage of it. That Weber accepted the neoclassical conception of the economy has had a far reaching impact on the Frankfurt School. Political economy, such as it would continue to exist in the Frankfurt School, becomes a strategy for going around or "beyond" the economy, rather than inside it,

[75] Cf., Steven Klein, *The Work of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), esp.70-2.

so as to capture structural changes to capitalism over time. Ironically, perhaps, the economy remains a black box that is not, in fact, open to critique within critical theory.

In Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Weber's worst nightmare has arrived. Adorno and Horkheimer present a bleak picture of a world in which technical rationality – in their words, "instrumental reason" – has betrayed its masters. Capitalist firms "now impress the same stamp on everything," and seem to direct tastes and preferences to their benefit.[76] Economic production has subsumed and become cultural production, which means that instrumental reason has declared victory over individual subjectivity. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer surmise that there is a relatively straight line running through the production of industry to the production of subjectivity. The culture industry, "has molded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product. All the agents of this process, from the producer to the women's clubs, take good care that the simple reproduction of this mental state is not nuanced or extended in any way."[77] What is at stake are the critical capacities of the masses that have being taken over by a mode of production that rationalizes the destruction it creates as efficient and progressive.

Whereas Marx's critique of political economy articulated how and why the working class could emancipate humanity from domination, the critique of instrumental reason tries to explain why they could not. Adorno and Horkheimer claim that capitalism had developed in such a way that workers' subjectivity had been fatally incorporated into the system. Their thesis is bleak—that "enlightenment has relinquished its own realization"—but it seemed warranted at the time.[78] It is clear that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not only the product

[76] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London and New York: Verso Books, 1997), 120.
[77] Ibid., 127.
[78] Ibid., 41.

of disappointed political hopes in the working class, but ironically the product of the same social theory that led Weber to reject socialism as an alternative.

The theory of monopoly capitalism is the watermark underneath all the pages of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[79] The theory postulates that capitalism becomes less competitive over time, which means that capitalism does not obey the laws of competition that Marx had set out for it. Giant firms eventually control huge market shares and can artificially manipulate prices. Firms' capacity to set prices means that they can impose their designs and products upon unwitting consumers, and these firms are so large that they have incredible leverage over state policy. They even merge with various arms of the capitalist state, and this is done to such an extent that capitalism evolves into a planned economy in private hands. From this perspective, top-down planning had become a mechanism for the total control of instrumental reason on both sides of the Iron Curtain under capitalism and socialism. Both aim to increase mechanization, commodification, and intersubjective sameness. Both are centralized, planned, bureaucratic, and barbaric in their single-minded focus on deploying human reason toward instrumental ends.

From the neoclassical perspective, monopolies are a matter of non-economic influences blocking competition, like the state, unions, mergers and acquisitions, or cartels and trusts. Heterodox economists, including Marxists, have often shared this premise with the neoclassical tradition, thereby concluding that competition is no longer central to how or what drives capital to accumulate.[80] From the heterodox side, the monopoly capitalism thesis

[79] The theory is that of monopoly capitalism, which was first developed by the German Marxist economist Rudolf Hilferding in *Finance Capital: A Study in the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development* (New York: Routledge, 2006). *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is dedicated to Friedrich Pollack, one of the theory's progenitors and also one-time director of the Frankfurt School.

[80] The Frankfurt School was hardly alone in that the monopoly capitalism school of thought emerges both in the Marxian tradition and among institutionalists and, later, Keynesians. By the 1960s, the monopoly capitalism school stated their alignment with neoclassicism explicitly. Paul Sweezy, one of the chief Marxian architects of the theory, writes that Marx's starting point is identical to the neoclassicals' and that "the normal functioning of the law of value presupposes competition among many units of capital, each too small in relation to the market in which it operates to have significant influence on the selling price" (Sweezy, *Four Lectures on*

is something like neoclassicism turned inside out, or a perverse mirror for its ideal of market competition. What monopolies do is distort economic calculations by undermining competition, so they deviate from economic rationality and turn the economy into a monster of instrumental reason. The idea of monopoly led Adorno and Horkheimer to agree with Weber that the problem with the labor movement was that it had attributed too benign of a role to "instrumental reason," thus putting too much faith in the capacities of workers to initiate a transition to a society that is not dominated by it.

What neoclassicists and their radical counterparts have in common is the premise that what tends to go wrong with capitalism is not really the competitive market itself. The problem with "late capitalism" is that market competition is either distorting or distorted by society. Heterodox thinkers like Adorno and Horkheimer saw the problem with late capitalism as one of the economy taking over society by fusing with the administrative state. Neoclassicals, by contrast, would hold that it is the other way around and that the state distorts the economy. But neither side re-evaluates their assumptions about what economic rationality is. Instead, they both claim that it is being distorted into something unexpected through its relationship with non-economic forces. The difference is not conceptual, but normative. Adorno and Horkheimer think instrumental reason is bad, whereas neoclassicals think it is good.

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This point of view created a black box problem because it sedimented the intuition that critical theory ought to look for emancipatory potential in forces external to the economy that could influence or contain it from the outside. For instance, Adorno implies in *Aesthetic*

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*Marxism.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981, 42). Thus, the Marxian theory of competition is no longer relevant to the modern capitalist economy because capitalism's competitive stage gives rise to the monopoly stage, in which it does not hold. In *Monopoly Capital*, Baran and Sweezy position their theory with the neoclassicists by arguing that, "the appropriate general price theory for an economy dominated by such corporations (i.e., oligopolies) is the traditional monopoly price theory of classical and neo-classical economics" (Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966, 59).

*Theory* that intellectuals are the group with the aesthetic acumen to negate instrumental reason. In *One-Dimensional Man,* Herbert Marcuse sees potential for revolutionary political subjectivity in the "new social movements," like civil rights, the student-led movement against the Vietnam War, and women's liberations. Both saw in these struggles subjects who were marginal enough to the core mechanisms of the capitalist economy that they could resist being subsumed within it. The focus of critical theory, then, became the outside of the economy, not its inside—or, external (society), not internal (economy).

Jürgen Habermas later broke with the idea that consciousness of the masses was determined b their class position or their subjection to monopoly capital. Habermas guided Critical Theory through a pluralist turn, wherein he argued that one must give the economy a more circumscribed role. Habermas is particularly emphatic about the differentiation between the state apparatus and the economy. The punchline of his argument is that Marxian orthodoxy cannot explain government intervention, mass democracy, the success of social reform programs and the welfare state, and the subsequent pacification of class conflict.[81] Instead, Habermas claims that the economy and thus instrumental reason can be adequately mediated by social welfare law, which prevents the economy from having a totalizing pull on society and permits society to develop dynamics of conflict and resistance of its own.[82]

Habermas performed a great rescuing act against the forces of instrumental reason by re-asserting the Weberian position that the economy is benign so long as it is appropriately circumscribed by society. Early Habermas argues that capitalist markets are a form of domination because they systematically distort communication. The structures that support market competition, like the price mechanism, split off price symbols away from other

[81] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 343-50.
[82] Ibid., 367-73.

communicative resources, which naturalizes them by making them into a compulsive way of affirming specific values. But late Habermas argues that the compulsive nature of the price mechanism is no longer a problem because he thinks that "late capitalism" displaces class conflict.[83] Value pluralism can exist external to the economy, which is enough to prevent market competition from becoming a system of domination.

I argue that the normative foundation of critical theory continues to rely on a logic of externalities. Two contemporary examples will illuminate how this trend continues to manifest itself. First, Nancy Fraser tends to argue that the apparent distinction between the economy and society within capitalism is a good enough reason to deploy normative criteria that reflect that appearance. It is with due consideration for how things appear that one can understand and then interrogate the folk paradigms that people use to articulate demands for justice.[84] Fraser substantiates this position by appropriating the Weberian categories of status and class to explain paradigmatic axes of inequality.[85] Fraser does not so much idealize the economy as she does circumscribe it analytically. What Fraser wants to do is deconstruct these distinctions from within so as to bring them together in a fuller understanding of capitalism. While I appreciate Fraser's deconstructive move, I am not convinced that this approach does not reify a normatively impoverished idea of what the economy is to begin with. Analytical distinctions tend to produce mental maps that are then difficult to entangle from one's substantive intuitions about what reality is like.[86]

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[83] Klein, *The Work of Politics*, 138-46.
[84] Nancy Fraser, "Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition: A Two-Dimensional Approach to Gender Justice," *Studies in Social Justice* 1(1)(2007): 23-35; Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke, (London and New York: Verso Books, 2003).
[85] Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition?*, 49.
[86] Cf. Christian Lazzeri, "Redistribution *and* Recognition: Rethinking N. Fraser's Dualistic Model," *Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory* 10(3)(2009): 307-40; Jacinda Swanson, "Recognition and Redistribution: Rethinking Cultural and the Economic," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 22(4)(2005): 87-118; Iris Marion Young (1997), "Unruly Categories: A Critique of Nancy Fraser's Dual Systems Theory," *New Left Review* 222: 147-60.

Axel Honneth, on the other hand, rejects normative dualisms. For Honneth, the basis of all social conflict is felt disrespect or indignity, i.e., misrecognition. The oppressed struggle for recognition by appealing to dominant norms and then reinterpreting them to become more inclusive.[87] The same holds for workers. In the economy, capitalist markets experience disruption if they do not respond to norms and values. Indeed, markets make an implicit promise of social freedom that entails seeing oneself as an equal within market exchange to which they must become responsive.[88] In this way, Honneth brings the Frankfurt School full circle back to the moral assumptions of the neoclassical model; the normatively salient features of the market are basically positive…or else they fail. At the end of the day, markets are a form of social integration, so they are primarily an opportunity structure in which people launch a struggle for recognition.

## *Whither From Neoclassicism?*

In my view, Weber was a fork in the road in the pre-history of critical theory, as well as a link to the neoclassical tradition that one finds outside of it in mainstream liberal and republican political thought. The fork in the road is the historical moment in which neoclassicism bracketed questions of value out of their concept of economic rationality against socialist critiques to the contrary. The neoclassicals declared victory against their socialist rivals by claiming that their conception of the economy is the only rational one. This argument would eventually lead to the "marginalist revolution," which is the distinct theory

[87] Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995); Honneth, "Is there and emancipatory interest? An attempt to answer critical theory's most fundamental question." *European Journal of Philosophy* 25(2017): 908-20.
[88] Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, trans. Joseph Ganahl *(*New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 189-192.

of economic rationality that distinguishes neoclassical (or modern) economics from its classical forebears. It is in these footsteps that the contemporary idea of "the economy" follows. One may just as easily, however, return to the fork and take the path less travelled.

Weber's argument regarding "technical rationality" refutes the position taken by Otto Neurath in a report to the Munich workers' council, "From War Economy to Economy in Kind," which kicked off the debate about socialism with Mises.[89] It is hard to overstate how different Neurath's view is from Mises' or Weber's. For Neurath, the economy is not an empirically or normatively distinct terrain of human activity. In Neurath's subsequent essay "Economic Plan and Calculation in Kind", he argues that the economy is a complex of judgments about human values and how human beings want to organize their lives together. The key to his argument in favor of economic planning is that human values are incommensurable. He claims that there is no self-evident empirical way of creating a common metric for measuring values against one another, so there are no given empirical grounds for defining the economy in a way that abstracts from questions of absolute value. There is no warrant to assume an immediate normative bracketing of economic value from other kinds. When one discusses economics one is talking about how human societies ought to reflect their values in practice.

[89] For an overview of the debate see John O'Neill, "Who Won the Socialist Calculation Debate?" *History of Political Thought* 17(3)(1996): 431-442. The original socialist calculation debate included contributions from Ludwig von Mises, *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth,* trans. S. Adler (Auburn, AL: Mises Institute, 1990); Otto Neurath, *Economic Writings: Selections 1904-1945,* eds. Thomas E. Uebel and Robert S. Cohen, trans. Robert S. Cohen et al., (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004); Otto Neurath, *Empiricism and Sociology,* eds. Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1973); Oskar Lange and Fred M. Taylor, *The Economic Theory of Socialism,* ed. Bejamin E. Lippincott (University of Minnesota Press, 1938); Friedrich A. Hayek, "Socialist Calculation I-III," in *Individualism and Economic Order* (University of Chicago Press, 1947), 119-208; Maurice Dobb, "Economic Theory and the Problems of a Socialist Economy," *The Economic Journal* 43(172)(1933): 588-98; Karl Polanyi, "Socialist Accounting," trans. Johanna Bockman et al., *Theor Soc* 45(2016): 385-427; Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

For Neurath, what an economy *should be* is a way of elevating humanity's capacities for making political and ethical judgments in their great diversity, together. Neurath writes that "socialism is full of human warmth" and that the economic efficiency of socialism "can satisfy the longing of a loving heart desiring to reach out beyond the individual."[90] He claims that the fruits of socialism are "to allow the men and women of today to develop emotionally and intellectually, to cultivate a deeply felt solidarity."[91] Socialism is a planned structure in which many individuals collaborate, which is not so difficult as its adversaries imagine. In fact, the activity of planning itself generates or solidarity, which "is a community-forming force from within."[92] Neurath envisions planning to be politically pluralistic, not the task of hard-hearted and undynamic state bureaucracies. It is not a way of homogenizing human values by the socialist state, but of fostering loving inclinations and tolerance of others. While there may be just as much democratic conflict under socialism, it is under socialism that "the kind-hearted person can to some extent feel at home."[93]

Planning must be politically pluralistic because it reflects genuine value pluralism among its planners. Thus, Neurath posits that, "this age of the future is essentially based on uniformity and community and yet will probably be richer in personal variety than the age of the capitalist bourgeoisie which has so praised individualism."[94] Capitalist individualism, says Neurath, is never a place where the kind-hearted person can feel at home. In fact, capitalist competition cannot take pluralism seriously at all. Anyone who cannot persevere through it will perish, will be employed far below their capacities, and will be seen as good-for-nothing. But a lucid plan can take all of our peculiarities into account because it will put

[90] Otto Neurath, *Economic Writings*, 406.
[91] Ibid., 407.
[92] Ibid., 454.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 459.

practical reasoning to a different use by calculating value in kind, rather than based on one single metric that makes all forms of value equivalent through money.

Neurath's starting point is a normative critique of capitalism as a false pluralism. He thought that using money as the universal equivalent of human value in commodity exchange is a fake-out, or a value-ridden bait and switch. Money stands in for a value judgement that precedes its use, which is that absolute values are ultimately commensurable through pricing. It is because capitalism undermines value pluralism that a kind-hearted person in a capitalist society will always stand "condemned to play a role *outside* the life of society, as a private matter so to speak."[95] Neurath both rejects the idea that the diversity of human value is in fact outside of the economy and that it is desirable to live in a society that reinforces the moral illusion that it is so. In a sense, Neurath agrees with Mises that there is no such thing as "the economy" from an ethical point of view.

If economies are not to be characterized by a distinct kind of rationality, then what are they? Neurath argues that economies are a nexus of social practices that we reflect upon and make judgments about. His critique of neoclassicism is that it mystifies this basic understanding of what we are all doing when we act as "economic" agents. The claim is not that economies are not qualitatively distinct in the kind of practices that they are, but that one misconceives them to the detriment of social criticism and human solidarity when one makes a strong distinction between the economic and the non-economic. Indeed, the binary distinction between the economic and the non-economic should itself be subject to criticism without obscuring the distinct qualities of capitalist markets that make them normatively interesting. It is these distinct qualities that create constraints on human agents that one ought to find not only interesting but concerning.

[95] Ibid., 454, emphasis mine.

## *Taking a Neo-Pragmatist Turn*

For my purposes, a pragmatist account of "the economy" is useful for one particularly important reason: Pragmatism breaks down binaries. I argue that turning toward pragmatism gives the theorist a green light to take the path less travelled in social theory by militating against the idealized abstractions that obscure constraint. In this case, pragmatism can be useful in representing constraints as constitutive of opportunity structures. Indeed, there is a distinctly pragmatist way of talking about social structure that is apt to undermining the neoclassical model.

There are three basic features to the pragmatist notion of social practice. The first is tacit knowledge, the second is problem-solving, and the third is social learning. I find Rahel Jaeggi's notion of practices to be particularly astute in connecting each feature. She posits that practices are normatively structured, habitual behaviors that with rules that are tacitly understood by those who participate. How agents evaluate whether a practice is successful depends on certain norms that are implicit, yet inherent to that practice. Norms explicitly and implicitly prohibit certain things and permit other things by defining and establishing "the conceivable modes of behavior within a form of life by normatively structuring the space of possibilities of action itself."[96] For instance, a retail salesperson who works commission at a luxury goods store and wants to sell something understands that they must reduce the feeling that their relationship with customers is instrumental. Many elite shoppers find instrumental relationships distasteful, so the personal connection with the sales employee makes the

[96] Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 95.

customer comfortable enough to buy products. The implicit norm of a successful interaction is that one ought to reduce a client's discomfort by elevating the personal dimension of the sale.

Social practices produce problems along with normative resources for resolving problems. The normative structuring of a practice is what provides the resources for identifying that there is a problem that must be resolved and sets the terms for how one goes about resolving it. A case in point is that if the normative structure of a commercial transaction is instrumental, then one must develop mannerisms, affects, and verbal cues to make customers feel comfortable enough to buy commodities. But the normative and cultural resources that one uses to resolve the problem of having to sell something might fail. Perhaps the customer is cynically aware that there exists an instrumental relationship and cannot be made to feel comfortable. The norm is not contingently related to the act. Rather, it sets the terms of its success or failure in agents' sense that they have solved a problem. At a cognitive or perceptual level, norms have a functional relationship to practices, which means that normative resources are not "outside" the problems to which they attend.[97] Thus, they are not only means by which agents evaluate success, but how they see a problem as a problem.

Attempts to solve problems give rise to developmental patterns that one can describe as learning processes in which the agents who participate in practices engage in problem-solving, put forward solutions, and attempt to solve further problems.[98] Importantly, the "learners" involved are responding to the conditions that are given by previous historical attempts to do something similar. Agency becomes deeply social, even if an individual is acting alone. It is this deeply social aspect of agency that makes pragmatism more pliable than alternatives for developing a concept of social structure.

[97] Ibid., 205.
[98] Ibid., 134-44.

As William H. Sewell Jr. writes, "structure" is "less a precise concept than a kind of founding or epistemic metaphor of social-scientific—and scientific—discourse."[99] Sewell helpfully summarizes that the main problems with having a theory of structure. They normally adopt (1) "rigid" causal determinism, having the undesirable effect of reifying structures whose persistence one is seeking to explain, (2) they make dealing with change epistemically awkward; the metaphor implies stability, so change tends to get represented as coming from the outside, and (3) they adopt a contradictory contrast between the "hardness" of structures and the "softness" of culture or mental activity, unless one thinks that culture is the pre-eminent site of structure, in which case the problem is the inverse. These three problems are related. If one adopts a rigid causal determinism in the structure, it is hard to explain change, and then one must seemingly make a choice between semiotic and materialist ideas of structure, denying the moral or causal import of one or the other.

The example of the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser helps to illustrate the structuralist issue. Recall that orthodox Marxism explains historical change by describing the interaction between the "productive forces" and the "relations of production." It claims that the relations exist because they are best suited for the development of the productive forces. Althusser argues the reverse, which is that the relations of production that keep the capitalist organization of the forces of production in place.[100] Althusser distinguishes between the "mode of production" (the economic infrastructure or "base") and "social formation" (the sum of the relations of production) and argues that the former unifies the latter "in the last instance."[101] Ideology enters Althusser's schema because he thinks that domination in the economic infrastructure cannot be kept intact without interpellation. "Interpellation" is the

[99] William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Transformation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 125.
[100] Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2014), 22-7.
[101] Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1980), 54-7.

name Althusser gives for becoming a subject in an ideologically driven environment. Relations of production in the state, family, and other such structures interpolate subjects to maintain the structure of domination. Ideology is the glue that locks individuals into relations of domination within the economic base.[102]

Ellen Wood points out that Althusser transfers agency upward and away from concrete practices of workers within the economic base and toward the realm of ideological contest to explain how and why class struggle does or does not transpire and to explain the persistence of domination.[103] Call this the *upscaling human agency problem* when one cannot explain change within a structure and then proceeds to look upward and outward away from human agency to explain it. The upscaling human agency problem is what generates (1) and (2) above. Althusser himself acknowledges the upscaling human agency problem when he writes that his theory, "[D]oes not at all provide us with the key to what happens *in the base itself*; very precisely, to *what happens* in the base (in the unity of the forces of production/relations of production) that is capable of fostering and then unleashing the class struggle…"[104] It is another black box at the base, since the question that remains is what motivates or does not motivate conflict under adverse ideological conditions.

The upscaling human agency problem tends to lead writers to posit awkward, abstract dichotomies between the economic structure and the human agency that reproduces it. The predictable result is that (3) follows from (1) and (2) as soon as one must decide on whether ideology or material conditions are more basic to the "structure." I think a pragmatist account of structure avoids this type of problem.[105] It more readily enables the theorists to imagine

[102] Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London: Verso Books, 1973).
[103] E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), 1-210; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, 99-100.
[104] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 163, emphasis in original.
[105] Other influential, non-pragmatist accounts that try for a similar result include Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979); Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism. Volume I:*

sources of social conflict and motivation, various moments of cognitive dissonance and contradiction, and the creative ways that people try to resolve problems that lead to (often unintended) consequences. People are working on a world that they did not choose to work on, and they are trying to solve the problems therein. What one can hope for from a pragmatist account is an enriched understanding of what Marx called the "silent compulsion of economic relations."[106] This time, one can bring the norms back in without letting the neoclassical idealizing moment dominate the scene.

### *Structural Practices*

Not all practices are structures. Structures, I argue, impose constraints with a high degree of regularity on human agents. Abstractly, a constraint is what Jean-Paul Sartre calls the *practico-inert.* The *practico-inert* is useful here because it literally means that which is practically inert, or what confronts agents that they do not choose to confront themselves. It emphasizes having been thrown into a nexus of constraints that present themselves to a person as objectively given, even if they are not in fact "objective" in the sense of being external to the human actions that reproduce them. A structural practice differs in quality and degree but not in kind from other practices. In a structure, agency is as present as it is in all practices, but constraints bind agency in a consistent and pervasive way.

*Power, Property, and State* (London: Macmillan, 1981); Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), as well as Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[106] Marx, *Capital*, 899.

Young combines four ideas into a definition of structure: (1) Human action and intentionality, (2) positioning, (3) objective constraint, and (4) unintended consequences.[107] I think that this conception is basically correct. Social relationships can position people in a way that shapes the kinds of intentions that an individual is likely to have and the ends they are likely to pursue. In other words, their agency is bound. What it means for agency to be bound is that an agent is subject to perceptual input within an environment and their response to it takes place under the auspices of reasonable expectations of what they can expect from others. These expectations are regularities that supervene on, but do not override, the intentional capacity of individual agents. In social life, there are aggregate regularities that reflect reasonable expectations. Formulaically, an agent who believes or anticipates P is embedded in an environment where such intentional states that warrant P are shared, in aggregate, by other individuals.[108]

Regularities can become constraints because they appear as objective facts, at least to those who must navigate them, by determining what one has to do to get what one wants or needs. It is both true that our responses to social constraints are intentional in the sense that we know what we are doing and why, allowing that we do not always know how our actions reproduce the social structure as a whole, and that the cumulative effects of many such actions can amount to constraints on future actions that individuals experience "objectively," or as "thing-like." These are the unintended consequences. If structures are recursive, what that effectively means is that intentional action produces a structure, which also enables and shapes future intentional actions. The nature of someone's intentional action depends on how they are situated in the relevant relationships that agents aim to reproduce.

[107] Iris Marion Young, "Structure as the Subject of Justice," in *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 43-74.
[108] Philip Pettit, *The Common Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11, 171-3. See also Ann Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 41.

The economy can be understood better if one describes it as a set of structural practices, or a regular way that individuals orient themselves toward problems that are given as constraints. One does not need a strong concept of rational agency or of instrumental reason to hold this view. People are rational, but what is interesting about the economy is how is selects out some questions of value as a result of the way that it imposes constraints. People need not essentially be utility maximizers to feel compulsions to act in a way that is consistent with dominant constraints and their reasonable expectations of how other people will react to the same. As Neurath points out, decision-making happens in the context of judgments that have already been made about what is valuable, which does not wholly represent what individual human beings value nor must it represent what they value the most. Such decision-making is always underdetermined because it is socially constituted, but it is nonetheless structurally bound.

The relationship between agency and constraint is something like a negotiation. Agents pursue problem-solving strategies in contexts where not all strategies are equally possible, which means that structurally bounded agency has a developmental logic. A developmental logic is the aggregate result of two things: First, depending on social position, individual agents respond differently to constraints. Second, depending on how a social position imposes constraints in common, social groups engage in both horizontal relationships with their social peers and vertical relationships with their social superiors. When they do this, they negotiate complex questions of value and priority. That some preferences appear to simply "realize" themselves with a high degree of regularity is a testament to have pervasive some constraints are.

When one talks about an economy, one is normally talking about property in the context of settled agricultural production, i.e., who owns it, controls it, uses it, whether that property is held in common, by slavers, by lords, or by capital. The idea of "social property

relations" is compelling as a way of representing how constraints bound agency in this type of economy. The term makes a linguistic shift away from a quantitative and toward and qualitative understanding of economics. It illuminates not only the resources at individuals' disposal, but the way individuals gain access to resources and their income more generally in relation to other people and what they expect from them.[109] It indicates that constraints condition how one acts, not just what one has; property is not a "holding" or an "endowment" as some liberals claim. Rather, one's position toward it relative to others determines what one has to do to get what one wants.[110] Social property relations are, therefore, a way of conceptualizing the qualitative and not just quantitative nature of the structural practices that make up the economy. These structural practices present human agents and – to the extent that they are generalizable – whole societies with a distinct set of problems.

What the distinct set of problems is depends on the type of social property relations in question. In a peasant-producing society, for instance, there are cyclical patterns of crisis when agricultural producers improve technology, the technology increases labor productivity, which allows the average economic output to grow along with the human population that this improvement in living standards can support. Both incomes and population increase, so there are more farmers to work land. Eventually, there is less land per farmer, which induces a diminishing average product of labor, falling incomes, and then a decrease in population once again. Peasants have incentives to overwork the land and to subdivide it in a context where markets are thin and they are disinclined to produce for the market. Lords, by contrast, can't reorganize production themselves to increase labor productivity, so they try to squeeze surplus from peasants, which exacerbates the declining fertility of the land. Without

[109] Brenner, "Property and Progress: Where Adam Smith Went Wrong," 57-8.
[110] Erik Olin Wright, *Approaches to Class Analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22.

incentives to increase labor productivity, demographic change is given-and-made as a recurrent problem for and by peasant producers.

The problems differ in capital-producing societies. Capitalist social property relations reflect a generalized condition of market dependency. Its preconditions are that economic agents are separated from the means of subsistence and property owners lack the means of coercion that would allow them to systematically appropriate by force what they need from direct producers. The dominant incentives here are the inverse of peasant production. Producers systematically seeks to cut costs through deeper specialization, reinvest surpluses, obsessively adopt the latest techniques, and move production from line to line by investing where they can expect the highest levels of profitability. One exemplary problem here is that market competition among property owners has the (mostly) unintended consequence of creating persistent unemployment for direct producers. Seeking profitability demands technological innovation, capital mobility, and geographic relocation. Market competition has no built-in mechanism to prevent structural unemployment. Even in neoclassical models, a "necessary" level of unemployment is built in. Thus, unemployment is given-and-made as a recurrent problem for and by market dependent producers.

What these problems have in common is that they are given-and-made by agents who, in aggregate, are subject to common constraints. Some constraints are society-wide, like market dependency, and some are relative to social position, like labor market dependency. Market dependency incentivizes market competition for all, but some compete as property owners and some compete as direct producers. These relative positions generate logics of action that also, in aggregate, give rise to corresponding and historically specific developmental patterns. These logics of action in turn generates both horizontal and vertical conflicts, which involves taking advantage of opportunities that are bound by constraints to negotiate their scope and strength. Brenner dubs the strategies that people pursue in these

negotiations “rules for reproduction.” My replacement formula for the neoclassical one is that
-> economies are a nexus of structural practices in which rules for reproduction generate unintended consequences and an underdetermined logic of action, out of which emerges macro-dynamic patterns that present distinct problems to human agents.

## *Patterns of Dependency and Vulnerability*

The critical point that neo-pragmatism helps to bring out about the economy is that it enables the social theorist to ask what is wrong with certain structural practices on several levels. The first level is the interpersonal one; is there something wrong with the relative ways that people need to interact given their position within structural practices? The second level is systemic; is there something wrong with the logics of action that emerge within structural practices? Finally, there is an “immanent” level; is there something wrong with the problems that tend to emerge within structural practices, including how people are likely to go about solving them?

There is a subaltern republican tradition that posits normative criteria for answering just these sorts of questions. Recall that the neo-republican tradition claims that domination is a capacity for exercising arbitrary power. The person(s) who is dominated is dependent on another such that they have that capacity. The republican tradition generally thinks that dependency has a number of deleterious effects. Not only does it enable domination, it also inhibits virtuous character-formation. When one is dependent, one cannot cultivate the independence of mind that is the stuff of moral character and responsible citizenship. In order to live in a free society, one must have that kind of independence so that one can have equal standing in the interdependent political relationships that make up and maintain the free

society. “Radical republicans,” as I call them, see this problem as a social one that results from a dominant logic of action within certain social relations. For this group, which includes feminists, abolitionists, and the labor movement, dependency is a problem for virtue and lack of virtue reflects a system-logic that involves domination.

The radical republican concern with virtue is that a lack of virtue inhibits one’s capacity to partake in freedom-enhancing behaviors. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, claims that dependence creates a set of practices, norms, and rules that prevent women from developing a critical perspective on what they observe around them, or to imagine their desires extending beyond their existing context.[111] It is important to be crystal clear on this point: Wollstonecraft is not claiming that women *cannot think.* She is claiming that their dependence prevents them from being able to think in a particular way, which is to wield the power of generalizing ideas that might free them of “corruption.” In the republican tradition, corruption was the primary political problem.[112] It conveys a sort of atrophy in the capacity of human reason to generalize beyond partial, narrow interests. It is a lack of virtue that deforms a person’s moral character, but for the radicals, it is derivative of certain constraints that are constituted in concrete social relationships.[113] So, there is a conceptual fusion between interest and virtue; one can either appreciate the general interest or not, as dependence involves mental subjection and lack of capacity for political imagination.[114]

The relationship between dependency and lack of virtue is not one-sided. Dependency also has deleterious effects on the “master” as much as it does the “slave.” Corruption is also a problem for the dominators because, in Wollstonecraft’s words, it makes them “unmanly.”

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[111] Hirschman and Regier, “Freedom” in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind,* ed. Sandrine Bergès et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 489-500.
[112] Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
[113] Virginia Sapiro, “Virtue,” in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, 323-37.
[114] Alex Gourevitch, “William Manning and the Political Theory of the Dependent Classes,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9(2)(2012): 331-60.

Manliness is a cognitive, psychic, and normative concept that Wollstonecraft deploys in her defense of the French Revolution against the conservative reservations of Edmund Burke. She argues that the social structure that Burke champions inhibits manliness by supporting rationally indefensible social relations.[115] The abolitionist Frederick Douglass argues much the same point in his "Speech on John Brown" in which he claims that it is possible for men to trample on justice for so long that men lose a sense of it.[116] Later, he argues further that it is not the republican form of government that is the problem, but the peculiar composition of its people and the relations between them that gives the country its "compromising spirit" regarding the post-bellum status of Black Americans and immigrants.[117] According to Douglass, this compromising spirit controls the "ruling power of the country" that has thus far refused to adopt the principle of absolute equality. It is the organizing principles of the polity that generate the material conditions of independence or dependence, which shapes the character of individuals within and aggregates to the level of the whole.[118]

Radical republicans, however, preoccupy themselves with lack of virtue among the dominated because they believe that it is only by through freedom-enhancing behaviors that they can become free. What is required is some social transformation of the organizing principles of the society such that people are able to cultivate the virtues of independence. Independence is a capacity to imagine different desires and want different things in the absence of arbitrary constraint. Independent people can generalize outward from particular to general interests, which means that radical republicans have a rather counterintuitive idea of what "independence" means that does not require liberal individualism. Virtue *is* a capacity to reason about the general interest and a free society is what enables individuals to develop

[115] Ruth Abbey, "Masculinity," in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, 365-78.
[116] Frederick Douglass, *The Essential Douglass: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Nicholas Buccola (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2016), 250-7.
[117] Ibid., 216-31.
[118] Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 162-209.

it. Virtue and freedom go hand in hand, which means that the obstacles standing in the way of the sort of transformation that is required to realize them are constitutive of domination. What is wrong with such obstacles is that they reinforce dependency and thus arbitrary power.

Now, I want to translate this radical republican story into pragmatist terms. Some practices are freedom-enhancing because they facilitate a learning process about the constraints that render individuals dependent and vulnerable to arbitrary power; they cultivate virtue. Other practices do so less effectively or not at all and thus can be said to reinforce domination. For Wollstonecraft, such freedom-enhancing practices involved education for women as well as political suffrage. For the same purpose, Douglass envisioned creating a Black counter-public in the United States for the purpose of renovating the prevailing public mind that was so lacking in virtue. He thought that prevailing practices tracked predominant public opinion and ideals, which entailed the need for alternative sites of education and debate.[119]

Alex Gourevitch explains that, according to labor republicans, competition among workers undermines the collective interest of all workers by making them more dependent on employers.[120] For them, solidarity is the antidote to competition because it allows workers to solve the problem of dependency as a group, which they could not do alone. Solidarity is a virtue that one cultivates, with a rational basis in self-interest, and a habit that comes with identifying one's own good (self-interest) with the universal, shared good of all workers (collective self-determination). Gourevitch writes that, "Solidarity cast off the mentality of dependence by making visible to each his power as a potential agent."[121] Solidarity could only develop if individual workers participated in specific institutional practices of self-

[119] Ibid., 204.
[120] Gourevitch, *Labor and the Cooperative Commonwealth*, 161-3.
[121] Ibid., 164.

organization, i.e. labor unions. Labor unions are virtue-cultivating environments that promote an ethos that runs against the grain of industrial competition.

The general idea here is that problem-solving strategies either expand the scope of human freedom or they fail to expand it. The criteria for expanding the scope of freedom are (a) reducing or eliminating dependency and (b) enabling or realizing the capacities of individuals for independence. In other words, some strategies facilitate the development of a counterculture against historically specific constraints by pitting the dominant logic of some structural practices against others. In doing so, they allow for different interpretations of the justificatory norms of the relevant practices by disrupting the system-logic in a way that militates against arbitrary power. What makes this perspective distinct is that it is focuses on what people do to pursue their perceived interests and asks how to change what they are doing so that they can see their interests differently (i.e., more generally) and thereby expand their political imagination. People learn to think that a society can do things differently by organizing themselves in a different way, which allows them to call the organizing principles of the society into question.

Radical republicanism contributes a critical perspective on structural practices that reinforce dependence and undermine independence, but "dependence" is specifically construed as a problem of enabling someone(s) to have arbitrary power over another. Dependence and independence are not free-standing norms that are intrinsically valuable. Rather, they are valuable or not valuable relative to the systematic presence of arbitrary power, which involves having the capacity to interfere in someone else's life with caprice. One need not consider the other's interests when one has arbitrary power. In my construal of this position, arbitrary power necessarily exists on a spectrum. If it's true that freedom-enhancing practices can undermine the social basis for domination, then domination can come in degrees. For instance, a slave may curry favor with a master so that they are favored

and treated relatively well, and the slave may be better off than another who is not, but they are nonetheless dominated. A trade union may protect its members from the worst excesses managerial caprice and low wages but fall far short of dismantling all harmful managerial prerogatives or guaranteeing full employment. The agency of the dominated can constrain the constraints, as it were, so domination cannot be zero-sum from a pragmatist point of view.

From a radical republican point of view, domination has three interconnected layers.

1. The first, interpersonal layer has to do with the intentions that people are likely to cultivate with respect to constraints, which informs how individuals interact with one another. The charge of interpersonal domination has to do with how the social positions of individual agents shape their intentions and therefore their manner of interacting. Structural practices are reproduced and reified by human agents, so it is important to grasp how they weigh matters of value relative to constraints. The critical point here is to show that constraints can select for some expressions of value over and against others *without* assuming that there is a particular set of value orientations that any given individual must have. Domination occurs when a social position creates incentives to disregard the interests of others and discriminates against acting on values that might inhibit this trajectory, which means that it reinforces their dependency and vulnerability.

2. The second, systemic layer has to do with macro-dynamics. Macro-dynamics are like emergent properties of structural practices. In the economist's terms, macro-dynamics are robustly indifferent to micro-foundations, i.e., one need not think in a certain way or have a specific value orientation for certain macro-dynamics to emerge. To recapitulate, this claim does not undermine the previous one that their resilience involves intentional action on the part of rational agents; rather, it simply relaxes the prejudice that rationality must be of the neoclassical kind. The emphasis is on the resilience of constraints that select out some values for others is how one links the micro and the macro-levels. Macro-dynamics represent more

than the sum of their parts in the sense that they result from a nexus of structural practices that have generated a distinct logic of action that individuals cannot change on their own. On republican terms, what can be wrong with macro-dynamics is that they can systematically undermine freedom-enhancing practices and instead select for dependency-reifying ones. In this case, a social system can reproduce a pattern of vulnerability to arbitrary power.

3.

The final layer is "immanent." There is something wrong with how people try to solve interpersonal and systemic problems that one can only see from the inside of the relevant social relations themselves. Structural practices inhibit social learning about their conditions, so one cannot take the intentional structure of action at face value. People are not fully transparent to themselves, nor are the consequences of their actions. What makes structural practices normatively interesting is how they constrain behavior by underdetermining the decision-making of individuals. They may obstruct recognition by agents of certain social problems by diminishing their capacity to generalize and to want different things than they do or people may organize themselves in such a way that they are better equipped to do so. Alternatively, people may not even be able to imagine solving a certain problem relative to their expectations of a system, even though they do recognize a problem as such. A system can lean on the decision-making of individuals to make one or the other of these results more likely. The wrong here can be structural powerlessness, which is the chronic absence of practical and normative resources to solve characteristic social problems within a system, like demographics under feudalism or unemployment under capitalism.

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All three layers of radical republican domination are connected; it is human agents who defend their interests and social positions, it is from the actions of human agents that macro-dynamics emerge, and it is agents who reinforce constraints that undermine problem-solving capacities. Domination occurs when the through-line of each layer is that some have arbitrary power over others and the structural practices that make up a system reinforce that

power. In my account, a neo-pragmatist notion of structural practices helps to illuminate each level, which I will use to open the black box of the economy by both reconceptualizing it and making matters of constraint salient that were not salient before. Unlike in the idealized neoclassical picture, the economy does not only generate opportunities, but also patterns of dependency and vulnerability. In the next chapter, I explain why this approach to developing a normative critique of capitalism's political economy it more useful as a starting point for understanding the political importance of exploitation.

# Chapter 3: From Exploitation to Domination

The traditional way of developing a critique of political economy is through the concept of exploitation: Capital exploits labor. In this chapter, I argue that the best way of characterizing exploitation is as a structural practice of domination. There are limits to other ways of capturing what is wrong with exploitation that I believe "domination" helps to clear away. I am particularly interested in addressing objections that challenge the scope of what counts as exploitation. Exploitation, so the argument goes, is of limited normative importance to political economy because it is either mainly a problem of distribution, it pertains only to privileged forms of labor, or it can be rectified with more democracy in the workplace.

The republican concept of domination is particularly useful for developing the causal, moral, and political ties that the process of exploiting wage labor has to the general situation of labor under capitalism that includes informal labor, reproductive labor, structural unemployment, and so on. It is, moreover, neither simply a matter of distributive justice, nor of democracy. Rather, inequality and autocracy (especially in the workplace) are downstream effects of structural practices of domination, which exploitation helps to explain. I argue that this streamlined approach to understanding what is wrong with exploitation helps to re-contextualize it within a system-logic. As a result, I re-politicize exploitation by describing it as a dividend of domination. The imperative for capital to exploit labor is like a centrifugal force in capitalist societies that generates many injustices that are not mutually convertible with the moment of exploitation itself. The account that I give here is simultaneously more streamlined and more capacious than alternatives.

## *What's Wrong with Exploitation?*

I think there are three primary ways of describing what is wrong with exploitation. These ways are (a) as a matter of distributive justice, (b) as a violation of moral intuitions about how to treat other people, or (c) as the absence of workplace democracy. There are limits to each strategy, which I identify in turn to motivate the turn that political theorists have made recently to thinking about capitalism more broadly as a system of domination. The philosophical literature on exploitation itself has also seen fit to make this turn, so I bring these discourses together to suggest that there is something of a consensus emerging on the concept of exploitation. Bringing the views together can help to develop a response to typical worries about the scope of the concern with exploitation in regard to "atypical" forms of wage labor or non-wage labor under capitalism.

The view that exploitation is a matter for distributive justice evolved out of controversies surrounding the classical Marxist view of exploitation. G.A. Cohen writes that in the traditional Marxist thesis "the forcible appropriation of another's labour time and product by virtue of ownership of the means of production is unjust."[122] This traditional thesis has two parts: Workers work more than they need to work for their own subsistence, which is "socially necessary labor time" to produce the relevant goods that they need for their own consumptions. They also produce value that capitalists appropriate by virtue of their ownership of the means of production. This value is "surplus value" because it is in excess of the value of the socially necessary labor time, which is relative to the level of labor productivity, technology, etc. One way of claiming that it is wrong to appropriate surplus

[122] G.A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 149.

labor is to say that capital is robbing workers of the full fruits of their labor, as workers are not being compensated for the full value of it on the market.

This classical charge of exploitation is particularly vulnerable to being undermined by objections to its priors about what produces value and why it is morally troubling to rob labor of that value. There are two such priors that are particularly difficult to defend: (1) Workers have a right to self-ownership and, therefore, the full fruits of their labor, and (2) Workers create all the value that capitalists appropriate from them. In the *Second Treatise on Government,* Locke argues that once one applies one's labor to something, then one puts a part of oneself into that thing. If another person takes that something away from the laborer, then that person is robbing the laborer of a part of themselves. In a free society, one cannot sell any part of oneself, so the things one labors on cannot be taken away from a laborer involuntarily. The classical view of exploitation implicitly argues capitalism violates the principle of self-ownership implied by the Lockean definition of property. When capitalists appropriate the object of a laborer's toil without fully compensating the laborer, they steal labor time and thereby illegitimately appropriate a part of the laborer's self.[123]

But two can play at the self-ownership game. The libertarian Robert Nozick, for instance, claims that the Marxian notion of exploitation was unintelligible from the point of view of self-ownership. Nozick challenges the labor theory of value that underwrites the Marxian theory of exploitation; workers do not generate most of the value that goes into producing commodities. In fact, Marxists ignore important features of production like investment risk and entrepreneurial talent, which would generate ownership rights to the entire productive process that spawns from them. By contrast, taxing the income that accrues to individuals as a result of this process in order to redistribute it to others is akin to slavery.

[123] Ibid., 146.

The final distribution of property is not what matters, but the process through which this distribution transpires. Unlike Marxists, Nozick argues that the final distribution of resources can only be unjust if the process through which the distribution comes to be is unjust. One might think that the unjustness of the process is exactly what Marxists try to prove, but their argument is not successful if it relies on a simplified theory of value that does not map onto the reality of the complex process of capitalist production.[124]

A contemporary, distributive way of thinking about exploitation concedes Nozick's point and proceeds to support the charge of exploitation by questioning the moral legitimacy of capitalism's unequal distribution of productive assets. John Roemer, for example, writes that,

> "It would be begging the question to define exploitation as the transfer of unpaid labor, for what one observer may consider expropriated labor another will consider an entitled labor transfer. This, indeed, is the heart of the disagreement between Marxian and neoclassical economists concerning the Marxian theory of exploitation."[125]

In Roemer's view, the argument against exploitation is basically a commitment to egalitarianism over and against claims to self-ownership. Roemer circumvents Nozick's objection by claiming that any unequal initial distribution of productive assets will inevitably give rise to exploitation and thus unjust patterns of inequality. Roemer insists that the process through which inequality emerges is entailed by an historically primary initial unequal distribution of assets. Roemer then redefines exploitation entirely as an unjust initial distribution of assets that leaves one group of (exploited) persons worse off for staying within a system and another (exploiter) group better off if the former does not leave. If the primary injustice is the unequal distribution of productive assets, then capitalist societies are unjust for

[124] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 232-75.
[125] John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and* Class (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 191-2.

the same reason that all class societies are unjust: They are unequal for morally and historically arbitrary reasons, having begun with a morally illegitimate unequal distribution in the society's productive assets.

The problems that I see in this approach reflect my agreement with Young on the limitations of the distributive paradigm for understanding structural injustice. Recall Young's argument that distributive theories of justice assume that there is a single model of justice where all situations in which justice is an issue are analogous to dividing a stock of goods and comparing the portions that individuals have. Then, one can decide if these allotments are fair or unfair, just or unjust, which implicitly reduces the robust world of social injustice to a matter of distribution. According to Young, this view implicitly assumes social atomism—that individuals lie at discrete nodes along the social field in which they are assigned goods, whether those goods be material resources or social power; the internal relations among persons either do not exist or they are opaque. The problem with the distributive view is that it presupposes and obscures the institutional context in which distributive patterns arise.

This charge was a serious one to raise against Marxists, but it holds here. Young points out that socialist or Marxist discussions of justice often fall under the distributive paradigm when they posit that what primarily distinguishes their vision of justice from a capitalist one is a different principle of distribution. Social processes, change, and the fluctuating shifts in the balance of power between labor and capital within a capitalist society become difficult to conceptualize. One might respond by saying, yes, but the upshot of sticking with distributive injustice is that it's more normatively fundamental than these other things. My answer is that even if I concede this point, it's not very interesting. Indeed, the distributive way of thinking about exploitation makes capitalism itself uninteresting. If it is unjust for all the same reasons that every class society is unjust, then why ought one try to understand how it works to generate conflict and change?

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There may be no need for social theory in the distributive view, since it doesn't help us to understand our object of concern any better than a face-value concern with inequality helps us to understand it. Roemer's single-minded focus on finding a principled objection to capitalism based on an incontrovertible moral claim generates a perspective from which one cannot even state Marx's concerns. Marx's account of how capital appropriates surplus labor originates from an extended set of arguments regarding the deep facts about how human labor is organized under particular conditions.[126] Roemer's distributive paradigm considers these conditions as second-order phenomena because his conceptual model lacks these historical features. The model is, of course, a neoclassical one, which makes the charge of exploitation redundant from the perspective of market exchange. My question for the distributive view of exploitation is, why write *Capital* if all that if the normative stakes are inequality? If markets clear, what can Marxists complain about?

The second way of articulating what's wrong with exploitation is a moral one. Many theorists of exploitation share my critique of the distributive view, faulting Roemer especially for missing the normatively interesting aspects of exploitation. Thus, others have a relational view, which locate the harm of exploitation in certain types of social relationships. Richard Arneson, for instance, argues that "exploitation" represents our intuition that one person is unfairly taking advantage of another.[127] Allen Wood also identifies exploitation as the moral intuition that one has when revulsed by the greater vulnerability of someone who is being unfairly taken advantage of. The idea here is that exploitation is degrading and violates proper respect for persons, even if the exploitative relationship is beneficial to the exploited relative to their circumstances.[128] Some maintain that coercion is constitutive of what makes

[126] Justin Schwartz, "In Defense of Exploitation," *Economics and Philosophy* 11(1995): 275-307; Justin Schwartz, "What's Wrong with Exploitation?" *Noûs* 29(2)(1995), 158-88.
[127] Richard Arneson, "Exploitation, Domination, Competitive Markets, and Unfair Division," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 54 (Spindel Supplement)(2016): 9-30.
[128] Allen W. Wood, "Exploitation," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 12(1995): 136-58, esp. 151.

exploitation bad; exploitation is like a forced transfer of unpaid labor in a bottle-neck dynamic in which workers and the poor are forced to accept some jobs and working conditions, wherein there is a lack of moral reciprocity between worker and employer.[129]

The latter concepts of exploitation are all moralized because they find their grounding in general moral commitments regarding how we ought to treat other people. My disagreement with moralized conceptions of exploitation is not so much that they are wrong. Indeed, I think that if a relationship is exploitative, such reasons are likely to capture part of why the relationship ought to be identified as such. What I object to is the scope of the moralized view, which I believe to be too narrow. It does not say why one ought to care about exploitation in the context of a political theory that analyses structural injustice. I argue that the moralized approach to understanding exploitation got in its own way by undermining the concept's explanatory value. It is, therefore, counterintuitively unable to inspire a critique of capitalism as such.

The narrowness is partly by design. It comes from a legacy of socialist and left-liberal writers trying to preserve their core commitment to equality in a political context in which interest in the labor movement had evaporated, including its role in bringing about a socialist alternative to capitalism. Many scholars cut their losses by talking about exploitation in a way that does not require a controversial social theory to explain what capitalism is and who is going to bring it to an end. They articulated what is wrong with exploitation in a manner that does not require particular emphasis on the working class as its victim or as the agent of change. So, they shifted to normative political philosophy *sans* social theory. As Roemer put

[129] Nancy Holmstrom, "Exploitation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 7(2)(1977): 353-69; Jeffrey Reiman, "Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 16(1)(1987): 3-41; John Reiman, "Why Worry About How Exploitation Is Defined?: Reply to John Roemer," *Social Theory and Practice* 16(1)(1990): 101-113; Jeffrey Reiman, "An Alternative to 'Distributive' Marxism: Further Thoughts on Roemer, Cohen and Exploitation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary* Volume 15 (1989): 299-331.

it, “many socialist scholars, formerly content with the Marxist condemnation of capitalism based upon the expropriation of surplus value, now take political philosophy more seriously.”[130]

In explaining this trajectory, G.A. Cohen writes that, “People like me, who were nurtured on a politically committed Marxism long before they encountered academic political philosophy, come to academic political philosophy with a certain paradigm of injustice governing their reflections.”[131] That paradigm is one of class conflict, in which the propertied capitalist and the propertyless wage workers are engaged in an asymmetric, interdependent, and exploitative relationship. What socialists saw in the working-class until the middle of the twentieth century was that its members:

1. Constituted the majority of society,
2. Produced the wealth of society,
3. Were the exploited people in society, and
4. Were the needy people in society.[132]

Cohen points out that many of the problems of Marxism were precipitated by the increasing lack of coincidence between these ideas. He had assumed that, because workers were so needy, they would have nothing to lose from revolution. Workers thus had an interest in, and therefore would, transform society. Moreover, Marxists had assumed that the relationship between workers and revolution was unproblematic, so they did not tend to argue philosophically about the normative justification for its legitimacy. What is especially problematic here is that if workers do not produce all the wealth in society and they are not necessarily the neediest people, then the charge of exploitation is harder to defend. Hence

[130] John Roemer, *A Future For Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 16.
[131] Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality*, 145.
[132] Ibid., 155.

efforts to ground that charge in basic moral claims, rather than controversial social theories and theories of historical change.

Unsurprisingly, this method inspires few people to rally to the cause of exploitation who are not already convinced that it is a serious injustice. Instead, "exploitation" under capitalism came to stand in for a normatively restricted harm done to a privileged few, not a concept with great explanatory value, including among its critics. It is far more common to hear students ask, "What about care work?" or "What about those excluded from wage labor?" than "What's wrong with exploitation?" Indeed, it is a notable trend that the exploitation debate did not inspire moral debates about the emergence of a racialized "underclass" in the 1990s, which was preoccupied with chronic under- or unemployment.[133] This debate seemed to assume that exploitation explains only what is being done to a subset of workers with full-time employment, salaries, benefits, and labor unions in contrast to the "precariat," "the underclass," or to informal and unskilled laborers. Exploitation's explanatory connection to these issues is oblique, which may be an unintended consequence of moralized attempts to rescue the phenomenon from philosophical obsolescence.

There may be a range of moral harms done to people that result from capitalist exploitation that are causally related to it and, in some cases, derived from it. Surely, for instance, it is changes to the conditions of production under capitalism (where exploitation transpires) that throws people out of work and creates chronic unemployment. The same process usually develops ways to refine management's control over the labor force by increasing labor productivity and adjusting the extent of managerial control. A single moral concept of exploitation alone cannot capture this whole sequence, but that does not mean it's not central either politically or causally. The process of exploitation may be unjust for moral

[133] Bill E. Lawson (ed.), *The Underclass Question* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992).

reasons, but the same process has morally various effects that can be worse, like unemployment or becoming superfluous to capital. For instance, exploitation might be wrong because it unjustly takes advantage of workers and it undermines moral reciprocity with employers, but it is also wrong for causing some people to be in a situation where they have no relationship with employers at all.

To summarize, moralized concepts of exploitation are relational in nature, which is a strength in contrast with the distributive view that points out inequality in productive assets as the primary normative problem. The trouble, however, is that moralizing exploitation trades off one restricted view for another, making it difficult to posit a conceptual schema that captures the labor process on the whole, including who is excluded from it and why. Rather than responding to these difficulties by claiming that there is nothing wrong with exploitation after all or that exploitation simply is a narrow issue, my conclusion is an ameliorative question: Is the philosophical discussion of exploitation focusing on the right thing? My answer is no, it's not. What is missing is an analysis of how the process of exploitation generates social pathologies, patterns of value, politics, and conflict. This analysis becomes impossible if one evacuates the controversial political content surrounding exploitation.

One could capture some of these dynamics by focusing on the absence of democratic participation in the workplace. In this case, exploitation is the result of lack of democratic control over work. This issue is no longer distributive justice or moral principle *per se*, as these issues are downstream effects of the absence of democracy. Democratic processes are intrinsically political conflictual, and value-laden, so pointing out the absence of workplace democracy and prescribing more of it is an important way to address some of the adverse effects of exploitation. It may even eliminate exploitation, if one redefines exploitation as being subject to a labor process where some people work for the purposes of others, thereby being seen as instruments to another's end. In such a redefinition, one can argue that the

autonomy of individual workers depends on public autonomy in the economic sphere. One must be able to participate in democratic processes to be a person who has meaningful autonomy at work. In this case, more democracy entails less exploitation.

I prefer the anti-democratic account of exploitation to either the distributive or the moral ones. As Elizabeth Anderson argues, autocracy in the workplace stands in contradiction to democratic norms because it subjects workers to "private government" wherein one sacrifices one's autonomy as a matter of course by accepting the capital's entitlement to managerial prerogative within the workplace. Labor contracts are intrinsically open-ended, so there is a ripe environment for abuse and advantage-taking of workers by employers when workers have no democratic form of redress in the workplace.[134] This privatization of politics in the economy stands in stark contrast to the ideal of public autonomy, which means that it also undermines individual autonomy. From this perspective, one can pinpoint a range of political problems and solutions. Trade unions, co-determination schemes, and worker cooperatives can all remedy some part of the anti-democratic excess of capitalist labor contracts.

However, I still think that the anti-democratic view elides the central problem, which is that capitalism is a system with a system-logic that leads capital to exploit labor. Workplace democracy comes in degrees and styles, many of which can coexist alongside this general situation of exploitation of labor by capital. Trade unions and works councils, for instance, can exist in capitalist economies and their constituencies can remain exploited. Workers in such organizations are more autonomous in comparison with their less protected peers, to be sure, but these organizations tend to play defense when market competition threatens to undermine the protections that they offer. A trade union, for instance, must not demand more wages than capital can provide while staying competitive because workers depend on capital

[134] Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government*.

for access to employment. The union provides a way for workers to exercise democratic self-governance, but it is a form of self-governance that is subject to the constraints of competition. Capitalism's system-logic remains a background condition for all forms of democratic participation in capitalist firms. Such institutions can actually reflect those constraints as much as they challenge them.

The anti-democratic argument is a theoretical bait and switch. If one defines exploitation as the absence of democracy, then it seems to follow that a democratic fix can get rid of exploitation. But what if it doesn't? Consider an example: There are three major strategies to expand workplace participation in capitalist firms, by organizing them (normally in trade unions) on a firm-by-firm basis, as a sector, or nationally through a union federation. All increase participation or self-determination in bargaining or wages, better working conditions, and benefits. If one assumes that each is equally well-organized at the individual firm level, democratic, organizing without employer interference, and bargaining over the same issues, then it is unlikely to matter to any individual worker at any given moment who represents them in negotiations.

The difference lies in how each type of participation affects the relationship between groups of workers and their employers. A firm-by-firm organizing strategy has to target the most powerful firms that set the wage floor for whole industries if they do not want to push themselves out of employment by undermining the competitiveness of their firm. A sectoral or national strategy can set the wage floor by getting many or all capitals to the bargaining table at once. Claiming that one strategy to expand economic democracy is superior to another is a claim that one makes with reference to the fact of market dependency and the competitive constraints that it places on a form of democratic participation. The scale, scope, and quality of such democratic interventions depends on how they navigate the competitive pressures that are born from capitalist patterns of ownership.

## *Why Turn to Domination?*

In my view, what is needed is a bigger picture political theory of exploitation, which is what I believe the contemporary turn to domination is trying to facilitate. Distributive, moralized, and democratic critiques do not capture the system-logic that is of concern if one wants to have an account of exploitation that informs a system-level critique of capitalism. I favor the domination argument because it creates a way to answer two questions rather than one; instead of simply asking, "What's wrong with exploitation?" it also asks, "Why does exploitation matter to a theory of structural injustice?"

Domination-based accounts of exploitation aim to be both normative and explanatory. Justin Schwartz argues that this perspective is one from which one can better state Marx's original concerns, which is with specific historical cases in which exploitation explains domination. According to Schwartz, Marx's account of how capital appropriates surplus labor is a response to deep facts about how human labor is organized under particular conditions. The domination view situates freedom logically prior to justice, whether justice is construed in distributive, moral, or democratic terms. Their aim is to conceptualize *how and why* a system coerces labor transfers from producers to appropriators. Distribution is downstream of exploitation, as is the quality and scope of democracy; the normative emphasis is on their background conditions, but the causal emphasis is on the process of exploitation that illuminates those background conditions.

Indeed, the explanatory structure of Marx's *Capital* suggests that domination-based accounts are on the right track. As David Harvey puts it, each part of *Capital* unfolds such that one realizes at the end of it that what came at the beginning presupposes the end. Harvey

writes that, "this is what he [Marx] called the method of descent—we proceed from the immediate reality around us, looking deeper for the concepts fundamental to that reality. Equipped with those concepts, we can begin working back to the surface—the method of ascent—and discover how deceiving the world of appearances can be."[135] For instance, Marx asks at the start why commodities appear to us solely as exchange values. By the end of the first part of the book, one realizes that it is the peculiar material relations between persons that make commodities appear as social relations among things. Commodities appear solely as exchange-values because human beings have developed a form of value equivalence in money that makes all commodities interchangeable through its medium. Money as the medium of equivalence among values presupposes market exchange. In Part II, one finds out that market exchange presupposes the transformation of money into capital.

A similar unfolding takes place in Part III regarding exploitation, where Marx introduces the concept for the first time. In Chapter 9, "The Rate of Surplus Value," Marx begins by saying that "The surplus-value generated in the production process by *C*, the capital advanced, i.e., the valorization of the value of the capital *C*, presents itself to us *first* as the amount by which the value of the product exceeds the value of its constituent elements."[136] The "degree of exploitation" appears in Marx's text as a way to develop plainer language for saying "the rate of surplus-value." By the end of Part III, one finds out that surplus-value appears as an amount of value that exceeds the value of its parts because it presupposes the process of extracting value through the buying and selling of labor-power. In Part IV, the latter also presupposes the persistence conflict between capital and labor, and therefore, class struggle.

[135] David Harvey, A Companion to Marx's Capital: The Complete Edition (London and New York: Verso Books, 2018), 9-13,111-136.
[136] Marx, *Capital*, 320 (emphasis mine).

The order of presentation suggests what the domination view also affirms; it ties the harm of exploitation to a social theory. Marx's discussion of exploitation leads the reader to consider that constant capital (instruments of labor) depreciates in value slowly and partially in the production process, whereas variable capital (labor-power) expends itself immediately with each use. Marx then proceeds to explain not only what generates surplus value in the process of appropriation, but the rate of that surplus value relative to these two constituent elements. Marx foreshadows his point in writing that, "Of course, the ratio of surplus-value not only to that portion of the capital from which it directly arises, and whose change in value it represents, but also the sum total of the capital advanced, is economically of very great importance," with a subsequent reference to dealing with it further in Volume 3.[137] Marx is referring to the rate of profit, so his exposition of the degree of exploitation is from the beginning presupposing capital's interest in this rate.

Profit has a rate because it is relative to what other capitals are able to generate through market competition. The presence of other capitals is why it "by no means suffices for capital to take over the labor process in its given or historically transmitted shape, and then simply prolong its duration."[138] Marx argues that one can try to generate "absolute surplus value" by lengthening the working day but squeezing surplus value out of producers cannot suffice. It cannot suffice because individual capitals have the presence of other capitals to contend with. Marx writes that,

> "While it is not our intention here to consider the way in which the immanent laws of capitalist production manifest themselves in the external movement of the individuals capitals, assert themselves as the coercive laws of competition, and therefore enter into the consciousness of the individual capitalist as the motives which drive him

[137] Ibid., 323.
[138] Ibid., 432.

forward, this much is clear: a scientific analysis of competition is possible only if we can grasp the inner nature of capital, just as the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are intelligible only to someone who is acquainted with their real motions, which are not perceptible to the senses."[139]

For Marx, then, it is market competition that motivates a capitalist to increase or decrease the rate of exploitation, which is relative to their overarching goal of maintaining a rate of profit vis-à-vis competitors. If exploitation is morally objectionable, then it is with respect to the reasons for its persistence that Marx is drawn to this conclusion. Exploitation does not only coerce workers, but competition coerces capitalists to exploit workers. Exploitation presupposes market dependency, competition, and class conflict, so the moral status of exploitation cannot be understood without reference to those features of it. Succinctly, one must explain the wrongness of exploitation with reference to the social form in which it lives.

Otherwise, one could escape the exploitation charge by saying that not all subordination is domination. What looks like exploitation is really "legitimate practical authority" in the workplace that is not illegitimate so long as workers have a decent standard of living and are not desperately needy, i.e., the surplus value is good for workers, too. In his distributive account, Roemer suggests the same. He writes that in a specified set of property relations, "if a coalition can do better for its members by 'withdrawing,' then it is exploited."[140] Thus, serfs are exploited because they would be better off keeping all of their surplus for their own consumption without lords making them pay taxes. Likewise, workers would be better off distributing a social surplus among themselves rather than getting paid a wage by capitalists. Roemer defines exploitation as one outcome of a hypothetical game in

[139] Ibid., 433.
[140] Ibid., 276.

which there is a reservation option that would make the would-be exploited party better off. If workers are doing materially well enough in a capitalist economy, exploitation stops being a serious problem because workers might not do better in another arrangement.

The domination account of exploitation avoids this outcome by emphasizing the background conditions and by giving them a normative status that other accounts do not. Nicholas Vrousalis captures the difference in writing that, "The disagreement [between Arneson and me] is, fundamentally, about the nature of exploitation claims: on my view, exploitation is about relations of domination and power; it is a dividend of servitude. [On Arneson's view], exploitation is about maldistribution and fairness."[141] What it means for exploitation to be a dividend of servitude is that the form of power that the exploiter exercises over the exploited must not be a morally benign form of subordination. For instance, it is not exploitative for a cancer patient to be at the mercy of an oncologist in seeking cancer treatment, but it is exploitative for the oncologist to raise the prices of treatment while being aware that they are the only oncologist in the region.

The difference between the exploitative and non-exploitative versions of the cancer treatment situation has to do with whether the doctor is taking advantage of the patient's vulnerability as a result of deeper facts about the social organization. Why are they the only oncologist in the region and why can't the patient's health insurance cover the costs of treatment regardless of how many oncologists there are? Do these factors incentivize price-raising and, thus, exploitation? In other words, do they create an *interest* in undermining the welfare of the cancer patient? In this case, the existence of exploitation implies domination. Conversely, if one ascertains that there are relations of domination, then exploitation is likely to follow, since exploitation is a dividend of domination. Put differently, one's intuitions

[141] Nicholas Vrousalis, "Exploitation as Domination: A Response to Richard Arneson," *Sothern Journal of Philosophy* 54(4)(2016): 527-538.

about what is exploitative and what is not has to do with whether those social facts make it especially likely for advantage-taking to occur, or in some cases – as with market competition – imperative that it does. One can say that exploitation helps to explain domination with reference to the social facts surrounding it; systematic exploitation indicates that there is an interest and a capacity to do harm.

What might make the relevant social facts qualify as domination? The domination view must establish such criteria for what counts as domination to avoid vicious circularity in my claim exploitation both explains domination and is a dividend of it. G.A. Cohen can help here. Cohen argues that what is normatively fundamental to exploitation is the moral legitimacy of the distribution of productive assets (Shelby 2002; Vrousalis 2014). Specifically, Cohen argues that private property distributes productive assets unequally, which is unjust because it creates involuntary and arbitrary disadvantage. the extraction of the social surplus by an exploiter group from an exploited group is unjust because it reflects an unjust distribution a*nd* the asset distribution is unjust because it generates unjust extraction. What is normatively fundamental is inequality, but what is causally fundamental in the flow that reflects the inequality. For Cohen, the unjust extraction (exploitation) requires an unequal initial distribution to set in motion "the flow" that transpires for the wrong reasons.

One can interpret Cohen as holding a distributive view. Indeed, I think he would have endorsed this interpretation. At the same time, Cohen's introduction of the idea of an unjust flow that tells us something normatively interesting about background conditions gestures at the domination view, even if he did not formulate it as such. Indeed, I argue that the republican notion of domination posits non-distributive, relational criteria for what makes the normatively fundamental part of exploitation unjust. In the next section, I build on Cohen's account, but I argue that a republican account of exploitation is more robust and explanatorily capacious than the distributive one that Cohen winds up endorsing.

## *The Radical Republican Account of Exploitation*

Recall that republicans posit the principle of freedom as non-domination, which means that no one can have the capacity to arbitrarily interfere with another's choices. What it means to "arbitrarily" interfere it that the interference is capricious; the interfering party can do what they are doing without having to consider the other party's interests, needs, and desires. This definition is intrinsically relational in the sense that it picks out a qualitative dimension of human relationships and makes that dimension the locus of a normative claim. In my view, these criteria help to clarify what is wrong with the "flow" of exploitation. The great advantage of a potential republican account of exploitation is that it de-moralizes and re-politicizes the concept.

The republican view re-politicizes exploitation by making an important shift in the level of abstraction. While it is possible that raising the level abstraction does a disservice to the theorist's ability to conceptualize the dynamics of concrete conflicts, in this case, it does the opposite. A higher level of abstraction gives normative salience to the organizing principles of patterns of conflict within the labor process. The leap of abstraction is from what happens in the workplace to why what happens there is happening in the way that it is.[142] Organizing principles are an abstract representation of a nexus of the imperatives within structural practices that constrain the scope of individual and collective agency. They point out how macrodynamic trends shape collective and interpersonal forms of contestation and vice versa. This perspective is more political in the sense that it makes conflict and

[142] Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 125.

contestation visible. It directs theorists toward a more robust understanding of the structural practices that organize social conflict in a certain way.

To put the case otherwise, the radical republican shift in the level of abstraction helps to highlight the difference between the distributive, moralized, and anti-democratic accounts of exploitation with the radical republican one; the republican pinpoints a way of evaluating the organizing principles that govern all three. William Clare Roberts has argued that Marx's political theory is republican in nature for just this reason. In Roberts' account, Marx's *Capital* actually innovates on the concept of exploitation to raise the level of abstraction in the way that I am recommending. Roberts argues that Marx appropriates and transforms "exploitation" to refer to a relationship between classes, rather than to a relationship between individuals (i.e., employer and employee). In doing so, Marx de-moralizes exploitation so as to show why individual employers and employees contest the terms of exploitation in the way that they do. Once the conditions of market competition demand a certain rate of profit, individual firms must find a way to extract it from the labor process relative to competitors. Workers also respond to these conditions and they tend to do so in predictable ways.

Other concepts of exploitation give organizing principles the short end of the conceptual stick. In seeking a fundamental moral principle with which to condemn exploitation, they tend to restrict rather than broaden the scope of normative concern. The scope of concern is actually that exploitation generates a "giant collective-action-problem generating machine" from which it is especially difficult for any particular agent or group of agents to extricate themselves.[143] Raising the level of abstraction and thus the scope allows the theorist of exploitation to meet an important objection, which is that a snapshot of some institutional variation in capitalist economies might undermine the conceptual tie between

[143] Ibid., 102.

exploitation and domination. If republicans focus on domination, but domination and exploitation do not always coincide, then radical republicans may be making too much hay out of exploitation.

A counterexample would be the best in Swedish social democracy. Swedish workers have a (still relatively) high standard of living, a massive welfare state, and a unique history of labor's strong influence on the political process. This situation could easily lead someone to say that there is no domination to be seen here. In this case, the appropriation of the social surplus has been to everyone's benefit. In evidence is the fact that the Swedish model allows the rate of exploitation to increase to labor's benefit. They allow unproductive firms to go under but have an active labor market policy that retrains and reskills workers to place them into new jobs. It seems that domination can decrease and exploitation can increase. Thus, once could argue that exploitation as such is not always domination, since in this case there is no concomitant interest in exploitation.

That conclusion would be mistaken. In a republican account, exploitation and domination do not need to be synchronous in their intensity; the link between them is causal. Domination is a relational concept that is not primarily referring to a quantity of appropriated surplus or a distributive schema. As a result, the republican need not deny that domination comes in degrees. They can consistently claim that domination decreases while exploitation increases if the latter increase might help to explain why the former decrease is possible. From this perspective, the Swedish case is a case in point. Swedish labor's strategy ensured that surplus appropriation would be done efficiently so as to reduce domination. It subordinates labor to the competitive constraint in a way that expands social freedom within it by increasing labor productivity and therefore the rate of exploitation. Labor is producing more value in less time, which reduces but does not eliminate labor's vulnerability to arbitrary power. Exploitation continues to explain not only why capital is subject to the

imperatives of competition, but why even highly organized workers might contest those imperatives in a way that continues to measure social freedom in terms of what maintains the rate of profit of capitalist firms.

If one is exploited, then one is having one's labor extracted for someone else's purposes. This extraction explains why someone is vulnerable to another's arbitrary power, but it does not mean that the scope of that power cannot be constrained. To the contrary, arbitrary power can be sharply constrained and yet persist. Thus, one can be exploited with or without collective bargaining agreements and with or without workplace representation. Workers can and have demanded greater respect, more income, and more of a voice in their workplace or firm. But the deeper problem is the reason that they need to do so in the first place and why such demands are vulnerable to further contestation by employers as a result of the imperatives to compete over time. The locus of the republican problem is on what it is about these imperatives that make labor structurally vulnerable to the arbitrary power of capital. As Martin Hagglund puts it, "we are all dominated by the collective priority of generating profit."[144]

What exploitation means, then, is that one is laboring for the purpose of another in a manner that grants the other arbitrary power over how one labors and what one does with its products. It is a negative form of dependency because the party with arbitrary power has an interest in exercising it. Even if the exploitative relationship becomes more fair, respectful, or democratic, the line between domination and freedom will not be crossed so long the joint conditions of arbitrariness, dependency, and interest remain intact. Insofar as workers must prioritize the interests of capital to eliminate the most disturbing effects of exploitation, they

[144] Martin Hagglund, "What Is Democratic Socialism? Part III: Life After Capitalism," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 15, 2020. Accessible here: https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-is-democratic-socialism-part-3-life-after-capitalism/

remain dominated. The republican account of exploitation is therefore more robust than, say, a neo-Kantian account. Such an account argues that exploitation involves servitude defined as having one's labor capacity subject to unilateral control by another in a mutually cooperative schema of work.[145] In my view, the control over capacities to labor that is at issue need not be unilateral. The control can be politically contested and reduced without eliminating the features of the control that are troublesome, namely that capital has an interest in regaining control at labor's expense, even if labor is able to mediate the process of exploitation in a significant way.

At this point, I want to clarify the way I am using the language of "dependency." Many feminists, for instance, will be quick to point out that dependency is not always bad and that emphasizing independence as a normative value can run against the grain of justice in situations where dependency relations require care and support as opposed to more independence. An example would be nursing a child during the most vulnerable stages of their life or one's kin in old age. I quite agree. My account of domination refers to capacities for arbitrary power that one has an interest in exercising without due deference to another's interests, needs, or desires. As any psychotherapist can tell you, parent-child relations can fit this definition, but they do not necessarily do so. And they need not do so systematically unless the social structure in which parenthood is embedded grants such power or an interest in exercising it. One can debate the extent to which current structures do so, but my point is that not all dependencies automatically qualify as domination. Parents do not necessarily have an interest in dominating their children by virtue of their position as parents. In any case, freedom need not entail an atomistic ideal of independence, yielding instead a system of non-arbitrary dependencies in which people must care for the interests and needs of others.

[145] Nicholas Vrousalis, *Exploitation as Domination* (forthcoming, 2022), 40.

What I will argue at greater length in Chapter 4 is that the capitalist labor process is a relation that does not pass the non-domination test, nor does it qualify in this definition of freedom. Instead, capital exploits labor, which reinforces labor's dependency on capital. Ultimately, market competition constrains the extent to which parties and trade unions can accept or reject changes to the conditions of production. At the same time, keeping one's firm competitive requires that one maintain a sufficient rate of profit relative to prevailing market conditions. The imperative to meet this requirement demands that labor subordinate itself to capital's primary purpose – profit – which can further shift the balance of power between labor and capital to capital's benefit. Therein lies the arbitrariness of capital's power, or so I will argue. So, in my view, exploitation is a dividend of domination, but what domination involves is not just any kind of heteronomy or the fact of being subject to an alien will. My position allows domination to come in degrees and to distinguish qualitative differences in good versus bad forms of dependency.

### *Five Faces of Oppression (Redux)*

I opened this book with a detailed discussion of Young's contribution to philosophical studies of social group inequality, where I discussed how her intervention has shaped the subsequent development of radical liberalism. I have also borrowed quite a bit from Young to make critiques of the narrow normative scope of philosophical discussions of exploitation, particularly of the distributive accounts. Before moving on to my account of structural domination, I want to book-end this conversation with Young. Doing so serves the purpose of justifying my radical republican interpretation of structural practices vis-à-vis other accounts of domination and to tie together the problem of exploitation with other phenomena that are

related to it. There is no better place to start than with Young's five faces of oppression: Exploitation, powerlessness, marginalization, violence, and cultural imperialism.

I begin with the categories that are clearly "economic" in nature. Young claims that exploitation coerces some people to work for the purposes of others, but powerlessness pinpoints complexity by distinguishing between skilled and unskilled workers, or professionals and nonprofessionals. The unskilled and the nonprofessional are powerless because they lack control over their labor. There is also marginalization, the subjects of which "are the people the system cannot or will not use."[146] My contention is that a moral concept of exploitation alone cannot capture all three, but a political account of exploitation can illuminate why exploitation is central to the causal story behind both powerlessness and marginalization. Simply, exploitation is the link between capitalist production and the wider economy. I reconstruct this link under the umbrella category of domination to provide a more integrated perspective on what each face of oppression has in common with the other.

My discussion of these faces of oppression accepts that moral harms may be incontrovertible. For instance, being marginal to capitalist production is not the same as being exploited within it. An Amazon warehouse worker is being exploited, but the harm being done to them significantly changes when they are fired after seasonal employment. Likewise, an auto worker may be exploited on the assembly line, but the nature of the harm done to them changes when the firm introduces new technology that makes their job redundant and pushes them off the assembly line altogether. Powerlessness, or leverage lost, is certainly a distinct problem facing many workers. In this sense, I do not dispute the pluralist character of the harm that are related to exploitation. Nonetheless, they are not independent of it. To the contrary, our moral intuitions regarding what is harmful about structural unemployment or

[146] Ibid., 53.

deskilling are derivative of the more general problem of domination in which exploitation plays a central explanatory role.

1. First, exploitation is political. Whilst appropriating a surplus from a given population, one must engage in sustained conflict. When lords exploit peasants, they raise taxes, use tributes, or use force. When capitalists exploit workers, they maximize work length and intensity, invest in technology, invest in work management, lean on the state to prevent work stoppages outside the workplace, and so on. It is not a guarantee that exploiters succeed in extracting the surplus, since they are dealing with human beings who have different priorities, values, and desires, none of which are reducible to those of the exploiter. Moreover, capitalist firms need to watch their competitors closely. Failing to appropriate the surplus at the right rate, at the right time, and in the right way will lead to further failures to retain one's market share. In this conflict, capitalists are also human beings. They, too, are complex. But market competition selects for some interests and values over others. So, one can be a socially conscientious capitalist, but one won't remain a capitalist for very long unless one's sense of social justice streamlines with one's economic ends.

Market competition is selection mechanism for adapting some ideals, desires, and purposes against others, which is what I think Marx was getting at when he described capitalists as a personification of economic relations. The point is not that there is no agency on their part. Rather, the point is that they face the competitive constraint as full and robust human beings whose agency is structurally bounded by the structural practice that grants them their position. I will say more about what structural agency means in Chapter 4, but I raise the issue now to highlight the causal mechanism as work behind exploitation that, in my view, leads to unintended consequences with emergent properties that are not reducible to the moment of exploitation itself. When one exploits, one must adopt strategies to do it to the right extent, which involves doing it in the right way under prevailing market conditions. This

concern that capital has for both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of exploitation poses distinct problems.

I mentioned in Chapter 2 that one such problem is structural unemployment. There are several harms involved in structural employment, like marginalization and neglect. When labor productivity becomes so high in a particular sector that it is no longer profitable to utilize its full capacity, there are clear consequences for the labor market. Exploitation is the direct cause of marginalization because it is why the sector won't absorb more labor. Likewise, deskilling work to raise labor productivity induces powerlessness among previously skilled workers. Low-skilled job are often in labor-intensive industries with a lower rate of profit, which makes employers more reticent to relinquish control over the labor process. Being powerless in these situations is again a direct result of the manner and extent of exploitation. Marginalization and powerlessness may not be mutually convertible with exploitation, morally speaking, but they are causally derivative of it.

In my view, the normative link among these concepts is a pattern of vulnerability and dependency to arbitrary power that exploitation helps to explain. How ought one to make sense of growing levels of global informal employment if not with reference to the fact that market dependent societies become increasing subject to the organizing principles of the competitive constraint? It is because the process of exploitation is increasingly central to the global economy that these other harms emerge in a way that they didn't before. Something similar can be said about increasing levels of work precarity in even the most developed capitalist economies. What is known as deindustrialization is not a process that makes exploitation less important, but more important. In this situation, labor productivity can be so high in the manufacturing sector that manufacturing can retain its share of GDP without absorbing more labor, all while decreasing employment levels in manufacturing. Unlike in

the Swedish case, this one is a story of an increase in the rate of exploitation without protections from its consequences.

In sum, working for the purposes of another in this particular way has unintended consequences that pose distinct problems, which generate moral harms that are not themselves captured by the moral features of the moment of exploitation itself. A politicized conception of exploitation, however, helps to explain those harms and connect them to a wider normative picture that finds injustice in the organizing principles that make such outcomes likely to occur and consistent with dominant social imperatives. There is path dependency involved in the structural practice of competition that leads to exploitation and, derivatively, to marginalization and powerlessness in their capitalist forms. I would like to add the harm of neglect, too, since this process is often experienced as a type of abandonment in a social structure that is unresponsive to one's needs.

Violence and culturalism imperialism are admittedly more indirectly related to exploitation in a causal story. Although it is indirect, it is nonetheless present. Neither is unique to capitalism, but capitalist exploitation gives them a distinct character. Vulnerability to violence in a capitalist system has a rather obvious set of preconditions. First, violence emerges in the workplace when there are few or no protections for workers against it. One may not require state violence to get people to go to work but getting them to work in the right way is often violent. Second, violence emerges when people do not find a durable place in the workforce and depend on informal labor, attachment to a breadwinner, or extra-legal forms of income. This situation besieges people internally through conflict among the parties involved as well as externally through the various arms of the state, like the police or the legal system. It is more likely that people who depend on access to the labor market but cannot satisfactorily access it turn to perpetuating violence or become its victims. That's what it means for capitalist exploitation to dominate the mode of production.

Cultural imperialism has to do with who controls the means of meaning-making. There are many causes for it, like preceding non-capitalist forms of colonialism and the lens through which its social relations were understood as propagating the virtues of Western culture. Equally, however, there is a specifically capitalist uptake of this culture that has to do with the uniquely exportable version of a culture that emerges out of capitalist production on a global scale. Indeed, it strikes me as important that capitalist cultural production sweeps the globe in an unprecedented way. My own view of U.S. cultural influence, for instance, is that its distinctness is the result of an empire whose social basis is one-hundred percent capitalist with almost no holdovers from any other, preceding strategies for social reproduction. This is not unique to the U.S., as one can now see that the export market for cultural products is becoming more diverse because the entertainment industries of Turkey, South Korea, India, and China are for the first time able to produce in comparable ways relative to the regulating capitals in Hollywood. Exploitation is in the background, but it is there, and its explanatory role remains. One cannot increase investment and expand cultural production without increasing the rate of exploitation in a competitive manner. The rest I leave for Adorno.

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The reason that "domination" is the best normative category to use for conceptualizing these harms is that it streamlines them without making them redundant. I think Young would agree with this point of view, as she also uses the concept of domination as an umbrella category in which these other injustices fall. But my account differs in a significant way because it is not typological and it insists on the causal role of exploitation. This difference matters because it shifts the burden of the argument from one that de-centers exploitation back to one that centers it. One can talk intelligibly about different forms of vulnerability and patterns of dependence without giving up on the causal relationships among them. This strategy is more helpful in capturing what is wrong with a given system-logic that generates social differences. If one conceives of exploitation as a dividend of domination,

then one can better explain how engaging in the social practices in which one cashes out on that dividend affects a broader constituency of people than those who capital directly exploits in the labor process. The demand to de-center exploitation for the sake of inclusion is a red herring. What is needed is rather to re-integrate exploitation into an account that helps one to conceptualize how engaging in structural practices that revolve around profit-seeking endogenously generates these other harms.

A common objection to exploitation-talk can now be met. Critics fear that "centering" exploitation may be disempowering since such analyses appear to focus on one social or political constituency to the exclusion of others who might face different challenges or have competing interests. Indeed, one problem with exploitation-talk is that the proportion of regularly employed wage-laborers varies quite a bit in capitalist societies. As a result, exploitation appears to many as being a problem that is almost provincial in nature, if it is not a problem for the privileged few who are "merely" exploited, as opposed to being superfluous, marginal, or expropriated. I gather that these are the moral intuitions behind the discomfort that people have about focusing on exploitation. However, this domination-based account of exploitation shifts the analytical terrain in a significant way that should assuage the worry about analytical and moral inclusion that they raise: *It is not wage-labor centric; it is capital-centric.*

The objection is based on a misunderstanding of why exploitation matters. It is common enough to hear that Marx was primarily concerned with industrial workers of a certain type and their regular employment. But Marx was not at all preoccupied with a certain type of worker. What concerned Marx were the "laws of motion" (here, organizing principles) that make exploitation a dividend of domination with which capital continues to get paid. Strategies to increase the rate of exploitation or to keep it within a margin that is compatible with an adequate profit rate are the result of the social imperatives emerging from

the class structure. Wage-labor is the form that exploitation takes. The labor contract is the dominant way through which capital achieves this goal, so what is analytically central is actually capitalist competition, not a type of labor. The latter is an entailment of the former, which has many other consequences in the social problems it creates for those who are not exploited, the dependents of those who are exploited, and those who struggle to make themselves useful enough to be exploited.

# Chapter 4: Structural Domination

Capitalism is more than an economy and having an expanded conception of capitalism that goes beyond "the economic" is the best strategy for a conceptual capture of the moral and political problems that are germane to it, or so the story goes. What I have argued thus far is that this analytical strategy obscures normative arguments surrounding capitalism's organizing principles. I have also argued for a social-theoretic re-framing of "the economy" so as to clear conceptual ground for a republican re-framing of the problem of social group inequality. I argue that the republican principle of freedom as non-domination has more potential to inspire a critique of what capitalism does to either reify or create social group inequality.

In this chapter, I bring together my social theory and this normative program. I argue for a particular way of construing the notions of domination and freedom such that these concepts are attentive to structural practices. I argue that horizontal conflicts among both labor and capital generate a pattern of vulnerability within the labor market. Further, I argue that both of horizontal conflicts amount to an unequal, sub-institutional logic of collective action underpinning the vertical conflict between capital and labor, including the role of the state in mediating it. I show that arbitrary power in the republican sense is constitutive of capital's social position within this nexus of conflict.

## *Varieties of Domination*

Domination comes in as many forms as does social, political, and economic power. Nonetheless, not all forms of power are subject to criticism by the same normative criteria. Foucault encourages one to think that power is not only repressive, but is often better described as productive, and is historically specific. If he's right, then the burden is on the critic of power to claim that a certain type of power is unjust. Happily, political philosophers are in a position to be ecumenical about the forms of power that they critique relative to the scope of their concern. In my case, I am concerned with structural domination. Thus far, I argued that social practices aggregate into structures – structural practices – that represent an instance in which power is not as diffuse as may be the case in other social practices. Instead, structural practices are regulating, supervening, and path dependent. These are the practices that I now claim to be unjust on republican grounds.

But those who require no persuasion that structural analysis is desirable may find themselves unpersuaded by what I have said about domination thus far because I have yet to say what the republican view adds to existing discussions of structural domination. There are two ways of describing domination – interpersonal and impersonal – that are relevant to these discussion. The choice between them is, on the one hand, conceiving of domination as something individual agents intentionally do to other agents, or on the other, conceiving of it as a sub- or supra-intentional abstraction that is outside the bounds of intentional agency. For capitalism's critics, the latter has been the most appealing way of talking about the system as a form of domination. Indeed, the *impersonal* nature of domination is often posited as basis for thinking that capitalism's characteristic form of domination as structural.

The notion of impersonal domination has at least four interwoven features, each of which emphasize something distinctive about what it is like to live within a capitalist economy. In the Marxian orbit, these features are the value form, reification, alienation, and exploitation. The value form refers to the historically distinctive way in which money creates

Value form

a measure of equivalence between unlike things in the process of commodity exchange on the market.[147] To create such an equivalence, the system flattens the scope and quality of human values into a single dimension for a comparison based on the system's criteria for success, which are competitiveness, profit maximization, accumulation, and growth.

Reification

Reification refers the way in which these flattened, one-dimensional values become naturalized in a society that is no longer conscious of having put the circuit of exchange into motion.[148] The idea of reification is accompanied by that of ideology, since human consciousness of capitalism's value form will likely generate ideas that are compatible with it and that justify it. Alienation, by contrast, is the sense that people have of having created a social process that they relate to only externally.[149] Commodity exchange both compels individuals to participate in it and appears to them as independent of their own activity, so it is out of their control. Indeed, exploitation is a process through which labor itself becomes an abstraction from the perspective of the capitalist for whom the contributions of individual laborers do not matter, provided that the replenishment of their labor-power is secure.[150]

Alienation

Exploitation

Each of these concepts creates a distinctive a contribution to the normative arsenal of critical theory. It is clear that this nexus of concepts is not easy to pull apart, but what is not clear is that there is a common normative criteria for claiming that each phenomenon is immoral or unjust, though they emphasize difference facets of immoral or unjust processes. In my view, it is likely that the viability of a normative critique on the basis of any of them hinges upon some acceptance of the others. I also think that domination is the best candidate

[147] Samuel A. Chambers, *There's No Such Thing as "The Economy": Essays on Capitalist Value* (Punctum Books, 2018); Michael Heinrich, *How to Read Marx's Capital*, trans. Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2021); Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[148] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971); Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1991).
[149] Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, trans. Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
[150] Cf., Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*.

for a concept that can weave a common normative thread throughout. The reasons that one is likely to find reification or alienation problematic, for instance, is probably the same reason that one finds exploitation problematic. At bottom, the issue is a system-logic that puts into motion a social process that individual direct producers do not and cannot control. Their lack of control over the system-logic and thus its dominant values create the conditions under which they are subject to domination, whether domination be examined objectively, subjectively, or something in between.

I have identified the republican notion of freedom as non-domination as my preferred way of talking about freedom, but it remains to be seen that the above phenomena can be adequately captured by the republican idea of domination. Recall that I've said that domination is a capacity to arbitrarily interfere is someone else's life, as well as to have an interest in doing so. In the neo-republican tradition, domination has an intentional character. It is done by agents to other agents. I want to explain and preserve the intentionality condition, despite the likely objections from the Marxian camp that it is not suitable for explaining the impersonal character of structural domination. I argue that domination is both structural and agential. Moreover, it is politically empowering to characterize capitalist domination in this way.

Indeed, in the Marxian orbit, domination is distinctively *not* intentional and that is the launching pad for identifying capital as dominating. The system dominates behind the backs of the individual agents who participate in it, which reveals something deeper than what one can observe in interpersonal interactions. The depth of the analysis lies in pointing out that individual agents are not in a position to change the system on their own, which is a task that can only be accomplished collectively by many agents. Thus, the normative punch line in this tradition is that the existence of a distinctly impersonal kind of domination exposes a more significant social problem that demands a much more significant transformation of society.

Impersonal domination raises the political stakes. Without that those stakes, the critique is less radical and comprehensive; it is less structural.

Neo-republicanism is already being forced to address this criticism from other angles outside the Marxian orbit. Critics claim that the principle of non-domination is simply too limited in scope to support a theory of structural domination. They argue that there is such a thing as unintentional, but socially produced, forms of domination that may have no intentional agent that we can identify as exerting domination in the relevant republican sense.[151] For example, there may be "background influences" that enable political domination to take place.[152] Background influences could be demographic characteristics that affect people statistically, not individually. Such influences can include race, gender, ethnicity, disability, and age. In these cases, domination is impersonal, not interpersonal. Agents often hold power unconsciously, yet they constrain the freedom of others by perpetuating the negative effects of complex, large-scale social dynamics. For instance, white people often perpetuate racial stigmas of people of color without full awareness of what they are doing. The problem is that neo-republicans assume that agents exercise power through a dyadic model in which one sovereign agent controls another. In reality, power and agency are more dispersed, which is what it means to say that domination can be abstract.[153]

To take a case in point, someone who is physically disabled in New York City experiences oppression due to lack of access to public transportation. It would be odd to argue that they are being dominated by the public employees who run the buses and trains or who make the budget for transportation construction. Instead, it is more likely the case that it was pinching pennies over budget constraints on the part of the original designers of the

[151] Marc Artiga, "The limits of freedom as non-domination," *Revista internacional de filosofia* 13 (2012): 40-42.
[152] Alan M.S.J. Coffee, "Two spheres of domination: Republican theory, social norms and the insufficiency of negative freedom," *Contemporary Political Theory* 14(1)(2015): 55.
[153] Sharon R. Krause, "Beyond non-domination: Agency, inequality and the meaning of freedom," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 39(2)(2013): 192-5.

subway infrastructure that led to a problem that city managers today may not be able to control. In New York, the transit authority budget is constrained because it is deeply in debt to the private sector. Individuals with physical disabilities are caught in the crosshairs of a structure that makes it more difficult for them to get to work, run their errands, and visit their family than for everyone else. This result is morally relevant for considering the scope of social freedom and it is unlikely to have resulted from a discrete someone(s) exercising a capacity to intentionally interfere in the lives of disabled people. Rather, domination here is an aggregate consequence of human action carried out by agents who do not fully understand that consequence.

These criticisms of freedom as non-domination are compelling; thus far, neo-republicans lack a theory of how social structures reproduce the material conditions for domination. They assume that it is possible to separate someone's capacity to intentionally interfere with arbitrary power from their social position, likely through the legal system mediated by the state. As discussed in Chapter 2, this assumption is part and parcel to implicitly accepting much of the idealizing social theory of the liberal view that it criticizes. It may challenge the liberal principle of noninterference to widen the scope of concern for domination, but it does not challenge the set of liberal assumptions that social power is primarily rooted in political institutions, that the state is a neutral institution that can arrange a just social order without being significantly modified in a process of changing the social structure, and that wealth itself can be understood independently of the historical process from which it originates. The core objection to neo-republicanism here is that capacities to dominate may be inherent in one's social position, not just granted by the state.

Nonetheless, I take the opposite position on the intentionality condition. By contrast, I think that the republican notion of domination is particularly apt to capture structural phenomena. While critics of the neo-republican principle of domination are correct to try to

expand the scope of what counts as domination, they have not yet developed a convincing definition of structural domination. Existing attempts fall prey to the criticisms that are normally raised against the Marxian notion of impersonal domination. One point of contention is that it is counter-intuitive to claim that non-agents dominate and, second, that sub- or supra-intentional accounts are really not as deep as they say they are. Insisting on impersonal and statistical effects of social processes actually makes *how* a society reproduces the material conditions for domination into a black box. It is unclear how such conditions reproduce themselves if not through the intentional actions of agents.

Normally, theorists respond to this "how" problem of social process by claiming that it cannot be true that all of those who contribute to structural domination have the capacity to enact the harms that individuals produce in aggregate. For instance, K. Sabeel Rahman argues that there is a difference between "dyadic" and the diffused, decentralized domination typical of market societies.[154] The former is likely to be intentional and take place in discrete instances between two individuals. In comparison, markets are a form of diffused, decentralized, and often invisible domination because they lack coherent intentionality. These theorists defend their position—that the scope of freedom as non-domination is too narrow—by relying on an intuition that the relevant social processes affect individuals statistically and impersonally. After all, the results are accidental.

I believe that accidental outcomes are the wrong to place the normative weight of the concept of structural domination. Privileging the accidental, aggregate nature of structural domination leaves a would-be alternative open to a crucial objection, which is that the unintended consequences at issue are just what they appear to be – (unfortunate) accidents

[154] K. Sabeel Rahman, "Democracy against domination: Contesting economic power in progressive and neo-republican political theory," *Contemporary Political Theory* 16(2016): 47-8.

whose moral harms are extrinsic to the practices from which they emerge. If critics cannot show why such a capacity is a constitutive feature of social relationships within the market, then there is little reason to believe that accidental outcomes, or outcomes that differ from what one intends, are necessarily a result of domination. There is no necessary connection between social positions within markets and unintended albeit unfortunate outcomes.

Moreover, almost all of the social actions that humans perform can lead to unintended consequences, and not all of these actions lead to domination. Much like telling a lie to one's friend to spare their feelings and finding out later that they are worse off for their ignorance, a structurally conditioned action intends one goal and may result in another depending on how others respond. In the end, it may be arbitrary to claim that the subway rider is structurally dominated and that one's friend is not. Of course, the intuition guiding the concerns about intentionality were that these two situations are not similar at all. One is a structural problem and the other is probably not. Throwing a spotlight on the unintentional way that social structures reproduce domination can actually mystify the social processes that lead to it, leading theorists to mistake effects for causes. That a structure seems to affect people
-> statistically and impersonally does not entail that the process of reproducing domination is also statistical and impersonal.

In my view, one must do more than argue that domination is unintentional. An account of structural domination should explain how a capacity to dominate results from the social relationships that shape the capacities that individuals have for domination. What motivates people in certain social positions within certain relationships to consistently act as they do? What do individuals actually want to accomplish, such that their actions, taken together, have certain unintended consequences? To be sure, asnswering such questions requires a more relational and dynamic understanding of agency, but I am not convinced that

such an understanding of agency demands that one forsake the intentionality condition for an analysis that can only operate at a sub- or supra-intentional level of abstraction.

Problems with impersonal accounts of domination are not restricted to their explanatory opacity; they are also disempowering. Bringing the discussion back to capitalism, the impersonal definition of domination simply accepts without question the assumption that market mechanisms are *so* diffuse and invisible in the way that they exercise of power. What follows from the assumption is the premise that capitalist markets are too diffuse and ubiquitous to allow one to speak of intentional action. My fear is that the warrant for the assumption seems to lie in how markets appear to those who have little control over them. But what if this assumption only replicates the sense of powerlessness that people feel in confronting those who do actually wield significant power within markets? Within the original Marxian orbit, such critiques tend to shift attention away from who is doing what to whom and toward how the effects of capital accumulation appear to those that cannot control it. My worry is that this analytical procedure becomes counterproductive by reifying its own results in the eyes of those who should seek to change them. Indeed, I suspect that the bankers and capitalists of this world find their own motivations and their rules of engagement a great deal less opaque. I wonder how deep the impersonal sort of criticism goes and to what ends it serves.

If the depth of the analysis lies in showing how the system dominates outside the control of individuals, then what does it help real individuals to understand about contesting the capital's power in their lives? In my view, impersonal analyses use a conceptual sleight of hand to avoid discussing the incentives and motivations of those who benefit the most from the dominating structure, so it is not clear who to contest with for power and why. Thus, individual agents can and do reasonably respond by saying that something so diffuse probably cannot be controlled or brought to heel by ordinary people like themselves. The

consequence is that one has less motivation to try to change the dominating structure. To rectify the disempowerment effect, a theory of structural domination ought to find an appropriate level of abstraction for representing intentional acts and unintended consequences within a system-logic. In other words, it will be an agential but nonetheless structuralist theory of domination.

## *Criss-crossing: Radical Republicanism*

The radical republican tradition crisscrosses the apparent chasm between intentional and sub- or supra-intentional explanations for domination. The republican partisans of the labor, feminist, and abolitionist movements offer strikingly parallel arguments for how intentionality fits into a system-logic that can explain domination at multiple levels through a republican lens. The radical republican perspective points out the intrinsic connection between what people actually want and try to do to reproduce a structure and the unintended consequences that impose themselves on individuals impersonally. I translate the radical republican view to bring it into line with the practice-theoretical account of structure that I developed in the previous chapter.

To begin, the labor republican tradition had a way of explaining structural domination through a critique of market-dependent labor. Capitalism distributes private property unequally, which creates a whole class of market-dependent people who do not control the conditions of their labor. To make sense of the tendency toward domination in capitalist workplaces, labor republicans emphasized structural incentives that capital has to control the labor of market dependent workers. “Structural” is the appropriate word here because it is a form of domination arising from the background structure of property ownership and because

the compulsion workers felt did not force them to work for a specific individual. It is not that structure was somehow an agent, nor that there were no dominating agents. There were, in this case, many dominating agents, i.e., those who defended property distributions that left the majority propertyless. Through human design and institutions, workers were left with no reasonable alternative but to sell their labor.[155]

Labor republicans argued that market dependency is coercive in one important way. Workers have to go out looking for capitalists to work for because they do not own property. Workers are dependent on employers for access to the labor market and the means of subsistence. On the other end, employers have incentives to defend their control over social property relations.[156] Labor republicans thought that capitalist property relations lead to domination because of the interests that these relations set in motion; employers must be committed to defending their position in these relationships.[157] Employers intentionally produce a structure, which, in turn, constrains the options of workers in ways that further their dependence on the labor market. In my view, the latter is a core insight into the nature of structural domination because it shifts one's critical focus away from unintended consequences and toward the intentions that, in aggregate, produce those consequences. Labor republicans point out that when individuals act, they try to bring about a state of affairs that they intend as well as reproducing the social relationships upon which they draw for their actions. It is par for the course that the outcomes of many such actions might be different than what one intends on an individual basis and that, in aggregate, they constrain a person from forming different intentions in the future.

[155] Alex Gourevitch, *Labour Republicanism and the Republican Commonwealth*, 109.
[156] Ibid., 103-9.
[157] Alex Gourevitch, "Labour republicanism and the transformation of work," *Political Theory* 41(4)(2013): 602.

Indeed, all republicans think that dependence has a number of deleterious effects on the character of persons that make it difficult to choose to live lives that reject the existing framework. But the radicals see these problems as constitutive of the logic of certain social relations in which dependency plays a large role. Recall that republicans like Mary Wollstonecraft and Frederick Douglass have been most adamant on this point. They argue that dependence creates a set of practices, norms, and rules that prevent the dominated from imagine desires that extend beyond their existing context.[158] Dependency leads to corruption, which is a sort of atrophy in the capacity of human reason to generalize beyond partial, narrow interests. Corruption is a lack of virtue that deforms a person's moral character, but it is derivative of certain constraints that are constituted in concrete social relationships.[159] So, there is a conceptual fusion between interest and virtue; one can either appreciate the general interest or not, as dependence involves mental subjection and lack of capacity for political imagination.[160] Importantly, the radicals create a link between virtue and system-logic by pointing out that dependency has deleterious effects on the "master" as much as it does the "slave." Material conditions of independence or dependence, which shapes the character of the various individuals within a structure in ways that reflects their social positions.[161]

That the organizing principles of society beget a system logic that shapes the character of all its inhabitants does not leave the radical republicans without the resources to say one party dominates another. The claim is that those principles beget relative capacities to the those who are situated differently within them. This relativeness creates the normative basis for saying that domination is a problem of having arbitrary power over others, even if the dominated are lacking in virtue. Indeed, the radical view is de-essentializing and

[158] Hirschman and Regier, "Freedom" in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind,* ed. Sandrine Bergès et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 489-500.
[159] Ibid., Virginia Sapiro, "Virtue," 323-37.
[160] Gourevitch, "William Manning and the Political Theory of the Dependent Classes," 331-60.
[161] Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois,* 162-209.

deconstructive. It is not that the dominated are naturally inferior or unsuitable for political leadership and self-government, but rather than the harm of domination lies in undermining their capacities to do so. Moreover, corruption can aggregate to the level of a whole society that cannot exercise capacities for self-determination, even if within it one party within this constellation of forces has a relative advantage. I take the latter to be what Douglass meant when he pointed out that racism deforms the American republic. Thus, there is a consistent line of argument within the radical republican tradition that sees dependency as a problem for virtue, lack of virtue as a problem with a system logic, and arbitrary power as the normative critique of the dynamic between dependency, virtue, and system-logic.

Now, I want to translate this radical republican perspective into the practice-theoretical terms that I developed in the previous chapter so as to develop my account of structural domination. In Chapter 2, I argued that there are some practices that are properly construed as structural in nature. Let me briefly recapitulate this argument. Structural practices create problems for the human agents that confront them as objective constraints from a variety of social positions as well as the normative resources for solving those problems. Normative resources are both expectations and justificatory strategies for problem-solving. What this framework could mean in republican terms is that the structural practices constrain agency in predictable ways, which generates relative capacities for negotiating constraints. These relative capacities are likely to yield deficits in virtue in the sense that they create incentives to pursue and justify partial interests. Problem-solving is not intrinsically good or bad, but its developmental trajectory can be bad if it systematically reproduces the material conditions for some party being able to wield arbitrary power over another while pursuing partial interests that are at the other's expense.

On the other hand, republicans argue that independence and virtue go together. Independence is a state lacking arbitrary constraints and with the capacity to imagine

different desires and want different things. Independent people can generalize outward from particular to general interests, which means that independence promotes virtue. Although virtue requires independence, it does not require individualism. If the definition of virtue is the capacity to generalize, then its impulse is to reason in terms of expanding the scope of freedom in society as a whole. Independence is only possible in a free society, which means that independence actually depends on the capacity of all individuals to reason about the general interest. This point may seem counter-intuitive, but to put it simply, the claim is that virtue and freedom come hand in hand. Freedom is the practice of virtue, which yields legitimate as opposed to arbitrary power. What exactly qualifies as legitimate as opposed to arbitrary power probably requires further and more specific criteria than simply the absence of domination, but what I would like to draw attention to here is the way that radical republicans have considered how to move from structural domination to non-domination. Whatever the criteria for legitimacy, the idea here is that there are certain problem-solving strategies that encourage independence as well as the reverse.

To proceed to structural domination, I argue that some practices are freedom-enhancing because they facilitate a learning process about the constraints that render individuals dependent and vulnerable to arbitrary power; they cultivate virtue. Other practices do so less effectively or not at. This line of argument is consistent with radical republicans like Wollstonecraft and Douglass who each argued that freedom and cultivating virtue complement one another. For Wollstonecraft, it was education for women as well as political suffrage. For Douglass, it was forming a black counter-public in the United States. Both thought that prevailing practices tracked predominant public opinion and ideals, which entailed the need for alternative sites of education and debate.[162]

[162] Ibid., 204.

For labor republicans, Gourevitch explains that competition among workers undermines the collective interest of all workers by making them more dependent on employers.[163] For them, solidarity is the antidote to competition because it allows workers to solve the problem of dependency as a group, which they could not do alone. Solidarity is a virtue that one cultivates, with a rational basis in self-interest, and a habit that comes with identifying one's own good (self-interest) with the universal, shared good of all workers (collective self-determination). Gourevitch writes that, "Solidarity cast off the mentality of dependence by making visible to each his power as a potential agent."[164] Solidarity could only develop if individual workers participated in specific institutional practices of self-organization, i.e. labor unions. Labor unions are virtue-cultivating environments that promote an ethos that runs against the grain of industrial competition.

The idea here is that structural practices that dominate are both maintained and contested by human agents through problem-solving strategies that either expand the scope of human freedom or that fail to do so. The criteria for expanding the scope of freedom are (a) reducing or eliminating dependency and (b) enabling or realizing the capacities of individuals for independence. In other words, some strategies facilitate the development of a counterculture against historically specific constraints by pitting the dominant logic of some structural practices against others. In doing so, they allow for different interpretations of the justificatory norms of the relevant practices by disrupting the system-logic in a way that militates against arbitrary power. What makes this perspective distinct is that it is focused on what people are actually doing to pursue their perceived interests and implicitly asks how to change what they are doing so that they can see their interests differently (i.e., more generally) and thereby expand their political imagination. People learn to think that a society

[163] Gourevitch, *Labor and the Cooperative Commonwealth*, 161-3.
[164] Ibid., 164.

can do things differently by organizing themselves in a different way, which allows them to call the organizing principles of the society into question. To the extent that a structural practices inhibit such capacities and thus diminishes people's capacity to generalize and to want different things, one can suspect it of enabling the exercise of arbitrary power. Indeed, if it is the case that a structural practice generates relative capacities that qualify as arbitrary power, the extent to which it prevents these subaltern capacities to imagine the situation otherwise are a constitutive part of the problem.

In sum, I think that what the radical republican accomplishes by crisscrossing between intentional action and sub- or supra-intentional constraint is a way to interrogate a historical process. All structures contain a nexus of freedom and constraint, which is what makes them normatively interesting. Interrogating how relative capacities facilitate the exercise of arbitrary power, and thus domination, is a way of tending to the historical specificity of distinct system-logics without creating ahistorical parallels between social forms to justify one normative judgment or another. For instance, it is not the case that the United States is still a slave-holding society, nor does it prevent women from seeking an education, but it does reproduce disparities along the lines of race and gender through a *contemporary* system-logic. One need not rely on an historical metaphor of master and slave to legitimate the judgment that there is domination if one can discern the relevant system-logic and its potential counter-logic.

## *The Political Economy of Dependence*

I argue that the competitive constraint produces a systematic pattern of vulnerability for some and not others in the republican sense of inhibited or diminished capacities for

independence. I trace this pattern in patterns of both horizontal and vertical conflict. First, labor market dependency inhibits workers' capacity to generalize about their situation, which systematically encourages "corruption" in the republican sense. Second, I argue that the combined effect of the first two conflicts is an asymmetric logic of collective action that cannot be resolved through state mediation. Third, one can see most clearly the structural asymmetry between capital and labor within the mediated conflict among capital, the state, and labor. I conclude that capital structurally dominates because it has capacities and interests to wield arbitrary power in a way that is constitutive of its social position.

Recall that generalized market dependency has the following effects on producers. It incentivizes that producers systematically seek to (1) cut costs through deeper innovation, (2) reinvest surpluses, (3) adopt the latest technologies, and move the means of production from line to line, i.e., to areas with the greatest profitability. Pursuing these ends within the confines of the competitive constraint generates certain aggregate regularities – macro-dynamics – among capitals that are best described as turbulent and real rather than harmonious and perfect. I argue that the capital-capital conflict systematically generates a pattern of vulnerability for labor in their dependence on capital.

I begin with the micro-level. At the micro level, market-dependent competition creates imperatives to both control the conditions of labor and to reinvest its surplus by innovating technologically and/or moving capital from line to line to the areas of greatest profitability. From the perspective of employers, competition is about maintaining (or gaining) market shares and turning over a profit. From the production side, competition creates standards of efficiency and process that employers must seek to excel. The consequences of not doing so that a particular capital will lose and exit the battle empty-handed or at a loss, which is the most common outcome in this war. Thus, employers have a great responsibility. They must realize the full usefulness of the work that others perform for

them to either meet competitive standards of efficiency or to supersede them by becoming the standard for their industry. The latter are regulating capitals, which are those that create the lower boundary of what can be competitive given market conditions. There are a couple of ways to realize the full usefulness of work and to increase one's productive capacity, all of which began to be documented by Marx in *Capital Volume I*: Increasing the length of the working day, increasing labor productivity, or both. One cannot accomplish these goals at one's leisure if workers control too much of the labor process.

The imperative to control the conditions of labor runs deeper than default legal advantages in favor of employers and at the expense of employees, which has also been a target of neo-republican critique. Elizabeth Anderson and Hsieh note that labor contracts, which set the terms for employment, are circumscribed within a production process that exceeds their boundaries.[165] The labor contract leaves out normatively critical features of contemporary workplaces because anything that it does not specify is left up to the decision-making power of employers and management. The existing legal framework takes for granted that the labor contract is an "openended agreement to follow orders" for what falls outside of its explicit terms. In most cases, what goes unspecified includes important issues like the duration, intensity, and speed of work. Consequently, workers implicitly relinquish control over decision-making along with the right to contest decision-making by managers and bosses. Capitalist property relations confer owners and management the power to govern workers by fiat. Therefore, there are myriad ways for employers to take advantage of the implicit bias of laws in their favor to arbitrarily interfere in the lives of those over whom they have a structural advantage without considering their interests.

[165] Elizabeth Anderson, "Equality and freedom in the workplace," 50, 64-5; Nien-he Hsieh, "Survey article: Justice in production," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 16(1)(2008): 81-2, 89-90.

Beyond default legal advantages, I argue that employers not only take advantage of implicit biases of the laws in their favor, but that they have incentives to maintain and regain control over the conditions of work and militate against incursions on their ability to do so successfully. As Anderson argues, the institutional context in which capitalist production takes place gives employers de facto rights to control all of the decisions about how they use the property that they own, which includes raw materials, circulation and distribution centers, factories, and technology. What I add here is that it is important for employers' ability to compete on the market that they do not lose control over how these resources are used. Not only do laws assume that employers have the right to control labor, but management seeks to dictate to workers the precise manner in which work is to be performed. The system of scientific management devised by Frederick Taylor during the latter part of the Industrial Revolution is a case in point. The Taylor system broke each industrial job down into its individual motions, decided which were essential, timed workers performing those jobs, and then paid them piecemeal for their output to incentivize productivity. The goal was to increase efficiency and decrease wasted time, which includes worker resistance through work stoppages that were made possible by workers having specialized knowledge of the job. If workers' control over their work entailed greater bargaining power, then management should seek to break it down.[166]

Importantly, strategies for control are relative to prevailing market standards and vary over time. It is not the case, for instance, that "Fordist" management on the assembly line is different in kind than what exists today. The compulsion to try to control the labor process is not fundamentally driven by the type of job to be controlled, but prerogatives to control

[166] Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

labor's surplus. Just-in-time production methods are an example of how this struggle has evolved in recent decades. Just-in-time production keeps inventory stocks low to ensure that there is no lapse in time between producing and circulating goods. To make these tight connections, 21st-century workers are encouraged to identify inefficiencies in the labor process themselves. In fact, they must. Otherwise, they cannot keep up. These examples are those of highly productive workplaces with high levels of capital investment in technology. Industries with lower levels of labor productivity, like service work, invest less in labor-saving technology, but it is not negligible. Moreover, there are different methods of control available that involve self-enforced sales goals, commission, and so on.

The struggle over control of the labor process is a struggle over the conditions of exploitation, or who controls the social surplus that emerges from it. The aim is to maintain or expand capital's capacity to reinvest the surplus without having to concern themselves with the needs and desires of the existing workforce and those who need to enter it but are currently excluded from it either in part or in whole. Moving the means of production from line to line by de-investing in sectors with a low rate of profit and re-investing in sectors with a high rate of profit has the effect of making some workers redundant. *Ceteris peribus*, workers cannot predict how, when, or where capital will reinvest a surplus and it is a decision over which they have no meaningful control. When capital invests in new technology, there is no reason for workers to assume that the jobs made redundant by that technology will be replaced by different jobs of the same quality and remuneration. Even if some of them are able to reskill and enter a different line of work, there is no guarantee that this option will present itself to everyone in need of a job. Geographic dislocation is a basic consequence of both capital mobility as it moves from line to line and attempts by the labor force to follow its path. To be clear, not all capital is terribly easy to move around. In particular, firms with high physical capital intensivity are not at all easy to uproot due to sunk fixed capital costs.

However, changes in demand will incentivize corresponding changes in capacity utilization that have adverse effects on employment. As new technologies become available and fixed capital depreciates, the option to cut one's losses and reinvest in more advantageous areas becomes increasingly attractive once less efficient plants wear themselves out.

At the macro-level, the struggle over the conditions of exploitation leads to redundancy, which leads to neglect, powerlessness, and marginalization on local and global scales. The process through which workers become redundant to capital is the same one that makes it possible for capital to "flee" an area and create the well-known problems of concentrated poverty in urban slums, rural wastelands along old production corridors, and large informal labor sectors. What follows is often neglect by way of political inertia in addressing the problems of chronic un- or under-employment. Without capitalist investment, there is little that states can do to expand employment beyond the public sector, which itself depends on sufficient tax revenue in state budgets and is therefore not outside the orbit of market dependency insofar as capital must be cajoled into contributing by way of taxation. Unlike Young, however, I argue that exploitation is causally fundamental to these other harms, as it is the imperative that explains these other macro-economic effects. Exploitation is also normatively fundamental because generates a pattern of vulnerability that that has consequences within the labor process *and* beyond it.

## *Patterns of Vulnerability and Corruption*

The pattern of vulnerability for labor that results from the conflict among capitals has a systematic impact on the subaltern capacities of labor to imagine alternatives. In republican terms, dependence leads to corruption. My use of "corruption" is technical; it is consistent

with the republican opposition between corruption and virtue. I am not blaming the victim, but rather making clear why the political agency of the dominated is constrained because, without constraint, there is no domination. At the heart of the problem is the fact that the political agency of the dominated is structurally bounded by the constraints that their dependent status imposes upon them. Making sense of corruption, then, is a useful way for understanding the moral and political texture of the market competition.

The corruption that I have in mind has to do with how competition coerces value judgments regarding what matters to people and how much before they have a meaningful opportunity to deliberate about their priorities. Simply put, the imperatives of market competition force people to commit to lexical ordering of what they value, which is reflected in the overall output of the economy. Given that competition forces people to regularly commit to such a lexical ordering, there is a tendency for some values to matter more than others in society at large. Consider the slogan "People over profits!" that has become increasingly widespread in social movements that range from labor to anti-racism to climate change. The intuition here is that capitalist societies value the wrongs things, or at least they value them in the wrong way and to the exclusion of other things. The slogan is a shorthand way of identifying the problem of the value form. Capitalism tends to subordinate questions of value to profitability and thus competitiveness, which is what warrants the traditional claim of classical political economy that there is a law of value that coincides with capitalism's laws of motion.

Despite the social fact of value pluralism (that people have diverse and sometimes incommensurable values) individuals are constrained in the extent to which they can prioritize "non-economic" values, which has profound effect on how agents exercise practical reason throughout society as a whole. Where others have seen instrumental reason or strategic rationality as paradigmatic of what counts as economic in nature, I see an

historically specific constraint on practical reason generally. Individuals confront the competitive constraint in a primarily pragmatic way, which means that they do not switch from one sort of action to another, nor to one sort of reasoning to another, but instead use the same sort of practical reasoning that they use all of the time to negotiate prevailing market conditions.

In practice-theoretical terms, they are problem-solving, which means that they negotiate a range of values within the constraints of rule-governed practices. The impact that having to negotiate the competitive constraint over and over again (given changing conditions of production) has on moral character can vary, but its variance is always relative to it and, therefore, one can expect the "value form" to remain as stable as the competitive constraint itself. The trouble is that in the face of genuine human plurality, human beings are pre-emptively coerced by a value judgment that they did not make and that they take as given in the *practico-inert.* The variety of responses include going "all in" and proclaiming that cash rules everything around them as well as taking refuge in family life as an alternative value system, holding fast to religious beliefs as an extra-worldly confirmation that other existential values exist, or some combination thereof. In other words, there is a spectrum from resignation to affirmative consent.[167]

The problem is that the law of value undermines capacities to imagine alternative organizing principles than the ones that exist. Whereas neoclassicals argue that market competition is a way of coordinating fixed preferences among fully knowledgeable individuals, I argue that the implicit lexical ordering of value in capitalist markets makes this claim incoherent. The competitive constraint selects for some values over others. Once generalized market dependency takes root, the interests of capital take precedence over others

[167] Vivek Chibber, *The Class Matrix: Social Theory After the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 78-116.

and what presents itself as "self-interest" on the part of individuals is better construed as an emergent property of how someone has negotiated the competitive constraint in the past while balancing various values in the present with an eye to the future. Thus, one can make intelligible the universalizing trends of capitalist development without sacrificing the idea that there are real differences among the people who are subject to it. The capitalist value form is, as Marxists have long argued, an "objective illusion," which means that it is (a) a universal tendency of practical reason under historically specific constraints, albeit one that (b) falsely appears as a universalizable moral law.

I take for granted the assumption that value pluralism is a starting point for democratic self-governance, which is why I think this theoretical diversion into the law of value is complimentary with republican concerns. If liberals are right to argue that a public conception of justice involves negotiating how one shares the world with others who are not of one's choosing, then the law of value presents a significant problem. It creates a constraint on deliberation by issuing a value judgment about what matters before deliberations even get going. For instance, one might very much want to put people over profits rather than the reverse, but one cannot put people over profits if people require the profitability of capitalist firms to generate the social surplus that may be redistributed in some fashion to fulfill their needs.

What the problem of value points out is how dependence within capitalist social property relations inhibits people from forming alternative intentions vis-à-vis the market practices. The labor-labor conflict, therefore, has an important normative structure as well as a material one. Real competition poses first-order problems that workers must resolve, and yet the norms that enable market competition to function well are the resources that workers have for resolving these problems. For instance, recall that the intra-labor conflict gives rise to norms of desert, wherein individuals feel strongly that they should should be able to earn social

entitlements among parties who start off as equal as a result of hard work, whether these be status, respect, stability, social protection, or even wealth.

Unfortunately, the experience of real competition regularly contradicts the expectations that are implied by this norm, which are that hard work will succeed in accruing certain entitlements and others will fail. It should not be a surprise that workers adapt these norms to justify their own place in the labor market or grievances therein. Workers, like everyone else, often justify social differences based on their understanding of the entitlements that they think their hard work deserves and how others deviate from their understanding of the relationship between work and desert. It is, in fact, a problem-solving strategy that is reasonable based on the immediate, partial perspective that their social position makes attractive and that market competition encourages them to prioritize.

When it is the further development of the organizing principles of the system itself that undermine one's expectations of equality, fairness, desert, or distribution, then it is a heavy lift for political agents to insist that organizing principles should be the target of discontent. When what is needed is to shift one's focus to organizing principles, what is also needed is practical engagement with a more solidaristic counterculture that challenges partial interpretations of the dominant norms by expanding one's capacity to generalize. In other words, such a shift requires a learning process through collective action. But there is structural inequality in the collective action problems that adhere to such strategies.

## *An Unequal Logic of Collective Action*

In all three of the conflicts that I have identified (capital-capital, labor-labor, capital-labor-state), the competitive constraint creates an internal logic to their development. This section argues that the state cannot by itself change or alter unequal class capacities. My claim is that working people are at a structural disadvantage in their interdependent relationship with capital despite potential state mediation. In other words, the relationship between capital and labor is asymmetric, which warrants my conclusion that capital exerts arbitrary power over labor as a constitutive part of its social position.

Consider a neo-republican objection regarding the role of the state and the capacities that it could have to eliminate the pattern of vulnerability and the corruption that I have identified thus far. One might object by pointing out that that I have gone too far in my analysis of structurally bounded agency so as to eliminate workers' agency more than I should. The constraints on collective action are not so great that workers cannot organize themselves, which calls into question the notion that labor market dependency necessarily leads to corruption. The neo-republican position is likely to be that, so long as the state ensures that employers cannot arbitrarily interfere in workers' affairs to obstruct them from organizing, then the problem of labor market dependency can be resolved through the self-organization of workers in capitalist firms. The market need not, in principle, prevent workers from garnering enough power to act effectively as equal citizens in political life because workers can organize to establish equality of legal status.

To answer the objection, I have thus far argued that the labor process is more static and more conflict-ridden than neo-republicans allow. It is a social relationship whose contours are determined by a history of struggle by intentional agents trying to influence the contexts in which they are able to act. It is true that organizing together through collective action can significantly alter the balance of power between workers and employers. It is also true that workers have challenged their own exclusion from political life in this way.

However, the objection looks at the issue upside down. Imagining a desirable result, it obscures tendencies against that result in the relationship between employers and workers, as well as among workers. For collective action to be successful, it must constantly militate against persisting imperatives toward competition on both levels. If collective action is what is needed, but there are structural imperatives against it, then those imperatives are a constitutive feature of structural domination.

Workers respond to the effects of the ongoing conflict between capitals in the context of a conflict among present and potential laborers. They can respond in one of two ways: individually or through collective action, but competitive constraint privileges the former. Consider, for instance, an individual's decision to join a trade union organizing drive. Along with the labor republicans, one might think membership is in the interest of individual workers since it provides them with an institutional mechanism to act collectively to advocate for better living standards. However, there is often a surprising amount of resistance to unionizing efforts in societies without strong histories of working-class organization. The benefits of collective bargaining have not been demonstrated in the experience of workers, and therefore the economic strategy that they adopt tends toward their perceived best chances of security. The strategy with the best chance of security is an individual one: competition with other workers and winning the favor of the boss on an individual basis. In contrast, joining a union organization drive involves a substantial, indefinite risk. The *default* condition of individual competition is a hurdle that any workplace organizers who want to demonstrate the power of collective action must overcome. Thus, individual responses are the most likely.

From the point of view of capital, there is constant pressure to make some sectors of the workforce redundant through technological innovation. But from the point of view of workers, unemployment, underemployment, or a diminished position within the labor market

is a perpetual threat. This condition holds unless working-class organizations intervene to mediate this process—and they might not, or not do so sufficiently well. Hence, collectively, workers face a contradictory reality. They face a set of structural dynamics in which competition among capitals differentiates them by skill level, job classification, and level of productivity, but they must also rely on one another to shift the burden of labor market competition among themselves.

Consider two-tiered wage systems, in which employers classify workers into two or more groups: one that works part-time in a firm and another that works full-time. Normally, firms justify tiering wage scales by saying that they need to cut wages but want to protect the seniority and productivity of more experienced workers. Thus, employers say they will pay more for more experience and productivity but hire less experienced workers at lower wages to avoid increasing labor costs. In turn, there are two options for workers: They can allow their workplace to be fragmented into more or less privileged workers (full-time and part-time), or they can reject the tiering in defense of part-time workers. The former makes the full-time workers more vulnerable in the long run. Once they accept the logic of needing to cut wages, it will be more difficult to defend against similar moves by employers later. Full-time workers will then lack the collective power that they would have gained from being in solidarity with part-time workers.

The choice to be in solidarity might seem obvious at some remove from the problem. Bit it is not obvious that workers are stronger together when they are not yet organized collectively or their organization is not strong enough to give confidence to workers whose place in the labor market is under threat. Thus, it is more likely that the more employers fragment the pay scale, the more workers want to retain *their* job classification and their skill level. Workers tend to adopt a defensive posture toward retaining their advantages *vis-à-vis* one another rather than fighting it out with their boss. Hence, workers engage in practices of

labor market closure along the lines of similar job classifications, skill, and seniority, as well as race, gender, or ethnicity in order to protect relative advantages (more on the latter set in Chapters 6 and 7).

The important point to take away about labor's collective action problem is that the labor market creates incentives among workers against collective action because it creates internal pressures that militate against it. Developing a counterweight to such pressures is not a small burden, especially when one considers that workers have few resources for organizing at their disposal. Indeed, the burden is rather large once one adds to the issue of fewer resources the plurality of needs and values that workers need to organize and make coherent within a collective political program, as opposed to capitalist firms that are already internally cohered in their purpose and interests. As Claus Offe and Heimut Weisenthal argue, capitalist firms are monological in their orientation toward either type of vertical conflict, whereas labor must engage in a politics of need interpretation and is intrinsically or multi-logical in its orientation to each type.[168]

My claim here circles back to the intra-labor problem of corruption. There are structural pressures against generalizing about the collective interest, which is a capacity that is required for collective action. Simple as it may be, it is critically important for revising the usual claim that workers will inevitably engage in solidaristic practices. This claim is not and has never been true. In fact, the opposite tends to be the case. The tendency to either create or reinforce social divisions can become especially sharp, which should become clear when one considers that what is needed to overcome them is a real far-sighted appraisal of common interests on the part of workers. For those who are dependent on access to the labor market to

[168] Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, "The Two Logics of Collective Action," in *Disorganized Capitalism* (MIT Press, 1985), 170-220.

survive, such far-sightedness is not to be taken for granted. For these reasons, it is not wise to attribute either historical or imagined success on the part of workers over and against market competition to the transience of its imperatives. Where it happens, success should be attributed to the tenacity of ordinary people who overcame social divisions against great odds. Their successes were not, and are not, inevitable.

The labor market guarantees solidarity to no one, but labor nonetheless shares a common fate over and against intra-group differences. Compare the situation of workers confronting the imposition of a two-tiered wage system versus the situation of professionals or capital-managers. In the case of two-tiered wage systems, one can see that workers are collectively vulnerable as they are dependent on the same constraints. The severity of those constraints, in turn, depends in a significant way on how the group responds as a group: Do they show solidarity with part-time workers or not? By contrast, professionals and capital managers are examples of groups who do not experience collective dependency. Individuals in these groups have lots of autonomy over their labor and can retain that autonomy by negotiating with their bosses as individuals, without worrying about depreciating working conditions as a result of failed collective action. They also have control over the labor of others who do depend on collective resistance. High level management is, of course, also often remunerated mostly by profits (such as stock portfolios) and thus does not depend on a wage. These are qualitatively different experiences of vulnerability than what workers face. The latter type of vulnerability arises from a vertical interdependence with capital and also a horizontal interdependence with labor.

The nature of each type of interdependence is different, but both are important for understanding why equality within the market is in fact a structural inequality of the relative capacities of so-called equal actors. Both form a nexus of sub-institutional constraints on collective action. Capital can organize itself mono-logically or, if it needs allies, much more

opportunistically. A state of permanent war is the condition of capital's relative success, whereas solidarity is the condition of workers' relative success, so long as they remain workers. For workers, solidarity is a virtue that one must cultivate to rid oneself of labor's unique type of dependency. As Gourevitch explains, solidarity has its rational basis in self-interest, but it is a cultivated habit that comes with identifying one's own good (self-interest) with the universal, shared good of all workers (collective self-determination).[169] Gourevitch writes that, "Solidarity cast off the mentality of dependence by making visible to each his power as a potential agent."[170] Solidarity could only develop if individual workers participated in specific institutional practices of self-organization, i.e. labor unions. Labor unions are virtue-cultivating environments that promote an ethos that runs against the grain of industrial competition.

Once solidarity is understood as a virtue, however, it becomes easy to conclude that individuals who do not live up to its expectations are more servile and less noble by nature. It is not a far leap to then connect servility to having an inferior nature with racial and ethnic differences.[171] Indeed, it is at this point that labor republicanism may intersect with other 19th-century pro-slavery republicans in the United States who thought that Black oppression was a result of slavishness rather than slavery.[172] Moralism toward oppressed groups results in explaining oppression through the psychological dispositions of individuals, not by the constraints that they face as members of those groups. For all their insight into the nature of structural domination, the tendency toward moralism by the labor republican movement is a

[169] Gourevitch, *Labor and The Cooperative Commonwealth*, 161-3.
[170] Ibid., 164.
[171] Ibid., 169.
[172] David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: The Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Books, 2000), 19-36.

rather anti-climactic decline into individualism at the expense of understanding collective constraints.

I think that my contribution to this labor republican view helps to overcome this potential moralism. Once one understands collective action to be the exception and not the rule, which leads to corruption and the sheer difficulty in developing the capacity to generalize about the common interest, then one can lift this sort of moral burden. Not only are hypothetical Black workers not lazy, but hypothetical white workers are not hopelessly reactionary in their attempts to preserve relative privileges. Reluctance to engage in collective action and attempts to preserve relative privileges are what one can expect *even among hypothetically ethnically, racially, or nationally homogenous workforces.* A non-moralistic labor republican perspective understands that constraints on solidarity are a constitutive part of domination.

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At the very least, any attempts to regulate this dynamic conflict between capital and labor through the state will remain a point of struggle. The logic of each conflict and of collective action on the part of labor structurally disadvantages labor relative to capital. This point stands in a liberal capitalist state with little state regulation as well as in social democratic states with lots of it. If it did not, then state reforms to the labor market, capital controls, and redistribution through the welfare state would not be vulnerable to challenge by the demands that profitability places on capital on the whole. It is clear that they are vulnerable to challenge and revision as soon as the competitive position of capital begins to slide, and not only at the behest of capital. It is also true that defensive trade unions and other workers' organizations will feel pressure to make concessions over and against the interests of their members because they need to prioritize capital's interests first and the interests of their constituencies relative to it. Capital, then, has an inherent, sub-institutional capacity to interfere arbitrarily in the lives of working people and their dependents that is always relative to institutional constraint but never eliminated by it. To a greater or lesser degree, they can

avoid taking their interests, needs, and desires into account and they have an interest in increasing their capacity to do so to reproduce their own position.

## *Conclusion*

Capital exercises arbitrary power. Put differently, individual capitalists are obliged by their social position to maintain or reproduce their capacity to arbitrarily interfere in the lives of working people, without which capacity they could not be capitalists. The effect of this capacity is to create a more impersonal system of dependence by working people on the labor market and therefore on capital. Domination is structural in the sense that it affects people impersonally, but it does so in a way that constrains agency such that it leads people to forms intentions that reproduce the system-logic from the perspective of subaltern social positions as well as from dominant ones. Therefore, there is an "inside" to the black box of the economy that exposes structural domination, which is no less structural because intentional agents are doing it. Indeed, there is a "Who whom?" question that this account can answer that strictly impersonal accounts of domination cannot. I believe that answering this question can also help to transition to a more fine-grained analysis of persistent group inequalities relative to the competitive constraint, to which I now turn.

# Part II: The Case for Class Politics

# Chapter 5: Contours of Class Conflict

Part II of this book applies the republican, practice-theoretical framework that I've developed thus far to the problem of social group inequality. This chapter explores an under-examined theme, which is who or what is the working class and what is wrong with the situation that members of this class share. In contrast to other dominant approaches that are commonly found either implicitly or explicitly in both the social scientific and the philosophical literature on social group inequality, I defend a pragmatic, class conflict approach to understanding class domination. In sum, I argue that class domination, in the republican sense, is a unique harm for a diverse and interdependent group within capitalist societies both in spite and because of differences among group members.

My view differs from earlier accounts of class domination because I claim that internal divisiveness is constitutive of processes of class formation. But it also differs from the bulk of social group inequality literature by doing just that; I situate that divisiveness within the context of class formation. I argue that social differences are salient for understanding who or what the working class is, but these differences are not reducible to some other combination of variables like racism or sexism. In fact, these other forms of social group inequality have a class character that partly explains their persistence in a market setting. Sadly, class is largely absent from this literature as a basis of analysis in its own right. Perhaps this deficit is a hangover from the New Left when many radicals challenged the notion that class is a central analytical and political category, so that analyses of race and gender have long since superseded it in focus. But that was a long time ago.

This chapter and the two that follow it leave to the side familiar debates about whether one can develop a "total" theory of domination rooted in class theory to focus on the

narrower problem of what, exactly, class illuminates about a broader field of domination that includes other paradigmatic instances of group domination. I do, however, assess the other materialist theories of social group inequality in each chapter, asking whether they have a conception of class domination that is adequate for answering their own questions about how social class relates to gender and race. It is my contention that the dominant perspectives on class largely elude drawing the connection between these inequalities in a meaningful way. At best, they are normatively confused about what is at stake – Domination or inequality? In this chapter, I aim to set the record straight, as well as set the stage for my own analyses of the class connection to race and gender in Chapters 6 and 7.

## *Class Theory and its Discontents*

What makes class differences problematic under capitalism depends on the social theory that one uses to understand capitalism's class structure. Stratification theories, on the one hand, assume that class is a continuous variable. Stratification theories designate class locations based on distributive patterns that result from market exchange, although they vary as to which variables they consider important. Stratification theories see groups in terms of who has similar "life chances" on the market based on individual consumption habits, education level, lifestyle preferences, cultural capital, and income.[173] Theorists derive group-based affiliations from the relationship between individuals and certain resources that, in turn,

[173] Kingsley Davis, *Human Society* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1948); Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification," *American Sociological Review* 10(2)(1945): 242-9; Peter M. Blau, Otis Dudley Duncan and Andrea Tyree, "The Process of Stratification." in *The Occupational Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1967): 163-206.

depend on what group differences one wants to highlight or explain. For these theories, class could have an infinite number of gradational types and there may be no "capitalist class" or "working class" as such. Theorists explain what is wrong with class differences based on the notion of unfair advantage or disadvantage in having access to the combination of resources that they think provide the best life chances in a competitive market.

On the other hand, class conflict theories argue that class is a categorical variable and that there is something intrinsically problematic about class divisions. For class conflict theories, the problem is not relative advantage or disadvantage, but domination by a dominant class (capitalists) of other classes (most centrally workers). A classic starting point in class conflict theory is the *Communist Manifesto*, wherein Marx and Engels identify class conflict as a source of domination. Marx and Engels write that capitalism produces "a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce."[174] Workers are dependent on access to a labor market because they do not own any means of production (i.e., land, tools, raw materials, facilities, and transport). Later, in *Capital*, Marx argues that capitalist agriculture displaces workers from property, which creates a compulsion to sell one's labor for access to means of subsistence (i.e., a wage). Marx argues that class societies exploit laboring classes by appropriating labor's surplus, as in the case of slaves or feudal serfs. Capitalist exploitation occurs when workers produce more than is needed to reproduce their own lives and capital appropriates the surplus to do with it what they will to maintain market shares. The imperative to maintain market shares induces competition between capitalist firms to make

[174] Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 479.

profit, which incentivizes investing in labor-saving technology to increase labor productivity and decrease labor costs.[175] As labor productivity increases, capitalism creates a pool of unemployed or underemployed workers that act as perpetual competition with those more gainfully employed. Exploitation leads to domination because workers do not control the conditions of their labor and they are subject to interests that are antagonistic to their own.

The advantage of class conflict theory is that, by defining class categorically, it explains how domination aggregates to the level of a social group in a non-arbitrary way. Domination here is normatively stronger than anything the stratification theorists claim is harmful about relative advantage or disadvantage. The disadvantage is that positing a theory of social group domination places burdens on class conflict theory that need not worry stratification theories. For instance, Marxists claim that domination leads to struggle between classes over who controls work and the distribution of resources. By extension, they argue that workers can cohere as a collective political agent to challenge the basis of the domination they face. There is reciprocal, but asymmetric, dependency between capital and workers; workers may be dependent on the labor market, but they also have, potentially, a great deal of power because their employers depend on their labor and because the market organizes workers into workplaces where they can then organize themselves. Workers have, in some way, a unique emancipatory claim to self-determination based on the fact of domination, their strategic position, and its political potential. Stratification theorists need not worry about defending the idea that class conflict leads to emancipatory claims for self-determination since they do not define class categorically as group domination. They do not profess a need to overcome class divisions *tout court*.

[175] Marx, *Capital*, 1990.

Critics of class conflict theory have consistently challenged the latter, more ambitious and normatively laden point while acknowledging its advantages for understanding a paradigm case of social group domination. They deny that class illuminates a unique claim to self-determination for workers. In fact, feminists and critical race theorists argue the contrary, which is that class conflict theories are reductive. "Class reductionism" means failing to acknowledge the power of other kinds of domination that are not reducible to class differences or economic effects. Critics focus on the *intra-class conflict problem* within the working class to argue that class conflict theories are blind to domination outside of the exploitative relationship between capital and labor. Their blindness is a result of a normatively problematic and artificial ideal of unity within a dominated class, which obscures a broader field of domination.

The first problem is that class conflict theories posit a simplistic, dyadic theory of power between capital and labor. Heidi Hartmann writes that Marxists only "see women's oppression in our connection (or lack of it) to production. Defining women as part of the working class, these analyses consistently subsume women's relation to men under workers' relation to capital."[176] According to Hartmann, class is a "gender-blind" analytical concept that obscures the reality that men have an interest in subordinating women to serve their needs. Hartmann argues that it is often the case that efforts to promote the interests of working-class men will mean subordinating the interests of women and reinforcing their dependence on men. She cites the fight for a family wage for male workers during the Great Depression as one such example, which expelled women from the industrial labor force. Women do not simply fill functionary roles to maintain capitalist relations because capitalists

[176] Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union," *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism,* ed. Lydia Sargent (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981), 3.

are not their only oppressors. Hartmann's seminal essay inspired debate about whether capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy are each a system of domination. Some theorists rejected the notion of "systems" altogether. Others diminished the role that class plays in reproducing social difference.[177]

The important thing to take away from Hartmann's central objection is that some workers have an interest in dominating other workers or non-workers. Weberian sociologists take up the same issue and argue that exploitation is one way that a social group closes off resources to another, but there are also other ways. Max Weber argues that life outcomes are determined by social positions within the market, which motivates workers to secure wealth. Workers hoard opportunities to better their life chances within the market.[178] Frank Parkin clarifies that not only are workers exploited (as in their surplus is appropriated by capital), workers also usurp (as in exclude others from) control over resources like credentialing and favorable employment contracts from other workers. Exploitation and usurpation are two parallel dynamics driving market outcomes; they are a process of dual closure by both appropriation and exclusion.[179] Charles Tilly similarly claims that the two central dynamics of the market are "opportunity hoarding" and exploitation.[180] Thus, for a Weberian, there are practices of exclusion that influence the process of exploitation.[181] Parkin's main example of how exclusion influences exploitation is that skilled white industrial workers in South Africa adopted exclusionary strategies toward unskilled blacks that were so beneficial that one should consider these workers a part of the ruling class, not the working class. Here the class

[177] See Sargent et al. 1981; Karen V. Hansen and Irene J. Philipson, eds. *Women, Class, and the Feminist Imagination: A Socialist Feminist Reader* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990); Anna G. Jónasdóttir, *Why Women are Oppressed* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994); Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1990); Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory (*Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2013).
[178] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 8.
[179] Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, reprint ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 89-116.
[180] Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (University of California Press, 1999).
[181] Raymond Murphy, "Exploitation or Exclusion?," *Sociology* 19(2): 225–43.

map changes insofar one can define the social position of white South African workers by the nature of their closure strategy, not their place in the productive process.

The issue of closure is particularly salient when considering racism within the working class. Literature on race and class in whiteness studies provides abundant testimonial detail that racism and sexism prevent class unity and conceal exploitation.[182] One thesis is that racism originates within the working class itself as "a way in which white workers responded to a fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline."[183] In the United States, industrial work discipline prompted white workers to construct an image of Blacks that embodied pre-industrial cultural traits that white people longed for and simultaneously distanced themselves from. Mills points out that white American workers have therefore historically identified themselves as white far more than they have identified themselves as workers, struggling against white capital but attempting to maintain their ontological standing as white workers.[184] According to Mills, Marxists fail to see this dynamic because Marxism is implicitly committed to a social ontology in which what is *most* real about people is their labor. In other words, class is ontologically deep, and race is ontologically superficial or ideological. This ontology obscures race (or, gender) as a material reality that creates a qualitatively different set of social norms and experiences for people of color. Instead, Marxists see these social differences functionally, as a tool used to divide and conquer a working class that they assume is unified and homogenous.[185]

Omi and Winant sum up a common thread of all the objections to class conflict theories by claiming that class-based approaches to understanding social difference are limited by

[182] Theodor Allen, *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race* (Hoboken Education Project, 1975); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and London: Verso Books, 1990).
[183] David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 13.
[184] Charles Mills, *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 165-170.
[185] Ibid., 153-55.

economic determinism. Regarding race, they argue that class-thinking makes an important contribution to understanding race in particular insofar as it asks, "How do we create and sustain ourselves materially, practically?" However, placing class inequality at the center of analyses of race is limited by always having to look outside the economic sphere to find independent, causal variables that explain racial divisions. The economy is embedded in a society, so people bring values from outside the workplace into it.[186] Thus, there are race conflicts and discrimination "at the point of production" and conflicts in society that are not reducible to class conflicts. One could, I assume, say something similar about other social differences as well.

The presence of intra-class conflict casts doubt on the idea that workers can or ought to be a collective political agent, leading to the conclusion that class conflict theories are reductive. Consonantly, the working class has not played the political role that such theories hope. The working class has had a difficult time uniting itself and is more often fragmented and dispersed. Some even conclude that racism and sexism are *most* prevalent in the working class.[187] Contrary to Marxian expectations, the working class is not a social group in which "social agents, perfectly constituted around interests, wage a struggle defined by transparent parameters."[188] The aggregate conclusion of these critiques is that the notion of a working class with generalizable interests or a normatively salient claim to self-determination as a collective is politically naïve.

## *Two Types of Reductionism*

[186] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 1986): 65-8; Ellis Cashmore and James Jennings (eds.), *Racism: Essential Readings* (SAGE Publications, 2001), 277-85.
[187] Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard, *Sexism, Racism, and Oppression* (Blackwell, 1984).
[188] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hemony and Socialist Strategy*, 104-5.

I define reductionism in two ways. A theory is reductive in my sense (a) if it cannot acknowledge that domination is not reducible to class differences, or (b) if it cannot use a conception of class difference to shed light on normatively salient aspects of other kinds of domination. Critiques of class conflict theories insist that such theories are reductive in the first sense but are themselves reductive in the second sense. They omit an analysis of how class conflict reproduces social differences and what the class character of those differences are. Critics reproduce in theory the logic of externalities, positing an analytical distinction between the "inside" and an "outside" to the economy. As elsewhere, this distinction is misleading. It distorts the role that class conflict plays in reproducing social group inequality. As a result, alternatives to class conflict theories fail to explain why class is itself normatively problematic in relation to social differences that are not themselves reducible to class divisions. The unfortunate consequence of the disparitarian social theory is that it puts the normative weight of the problem with class on its disproportionate effects. Domination falls by the wayside, which is just as reductive for class as it is for race or gender.

First, a review of neoclassicism's priors. Neoclassical economists assume that divisions within the market based on social group differences, like race or gender, are an aberration that result from the attitudes of imperfect individuals, not market competition itself. They make this assumption because they idealize capitalist competition with the notion of "perfect competition" to model market behavior. Perfect competition posits a large and homogenous market, that all consumers are expertly well-informed about commodities and their prices, that firms cannot influence prices, that labor is perfectly mobile, and that firms can enter or exit the market without cost. Under these conditions, economists hypothesize about the conditions for pareto optimal equilibrium, where the quantity supplied for every commodity, including labor, equals the quantity demanded. Thus, there are no involuntarily

unemployed workers and every similarly skilled worker is paid the same wage. The model of perfect competition abstracts from the conditions of real competition in the world. If actual outcomes do not match the model's, neoclassicists posit that some variable that is external to the market must be adjusted to more accurately depict what is happening within it. For instance, if labor is not perfectly mobile due to restrictions on some group entering a labor market, then the reason for that restriction is the behavior of some group or institution that distorts the model by limiting labor's mobility (i.e., unions, xenophobia, sexism, racism).

I have argued that this model is not only an abstraction, but a pervasive case of salience idealization. It makes some economic behaviors normatively salient, giving them a positive normative valence, then assumes that deviations from these value-laden behaviors are exogenous to the market as such. Specifically, the model idealizes the economy as *primarily* an opportunity structure. Within this framework, there is an analytical "inside" and "outside" to the norms that are germane to the market, and racism and sexism fall on the outside. My claim is that critics of class conflict theory basically retain this inside/outside distinction, which is reductive. As a result, alternative theories of how race and gender interact with capitalism's class structure fail to make salient the problem of class domination that emerges from the general conditions of structural domination. This claim is a continuation of my critique of how political philosophers generally tend to think about what the economy is. Nonetheless, it might seem counterintuitive since critics of class theory often appear accept some part of the Marxian story about exploitation and class conflict, so let me explain.

One can reproduce the same assumptions as neoclassicism from a different starting point. For neoclassicists, the market is basically indifferent to identity, so one must explain divergent labor market behavior through extra-economic prejudices, education levels, cultural influences, lazy dispositions, or the ignorance of the working class. For the critics that I

discussed in the previous section, too, the fact that bringing workers together need not entail solidarity within the economy requires an extra-economic explanation. The subjective failures of workers are not the labor market's fault, but the fault of external processes that "shape" market competition. Racism and sexism shape the process of class conflict from the outside by preventing the requisite subjective affinities and political unity on the inside. Critics then conclude that capitalism may only bring white workers or male workers together in solidarity, so the effects are not what class conflict theories assume.

Harmant & Mill f.e. reproduce neo-classics

Consider multiple systems theories. Theorists of multiple systems (patriarchy, capitalism, white supremacy) like Hartmann and Mills critique class conflict theory by identifying other systems of social differentiation. Mills, for instance, explicitly retreats from the terrain of analyzing class and race together, toward analyzing white supremacy as its own system. Mills uses Roediger's cultural analysis of white working-class racism to support his view that whites have an "ontological stake" in white supremacy that shapes their interests. It is thus possible for white workers to forego their economic interests to maintain a privileged ontological position. Mills thinks that race shapes the contours of collective action and political solidarity because class brings workers together, but white supremacy divides them.[189] Racism (extra-economic) shapes the class structure (economic). The inside/outside framing of the economy holds even if one admits that workers are exploited.

In my view, multiple-systems theory reifies the analytical distinction that originates with neoclassicism. Of course, the irony is that the view itself results from an attempt to conceptualize class in a less narrow, more relational way. But one need not vindicate earlier theories of class conflict to show that their critics do not resolve the problems that are germane to those theories. Indeed, the verb "to shape" invokes the image of someone making

[189] Mills, *From Class to Race*, 164-9.

pottery with a wheel; hands running along the outside of a system in motion. Many words have been used to describe this basic image—intertwining, co-determining, interlocking. All retain the basic idea that the market is, in principle, indifferent to identity and then point to normative features that are ostensibly external to market principles explain why what happens on the inside is different than what one may expect based on abstract models. The outside "shapes" the inside of the market in a specific locale, which explains both market failures and failures of solidarity.

Weberians reproduce neo-classics

Weberians, too, reproduce the neoclassical paradigm. Weber conceptualizes class as a uniquely economic group by distinguishing between status and class. Status groups differentiate based on non-economic qualities like honor, prestige, ethnicity, and race. Weber defines the "economic" as the market, where workers are both exploited and vying to hoard resources. By his account slaves are an example of a status group, not a class, because they are not subject to market mechanisms. Weber argues that "status groups hinder the strict carrying out of the market principle."[190] I understand this statement to mean that status groups, not economic groups, motivate in-group closure and social differentiation, though Weber makes it unclear why some types of resource closure dictate others. Parkin, who is a prominent Weberian sociologist, concedes that workers try to usurp resources from one another within a framework determined by exclusive ownership of the means of production by capital.[191] In other words, capital-labor relations set the terms on which labor resists capital and intra-class cleavages transpire. So, what makes the capital-labor relation sufficiently distinct to shape how workers usurp resources? How does the former set the terms for the latter and what should one find problematic about that? Like with multiple systems theories, thinking of class in a distinctively economic way, while also trying to

[190] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 930.
[191] Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory*, 93.

explain social differences that are not reducible to class, fails to explain how status and class are related to one another.

For both multiple-systems theories and Weberian theories, reifying the neoclassical distinction between what is internal and external to the market is the result of continuing to idealize the non-discriminatory features of market competition. For neoclassicists, discrimination by employers is irrational unless something else interferes. For critical theorists of race and gender, market competition leads to solidarity among workers by homogenizing the labor force, unless something else interferes. As Iris Young and Cinzia Arruzza point out, the problem with adding on systems (or status) is that one fails to transform how one thinks about class and the economy in the first place.[192] One leaves the conceptual apparatus of the deficient theory of class intact and in doing so fails to challenge the core assumptions that make it deficient, which is that it is an "economic" theory and not a theory of "extra-economic" domination. A reductive concept of class conflict as an economic phenomenon continues to oblige theorists of race and gender to argue that whatever differentiates workers is somehow extra-economic.

The result is a tiresome chicken and egg dilemma regarding what causes what, which necessarily eclipses the problem of what one should find problematic about the role that class plays in reproducing social differences to begin with. In idealizing market competition, such theories transform class into a background *tableau* upon which other forms of domination do their work. This theoretical trend has had the pernicious effect of naturalizing the labor market and the scarcity that comes with it as a background condition for other kinds of domination. Thus, it obscures the class character of domination in capitalist societies writ large. In fact, the labor market can begin to look benign compared to other systems or status

[192] Cinzia Arruzza, "Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and Its Critics," *Science and Society* 80(1)(2016): 9–30; Iris Young, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage," in Sargent et al., 43-69.

differences, as if it is mostly an opportunity for some people within the working class to take advantage of at the expense of others instead of the form of domination that creates the scarcity in which such advantage-taking can take place. When the labor market begins to look more like an opportunity for some workers and less like a fundamental constraint for the entire working class, it is a sign that one is no longer talking about domination but of inequality.

The problem with inequality discourse, which encompasses the stratification theories discussed in the first section, is that inequality is always a relation between two objects with respect to some good, so a critique of inequality depends on how one thinks about the condition of scarcity relative to its effects. I argue that the critics of class conflict theory fail to carry out such a critique, so now it is not clear why class is itself normatively problematic within a broader field of domination. In other words, why does class matter? My view is that the normative conclusion for multiple systems and Weberian theories is ambiguous: Class is bad, but not that bad, since the labor market is not *in principle* racist, sexist, ableist, transphobic, and so on. Class inequality might affect certain groups disproportionately, but the disproportionate effects of inequality might really be the fault of workers for extra-economic reasons, not capitalism. In sum, these critics claim that class conflict theories are reductive, but they are reductive in another way. The reduction lies in failing to analyze class beyond inequality as a social and political dynamic, not just an economic one.

### *Class as Process and Relationship (Redux)*

A theory is reductive in my sense if it cannot (a) acknowledge the power of kinds of domination that are not reducible to class divisions, or (b) use a conception of class conflict

to shed light on other kinds of domination. Some theories have insisted on (a) and others have emphasized (b), but my view is that what is needed is a concept of class that enables (a) and (b). In this chapter, I am agnostic about the extent to which other social forces have causal weight in determining the contours of a society's map of social difference. Indeed, my aim is to demonstrate that class is not best conceptualized as a social map of locations but rather as structural practices whose pattern of conflict generates a social process. Classes are distinct for qualitative reasons in their approach to problem-solving over their conditions of market dependency. As Erik Olin Wright claims, class is not about what you have or where you stand, it is about what you have to do to get what you want, which predicts to a range of possibilities regarding what you have and where you stand. It is only by getting a grip on how to conceptualize this process that one can do more than be agnostic about class's causal weight relative to other factors.

There is one previous attempt to clarify this claim. In her original essay, "Class as Process and Relationship," Ellen Meiksins Wood writes that,

> "The importance of stressing the relationship between classes as essential to the definition of class is self-evident when considered against the background of 'stratification' theories which – whether they focus on income distribution, occupation groups, status, or any other criterion – have to do with *differences, inequalities,* and *hierarchy,* not relations. It is surely unnecessary to point out the consequences, both sociological and ideological, of employing a definition of class (if class is admitted as a 'category of stratification' at all) which factors our relations like domination or exploitation. Even more fundamentally, such categories of stratification may render class itself invisible altogether. Where is the dividing line between classes

in a continuum of inequality? Where is the qualitative break in a structure of stratification?"[193]

I have demonstrated that it is indeed necessary to point out the consequences of thinking about class by way of stratification; one must ask, difference, inequality, and hierarchy relative to what? Lamentably, the diffuse and relational notions of power that are common in philosophical studies of race and gender have only served to render class invisible because they too fail to answer this question. Notions like "relationality" and "positionality" are entirely compatible with stratification theories. A more difficult conceptual problem to understand is how theorists that appear to accept some part of Marx's story about class conflict manage to also fall short of offering a satisfying answer to the above question. My claim is that the kernel of the conceptual problem remains an idealized notion of market competition that is itself reductive while using it as a launching pad for making the normatively laden accusation of reductionism at class conflict theory. I contend that the reason for this is the prior theoretical reception of structuralist theories of class.

By "structuralist" I mean those who emphasize the idea of impersonal domination by abstract structures. In Chapter 3, I used Althusser as a foil for diagnosing the conceptual problems involved in structuralism writ large. In doing so, I argued that structuralism upscales human agency be shifting it into the realm of ideology, which motivated my turn to a practice-theoretical framework for understanding social structure. Althusser is again a useful foil here because it is his approach that yielded to the sustained criticisms of structuralist class analysis. He was a key interlocutor for the critics of class theory within the New Left, including those discussed in the previous section, and therefore the assumptions that they make about what class is and its explanatory scope.

[193] Wood, *Capitalism Against Democracy*, 93.

Althusser's structuralism is deficient not only because it creates an unhelpful analytical gap between structure and agency, but also because the result of this gap is to do too little to explain the texture of class conflict. By "texture" I mean the salient features of the horizontal and vertical relationships in which workers forge bonds of solidarity, come to identify with one another, and thus engage in conflict. Conversely, the texture also includes the features of these relationships that prevent those bonds from forming, which is also a part of engaging in class conflict. The structuralist paradigm is vague about what motivates class struggle, which empties that struggle of meaningful normative content. Thereby, it creates the impression that classes are mechanically determined or that class actors only exercise instrumental reason as opposed to the practical kind. Therefore, structuralist theories of class tend to both reproduce the neoclassical inside/outside paradigm for thinking about the economy and makes the economy into a black box.

This analytical deficiency cannot be resolved or challenged by a theory that claims to go beyond the economic. Indeed, "going beyond" is a linguistic sleight of hand that more often means "adding on" or "ignoring" than anything else. The theory must instead be revised in its fundamentals. Wood is one class theorist who saw the need to do so clearly. She argues that, when it comes to class, the upscaling human agency problem arises when one finds it unnecessary to explain processes of class formation, which refer to processes in which people collectively "organize social forces within class structures in pursuit of class interests."[194] She writes that the first conceptual misstep is to depict class relationships and something people enter into and a process that they thereafter undergo.[195] This misstep is the result of a failure to treat working people as conscious and active historical beings who exercise practical reason with all of its attendant negotiations regarding matters of value.

[194] Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts*, 379.
[195] Wood, *Capitalism Against Democracy*, 93.

Wood is not the first person to see the need for revision. E.P. Thompson, author of *The Making of the English Working Class*, famously makes a similar criticism of Althusser. As he notes, "The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making."[196] Thompson argues that classes form "at the intersection of determination and self-activity" in a process of people experiencing concrete conditions and handling constraints in more or less conscious ways. I interpret Thompson and Wood to have suggested the intervention that I want to make here, which is that class struggle has a texture—it is a normatively structured practice, socially and politically robust, and if one conceptualizes this practice a bit more pragmatically and less statically then one will avoid thinking about class in a narrow, economistic (and therefore idealized) way to begin with.

What I add is that, given this antecedent failure of structuralist formulations, it is not surprising that critics of structuralist Marxism did not see fit to develop this alternative. They, too, reproduce the internal/external framing of what counts as economic or extra-economic behavior and interests because they imagined the "economic" to be one part of a social map to which they added the "non-economic," rather than developing a theory of class conflict as a politically robust process. Further, and given this conceptual landscape, it is also not surprising that the failure of workers to live up to what the late-twentieth century theorist anticipates as their historic role in bringing about a revolution against capitalism prompts the theorist to look outside of the economy to explain their disappointment. The "extra-economic" appears to be the key for understanding working class political agency, but it instead reifies "the economic" in place, which only begs the question of why workers do or do not engage in certain types of political activity.

[196] E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, 9.

Like Wood, I argue that what class *is*, is a relationship and a process: At any given point in time, the "that, there" of class is derived from historical conflicts between those who are asset-poor and those who are asset-rich. Capitalist classes are derived from historical conflicts that are relative to the competitive constraint for both the asset-poor and the asset-rich. What it means to engage in a conflict relative to the competitive constraint for the asset-poor is that one does not require political sanctions or, say, the pressures of social shaming to feel compelled to act in a manner that is consistent with capitalist social reproduction. One seeks out the asset-rich for employment and if one is subject to their lash or their whip then it is after having done so. The alternative is to starve, live off the grid, or do informal subsistence agriculture, which are all possibilities that deviate from the norm. This developmental pattern is the outcome of labor market dependency and it varies from place to place depending on how market-dependent a region is, how much labor capitalist firms can absorb, and how competitive they are. At a minimum, it does not rely on active consent on the part of laborer, only that they understand the competitive pressures to which they are subject and that they act accordingly.

At a maximum, a society will already have norms that promote the dominant pattern, but the latter is greasing the wheels for active consent. As Vivek Chibber writes, "[W]age labor creates a powerful incentive for its practitioners to achieve [cultural] competency. Indeed, the wage laborer will not only accept the new codes, he will make it his mission to learn them because to fail in this endeavor can cause a loss of livelihood."[197] Chibber makes this argument in the context of supporting a materialist class analysis over and against a culturalist one. Within my practice-theoretical framework, the argument for materialism has simply been that first-order problems are real and they cannot be interpreted away, by which I mean that the competitive constraint is a problem-to-be-solved that cannot be collapsed into a

[197] Chibber, *The Class Matrix*, 34.

hermeneutic one. Problem-solving involves interpreting and re-interpreting normative evaluations of how things ought to be, but these evaluative positions become spontaneously inflected by the expectations that people learn to have of the market, which is what allows capitalism to flourish in heterogenous cultural environments.

In other words, people adjust to the competitive constraint, which is what makes class groups analytically distinct from other kinds of associations that one finds in civil society and that do require assent to a particular normative schema (or, more strongly, common commitments) prior to entering relations within them, like a church, political party, or a trade union.[198] Formally put, social class is a species of a *nonvoluntary* group. Ann Cudd helpfully defines a social group as "[A] collection of persons who share (or would share under similar circumstances) a set of social constraints on action."[199] Such a group is nonvoluntary when it is socially and not individually determined (i.e., opting out is not *normally* in the cards for the *average* individual), which means that social groups are formed not by the intentions of individuals to share in a common project but by the actions, beliefs, and attitudes of others.

Cudd writes that, "Members of nonvoluntary social groups share the same constraints as a result of others' decisions, while voluntary group members share constraints as a result from their decisions and actions to join together, against a background of social constraints consequence on others' decision."[200] This idea of a nonvoluntary group is consistent with a compatibilist view that splits the difference between intentional and structural definition of groups, which makes it well-suited to a practice-theoretical approach. It admits that constraints are not unchangeable facts and can be altered by human action, so they are exogenous variables (i.e., they are "objective") only in the short run. In considering the

[198] Ibid., 38-42.
[199] Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 44.
[200] Ibid.

potential limits of defining nonvoluntary groups by way of common constraints, Cudd cites John Maynard Keynes to point out that we all live in the short run, after all, so "constraints are among the facts we have to face in planning our lives."[201]

Exactly who is a member of a nonvoluntary class grouping under capitalist conditions depends on the really existing state of market competition. A constraint-based approach to ascertaining the contours of class conflict (and derivatively of class groups) side-steps the issue of defining classes narrowly by occupation or type of work, and thus pigeon-holing who they are into an idealized social type, like the "white male industrial worker." Class as process and relationship is a qualitative analysis, not a static description of a perceived norm within a particular slice of time. In considering the working class, the upshot of this approach is being able to accommodate changes to the job profile and the demographics of the labor market, since it does not rely on one labor regime or manifestation of class consciousness within it to identify who is a worker. Rather, class formation is the combined and uneven effects of people's responses to the objective constraints that they face. Membership in a class group is being subject to the competitive constraint in a manner that can be meaningfully contrasted with others who are similarly situated in every other respect other than experiencing a different type of vulnerability relative to this constraint.

I believe the relevant qualitative contrast to be quite meaningful indeed. Concretely, individual members of the working class share three characteristics that are jointly sufficient for considering the group as subject to the same constraint. These are,

1. Non-existence of appreciable capital assets in a market-dependent setting
2. Labor market dependency
3. Collective vulnerability

[201] Ibid., 42.

The first two characteristics need little explanation here, given what I have argued so far. Working class people do not own the "means of production," which means that they do not possess appreciable capital assets. Their income does not primarily come from returns on investment and, as a result, access to their income depends on those who do. Investment is what creates employment or lack thereof. Conversely, members of the capitalist class earn their income from returns on investment and they are not therefore dependent on the labor market. It is worth noting that high level management is also often remunerated mostly by profits (such as stock portfolios) and thus does not depend on a wage. Given the close alignment in sources of remuneration and therefore the tight alignment of interests, capitalists and capital-managers are in the same class for most analytical purposes. "Capital" as a category encompasses both. In any case, the way in which capital is market dependent differs strongly from the way that labor is market dependent. Capital does depend on having an available labor force, but their dependence on the available labor force is asymmetrically related to the dependence of that labor on them.

The third characteristic requires more explanation, but I believe that it is essential for understanding the qualitative dimension of class conflict and, ultimately, why class is best understood as a process and relationship. As labor is vulnerable to the vicissitudes of intra-capitalist competition, there are strong pressures against collective action that result. The effect is collective vulnerability. Collective vulnerability shifts the distinction between class positions from a difference in degree to a difference in kind. The most central qualitative distinction between being in a working class position and not being in one is that working class individuals are not only vulnerable to the vicissitudes of intra-capitalist competition but also how one another responds to them. What it means to be collectively vulnerable is for individuals to be interdependent enough among themselves that they rely on effective collective action to improve the conditions of the average person who fulfills the first two

criteria. I emphasize the average individual because it is clear that discrete individuals can go it alone and succeed with individualist strategies relative to their peers. The point of the individualist strategy is to gain a relative advantage *over* the social average. By contrast, improving the conditions of the average worker requires collective action.

To illustrate, compare the situation of workers confronting the imposition of a two-tiered wage system versus the situation of credentialed professionals. In the case of two-tiered wage systems, one can see that workers are collectively vulnerable as they are dependent on the same constraints. The severity of those constraints, in turn, depends in a significant way on how the group responds as a group: Do full-time workers show solidarity with part-time workers or not? In deciding, workers need to balance the short-run with the long-run. Faced with long-run uncertainty, short-run decisions to exclude part-time workers for a collective bargaining agreement may be attractive. Given enough foresight, however, full-time workers may anticipate further attempts to undermine their collective capacity to resist precarious working conditions over the long-run. Full-time workers may see "where the winds are blowing" and try to ameliorate their effects by insisting that part-time workers are covered by their contract. The point is that it is working class people who are faced with this choice implicitly or explicitly. Further, the relative vulnerability of each individual worker depends on the answer that they give (as well as the answer that their historical predecessors gave in the past).

By contrast, professionals tend to not only have lots of autonomy over their labor – think of a professor, lawyer, or doctor – but they can retain that autonomy by negotiating with their bosses as individuals, without worrying about depreciating working conditions for the average person in a similar position as a result of failed collective action. Now you might think that a university professor, for instance, could do with a bit of collective bargaining, especially in a highly privatized education sector that is increasingly run like a business for

the ends of business, as one finds in the United States. I find this possibility to be instructive and not at all undermining of the third criterium. Historically, professors have not seen fit to have labor unions in the U.S. private sector and they rely on good faith "shared governance" agreements with university management. Today, structural changes in the university business model have created a large pool of precarious and underemployed professors who do not have permanent jobs, and for whom the possibility of attaining such jobs is vanishingly small. Professors with permanent positions deal with this changed reality by doing what they can to maintain what they have, to negotiate particular hires around the margins of the general downward trend, and they tend to avoid engaging in conflicts with management that would expand opportunities for permanent employment but risk undermining the success of the other strategies. Here, one can clearly see individualist strategies at work. But there is a section of this highly skilled workforce that may be becoming proletarian. Accordingly, they have begun to rely on collective action in contrast to their more gainfully employed peers. If They are losing the individualist bargaining power that is typical of the middle class.

My claim is that working class people experience collective vulnerability, which at some point becomes a difference in kind from other types of vulnerability. It is not a problem that the boundaries of the working class are murky. The aim of class conflict theory is to track real life, and real life is the messy result of the historical conflicts through which social categories emerge. What matters is not the neatness of the category of class within a static map of social kinds, but the dynamism with which one can deploy the category to track a process and relationship. Put another way, one can ascertain class membership given sufficient understanding of that process and those relationships. The adequacy of the category of class relies upon the analyst having an adequate understanding, not the other way around. One needs to know what is going on. But in general, if one does not own appreciable capital assets, confronts dependency on the labor market as a problem, and depends on collective

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action to address that problem, then one is working class. This definition is, I think, thin enough to avoid pigeon-holing who is a worker, dynamic enough to analyze change, and robust enough to exclude those who are not vulnerable in the same way.

## *Beyond Class Reductionism*

To sum up, to be working class is to be in a condition of collective vulnerability among individuals to both shared constraints and to one another. Workers are vulnerable to the arbitrary power of employers who have an interest in undermining their well-being and they depend on one another to mediate that power. I now turn back to the issue of social difference; I argue that a practice-theoretical perspective can grasp both why the "working class" is dominated as a group under capitalism and why the reproduction of harmful social differences has a class character. What I conclude is that class domination is a unique problem that is irreducible to any other form of domination like racism or sexism. It also partly explains their persistence. Thus, my view is a reversal of the usual story offered by critics of class conflict theory: Social differences do not supervene on the working class to explain intra-class conflict. Rather, endogenous constraints on collective action within the working class partly explain social differences.

This argument requires an analytical shift from what the working class is to how it forms. "Class formation" is the usual Marxian phrase for describing this historical process. Class formation is often discussed interchangeably with the idea that the working class "in-itself" can and should become a class "for-itself," so instead of remaining a passive political object the working class becomes active political subject. I use the idea somewhat differently, as I hold the view that working people are active political subjects all the time, but that their

activity is not always what the socialist left has hoped. For me, class formation is simply the process of the nonvoluntary group coming to be what it is through conflicts that are structural in nature because they are made up of the structural practices as previously defined. It is how the unequal logic of collective action creates social pressures toward social differentiation.

Social differences emerge as a product of class formation, so they are part and parcel of who the working class is and how it got to be that way. Racism and sexism, the most prominent examples of such differences, are thus "ontologically thick" *vis à vis* class in the sense that the reproduction of "race" via racism and "gender" via sexism are real divisions among working people and they can shape the contours of collective action. Yet I find that it is a red herring to then argue on this basis that race and gender form different systems as others have done, or that the constraints such differences place on collective action are a sufficient reason to doubt that the working class has a claim to self-determination. On the contrary, I argue that the working class has a claim to self-determination, as it is in the nature of class domination to be both because of and in spite of intra-group differences. In brief, the original premises of the class reductionism debate were wrong because they affirmed an idealized notion of market competition that underestimated and obscured the political dynamic that it criticized. My alternative is based not on an idealized model of market competition, but on a realistic one.

Indeed, the most important point of divergence between my account and earlier ones is that, contrary to neoclassical assumptions, I have posited that workers cannot be a homogenous group. *Real* competition does not lead to the labor market equilibrium that neoclassical economists expect. It is instead a process of "turbulent equilibration," as Shaikh calls it. This point is significant because it creates a stark contrast between the social harmony that neoclassicists presume in the market at large. For a more critical audience, it dispels with the notion that capitalism brings workers together and automatically motivates at least some

group of workers to be in solidarity with one another. To the contrary, if market competition is generally not perfect, then one can expect no less from labor market competition among workers. The notion of real competition is a step toward anti-essentialism, which would assume that there are automatic affinities among groups of workers based on some part of their identity. Indeed, labor market competition guarantees solidarity to no one.

Not only is the working class not a homogenous group, but the working class has never been a purely economic group either. *Contra* Weberian and multiple systems theories, status-based norms are neither layered on top of inter-class divisions nor do they intervene in them from the outside to produce intra-class divisions. The practice-theoretical premise that normative resources are not outside of the actions that portend to solve problems sheds a different light on the shared constraints of labor market dependency and competition among working people. As I will show, the social differences among workers that concern theorists of social group inequality continue to emerge from previous attempts to resolve the problems incurred by this shared constraint. Thus, they have a class character in capitalist societies regardless of whether capitalism is their original cause. Social group inequality is a developmental pattern of capitalist class formation and a constitutive part of how people learn to make sense of inequality writ large. Social differences are a constitutive part of the problem of market dependency and how it presents itself to a working class constituency.

How the problem of market dependency presents itself to working people also has to do with the normative resources that are available to make sense of it. In my view, these resources tend to be historically negotiated expectations for equality, fairness, desert, and redistribution. Recall that I have claimed that these norms emerge more or less spontaneously based on the problem-solving dynamics of competitive market practices. They never represent the full scope of what people expect, desire, or think *should* be, but they are a way of resolving conflicts that are not just as resolvable with other normative resources. In other

words, when people adapt to market imperatives, they adjust their expectations and then they say what ought to be the case in these new conditions. Thus, there are strong developmental trend regarding the kind of norms that emerge in this context.

In this context, it is common for people to justify their relative position in regard to norms that present themselves as universal but are persistently undermined by market competition. They tend to justify inequality as a way of legitimizing the normative structure of these structural practices. When an individual or a group does not succeed as a competitor, these norms only appear as more legitimate than before. If they are to be held as true and worthy expectation, then the response to those who are down and out is normally along essentialist lines. "Essentialism" is an attitude toward inequality that sees it as the result of a natural disposition on the part of those who unequal. Concretely, if one finds that one is relatively successful within the confines of the rules of the game and can see that others are not, then it makes sense to view the situation as a reflection of something that is wrong with them. Competition turns a universal set of normative expectations into a partial set. The peculiar hypocrisy of capital's so-called moral universalism is not a psychological enigma, but the only way that universal norms can appear under these historically specific constraints.

Thus, Black workers are lazy, Latin American workers are stealing jobs, women workers are unreliable (so motherhood is natural), Muslim workers are hostile to liberal norms, and so on. At this level of abstraction, I make no general claims about why it is some specific groups and not others who are subject to such essentialist ideas about their character. I think this question is largely an empirical one—for instance, a settler-colonial state with a slave population that reproduced demographically like the United States has a particular history of the integration of Black people into the labor market—so I make the make the more modest claim that the emergence of such ideas is a developmental pattern of market competition. Essentialist ideas, whether biological or cultural, naturalize social differences by resolving a

social contradiction between the normative expectations of the market and its differentiating reality, which is why racism and sexism have a class character under capitalism. Conversely, essentialist ideas defend one's position in the market as deserved, indeed as natural.

Where class is a racialized, gendered group, it is so because market competition is a process of social differentiation and the norms that are functional to it and adapted by its practitioners are constitutive of that process. Therefore, social differences among workers in general need not come from sources that are external to "the economy" and class conflict partly explains the specific forms they take. Put simply, class formation is complexly political, which, in my view, does not undermine the notion that the working class is dominated or that it has a claim to self-determination. To the contrary, my view is that this situation is one in which workers are subject to arbitrary power both because of and despite their differences. Workers need to associate collectively in order to exercise capacities for self-determination, but the normative and material conditions of their work systematically undermine their capacity to do so, thus making workers subject to the prerogative of employer incentives that have the effect of enforcing workers' dependency on the labor market.

What is needed is an alternative perspective that exposes interdependency and collective vulnerability. If competition differentiates workers and has a normative structure that creates expectations of success and failure on the market, then it follows that for workers to organize themselves as a group, they require an alternative normative structure corresponding to practices of collective action. Historically, "solidarity" has been this alternative, so I focus on it here to illuminate why it is precisely its precarity and non-inevitability that makes the problem of class under capitalism one of domination. Many theorists have noted failures of worker solidarity as symptoms of privilege and stopped theorizing class domination there. By contrast, I argue that if one incorporates the systematic constraints that capitalism places on

solidarity into the argument about why the working class is dominated, then one can interrogate the scarcity that creates relative privileges. Thus, against the grain, I argue that constraints on solidarity are a part of the class problem, not an external one.

I define solidarity as a practice of identifying someone else's different, but related interests as one's own, conversely, of identifying one's self-interest with a collective good.[202] Normatively speaking, it is the belief that one ought to fight on behalf of that someone else because one acknowledges and is invested in a collective political project. In a world devoid of solidarity, the normative resources that are imminent to solving the problem of market dependency obscure the interdependence and vulnerability that workers share. In such a world, workers tend to try to shift the burden of labor market competition but cannot eliminate it. Such attempts at burden-shifting are often too narrow and are thus self-defeating over time. What is obscured is that the labor market distributes the burden of competition across the class as a whole.

By contrast, solidarity resolves the dilemma of labor market dependency by highlighting interdependence. An example is the old labor movement slogan of "an injury to one is an injury to all," which, seen from a practice-theoretical perspective, can be understood as the learned common sense of those who had witnessed the failures that came with assuming that their skill group, racial group, or seniority group will be the privileged ones to avoid the changes and pressures of the labor market. The notion of solidarity was not an abstract idea in that context, but a norm embedded in the collective practice of those who understood that attacks on those who are unlike them would likely become attacks on themselves. It was functional to understanding what made collective action successful.

[202] Bruno Leipold, Karma Nebulsi, and Stuart White, *Radical Republicanism: Recovering the Tradition's Popular* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), 149-71.

The problem is that a counterculture in which solidarity is the prevailing norm is a precarious business under the best of circumstances. At their strongest points, workers establish their own institutions, like trade unions and political parties, which preserve the historical memory of shared vulnerability, as well as knowledge of how and why one engages in practices of solidarity. However imperfectly, they mitigate the precarity involved in the self-organization of the class by teaching workers to see the contradictions of the market as a problem. Yet the organizational and normative vigilance required of workers to maintain such collective strength contrasts starkly with the relative ease with which employers organize to sabotage collective action through manipulation, intimidation, divide and conquer strategies like race baiting and red baiting, political engineering, and in some cases outright repression, to say nothing of their capacity to interfere in the conditions of work that makes workers vulnerable on the market in the first place. Most importantly, the changing conditions of production themselves are a persistent threat to preserving solidarity as a common sense among the vulnerable even where workers have been successful in the past.

I think recognition of the stakes of such vigilance, of collective success or failure, is why Black socialists in the U.S. have so often argued for the racial integration of the labor movement and depicted the issue of racism within it as a failure of the entire movement, not just for Black workers. Hubert Harrison was a leading Socialist Party member who called racism within trade unions "suicidal" in an essay called "The Negro and Socialism" published in the *New York Call* in 1911.[203] C.L.R. James argued that the Black struggle in the United States is central to the development of the only kind of class struggle that can succeed in creating structural changes in how society is organized.[204] Early Black left feminists like Maude White and Claudia Jones persistently argued that the working-class movement

[203] Paul Heideman (ed.), *Class Struggle and the Color Line* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018), 107.
[204] Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C. L. R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C. L. R. James 1939–1949* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018), 179-87.

ignored the problems of Black women at its own peril.[205] For these socialists, class interest and anti-racism went hand in hand in learning to exert durable forms of collective power over and against the precarious terrain of the market.

Consider an example of both learning to be in solidarity and the precarity of solidaristic practices. In the United States, the Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO) and its predecessor the American Federation of Labor (AFL) took different approaches to organizing Black workers that reflected changing conditions of production. The AFL organized itself on a craft basis, involving only skilled workers. These craft unions were often virulently racist and closed ranks to protect their access to skilled work. Before and after the Great Depression, American industry began employing hundreds of thousands of low-skilled workers. The craft model of unionism became increasingly unable to address the needs of auto, steel, rubber, and mining workers. The CIO, on the other hand, argued to "organize the unorganized" to meet these needs. Because these industries absorbed Black labor in greater numbers, the CIO argued to unionize workers across racial lines to disrupt the particularism of craft unionism. Thus, the labor movement learned through the failure of the AFL that it had to organize interracial unions. This learning process did not survive the red-baiting McCarthy era, which purged the labor left, particularly the Black left, from working class institutions for their communist sympathies.[206] If one combines this repression with the onset of deindustrialization, then what emerges is a labor movement that was unable to transmit a learning process in which solidarity had emerged as a counterculture.

A similar contrast is also possible in the women's movement. In my view, who is working class includes those who do informal reproductive labor. Reproductive labor is labor

[205] Erik McDuffie, *Sourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 51-2, 166-71.
[206] Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006*, 3rd ed. (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 12-37.

that reproduces life in terms of housework, child-rearing, and emotional support. It can be commodified or not, but in any case, someone must perform the labor that reproduces life. On the unpaid side of things, families organize who does this labor by considering the relative market competitiveness of family members. It might make practical sense, for instance, for pregnant people to exit the labor market to have children and a more consistent laborer to stay in it to support a household. A single parent household will not have so many options or must rely on extended family to stay at work. My view is that the conditions of reproductive labor are congruent with the constraints that the labor market places on individuals, families, and households. My definition holds that the members of working-families are working class, whether they are themselves a part of the formal labor market or not.

There are greater degrees of equality by sex and gender when feminist politics have been integrated with and had strong alliances with the labor movement. Consider the differences in the feminist debates over the relationship between "patriarchy" and capitalism in France and the United States as compared to Sweden and Germany. The feminist movements in the former advanced capitalist countries have had historically less integration into their respective labor movements than the latter pair, so what would be consistent with my argument is to suspect that the lack of political development of the labor movement created a set of dilemmas regarding the value of an independent women's movement that were less pronounced in the latter.[207] The outcome of affirming the value of the women's movement and the lack of clarity regarding its interdependence with labor in general generated debates about how to counter two systems instead of one. It would be consistent

[207] I grant that this point is somewhat speculative given the low volume of research on women in organized labor, but some resources have provided fodder for this idea. See Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement: From the First Trade Unions to the Present* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018) and Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004) for background regarding the fractious relationship that labor women had with both the first and second "waves" of the women's movement in the United States. By contrast, Steven Klein discusses the labor-oriented strategy of Swedish feminists vis-à-vis the welfare state in *The Work of Politics,* 129-70.

with my view to claim that situation was another learning process that is either inhibited or facilitated by previous attempts to negotiate against the competitive constraint.

I conclude that constraints on solidarity are thus a part of what defines class domination because they reinforce dependency on the labor market and further subject workers to the arbitrary power of employers to act on their own prerogatives. Mitigating this dependency and attaining some modicum of self-determination is a burden that falls almost entirely upon workers under adverse conditions. What should inspire us is that workers continue to organize, to learn, and to resist. Although one would not glean it from much academic discourse about racism and whiteness, or misogyny and sexism, they even learn to be anti-racist and anti-sexist. Whatever its shortcomings, solidarity has been a practical principle of resistance for those claiming that they should determine the conditions of their actions and indeed, their very lives.

## *Conclusion*

I have argued that class represents a unique harm done to a social group. My view is that capitalism's working class is large and diverse, yet interdependent and collectively vulnerable to arbitrary power in a manner that is distinct from other types of vulnerability in the same market setting. Intra-class conflict is a significant reason that is so, although my framing of the issue is relative to the competitive constraint and does not rely on "extra-economic" or "external" factors to do the bulk of analytical work in conceptualizing the processes and relationships that generate it. To reiterate, my goal has not been to arbitrate debates about the specific way that race or gender affect class formation. There is plenty of space for such controversy in the chapters that follow. Class has been comparatively undertheorized, so what

I have done here is explain why the previous discourse surrounding class and "class reductionism" have been insufficient so as to offer something more robust and, frankly, interesting.

What I hope to have made possible is greater understanding of the role that class plays in reproducing social group inequality along several axes during capitalist development. It should no longer be possible to observe absences of worker solidarity and to claim that class is not operative causally or normatively. Instead, my argument implies that class is always operative. One can now ask what constraints are stronger or weaker that make solidarity likely or unlikely in a historical conjuncture. Moreover, if class is always operative, and race and gender are heterogeneously distributed across the class structure, then one can interrogate how the class politics of working-class members of these groups differ from, or conflict with, other strata.

Class conflict has normative salience not just because it creates economic groups in which some are rich and others are poor, but because competition creates conditions that militate against solidarity, toward cleavage and conflict. Class is, therefore, a constraint on collective self-determination. Conversely, it is a basis for a claim to self-determination by many if not most people in capitalist societies. Whether workers develop the requisite consciousness required to make this claim and negotiate their differences sufficiently to expand the scope of human freedom within or beyond capitalism is not a philosopher's prediction to make. I know that they have done it before, and that as a result of their struggle to lead lives free of domination, many of us today owe them ours.

# Chapter 6: Is Capitalism Systemically Racist?

In a word, my answer is "Yes." Capitalism is systemically racist. In my view, the crux of the matter is that there is a contradiction of normative expectations in a state of generalized market dependency. In capitalist societies, human beings live in an unprecedented condition of relative equality in their relationship to the market. Nonetheless, they are dominated and the way in which they are dominated undermines what they learn to expect (or hope for, or desire) out of this relative equality. I argue that, in this system, race concepts are durable ideological distortions of the social problems that the competitive constraint creates. Race need not originate within capitalism for this claim to be true. Indeed, the sheer variety of race concepts should create skepticism that the relationship between racism and capitalism is straightforwardly functional in nature.

I argue that there is an important upshot to disavowing functionalist explanations for racism's relationship to capitalist development. I take these sorts of explanations to be the most common in the left-wing common sense about this topic, so section two of this chapter discusses what I believe to be the shortcomings of functionalist approaches. The upshot of my account is that one can see what capitalism specifically has to do with racism, which enables one to see how race might be reproduced by different mechanisms than in the past. Historical injustices weigh heavily on the capitalist present, but the reason that capitalism perpetuates patterns of historical inequality are different than what produced that inequality in the first place. For those seeking not only retributive justice for past wrongs, but freedom in the future, this distinction makes a world of difference. A non-functionalist account can better illuminate the distinct patterns of vulnerability, dependency, and corruption that create a false sense of scarcity in a capitalist world.

## *A Condition of Relative Equality*

The social theory that I have advanced so far has two important features. First, I have argued that market competition is a structural practice and that what emerges from it are problem-solving strategies that are path dependent. Capitalism is a system with developmental patterns that different institutional varieties of it share in common. The central pattern that I have used as an analytical axis for my account of domination is in the vertical and horizontal kinds of class conflict that respond to and reflect capital's competitive constraint. Second, I have argued that certain normative conflicts ought to be understood in the context of the competitive constraint and how people draw upon available normative resources to problem-solve within it. Some normative expectations of how a social practice ought to be, or what makes it successful, are immanent to the practice, which in this case leads to conflict surrounding the relative burdens of market competition.

The most controversial social-theoretic claim that I am making is probably that there are certain norms that universalize alongside capital's own universalizing tendencies across the globe. One may well question whether such a claim can hold given the robust cultural differences among those whom it concerns. This objection is especially important to consider in an analysis of racism. One could object that I am using norms to criticize racism that are themselves racist by virtue of the fact that they are provincially "Western" or "white" norms. I do not believe this objection to hold for the following reason: One does not need to endorse the imperializing nature of the relevant norms to say that that they are universalizing. Indeed, the purpose of the criticism is exactly the reverse, which is to show what's harmful about their use in their current form.

Moreover, the moral language of resistance to disadvantages within capitalist structures is often consistent with the expectations that people have of what that system could be like if it were responsive to historical injustice. Take, for instance, dependency theory. It is very common for politicians in the global south to insist that the global north would not be so rich if not for its exploitation of poor nations, so much so that rich countries depend on poor countries. The moral claim here is not necessarily an overthrow of capitalism but has historically meant that the poor country has been cheated out of its own chance at development. The terms of trade haven't fair, not that they shouldn't exist. Likewise, it is common to hear Black Americans claim to "want a seat at the table," which is a claim about wanting access to, and to reap the rewards of, capitalist opportunities, not to undermine the social basis of those opportunities. That there are more marginal expressions of subaltern groups rejecting capitalist norms altogether does not change the fact that the dominant normative verbiage is consistent with them. For this reason, it is appropriate to pay due philosophical attention to such universalizing norms, even if there is more to see.

In fact, denying the practical and normative universalizing qualities of the competitive constraint makes it more and not less difficult to see where and why race concepts can retain their salience in the existing class structure. The "where," I think, is in where expectations of equality turn into something else. In a condition of relative equality, in which norms like merit, just desert, and redistributive entitlement create a sense of justice amidst concrete conditions of inequality, such expectations discriminate. In the first chapter, I claimed that liberalism is a discriminating philosophy when it comes to property, which brings out conflicts regarding how liberalism accounts for other kinds of discrimination that liberals consider to be *prima facie* arbitrary. My contention here is that this form of discrimination relative to the expectations that people have of property ownership and what they have to do to get what they want in regard to property is universal in capitalist societies. This posit of

universalism helps rather than hinders one's efforts to make sense of social differentiation in response to it.

There is actually a great deal of variation within what is quite consistent across cultural and geographical contexts, depending on how society has mitigated class conflict. For instance, someone who is raised in a social democracy might think that "People ought to work enough to contribute to the general social welfare in a way that is proportionate with their ability to do so. So long as they contribute to the welfare system, then individuals should be entitled to its benefits." The opposite is likely to be true in a capitalist society with scant experience with social democratic reforms, like the United States. People are more likely to think that "Nothing comes free in this life and that the fruits of one's hard work should only accrue to the individual who works." The reasoning is that if one individual can succeed, then so can anyone else who has enough self-control to do the same. In the latter case, there is a much greater emphasis on personal responsibility that affects what people think they and others deserve.

One can expect some consistency in these norms is because market competition creates the condition of relative equality in which individuals can reliably attribute some motivations and interests to other people that face similar constraints as they do. For instance, one's experience of having been made responsible for one's success on the market creates a basis upon which individuals develop expectations of what is fair treatment of themselves and others. Norms may imply different weights given to different aspects of this experience, as illustrated by the difference between social democracies and the United States above, but they are not unrecognizable as having a core feature in common, which is that they are especially responsive to how people learn to navigate, challenge, or amend competitive constraints. From this perspective, the selection mechanism that determines why an ideology like racism

emerges in one place, but not another, or in one form or another, will likewise depend on such local histories.

What I wish to show is not that a specific form of racism is inevitable, but why, exactly, racism is a pattern of capitalist development that emerges or remains a durable way of making sense of a social terrain that is especially shaped by competitive constraints. I take the idea of social terrain from Barbara Fields. Fields explains that "Human beings live in human societies by negotiating a certain social terrain, whose map they keep alive in their minds by the collective, ritual repetition of the activities they must carry out in order to negotiate the terrain. If the terrain changes, so must their activities, and therefore so must the map."[208] I want to suggest that capitalism, likewise, does not just inherit the social map of colonialism like a sickness or an original sin, but changes the map in which people reproduce race as an *ideology* repetitively and ritually relative to the historically distinct set of constraints that I have been using to analyze structural and class domination.

Race concepts are multiple and my method is materialist, so I think that an approach that tries to tie normative tendencies to the developmental tendencies of social practices is the highest level of abstraction at which one can meaningfully talk about race as a systematic form of oppression. Race concepts are either reproduced as a way of navigating a social terrain – a way of perceiving one's place on the map – within concrete social practices, or they do not exist. I believe this position to be the only consistent outcome of my commitment to challenge, rather than reify, race as a pejorative set of normative expectations. In other words, a materialist approach aims to undermine naturalized and common sense forms of race essentialism, i.e., racism. This position is likely controversial to those who think that race is a structure or social ontology in itself, but I hope to show that what most people mean by

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[208] Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* (1/181) (May/June 1990), 113.

structural or systemic racism is normally reducible to either a meta-psychological explanation of racism or to what I mean when I say that race is an ideology that is built on immanent normative expectations within structural practices.

I maintain that race is an ideology. It is a durable distortion of the problems that the dominant social terrain throws at people who have little control over it, who struggle to generalize about it, and who then are ill-equipped to solve the problems at hand. In the republican terms that I have been using throughout this book, racism is a kind of corruption, both moral and epistemic, that is neither irrational nor epiphenomenal. It is a way of drawing on existing normative resources to rationalize inequality. So, the ideology itself is both false and internally contradictory in a logical sense, but not is a social sense. Another way of saying the same thing is that racism smooths over a contradiction at the heart of capitalist development. I argue that it's stickiness and durability endure because this contradiction it unresolved.

I defend an account of race as an ideology that relies on the potential for historically rooted forms of character essentialism to remain durable in new forms as the conditions of production change. Capitalism increases social mobility within and across labor markets compared to pre-capitalist social property relations. It thereby creates incentives to differentiate by skill, talent, and moral character to explain individual, familial, and national success. For the first time, individuals across the class structure must justify market success in the distribution of wealth, rights, and other social privileges. It is now important to justify success by attributing success to virtue and by attributing failure to lack of virtue. It is but a small step from perceiving a difference in virtue to a difference in kind, and thus viewing social inequality as a symptom of natural inequality: X fails or belongs in X position because

of their X-ness.[209] Ironically, it might be especially attractive to attribute market failures or the cornering of markets to X-ness if competition transpires under conditions of legal equality. In the latter context, the core contradiction is all the more apparent and in need of justification.

In her famous essay, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," Barbara Fields writes that,

> "This is perhaps a good moment to say a few words about what ideology is and what it is not; because without an understanding of what ideology is and does, how it arises and how it is sustained, there can be no genuinely historical understanding of race. Ideology is best understood as the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day. It is the language of consciousness that suits the particular way in which people deal with their fellows. It is the interpretation in through of the social relations through which they constantly create and re-create their collective being, in all the varied forms their collective being may assume: family, clan, tribe, nation, class, party, business enterprise, church, army, club, and so on."[210]

What I interpret Fields to argue in this passage is that ideology has an *immanent* relationship to the social practices in which it is relevant as a way of making sense of those practices. She uses phrases like "the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence," "make rough sense of," "the language of consciousness," and "interpretation in and through social relations" to articulate the manner in which people problem-solve in the context of constraints that is neither reducible to abstract beliefs or attitudes. For instance, she argues that it is neither abstract belief nor attitude that makes a person stop at an intersection for a

[209] Tommie Shelby makes the same point in *We Who are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005): 142.
[210] Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," 110.

red light. Rather, "People discover the advantage of being able to take for granted what everyone else will do at an intersection" and, since they live in a society that ritualizes this discovery, then there is a developmental process in which people learn the demonstrable advantages of stopping at a red light as well as the routine that removes a decision to stop at the light from calculation. If one wants to make the opposite decision, then one agonizes over it, calculating different costs like an accident or a traffic ticket.[211]

Fields thinks that race is like the traffic light. People discover the social advantages of taking the reality of race for granted as they navigate social terrain. One could liken this process to Kant's postulate on human freedom: I cannot know if I am free, but I suppose that I am so that I can make sense of living as a moral agent. Likewise, I may know that race is socially constructed and racism morally wrong, but I will behave as though it is real and adopt racialized perceptions so that I can negotiate the social relations in which it is relevant. These advantages might be the more obvious advantages of greater social status for dominant groups, but it is not only that kind of advantage. Another kind of advantage would be showing moral virtue to one's peers by demonstrating one's awareness of racial inequality. For example, one might show epistemic deference to the perspective that racialized persons possess about racism. In such a case, people are also anticipating what to expect from one another in a distinctly racialized way. One may consider the former to be morally blameworthy in a way the latter is not, but the traffic light metaphor holds either way.

## *Preserving the Materialist Moment*

[211] Ibid., 113.

Materialist theories of race tend to employ functionalist explanations for how racism is causally related to the social terrain. In this section, I explain why functionalism is the materialist's order of the day and what I take to be the main analytical challenges of such a view. I instead adopt a non-functionalist explanation for racism in capitalism. I reach a similar conclusion to that of my functionalist peers but for different reasons. I argue that my non-functionalist view has analytical advantages that the functionalist does not, like that it avoids becoming reducible to a meta-psychological account or becoming viciously circular in its causal claims. There are normative advantages, too, which lie in helping us to forge a forward-looking political imagination of how one might undermine historical patterns of racism with respect to competitive constraints.

First, however, I step aside to clarify why a materialist account of race differs from other types of accounts. I said that if race concepts do not emerge or persist in response to concrete social practices then they do not or would not exist. This position will not be agreeable to those who think that race is a stable social ontology, a psychopathology, or primarily a discourse.[212] What I am saying is that race does not have a life of its own. It is, as Fields says, not like a flu that one can catch or like hand-me-down clothing. It does not burrow in the psyche like a virus nor does it reappear on a different person in a younger generation in much the same way as it did someone older. The simple reason for constraining race in this way is that the alternative sort of explanation is bound to be circular. In each case, race generates racism, which begs the deeper question of what causes race concepts to emerge or remain salient. The only answer to this question that I can gather from these other

[212] The following are representative examples: For instance, David Roediger (1991) pursues a psycho-sexual explanation of white working-class racism in the United States without reference to the concrete economic practices in which this takes place in history, despite broadly talking about class as a relational social position. For an argument that racism is best understood as a culture and discourse, see David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 106-7. For an argument that posits race as an ontological kind see Frank Wilderson III, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Wither the Slave in Civil Society?" *Social Identities* 9(2)(2003): 225-40.

sorts of accounts is that it just does. If one admits that there is a reason for their continuing salience, then one is on materialist territory and race cannot be an adequate explanation for racism.

Something must explain discrimination, which then explains racism, which then explains race: The normatively discriminating features of social practices generate a perceptual map in which race concepts make sense as way of navigating them. This sort of causal claim is not the same one that says that race is an epiphenomenon of class. There is much careless use of the idea of "epiphenomenalism" as a pejorative way of accusing materialist accounts of not taking race and racism seriously. I believe that this back and forth to be highly confused because it is too moralized and therefore unhelpful. Epiphenomenalism is a view in philosophy of mind stating that mental events are caused by physical events in the brain. Mental events have no causal effects on physical events. So, muscles contract upon receiving neural impulses, which are in turn receiving input from other sense organs, but the mental events that result from this process are like its discharge. A well-known example is of a locomotive that discharges steam, but the steam is not causing the locomotive to run.[213]

Human societies are not like the train, least of all something so dynamic as the economy. In fact, neither is the train really like the train in this example. The train would not run at all if there were no coal inputs from mines. The steam does have causal effects on the ecosystem around it, however diffuse they may be to the immediate observer, which alters the natural conditions under which human beings mine the mine and power the steam. These are emergent properties of material processes that change the conditions under which one acts in the future, where one's previous attempts to solve problems come to bear on their new manifestations of those problems. If epiphenomenalism were the only causal view that

[213] Cf., T.H. Huxley, "On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and its History", *The Fortnightly Review* 16 (New Series) (1874): 555–580.

materialism had to offer, materialism would be in trouble not just for moral reasons but for reasons of incoherency, incongruity, and straight up silliness. Happily, epiphenomenalism is not the only causal model that is possible.[214] What I explain in this and the following section is how one might think about it differently without conceding that race is meaningfully independent of practices.

There are certainly aesthetic, phenomenological, discursive, and psycho-sexual ways of talking about race that are compatible with a materialist view. The difference between what type of race-talk is compatible or not compatible with materialism hinges on whether the account takes itself to be explaining race. None of these types of accounts are necessarily explanatory. Asking how race concepts appear in literature, for instance, need not explain why they persist or comes into existence at a particular point in time such that it appears in a novel to begin with. There are many interesting questions about how a culture perceives race and develops a cultural imagination around it that are not easily captured by the would-be relevant explanation, but they don't have to be so captured to be of interest. Indeed, I believe that much of the resistance to materialist theories of race are simply about the feeling that scholars do not want to be constrained to study political economy as opposed to, say, representations of race art and media. But no one has to be so constrained; *all* scholarship has a scope.

What seems constraining to *me* right now is how none of the above sorts of analyses are at the appropriate level of abstraction for understanding the relationship between race and class. Indeed, they are hardly in the same universe of debate if they do not actually conflict. It is no less of a narrow analytical perspective to focus on discourse and aesthetics than it is to focus on political economy. For reasons of academic politics, however, the former need not

[214] Vanessa Wills likewise makes this point in, "What Could it Mean to Say, 'Capitalism Causes Racism and Sexism?'" *Philosophical Topics* 46(2) (2018): 229-46.

defend itself from the same criticisms and the burden of proof is much lower on that side of the argument. For instance, rarely does this race-talk really engage with the social theory of political economy; indeed, its priors are mostly unsystematized assumptions about economic stratification within a disparity paradigm. Moreover, the academic discourse surrounding race seems to think that the economics are the easy part and race is the hard part, so the debates surrounding race and class notably lack any reference to class theory.

In this context, what I mean by the wrong level of abstraction is an analytical mismatch that makes the relationship between race and class seem more mysterious than it should be. For instance, many scholars hold that what makes racism distinct as a power relation is that racist actions and attitudes need not be accompanied by intentions to do harm. Race is diffuse, so people tend to characterize race as an unconscious bias, interest, or libidinal investment. But class conflict and domination, as I have shown, is not well-understood as solely an unintentional or unconscious process. People are quite intentional in what they hope to get out of the process even if their actions have effects that they do not want or understand. If I am right, then race and class are *prima facie* too dissimilar to draw together in either a comparison or a causal story. One is always spectral and illusive while the other is practical and concrete. This analytical mismatch is a serious inhibition on seeing the kind of causality that is at work within the structural practices that pervade most of our lives.

## *Disambiguating the Terrain: A Critical Balance Sheet of Functionalist Explanations of Race and Racism*

I turn now to my main interlocutors in this chapter, which are materialist accounts of race and racism. What I argue here is that they share an explanatory structure. They tend to

make one of two claims: Either race is a source of social stability in capitalism, or it is a distinct mechanism for capital accumulation. At bottom, these are functionalist explanations for the origins or persistence of race. I do not want to be misunderstood as polemical, as there are strengths to the functionalist arguments. I explain these strengths in more detail below, but I ultimately find them to be lacking on both analytical and normative grounds. They are analytically weak because they lack the means to explain historical variation in race concepts or in changes to the relative causal weight of race discrimination or imperialism over time. They are normatively weak because they are politically disempowering. I consider three examples of materialist views that I believe to be functionalist in nature "at the end of the day": Ideology critique, multiple-systems theory, and racial capitalism.

*Ideology Critique.* I begin with ideology critique because this view is closest to my own view and because it helps to put the problems with functionalism into stark relief before moving on to the latter two examples that are heavier on the social theory. To begin, there are general problems with the idea of ideology and using it as a critical tool, and there are specific problems with thinking about racism as an ideology. Nonetheless, most scholars would agree that racism is, in part, an ideology. What they disagree about is the extent to which one can explain racism-as-ideology by economic factors. My aim is to break down what is potentially problematic about thinking of racism as an ideology and how these problems have been resolved by representative theorists such as Stuart Hall and Tommie Shelby. I then explain how the arguments of previous chapters in this book regarding the nature of structural and class domination can serve to strengthen the view of racism as an ideology in relation to capitalist social property relations.

As Shelby explains, there are two different ways of talking about ideology, one of which is distinctively critical in nature and the other is not. The non-critical, or nonevaluative, notion of ideology is that "ideology" describes and explains widely held beliefs shared by

members in some relevant group that are derived from some coherent system of thought. Such beliefs inform the general outlook and self-conception of many within the relevant group, and they have a significant impact on social action and institutions. Liberalism, communism, nationalism, republicanism, and so on, would count as "ideologies" in this sense. In its critical sense, ideology also has negative characteristics that should lead one to reject it because they generate oppressive social consequences. As both Shelby and I are interested in thinking about racism as an ideology in the critical, normatively charged sense, I explain the general difficulties in developing criteria for such a view.

The main problem is that it is not clear *how* material relationships produce ideological effects. And the way that most theorists have responded to this question is by way of a functionalist explanation. A functionalist explanation is one that explains X because of its tendency to have effect Y. The most accessible examples are those having to do with biological anthropology; One might claim that bipedal homo sapiens have lots of hair on their head in particular is because of its tendency to protect this type of creature from the sun. When it comes to social systems, the functionalist claims that ideologies reinforce and stabilize a social system through distortions that legitimate the system by way of illusions and misrepresentation. More specifically, racism stabilizes capitalism by its tendency to prevent the emergence of a unified working class that can challenge capital. Said otherwise, racism internally divides the labor force, less capable of resisting exploitation than it would be otherwise.

For instance, Immanuel Wallerstein argues that racial ideology continues to justify a collective niche in the global capitalist economy because the "ethnicization" of the workforce

permits very low wages for whole segments of the labor market.[215] In addition, Etienne Balibar claims that racism, at least in the French case, is organically linked to rationalizing the benefits that accrue to higher paid workers and protecting those benefits.[216] Nancy Fraser claims that labor market segmentation invites racialization of jobs with the lowest wages and social esteem.[217] Hall, too, argues that racism is an ideology that prepares the social ground for using racialized groups as fluid and variable labor.[218] Capitalism *needs* racism to divide and conquer the labor force, control the population (i.e., incarceration), and to scapegoat vulnerable sections of the population for the injustices for which capital is responsible. One ;) gets the inkling of a counterfactual from this point of view; if the working class was militantly anti-racist, then it would win the class war.

*Multiple systems theory.* First, some clarification: Whether there are multiple systems that reproduce domination depends on the question one is asking and the level of abstraction that one uses to answer it. It is obviously true that there are multiple systems that cause racism if one defines various concrete institutions as systems. For instance, one can say that the criminal justice system, the educational system, the family and child services system, and the immigration system all contribute to racialized forms of injustice. In this sense, a system is a complex of institutions that respond to common legal and economic constraints, with an internally generated set of standards that one can deem biased or unbiased, fair, or unfair. If they are unfair or biased, then they may cause racism. At a different, less concrete register, one could also analyze affective systems, libidinal systems, and so on. These are the kinds of inquiries one is likely to find in phenomenological or aesthetic studies of gender, race, and

[215] Immanuel Wallerstein, "Ideological Tensions in Capitalism: Universalism versus Racism and Sexism," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* with Etienne Balibar (London and New York: Verso Books, 1991), 34.
[216] Etienne Balibar, "Racism and Crisis," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, 224.
[217] Nancy Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson," *Critical Historical Studies* 3(1)(2016): 163-178.
[218] Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1978).

sexuality. In the latter case, one is talking about discernable patterns of interaction whose pervasiveness earns the moniker of "systemic."

But multiple systems theories are more ambitious than this other way of using the language of "system." Multiple systems theories address the "big three" systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Thus, its claims are at a different level of abstraction. In this case, a theorist who asserts that there are multiple systems that generate a particular type of domination says that there is a selection mechanism akin to what Marx called the "laws of motion" of capitalism, not only for capitalism, but for patriarchy and white supremacy as well. Once again, Charles Mills is a representative theorist of this view. First, he posits that race is ontologically and therefore politically prior to class; it is the primary contradiction of modern society. Second, he thinks that race straightforwardly explains divisions within the working class as a result of a mental handicap that is racism.[219] But this mental handicap is not psychological, it's ontological, which makes it more material than class.

While the above might lead one to think that there is really just one system – race – of which class is derivative, Mills posits the idea that theorists of race ought to do what dual systems theorists (i.e., Hartmann et al) did for gender and posit and multiple systems view. White supremacy is simultaneously a juridico-political, economic, cultural, cognitive-evaluative, somatic, and metaphysical system. If one were to protest that none of these areas of life are independent of the class structure, Mills fends it off by turning away from seeking a unitary framework. He writes that, "[M]y strategy has been to leaved bracketed the question of whether such a theoretical synthesis is possible and to treat white supremacy as an at least semiautonomous system…" which, he insists, should not "be taken to imply a complete

[219] Mills, *From Race to Class,* 156-8, 167.

repudiation of Marxism, since I do think attempting to incorporate whiteness-as-property into an expanded conception of the relations of production would represent a promising line of research for the necessary transformation of historical materialism."[220] At the same time, Mills insists that the reason one ought to focus on race as the primary political contradiction is that it can be resolved under capitalism, whereas the class contradiction cannot be so resolved.[221] Mills then makes a gamble that focusing one's energies on racial injustice rather than capitalism will yield greater dividends on justice.

These premises are inconsistent if they do not emerge together as a functionalist explanation. First, saying that race is the primary contradiction rather than class, but that one can also solve the race problem internal to the class structure, is a non sequitur. It leaves one wondering what is so primary about a contradiction that can be straightforwardly resolved within mainstream capitalist institutions. But Mills says so explicitly when he claims that once the working class sorts out their racism, then they can fight the boss.[222] If race is primary to class (causally speaking), then there is no class without race. Indeed, he also claims that racial justice can be found in the very structure that relies so intensely on what he calls "racial exploitation" (historic and ongoing land expropriation, white monopoly control, etc.). I think that Mills either reached a conclusion that he did not want to reach or there is an implicit functionalist argument that makes these premises consistent when they otherwise would not be. The unwanted conclusion is that, in Mills' own account, class *is* the primary contradiction after all, since all that is standing in the way of racial justice is white supremacy and not capitalism.

[220] Ibid., 173.
[221] Ibid., 206.
[222] Ibid., 160.

But there is another option that is only implied. If race is primary to class, then there is no class without race. If the former conditional statement is true, then one can more consistently claim that the class structure relies upon the racial structure. Indeed, Mills repeatedly affirms that it is the psychological salience of white identities in determining political solidarity along racial lines that legitimizes the class structure. In other words, a non-non sequitur conclusion would be to claim that the capitalist system needs the white supremacist system to generate white supremacist social integration and, therefore, stability. Whereas Marxists used this argument as a reason for class solidarity over and against racial divisions, Mills draws the opposite conclusion. The structure of the argument, however, is the same. Race can be functionally explained by the effects that it tends to have in permitting (racial) exploitation and accumulation, as well as a type of social stability on the basis of race.

*Racial Capitalism.* The third materialist approach that I consider is the notion of "racial capitalism." I break this argument into two representative theses: The first is Cedric Robinson's argument in *Black Marxism* and the second is Nancy Fraser's claim that there is a special form of "racial accumulation" that serves capitalist accumulation. Robinson's argument proceeds by way of a critique of Marxism, claiming that Marxism is Eurocentric because the working class that is supposed to be the subject of history is really a provincial, white working class that does not understand that significance of race (understood *very* broadly as anything from nationalist and religious sentiments in pre-capitalist, peasant societies to modern biological racism) exclusion for political practice. He posits the specific problem that Marxists do not adequately theorize the excess of violence toward Black people, which exceeds the terrain of the workplace, production, and the economy in general. This excess is the legacy of a medieval, racial ontology as well as slavery and colonialism. Robinson's thesis is that:

(1) Racism pre-dates capitalism in medieval Europe, so an ontologically or metaphysically rooted racism shapes capitalism's development.

(2) Capitalism needed slavery and colonialism as a precondition of its development, which means that capitalism needed racism to become the dominant economic world system.[223]

Fraser's thesis, on the other hand, is that capitalist states facilitate a process of racialized accumulation. According to Fraser, capitalism relies on two mechanisms of accumulation—exploitation *and* expropriation, which form a status hierarchy that amounts to racism. Fraser explains that,

> "Whereas exploited workers are accorded the status of rights-bearing individuals and citizens who enjoy state protection and can freely dispose of their own labor power, those subject to expropriation are constituted as unfree, dependent beings who are stripped of political protection and rendered defenseless—as, for example, in the cases of chattel slaves, colonized subjects, "natives," debt peons, "illegals," and convicted felons…[T]he third and final step is that this status differential coincides with "race." It is overwhelmingly racialized populations who lack political protection in capitalist society and who are constituted as *inherently expropriable*."[224]

Politically, wage laborers are rights-bearing individuals and citizens, whereas expropriated individuals are not. In theory, the free legal status of wage laborers protects them from further expropriation. The political status of the exploited thus differs significantly from those whose labor, property, and persons are subject to expropriation for capital's benefit. The expropriated do not enjoy such protections. The state maintains social divisions

[223] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 9-65.
[224] Nancy Fraser, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory* with Rahel Jaeggi, ed. Brian Milstein (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 41.

to ensure or deny these protections by codifying status hierarchies of citizenship and what counts as a worker in contrast to aliens, dependents, and so on. Fraser concludes that states, "[C]onstruct and mark off groups subject to brute expropriation from those destined for 'mere' exploitation. By codifying and enforcing those distinctions, states supply yet another indispensable precondition for capital accumulation."[225] Fraser claims that all such political divisions invite racialization, which is essential for a system that pursues accumulation simultaneously along two tracks.

The functionalist explanation in each of the racial capitalism theses is that racial exploitation/expropriation is specifically beneficial to capital because of its tendency to facilitate greater accumulation. Without the racial component, capital would not be able to expand and thus successfully carry on with the normal sort of exploitation. Again, the implied counterfactual is paramount to the plausibility of the claim. In Robinson's case, European nationalism is the unique precondition for capitalist development; it wouldn't have happened otherwise. In Fraser's case, racial expropriation is the unique and ongoing precondition of capitalist development; it would have also not happened otherwise. In both cases, one can explain racism by its tendency to grease the wheels of capital accumulation.

Here is an instance in which Fraser says as much in reference to gender oppression. She claims that "[S]ocial-reproductive activity is absolutely necessary to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism as such."[226] In other words, it is the effect of social reproductive activity to stabilize a system whose stability can be explained by the effects that those activities tend to have. Given that Fraser has a nice way of creating mirroring her exploitation and expropriation narrative across class, race, and gender, I believe that she would make the same claim about racialized expropriation, which is

[225] Ibid., 42.
[226] Ibid., 61.

that it facilitates the accumulation of profits that capital could not extract through the normal process of exploitation and, therefore, serves to prop up a system that eats its own tail.

Like with Mills, the functionalist argument is only implied in Robinson's account. Robinson argues that racialization produces capitalism; capitalism would not have emerged if not for racism/nationalism. Like with Fraser, Robinson's is an origin story but is also more ambitious. The origin story serves to suggest that where capitalism started is where it is going, so race plays some intrinsic role in contributing to both capital accumulation and stability. Robinson wants to say that after it is borne, capitalism must make use of racial categorizations as a result of its origin in the context of such categorizations. Saying why this has to be so involves claiming that capitalism needs racism to legitimate its process of exploitation and expropriation. In this case, too, the reversal of race and class primacies does not produce a different explanatory structure. If this is not what Robinson is saying, then one wonders how racial capitalism in itself can explain what contemporary scholars want it to explain; if the functionalist claim isn't there, then what kind of explanation is it? I suggest that it's either meta-psychological or what I say it is in my account below.

## *What's Wrong with Race Functionalism?*

Whether one posits race or class primacy, either formulation makes a similar claim. While I do not agree with the race primacy thesis, its claim to being a rival materialist, albeit ontological, account led me to ask what the difference is between it and its class primacy rivals. As it turns out, the two are not so different in form, even if they disagree on content. I now explain why I believe that this common form to also have common weaknesses. In brief,

what I believe to be wrong with race functionalism is that it is question-begging, too vague, and politically disempowering.

A functionalist conception of ideology – what I've called social glue functionalism – faces several obstacles of both a practical and theoretical nature. From a practical perspective, it is difficult to falsify the claim that ideologies motivate people to act. Thus, theoretically, those with an interest in the ideologically driven motivations for human action frequently resort to the more esoteric methods like genealogical reconstruction or psychoanalysis as a way of closing the explanatory gap. As Stuart Hall explains,

> "This is the long descent of 'revisionist' work on ideology, which leads ultimately (in Foucault) to the abolition of the category of 'ideology' altogether. Yet its highly sophisticated theorists, for reasons quite obscure, continue to insist that their theories are 'really' materialist, political, historical, and so on: as if haunted by Marx's ghost still rattling around in the theoretical machine."[227]

But these strategies hardly solve the problem with social glue functionalism. There is a sticky circularity to the functionalist claim. It provides no selection mechanism that might illuminate why racism is the ideology that arises instead of something else to divide the labor force and ensure the stability of the system. To adopt this position, one must put a great deal of stock in the implicit counterfactual scenario in which a racially united working class is necessarily capable of taking on capital by virtue of the fact that it is racially united. In one way, this claim is compelling. It maintains the premise that Marxists want to maintain, which is that workers have a capacity to undermine the competitive constraint. On the other hand, it can do a great deal to obscure other reasons for why workers don't fight back to the point of revolution. Alas there are many examples in U.S. history of multiracial coalitions within

[227] Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology—Marxism without Guarantees," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* (1986): 32.

organized labor that lose anyway.[228] Did they lose because they just were not anti-racist *enough*? Perhaps. But equally there may be other factors that remain in the dark, like the type of industries that labor organized in a certain region and their levels of labor intensity, which makes employers more or less willing to concede.[229]

The functionalist explanatory strategy tends to refuse the use of counterfactual reasoning to meet objections because it implicitly relies on them and disavows them. If one asks why race persists and not something else, the response is usually that it is not useful to ask such a question. Theorists insist that the counterfactual deters the pragmatically minded theorists away from "real capitalism" toward an "abstract capitalism" that denies the salience of race. I rather think the problem lies in the reverse. By inflating race to the level of a functional necessity, one undermines one's ability to understand change in race concepts and structures themselves. Changes in how people perceive race or evaluate race concepts can only be a change in content but never in form, so it becomes obstinately difficult to understand how major macroeconomic changes constrain or enable racism. The gap in between the system and its legitimation is a large and yawning one. It exists because functionalist explanations continue to beg the question of history in regard to race, which reifies the race concepts that it should seek to explain.

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[228] For detailed historical discussions of interracial working class politics see Jack M. Bloom, *Race, Class & The Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1987); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1983); Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor & The Black Worker 1619-1981* (Praeger Publishers, 1974); Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkan, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1975); Robin D.G. Kelly, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Brian Kelly, *Race, Class and Power in the Alabama Coalfields 1908-1921* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

[229] Kelly's *Race, Class and Power in the Alabama Coalfields 1908-1921* is a particularly good resource for thinking through the distinctiveness of various labor processes, bringing employer interests and fight-back back into the discussion about why it was so difficult to organize industries in the post-bellum U.S. South. Along similar lines, Stanley R. Greenburg's *Race and State in Capitalist Development*: *Comparative Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980) develops international comparisons among apartheid regimes in the U.S., South Africa, Ireland, and Israel.

A theory of multiple systems does not do better. It raises but does not answer basic explanatory, system-immanent questions. The first is what the laws of motion are for each system. The second is how, considering such laws of motion, the systems relate to one another. The third is how to explain social change within the systems in a manner that is consistent with the macro-dynamic claim about the relationship between systems. Scholars originally presented multiple systems theories as more complex alternatives to the problem of economic reductionism. However, as I have shown, even in the case of class they often result in reifying economic categories further, which simply evades rather than resolves the problem of how "the economy" does any work to reproduce "non-economic" domination. I believe that the same is true about race and gender, the circularity of which contributes to essentialist ideas about all members of the relevant groups by insisting that identity and political constituency are the same.

Class differences within racial groups should be enough to make one doubt the prudence of making such an assumption. More importantly, however, are basic methodological questions: What social practices are relevant to understanding the relationship between race and class? In response to what constraints can one expect individuals and groups to form ideas about their interests? In sum, the main problem with multiple systems theories is that they ironically fail to answer the question that they start with, which is what, exactly, capitalism has to do with racism. Is it that capitalism has an opportunistic relationship with the social relationships that were established during the colonial period? Does it do anything endogenously to reproduce racism, or is racism a hangover from an earlier, pre-capitalist era that "takes on a life of its own?" If so, how does it do that without being reducible to a psychological account?

The racial capitalism thesis repeats these problems by recapitulating earlier forms of functionalist argumentation in a new guise. Other critics have pointed out that the thesis

winds up adopting a transhistorical notion of race that is untethered to material conditions. Proponents refuse this objection by saying that it is race's imbrication with material conditions that are of interest to begin with. I am not satisfied with the latter answer. Even if one were to successfully explain how peasant societies generated something like racial categories, then why would these categories persist and continue to make sense within emerging, capitalist social relationships? Capitalism has done so much to revolutionize basic patterns of human sociality that explaining the salience of race over time cannot simply rely on a claim about its historical preconditions, including European colonial ones. Not all colonial empires were capitalist. In fact, many were not, like those of Spain, Portugal, and arguably France, which transitioned to capitalism much later than Great Britain and Holland. The claim is either false because it is contestable by way of historical comparison or it is empty of explanatory content because it is too vague in light of them.

My disagreement with Fraser is more concrete. I do not think that wage labor comes with the rights and protections that Fraser attributes to it when she makes her distinction between those who are exploited and expropriated. It is erroneous to build the results of class conflict into the definition of what it means to be exploited or who workers are. One must have, once again, already defined exploitation in particularly narrow and economistic terms to have to attribute the worst aspects of capitalist development to some other dynamic like expropriation. Market dependency is what makes predation possible, so the terms of exploitation set the terms for resource exclusion or expropriation. As I argued in Chapter 3, those who capital exploits directly need not experience the most morally reprehensible effects of exploitation for exploitation to explain its most reprehensible effects. The fact that capital does not necessarily lead to rights and protections for those who are dependent on it, or that it makes many market dependent persons superfluous, is a significant enough problem. It is the

black box of the economy that creates the need for a concept like expropriation to functionally explain race.

In sum, functionalist explanations are the dominant way of explaining the relationship between race and class via capital's need for stability or special strategies of accumulation. The problem is that these explanations tend to be speculative, question-begging, and therefore, empty of content and reifying of the race concepts that one is seeking to explain. One way of summarizing the arguments that I have made in this section is that it is not so helpful to ask, "What is racism doing to reproduce capitalism?" The answer is redundant: Capitalism is racist because it needs racism. I argue that what is needed is to ask the question the other way around, which is, "What is capitalism *doing* that reproduces racism?"

## *A Proposal to Try Something New*

A non-functionalist strategy helps to open the second black box that remains in the space between exploitation and its racist legitimation. It also has the normative upshot of making clearer the lines of normative argumentation that might help to not only rectify the horrors of the past, if it is possible to do such a thing, but contextualize the multiple legacies of historical injustices within an ideal of freedom that is sensitive to important macroeconomic changes within the post-colonial, post-segregation, post-apartheid world. What is sorely needed is for political agents to begin to see the horizon of a future that is not simply a repetition of that past. I believe it to be imperative that critical political philosophy seek to undermine "capitalist realism" and militate against the constraints that currently reproduce the patterns of historical injustice, regardless of their original causes.

Indeed, my final objection to functionalist explanations is that they are politically disempowering. Circularity and vagueness are serious analytical problems, but one might wonder why that matters when such arguments have been so influential on emancipatory social movements. The functionalist story inspires political agents to see how their fates are connected. It empowers people of different groups to see a common enemy and to glean that the system as a whole needs to be transformed. For instance, if exploitation relies on expropriation, and one wants to end exploitation, then one must also put an end to what enables it. Its purpose is to be a stylized narrative that creates an expansive view of potential human solidarities against both capitalism and (neo)colonialism, which is what makes this way of talking about capitalism and racism justifiably compelling. So, I do not criticize this position lightly. I rather sympathize with it a great deal. The reason I know it intimately is because it was a view that I held until recently.

Thus, my reasons for adopting a different explanatory strategy are not just analytical. The impressive expansiveness of the functionalist view is only rivaled by the political prescriptions that accompany it, whilst both stand in stark contrast to the sorts of things upon which most political agents can act. Like impersonal theories of domination, functionalist arguments also have an upscaling of human agency problem. By describing racial domination as a need of a system, it becomes rather unclear who is doing what to whom. It's not that the domination is not structural but that, like class domination itself, it is also agential. As ever, the question is to what practices race concepts adhere how they facilitate patterns of problem-solving that reify those concepts as a justification for inequality. Saying that the system *needs* to do so is an obtuse way of saying the same thing such that the practices are hidden in the shadow of their effects. The unfortunate result of this mystical way of talking about what capitalism needs to do is that the functionalist explanation collapses into metapsychology.

By “metapsychology” I mean a tendency to see racism as a psychopathological or ontological virus that infects the mind of capitalist subjects. The failure to draw the needed connection between unjust structural practices and their racist legitimation tends to draw theorists into ever higher levels of abstraction. Discrimination, for example, becomes a mental activity rather than a way of preventing people from having access to resources for some reason that makes sense given the social positions in which they find themselves. In the final instance, it’s irrational bigotry pure and simple. This point of view is disempowering in the sense that it turns political agents inward rather than outward to try to expand the scope of things that they can control. And expanding the scope of things that one can control in a system that dominates is the substance of political emancipation; the dominated tend to lack control over the social process on which they depend. This attempt to collectively expand one’s capacities to influence, control, and transform a system of domination is what political solidarity is about. Any perspective that makes the link between solidarity and political emancipation harder to see as opposed to easier to see is not an empowering theoretical analysis.

1. Non-functionalism is more politically empowering because (a) it is better able to
2. capture emergent properties of path-dependent institutions at the level of social theory, (b) it is better able to capture how historical injustices are reproduced through contemporary
3. practices, and (c) it helps to open the normative horizon of freedom, all without collapsing into metapsychology. I now turn to how the social-theoretic approach that I have been developing can begin to conceptualize this horizon through a republican framing of three levels of dependency and vulnerability that help to explain the persistence of race as a salient political ideology.

1. The first level is that at which Fields begins in her analysis of race as an ideology. I have a formula for “ideology”: Structural practices plus normative expectations equals corruption.

Recall that I have argued that structural practices give rise to developmental patterns and endogenously driven, system-typical problems once individuals can assume that others will pursue certain reproductive strategies to which they can respond in kind. Within this process, individuals develop normative expectations of what benefits of social status, or lack thereof, should accrue to them. As Fields explains in the context of plantation slavery in the early American republic:

> "Only when the denial of liberty became an anomaly apparent even to the least observant and reflective members of EuroAmerican society did ideology systematically explain the anomaly. But slavery got along for a hundred years after its establishment without race as its ideological rationale. The reason is simple. Race explained why some people could rightly be denied what others took for granted: namely, liberty, supposedly a self-evident gift of nature's God. But there was nothing to explain until most people could, in fact, take liberty for granted—as the indentured servants and disfranchised freedmen of colonial America could not."[230]

In North America, the system of plantation slavery emerges with the dawn of a republic where all but a minority were excluded from the political status of citizenship that bourgeois republicanism brings. It is in such a context that biological explanations for why some people are not free and equal become convincing. One must recreate a system of inherent inferiority where such a system is not already granted by the state as part and parcel an existing class structure. It was opportune that slaves were taken from Africa and that they had a different skin color, which supported the biological notion of race that continues to hold in this context. This notion would go on to inform the one-drop rule and the uniquely nuanced perception that native-born Americans have of racial classifications. By contrast, in South

[230] Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," 114.

Africa the primary race concepts have a religious basis, not a strictly biological one. Legal equality did not adhere to the South African system so early in its history, so racism fit into a a messianic, civilizational discourse.

Both can and have become apt ways of rationalizing attempts to shift the burden of competition. Racism discriminates based on a sense of who deserves what with respect to efforts to shift this burden. Even if the race concepts exist prior to the full subsumption of the population to market imperatives, they remain salient if they help people to make sense of the necessary appearance of political and economic scarcity that market competition produces. What I mean by the necessary appearance of scarcity is agents' justifiable belief that they are vulnerable to not only other competitors within the labor market but the intra-class competition of capital. When capital invests, innovates, or moves, there is no guarantee that this process will be to the benefit of any particular individual within the labor process. Even if technocratic managers tell people that change is good because it will create more employment in the long run, there is little reason for individuals to gamble on this wisdom. Increased labor market competition does not help, either. Both pressures from above and below lead to perceptions of scarcity within the relative equality that the market provides, which incentivizes the adaption of race concepts to justify relative advantages, i.e., discrimination. Market dependency makes people vulnerable in a way that makes retrenchment attractive, which makes others vulnerable to the deprivation and violence that results from attempts at resource closure.

2. The second level involves both market competition and the state. Relative to capital, labor has not only an unequal capacity for collective action but less mobility. Unfortunately, even the most militant efforts at retrenchment that try to protect certain skills and trades from market competition tend to not succeed over time. In this context, unemployment, skill matching with existing jobs, and labor mobility become crucial problems. State intervention

manages these effects. It too must justify its strategies for how it does so. If labor is fragmented and weak in its organizational capacity, which is the rule, then the state's responses to these social problems is more beholden to capital's interests than it is to labor's. What is needed to respond at all adequately is a massive tax base to fund a welfare state, labor market policies, and education. Without tax revenue, it cannot be done. The state tends to find relatively cheap ways of managing the population, like policing, incarceration, or means-tested redistribution. Which combination of these options the state pursues is responsive to the local history of class conflict and the extent to which other groups have taken on the leadership of reform movements in labor's stead.

What this second level has to do with racism is that the necessary appearance of scarcity mobilizes not only the norms of equality and desert, but also of entitlement. This situation creates a hierarchy of worthiness of social protection from market fluctuations. Means-testing for social protection from unemployment insurance and welfare benefits is a particularly insidious motivation for mobilizing race concepts to explain why these sorts of reforms cannot be universal in nature. Race remains salient because they respond to a social contradiction that people are actually experiencing and that they lack capacities to generalize about. As I argued in Chapter 3, capitalist social property relations give rise to normative expectations of that labor should be rewarded and the institutional differentiation between the economy and the state motivates additional expectations that the state should do something to secure the conditions under which labor can be rewarded fairly. That there is a difference between those who labor and deserve their entitlements and those who do not is the result of a partial and inadequate response to these expectations that macroeconomic change can make increasingly difficult to meet.

The institutional separation between the economy and the state creates an opportunity for struggles for political equality. Whereas in pre-capitalist societies political status was fully

enmeshed in the class structure, capitalism disrupts this more traditional political equilibrium by creating the conditions for both appropriators and direct producers to have ownership over the state. States can expand access to citizenship without challenging economic power directly, so they, not capital, are the gatekeepers of political equality. At the same time, the state's distance from the economy provincializes class conflict. As Wood argues, the political authority of capital is now experienced most directly in a private sphere, which makes the state appear as the primary source of political authority, not capital. In slave, tributary, and feudal societies, class conflict has an overtly political character because it confronts political power directly, but the political character of class conflict is less overt in capitalist societies. In fact, it must become quite organized and militant to be able to project a political message to a broad public audience.

In this context, the state plays a contradictory role in mediating the normative expectations that individuals have of market competition. The sociologist T.H. Marshall explains the normative contradiction between the market and the state in his classic lecture *Citizenship and Social Class*:

> "[S]ocieties in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed. The urge forward along the path thus plotted is an urge towards a fuller measure of equality, an enrichment of the stuff of which the status is made and an increase in the number of those on whom the status is bestowed. Social class, on the other hand, is a system of inequality. And it too, like citizenship, can be based on a set of ideals, beliefs and values. It is therefore reasonable to expect that the

> impact of citizenship of social class should take the form of a conflict between opposing principles."[231]

Marshall goes on to point out that the growth of the institution of citizenship "coincides with the rise of capitalism, which is a system, not of equality, but of inequality."[232] He further asks how such opposing principles could go on to exist side by side. Marshall suggests that a key to the beginning of an answer to this question is that "civil rights" are indispensable to a market economy because they give each person the power to engage in market competition as an independent economic unit, which makes it possible to deny the individual social protection on the ground that they have the means to protect themselves.[233] On the other hand, Marshall notes that it also becomes possible to begin to militate for a more expansive notion of entitlement to social protection based on an image of ideal citizenship.

In sum, individuals are held responsible for protecting themselves on the market, but as equal citizens there is a political basis for establishing what type of market competition is fair. The state, by virtue of its capacity to expand citizenship, carries expectations of protecting people from bad or unfair market competition. The state is responsible for ensuring that those who are behaving responsibly receive the entitlements that they are due. The idea is that the state is the primary political authority—not capital—so it should guarantee that some people do not have an unfair advantage over others, at least to the extent that it affects their political status. Systems of reconciling equal citizenship with economic inequality differ in their conception of fairness, but I think this point holds so long as the relative condition of market equality penetrates the social undercurrent of capitalist states.

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[231] T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 29.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid., 33.

This set of normative expectations is unique to capitalist development. They are also rarely met. Like Fields, my response to "Why racism?" as opposed to something else is simply that it makes sense to explain and justify inequality through essentialist, nationalist, or other identarian means when one experiences the contradiction between one's expectations of the market and the effects of real competition. A society in which the prevailing norms are a set of "color-blind" or otherwise identity-neutral propositions based on social equality can only become discriminating when people perceive that these propositions are at least partially false.

Color blindness, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and other supposedly inclusive aspects of global capitalism invite their opposite when people observe, quite rationally, that discrimination is inherent to the labor process. And it is not only those who wish to exclude that partake in the common sense of racial ideology. It is also those who want to include. For instance, Adolph Reed Jr. diagnoses the phenomena of "brokerage politics" as a peculiar, persistent feature of Black politics in the United States, in which political and economic inclusion rests on race-based arguments made by experts, professionals, and political elites that supposedly represent the authentic voice of a Black community.[234] Further, the middle and professional classes invest in negotiating the nuanced horizontal inequalities among themselves culturally, aesthetically, and symbolically. Workers may do this as well, but they are also prone to other responses like resignation and self-blame, particularly if they cannot find stable employment or lack opportunities for upward mobility. *Therefore, concerns of racial minorities with discrimination may significantly differ by class in what social problems they are actually responding to.*

[234] Adolph Reed Jr, *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 77-92.

3. The final level is global. I can be briefer about this level because the dynamics of the first two levels hold twice over for global patterns. The most significant issue is migration across borders. In a post-colonial context, the Global South has been subordinated to market imperatives as much as the Global North, but its market dependency poses unique challenges that result from the colonial past. Late integration into the global market puts poor countries in a situation where they are flooded by cheap goods and cannot keep up with previous ways of producing. Price competition creates a need to compete, but the regulating capitals are elsewhere, which incentivizes hyper specialization in producing one or two resources in which they have a competitive advantage. Usually, these resources are the sorts that are the opportune result of geography and are therefore especially susceptible to monopolization. Hyper-specialization leads to underdeveloped home markets, which impoverishes the population without a diverse enough productive sector to absorb labor and induce consumer spending. Thus, there are massive informal sectors of employment.

That workers try to access larger and more competitive markets is a straightforward response to this problem. State borders do the same thing externally that means-tested national welfare states do internally, which is regulate access to protections from changes to the conditions of production, entitlements to the benefits of growth, and more robust home markets. All of these factors contribute to quality of life, which is systematically denied to migrants through border controls. Migrants are workers with fewer or no rights; citizenship is what confers these rights. At this level, racism is highly variable in form. What we call racism here may be something less perceptually and conceptually sticky than the kind of racism that one finds in colonial or apartheid contexts and be aptly called xenophobia instead, but racism is also likely to be an accurate way of describing the kind of discrimination that this process entails due to colonial histories. I don’t have a straightforward way of

distinguishing racism from xenophobia, since the answer is likely to be that it depends on how pervasively and deeply the ideology shapes one's perceptual map.

I close this section by referring once more to functionalist explanations, as they were not needed to argue at any of the preceding levels that I discussed above. What I have done is shown how a system-logic can be racist as a result of the problem-solving dynamics in structural practices in which agents are immanently engaged. The patterns of dependency on labor markets and vulnerability to the oscillations of market competition certainly generate advantages for some and disadvantages for others, but unlike in the disparity paradigm, they are put into a context that answers my original question from Chapter 1, which is "Disadvantaged relative to *what*?" A significant normative problem that the disparity paradigm brings to the surface is that capitalism is a system that creates an interest for some people to shift the burden of competition in a way that is directly antagonistic to the well-being of others. In being anti-solidaristic in this way, it creates fertile ground for racism to flourish as a reason for making these shifts.

## *Racism as a Form of Corruption*

I now define *racism* as a form of discrimination with respect to resources, whereas race is an ideology. More specifically, racism is the use of practical reason to discriminate. Racism causes race. The latter is the sedimented perceptual map combined with essentialist normative expectations. Whereas in Chapter 1 I resisted the language of discrimination due to its uncritical alliance with the disparity paradigm, I now reintroduce the term under a different framework. Discrimination is indeed apt for describing racism under the circumstances that I described above. It will not capture every permutation and social effect

of racial ideologies, but it grasps why "racial domination" can describe a situation that results from class domination.

The process of social differentiation within the class structure is an opportunity for political agents to adapt race concepts to discriminate about who gets access to scarce political and economic resources. I think it is justified for me to put it this simply at the risk of more charges of "reductionism" because I do not think that a population can be dominated in this way if they do not lack resources. As Kwame Ture once said, just as simply,

> "If a white man wants to lynch me, that's his problem. If he's got the power to lynch me, that's my problem. Racism is not a question of attitude; it's a question of power. Thus, if you're anti-racist, whether you know it or not, you must be anti-capitalist. The power for racism, the power for sexism, comes from capitalism, not an attitude."[235]

In my reformulation, the necessary appearance of political and economic scarcity creates the social basis for racism. The disparity paradigm is wrong when it uses the language of discrimination in a way that reinforces the appearance of scarcity, but it is not wrong to see discrimination over something as the problem.

Consider proposals for affirmative action and for reparations. Proponents argue that affirmative action in hiring is required to reduce disparities between groups that result from historical practices of discrimination. Likewise, they demand reparations for slavery and colonialism to do the same thing for redistributing basic resources. The existing justifications for these proposals tends to not challenge the appearance of scarcity on the social terrain in which most people see these sorts of policies playing out, so they are fraught with political debate over what is fair, who deserves what, and who is entitled to what. In my view, these

[235] Kwame Ture (then Stokely Carmichael), "Speech at the University of California, Berkeley," *American Public Media*, 1966. Accessible here: https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/scarmichael.html.

debates are racially charged because they are taking place in a context in which jobs are scarce and dwindling further all the time. Moreover, economic growth is low. One could instead change the rationale for such reforms into an argument that there should be more jobs and more investment in public goods for *everyone* whilst insisting that the developmental needs of different groups and regions are not the same. Discrimination is bad, certainly, but there is enough to go around, actually.

Race is an ideology that distorts such social problems in a fundamental way. Its sedimentation makes it difficult for people to generalize about problems that are germane to this social terrain. For instance, it is not possible to resolve racial inequality in the United States through reparations or affirmative action absent a massive industrial policy that eliminates the concentrated poverty of its urban areas. Black Americans migrated to these cities in huge numbers for a second time as deindustrialization was already underway in the 1950s and 1960s. They could not integrate into labor markets like other immigrant groups were able to do, since increasing downward pressure on a loose labor market made racism even more salient in shaping the general social understanding of this problem. I do not see how redistributing any particular sum of money will fundamentally change this situation today. At best, it is an extremely narrow response to it. But one could have a wider response if one were to generalize about how reparations could fit into a much more ambitious set of reforms.

Thus, the lack of capacity to generalize about the imperatives of market competition is a form of corruption. Capitalism makes people provincial in their politics, resentful in their expectations, and unforgiving in their attitudes toward those who are less fortunate than themselves. It prevents people from having different desires and wanting different things. Race is, therefore, a deadly constraint on political imagination. Moreover, this inhibited capacity to generalize pervades the class structure, which is why racism is not only something

that affects working class and poor people. When a society cannot even conceptualize its problems at the level of generality that it needs to in order to solve them, the ideological effects cannot be circumscribed within a class frame. Rather, race must exceed the class frame of reference if it is to appear as a logically consistent response to what appears as scarcity. I agree with Shelby in writing that, "As long as nonblacks regard the condition of the worst-off African Americans as a sign of inferiority of black people as a whole, the black elite cannot both affirm their black identity and share equal social status with their nonblack elite counterparts."[236] In other words, racism tracks class, even for the elite.

In inhibiting one's capacity for generalizing ideas, reason becomes provincial rather than general. In republican terms, racial ideology is a symptom of the atrophy of reason. Reason can atrophy and decline if it does not adjust to changing conditions, so it is basically an action that can make use of its capacity or not.[237] If one does not exercise reason, then one falls into vice. Wollstonecraft claims that prejudice is how undisciplined minds associates unexamined ideas, which keeps them in a state of childhood, making them "unmanly" in the gendered language of her day. Suggestively, she also links unmanliness explicitly to the servility that she sees resulting from the "iron hand of property."

If I am right that capitalism's competitive constraints persistently undermine the necessary capacities of workers to exercise collective self-determination and that racism emerges as a way to navigate these constraints, then it is accurate to say that racial ideology distorts and obscures class domination. It inhibits the learning process that would lead to identifying self-interest with a collective in the form of solidarity, disabling the epistemic and affective capacities that would need to be properly attuned to be in solidarity. In other words, racial ideology reflects the atrophy and decline of reason, understood as a capacity to

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[236] Shelby, *We Who are Dark*, 87.
[237] Sapiro, "Virtue," 327-8.

generalize in relation to specific problems within changing conditions of production. Instead, racism leads to collective failure in which people find it prudent to identify self-interest much more narrowly on an individual or tribal basis, neither of which can shift the burden of competition once and for all.

The same holds on a global scale, as the economic ties that bind nations become more interdependent, the asymmetry of this interdependence produces nationalist ideologies. Interestingly, nationalism has a fairly consistent way of reifying the categories of race and class on the political right. The latter often emphasizes the betrayal of the "nation" or the "people" by bad, disloyal capitalists. Their focus is never capital as such, but the capitals that do not do right by their native populations, which is a response to the contradictions that arise between experiences of the market and expectations of the state. These ideas reflect expectations that the state ought to protect society from market competition by getting the bad capitals under control. In other words, for conservatives, economics is not a zero-sum game, but politics is, so one must exclude undesirable, disloyal, or unworthy people from the political community for the sake of the economy. Such arguments amplify capitalism's contradictions rather than undermining them, which is what warrants the traditional use of the word *reactionary* on the political left to describe nationalist politics.

## *Conclusion*

Capitalism is systematically racist because race concepts resonate strongly with the historically specific appearance of scarcity that it generates. It is a deadly way of rationalizing problem-solving strategies with respect to competitive constraints. One does not need a sweeping functionalist narrative to make this argument. Instead of using functionalist claims to explain the relationship between race and class, I shifted the social-theoretic and normative

framing to highlight the way that market competition influences capacities to generalize about its constraints. Claims about capitalism's stability or its preconditions for accumulation are immaterial to the central problem of domination. The upshot of this strategy is to turn one's normative horizons more concretely toward universal aspirations for freedom rather than accepting capitalist realism as its limit.

# Chapter 7: Where Are the Independent Women?

This chapter examines the class character of sexism. To reiterate an earlier point, I do not present a total theory of gender or sexuality, but a normative argument supported by a social theory for why capitalism is sexist. My analysis does not offer a theory of gender, but it does offer an overview of normative expectations that people tend to have of "women" under historically specific constraints. It is an analysis that is fundamentally open to exploring how those norms strengthen or relax the gender binary relative to changing historical conditions that include demographic changes, labor force participation rates, and the evolution of welfare states (or the lack thereof). But what I am principally interested in here is the historically specific sense in which it is justified to claim that capitalism perpetuates, and does not provide relief for, sexism. Toward this end, I represent "woman" as a personification of an economic relation and, henceforth, drop the quotation marks.[238]

I expand on insights of socialist feminist theory to analyze how capitalism creates opportunities for women and places constraints on then. I first explain the opportunity part by way of what leads liberal feminists to think that capitalism is good for women. Indeed, I grant liberal feminism one side to the story where I think that other critics of liberal feminism declare too easy of a victory over it. But I maintain that the constraint side is what liberals miss. Capitalism constraints women on a class basis in a manner that encourages persistent anxiety over fertility and family form. This give and take of capitalism toward women is what I call "the antinomy of liberal feminism." I then shift the normative criteria to non-

[238] This is the approach taken by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James in a pamphlet called "Women and the Subversion of the Community" (1971) wherein they declare that all women are housewives, since the housewife is a personified economic relation for the purpose of analyzing reproductive labor in the same way that worker and capitalist are in Marx's analysis of productive labor.

domination to argue that at the core of the liberal antinomy is a social contradiction that belies a deeper pattern of dependency whose opposite is not autonomy, but freedom.

## *Liberal Feminism: Friend or Foe?*

Many feminists have an ambivalent relationship to liberalism. The ambivalence is about how liberalism promotes social exclusion all the while it is touting its accolades in promoting inclusion. As there are many women in the world for whom liberalism seems to have served well, feminists tend to resist liberalism by pointing to its constitutive blind spots. In turn, liberals resist their critics by saying that the blind spots are not constitutive; rather, inclusion is possible within liberalism. In this section, I point out the role that capitalism plays in the debate over liberal feminism and inclusion. Either explicitly or implicitly, liberal feminists tend to think of capitalism as an institutional ally in promoting social inclusion. I explain why this view is plausible and not to be easily dismissed, given the social theory that I have developed thus far.

Liberals see the historical arc of gender politics as progressive, which is wrapped tightly together to a common sense social theory regarding the nature of capitalist development and a normative horizon of equality within it. This position rests on the modernization thesis that says that capitalism is a modernizing force, which means that it tends to challenge so-called traditional social arrangements and encourage new ones. Importantly, the new social arrangements have different norms and cultural mores. Instead of accepting hierarchy, populations come to expect moral and political equality. Instead of accepting toil for the sake of another, one expects fair returns on one's labor. Instead of accepting that those with higher social status deserve their attendant social entitlements, one expects that one must justify any

entitlements with respect to these other norms. Likewise with redistribution. Liberals, therefore, frequently juxtapose progress and tradition.

Indeed, the feminists who identify liberalism as an ally in making the case for gender equality tend to use "tradition" as a negative foil. Susan Okin, for instance, argues that liberalism is in principle less susceptible than other political philosophies to masking traditional forms of gender inequality through a false claim to neutrality. Liberalism may have been historically subject to such a critique, but it fares better than, say, communitarianism in responding to it. In contrast with liberals, communitarians posit an ideal of citizenship and civic virtue within a context of shared values that is implicitly masculine and dominated by men.[239] Alisdair MacIntyre, for instance, claims that liberalism fails generate shared values and a mutually intelligible conception of justice.[240] Liberalism uproots human reason from the traditions that people recognize as meaningful in specific contexts. As a result, individuals within liberal societies develop incommensurable ideas about justice that are jointly incoherent, which becomes irrational, not just. By contrast, communitarians accept that communities share a horizon of meaning that makes justice intelligible. Sharing cultural heritage, common meaning, and so on, create the basis upon which one appeals to justice.

For Okin, this appeal to tradition must be a conservative move that is hostile to feminism. Tradition is often deeply patriarchal, which is something to criticize and not to reinforce. Political liberalism does better by having a theory of justice that is open to such a feminist challenge. She claims that liberalism is at fault for presuming problem that justice is a matter that applies primarily to the state and the economy but not the household and the family. Historically, liberalism has obscured the political character of the family and the social

[239] Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 41-73.
[240] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Terra Haute, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

institutions that enforce it implicitly positing that the private sphere is meant to be a respite for men *from* politics rather than a place *of* politics. A myriad of binary and oppressive gender norms emerges from such an assumption, like that women are emotional hysterics, that women are natural caregivers in the home, and so on. What makes liberalism open to feminist challenge is that its own commitments invite it. [241] Okin writes that what is needed is to take feminist critiques of the family and the gendered division of labor seriously so as to demystify the so-called private sphere and extend contractual thinking to it. The point is to challenge the "entrenched institutionalization of sexual difference."[242]

Unlike communitarianism, liberalism is forward looking. It promotes norms that support gender and sex equality if they are interpreted in the way that Okin suggests. Indeed, Martha Nussbaum argues that liberalism posits a deep vision of personhood and autonomy, which can become a sort of auto-critique of gender norms. For example, society often expects that women abandon themselves to the care of their children and to the pleasure of their partners, but liberalism says, "Fine, so long as you think first. Abandon yourself, as long as you do so within a context of equality and non-instrumental respect."[243] She goes on to write that,

> "In short, wherever you most mistrust habit, there you have the most need for reason…[W]omen should realize that where the voice of tradition speaks, that voice is most often male, and it has even invented a little squeaky voice for women to speak in, a voice that may be far from being their own true voice, whatever precise content we attach to the idea."[244]

In sum, liberal feminism promotes norms that facilitate the flourishing of women as individuals who are not tied down to role. How liberal norms do so in practice is to ensure

[241] Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family,* 125-8.
[242] Ibid., 6.
[243] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 79.
[244] Ibid.

that individuals have the practical capacities to make use of basic liberties, like health, imagination, leisure, and education.[245] In response to the objection that liberal feminism is *de facto* doing the same thing as their opponents by positing false moral universals about the situation of *all* women, Martha Nussbaum argues the same point as Okin from a different angle. It may be true that dominant conceptions of liberalism (including feminist ones) neglect historical and cultural differences, which means that their practical effects are to interpret and impose liberal norms in an imperialist way. However, liberalism's strength is its commitment to reasonable value pluralism among equals, so it is possible to support reasonable divergences in institutional and cultural interpretations of this core ideal. Liberalism is open-ended and non-exhaustive, which is what makes it forward-looking and, therefore, good for women.

Capitalism is an institutional ally in this moral worldview. As Ann Cudd writes, it is also "good for women" (Cudd 2015).[246] If liberal feminism's central commitment is to "work to protect and promote women's ability to live lives of their own choosing by identifying autonomy deficits in women's lives and promoting the conditions that enable autonomy," then capitalism does this better than other social institutions.[247] Cudd writes,

> "My main concern is to argue for capitalism as a feminist ideal for the future, by which I mean that capitalism initiated and continues to motivate a feminist political transformation of society from the oppressive patriarchy of the past to an enlightened freedom for women and men in the future. By feminist political transformation I mean a transformation of the formal and informal social structures of society that allows

[245] Ibid., 42-7. For a fuller development, see Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 2011.
[246] Ann E. Cudd, "Is Capitalism Good for Women?" *Journal of Business Ethics* 127(2015): 761-770.
[247] Baehr, Amy R. "Liberal Feminism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/feminism-liberal/ (accessed April 8, 2022).

persons, regardless of sex, gender, race, or other attributed status, to freely and fully develop their personalities and capacities."[248]

Capitalism is historically responsible for important improvements to women's lives, like technological innovations that improve maternal and infant health, birth control, and that reduce the burden of domestic labor.[249] It also generates opportunities for employment that give women greater bargaining power outside and within the home. It is, therefore, a challenge to, if not straightforwardly opposed to, traditional patriarchal arrangements for the simple reason that it tends to undermine naturalized assumptions about who and what women are.

While Cudd does not take the argument further, it is clear that one can extend it to LGBT rights and increasing tolerance in capitalist countries of non-traditional family forms. When the material basis for tightly circumscribing the social roles surrounding biological reproduction and fertility erode, people start to question why they are necessary and whether they have other, more authentic desires of their own. Thus, political opportunities emerge to struggle for change. One way of summarizing this point of view is that capitalism promotes an ideal of non-discrimination for individuals by undermining the material basis for their persistence. Instead of the norm of "womanly self-sacrifice" lamented by Okin, norms of bodily autonomy and self-interest emerged instead. Capitalism creates institutional openings to re-interpret such norms according to liberal standards of justice.

Given the social theory that I have developed thus far, this liberal argument for capitalism as good for women has considerable strengths. What liberals are right to see in capitalism is that its structural transformations create political opportunities of a gendered kind. They are

[248] Ann Cudd, "For Capitalism as Feminist Ideal and Reality," in *Capitalism, For and Against: A Feminist Debate*, 26.
[249] Ibid., 29 and "Is Capitalism Good for Women?" 768.

also right to see that this structural transformation has a normative dimension. First, the relative equality of market dependency compels women to present themselves on the market as individuals. Market competition separates the kinship unit such that each person within it appears as an individual at work, at school, and with suffrage, in politics. That demands for women's political equality emerge as a result of this system seems like a historical fact that I do not see the point in denying. It seems global and cross-cultural. Second, labor-power has an abstract value from the point of view of capital, so the gender of the laborer is less important to the functionality of the productive process. It is also a general trend that what emerges from these changes are demands for economic equality like access to trades and professions and equal pay for equal work.

Finally, cultural changes in gender norms follow from this historical arc. Capitalism creates the political space to decouple biological from social reproduction. Insofar as gender norms track cultural expectations of the unity between those two things, they are vulnerable to challenge as soon as they decompose. The advent of widespread birth control, reproductive technology, and more efficient household technologies all decrease the medical risks of childbearing as well as the time that women spend pregnant, cleaning, or caring for children. Fertility rates go down, women's labor force participation goes up. People start to question why families need to be heterosexual, or why they need to have families at all. People begin to challenge the gender binary that makes the link between biological and social reproduction seem like the natural way of things. As developmental tendencies, these political developments also seem generalizable, albeit to different degrees and within different discursive frames.

In sum, there are norms immanent to capitalist development that agents tend to interpret in ways that challenge gender hierarchies. Once more, these norms are of equality, desert, and entitlement. Laboring under these conditions not only produces expectations of equality, but

who deserves remuneration for their work, including for housework, sex work, and gestational work (i.e., surrogacy). All of these areas of work can become commodities whose value becomes intelligible in exchange for money, just like labor-power itself. These transformations lead to real political opportunities for those who are both fundamental to social reproduction and who are nonetheless marginalized from the privatized labor process that creates surplus value. As Marx once put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, "all that is solid melts into air." I believe that any feminist critique of liberal feminism needs to begin by granting that these opportunities exist, however partially realized they may be. Otherwise, the distinct way in which capitalism constrains the horizon of gender equality fails to come clearly into view.

### *The Antinomy of Liberal Feminism*

There are many critiques of liberal feminism from almost every corner of feminist theory. Critics say that liberal feminism is provincial, imperialist, and elitist. In reading feminist literature on this topic, one often gets the sense that the critique of liberal feminism is naturally a critique of capitalism as such. I do not think that the two so easily coincide, so what critics often fail to appreciate is a real antinomy in liberal feminist thinking about how capitalism does and does not reproduce gender inequality. Therefore, feminist critics are often more ambivalent about capitalism than they advertise. By "antinomy" I mean that there are two theoretical postulates that are both true but they contradict each other. Opportunities are real, but so are constraints. Getting to the bottom of what is sexist about capitalism must account for both, rather than denying the former as an elitist or imperial mystification.

I begin by discussing post-colonial critiques of liberal feminism before moving on the socialist critiques. Liberal feminism has an easy relationship with capitalism, but it does not have an easy relationship with the colonial history of advanced capitalist countries. Much of what Serene Khader calls anti-imperialist feminisms are hostile to capitalism for reproducing global inequality along post-colonial lines. As Khader summarizes, anti-imperialist feminists persuasively argue that liberalism has done much to justify saving "other" women outside of the cultural West and the economic North as a sort of missionary project to wrench them out of their backward traditions.[250] In idealizing capitalist development, liberals seem to insist that what is harming women in the global South is actually good for them. In endorsing capitalist norms, liberals also seem to insist that women in the global South do not know what is good for them. Liberal norms like autonomy are not universal in their aspirations. Rather, they are provincial cultural norms that are being imposed on women through colonial ties.

The problem is that a norm like autonomy has a dark side. Western women might find it empowering, but that is because they already accept that the capitalist labor market is a source of emancipation. They glorify independence and work, but in doing so, they fail to recognize that there are forms of dependence within communities that people also find valuable and that they want to preserve. Or, if they want to change such forms of dependence, they do not want to do so through the western normative framing of the problem. "Autonomy" and "independence" are not necessarily the means to resist sexism in all cases. When liberals assume that they are, they endorse a worldview where they insist that women need to do what's bad for them in order to do what's good for them. This perspective is condescending, racist, and Eurocentric. It's what Khader calls "missionary feminism."

[250] Serene J. Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019). See also Chela Sandoval, "US Third-World-Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders* 10(1991): 1-24.

I have no quarrel with this argument against missionary feminism, as far as it goes. What I am unconvinced by is the scope of the argument. I do not believe that it is necessarily outside the orbit of liberal feminism, nor am I convinced that capitalism as such is the target of this critique. Liberal feminism can auto correct with regard to these critiques, so there is some normative ambiguity regarding its criticism of capitalist development as such. The post-colonial critique of liberal feminism is in principle amenable to a rescue project for liberalism that accepts an "enlightened" capitalism as a background condition for a more genuinely universalist moral perspective that is attenuated to better appreciate social differences. The capability approach would be an example of such a solution.

To put the issue provocatively: If the crux of the post-colonial argument is about the normative status of post-colonial capitalist development, then what remains unclear is whether the door is open to enlightened liberal capitalism. My reasons for making this counter-intuitive claim are the following. Post-colonial arguments tend to assume that capitalism and liberalism go hand-in-hand, i.e., what one does when one rejects Western capital's justificatory strategy is reject capital itself. But there is some ambiguity to assuming that capitalism is necessarily liberal or that it requires justification through the lens of a uniquely Western liberal ideology. Ambiguity arises in two ways, the first more general than the second. The first is that when it becomes evident that capitalist development does not carry liberalism on its back, Western liberal Enlightenment ideals tend to be held to account for their hypocrisy, duplicity, and partiality. Liberal norms present themselves as a provincial paradox – emancipatory for some (well-to-do white women in the West), but not all, in a capitalist system that (in fact) benefits the North but (more or less intentionally) betrays its ideals in the South.

Interestingly, the charge that liberal feminism is an outgrowth of Western ethnocentrism seems to imply that liberalism is indeed emancipatory for Western women, which implicitly

posits that the standard-bearer of Western womanhood is well-to-do and white. Post-, de-, or transnational feminist texts tend to allow a very strong dichotomy between the latter sort of woman and women in the global South. Working class women in the global North, however, historically faced similar challenges in resisting or adapting to capitalist transition. In some cases, they continue to do so. The level of women's labor organization in the U.S., for instance, is more similar to countries like Brazil and Turkey than it is to countries in Western Europe. If one takes working class women on the whole to be the subject of interest, the lines begin to blur between "Western women" and "Other women." Insisting that it is conceptually adequate for heuristic purposes to compare rich, white, western women to poor, racialized, other women reifies race and nation at the expense of class and labor.

In emphasizing differences, some similarities are eclipsed in a way that makes capitalist transition seem like a natural cultural outgrowth of the West rather than what is actually was and is, which is bloody and conflict-ridden. Without exploring lines of contiguous development, liberal feminism's staunchest critics are as at risk of idealizing capitalism as much as liberals themselves. Western capitalism enters the comparison with non-Western capitalism in a way that precludes the possibility that capitalism is *not* intrinsically liberal and that liberalism has *always* been contradictory, partial, and a hypocritical justification for social inclusion, even in the West. It moreover precludes asking whether the West's working majority may be less provincial in comparison with the conditions of the South than its idealized middle class constituency would lead one to believe, especially given twenty-first century changes to the conditions of capitalist production like deindustrialization, the

disappearance of middle-skilled work, an expansion of informal labor markets, austerity, and waves of forced migration to urban areas amidst population decline in rural ones.[251]

The normative ambiguity is that the challenge to liberal feminism's presumptuous one-size fits all endorsement of norms such as autonomy and independence leaves open the possibility of reconfiguring liberalism to address such concerns. Could liberal feminism throw off its missionary fetters? Is there no liberal feminism that endorse an ideal of equal personhood that is sensitive to social difference? I believe that it could. Liberal feminism might offer a critique of how international markets are currently creating a zero-sum game between community and autonomy. It might contend that what is fundamental to feminism is not strong normative ideals of autonomy and economic independence, but more capacious moral universals that allows value pluralism to flourish in the context of the increased labor productivity and growth. It could argue for a kind of developmentalism whose goal is creating the material conditions for such value pluralism, as in Nussbaum's capabilities approach.[252] The capabilities approach seeks to promote a form of economic development in which individuals can realize forms of life that they find genuinely valuable, including within communities, religions, as well as leisure and play.

There is some intersection between anti-imperial and socialist feminisms. I distinguish the two here because these strands of feminist thought tend to emphasize different things, not because there is no substantive agreement between them. I discuss their differences in emphasis to show that both have weaknesses when it comes to development a normative critique of capitalism as such. Indeed, socialist feminists tend to describe liberal feminism as an elitist paradigm in the same way that anti-imperialist feminism tends to describe liberal

[251] Cf. Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London and New York: Verso Books), Chapters 2 and 3, in which Chibber argues for the disaggregation of Enlightenment norms from capitalist development.
[252] Cf. Nussbaum, *The Capabilities Approach* and Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London, Penguin Books, 2009).

feminism as a Western one. Agreement on both points is, I assume, where these strands of feminism are likely to converge. Nonetheless, they are subjecting different aspects of liberal feminism to criticism.

Socialist feminists argue that the problem with the liberal point of view is not just omission, exclusion, or ethnocentric blind spots, but a social theory that idealizes capitalism as an institutional ally and thus reinforces those blind spots. I argue that it is a weakness of the socialist feminist view as it has developed thus far that these arguments against the liberal social theory are not *ipso facto* also normative arguments against liberal feminism. They are best understood as arguments for why capitalism is the wrong institutional ally for liberal feminism. Socialist feminism has the great disadvantage of being normatively underdeveloped. It rightly posits that capitalism as such is sexist in its development, but it also does not explain why liberal feminism cannot auto correct to become more critical of this situation. Pithily, why not radical liberal feminism?

Socialist feminists argue that, by contrasting "tradition" with capitalist modernity specifically, liberal feminists implicitly posit that gender oppression is anachronistic in the context of capitalist development. In other words, it's a hold-over from a different system – patriarchy, which is endemic to pre-capitalist societies but not to capitalist ones. Cinzia Arruzza captures this assumption well,

> "The typical narrative undergirding liberal feminism implicitly (or even explicitly) relies on the notion of social and technical progress and on a philosophy of history that views women's and sexual oppression as residual vestiges of a pre-capitalist past,

> that is, of a patriarchal system or of patriarchal cultural norms progressively swept away by capitalism's advancements [...]"[253]

Whereas Marx once said that "all that is solid melts into air" under the constraints of capitalist development, a slogan that could apply to left critiques of the modernization thesis is "all that is old becomes new again" by way of class inequality and the influence of colonial geopolitical ties. Arruzza argues "that these forms of oppression cannot be considered remnants from a not entirely overcome pre-capitalist past but should be analyzed in their capitalist contemporaneity."[254] Arruzza´s argument is "based on the opposite view that capitalism reproduces gender and sexual oppression in various ways and in new forms." Women's oppression originates from specifically capitalist dynamics. Arruzza continues,

> "Contrary to interpretations insisting on capitalism's capacity to uproot and dissolve patriarchal social relations and cultural traditions, the global oppression of women today should be interpreted precisely as an eminently contemporary phenomenon rather than an anachronism. This oppression is produced and reproduced by the inequalities inherent to capitalist accumulation and by the capitalist reorganization of the relation between production and social reproduction."[255]

What Arruzza means by specifically capitalist dynamics has to do with its historically specific way of linking of production and reproduction, the latter being both biological and social. This feminist perspective on political economy posits that that there is a systematic relationship between capitalism, the conditions of reproductive life, and sexist oppression.

[253] Cinzia Arruzza, "Capitalism´s Insidious Charm vs. Women´s and Sexual Liberation," in *Feminism, Capitalism and Critique. Essays in Honor of Nancy Fraser*, ed. Banu Bargu and Chiara Bottici (Cham Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 86.
[254] Ibid., 89.
[255] Ibid., 94.

There are different ways of modelling this relationship. The main positions emerged after the publication of Juliet Mitchell's "Women: The Longest Revolution" in 1966. Mitchell claimed that socialists were often committed to liberating women as a "normative ideal," but did not have a convincing social-theoretic account of women's oppression. Mitchell argued that there are four categories of social structures that develop unevenly to create a "complex unity" of the different elements of gendered experience: production, reproduction, socialization, and sexuality.[256] Zillah Eisenstein argued that the relationship between reproduction, socialization, and sexuality to production was unclear. Mitchell's view was vague and did not offer a method for pursuing the inquiry further.[257]

One position argued for dual-systems theory, in which patriarchy and capitalism were distinct systems, one which benefitted capitalists and one which benefitted men. In this view, the labor system controls production and the sex/gender system controls reproduction, producing a hierarchy between men and women and a unique solidarity amongst men to maintain it.[258] The two systems often interlock and conflict, presenting discrete political questions for feminist and socialist demands.[259] Some described patriarchy as a network of psychic and property relations holding relative autonomy vis-à-vis capitalism because patriarchy includes the organisation of the family.[260] The family produces human subjects outside the scope of the logic of capital accumulation, although it aids and abets it. Others

[256] Juliet Mitchell, "Women: The Longest Revolution" in*Women, Class and the Feminist Imagination: A Socialist-Feminist Reader,* ed. Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 43-73. Cf. Mitchell, *Pyschoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian* Psychoanalysis (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).
[257] Zillah Eisenstein, "Constructing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy," in *Women, Class and the Feminist Imagination,* 132–34.
[258] Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism."
[259] Ferguson and Folbre, "The Unhappy Marriage of Capitalism and Patriarchy."
[260] Kuhn, "Structures of Patriarchy and Capital in the Family" in *Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production,* ed. Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe (London: Routledge, 1978), 42-67; and McDonough and Harrison, "Patriarchy and Relations of Production" in *Feminism and Materialism,* 11-41.

argued that women are a discrete social class who are exploited by virtue of the sexual, emotional, and affective division of labor.[261]

Another position argues for a single system theory. They argue that the household division of labour, or men discriminating against women in the workplace, is essential for producing surplus value. Capitalism creates an institutional distinction between public and private spheres of life that did not exist in the feudal mode of production. In feudal societies, individual households produced many goods intended for market exchange by the whole family. When dual-systems theorists accept sharp distinctions between patriarchy and capitalism they take out of their historical context the institutional divisions produced by the transition to capitalism itself. Iris Young argued that dual systems theories operate as additives to analyses of production, but do not enrich or transform them. The category of class maintains its rigid analytical parameters in dual systems theories, with non-exploitative social oppressions simply added on.[262]

In either case, the core socialist feminist capitalism systemically subordinates reproductive activities to productive ones. In fact, there is a latent contradiction between them, which has far-reaching effects beyond the workplace. This perspective adopts the Marxian view that labor market dependency of direct producers (labor) and appropriators (capital) is a precondition for capitalism's competitive constraints on both labor and capital. What emerges is an economic system that produces for exchange value instead of for use value, which, in non-technical language, means that capital competes for profit by cutting prices and retaining market shares in various types of consumer markets. Labor, on the other

[261] Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, trans. Diana Leonard (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Zillah Eisenstein, "Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism," in *Feminism and Materialism*, 42–67; Ann Ferguson, "Women as a New Revolutionary Class in the US" in *Between Labor and Capital*, ed. Pat Walker, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), 279–309.
[262] Young, "The Limits of Dual Systems Theory" in *Women and Revolution,* 43-70.

hand must compete to work for capital for access to wages and, therefore, the means of subsistence. This process is exploitative in more ways than one.

Workers produce and sell commodities for exchange, and they prepare others to produce and sell them as well. In other words, workers need to work, but they also need to regenerate their own capacity to labor, which is a process that is both social and biological in nature. Simply put, someone must do the reproductive labor needed for regeneration—birth, death, childrearing, housework, education, healthcare, and so on. Social reproductive labor has a close historical tie with childbearing. Lise Vogel writes that, "What raises the question of gender is, of course the phenomenon of generational replacement of bearers of labour-power – that is, the replacement of existing workers by new workers from the next generation."[263] The gender of those bearing children is not, of course, preordained. But childbearing takes on a particular social meaning and thus gender "within certain modes of societal and social reproduction that have specific features."[264]

The contradiction is that capitalism systematically undermines its own conditions for social reproduction, despite its being essential to social cohesion beyond the labor market and its role in ensuring the reproduction of labor power within it. Fraser explains that,

> "[E]very form of capitalist society harbours a deep-seated 'crisis tendency' or contradiction: on the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies. This social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism lies at the root of the so-called

[263] Lise Vogel, *Marxism and Women's Oppression,* 146.
[264] Cinzia Arruzza, "Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and its Critics," *Science and Society* 80 (2016): 22.

crisis of care. Although inherent in capitalism as such, it assumes a different and distinctive guise in every historically specific form of capitalist society…."[265]

Fraser explains this self-undermining tendency further by describing how changes to the way that capitalism organizes production influence the organization of reproduction. What is part and parcel to capitalist development historically it has adjusted to these "economic" changes and influenced them in return to try to satisfy "non-economic" needs that are not met by the market alone. The social reproductive dimension to class conflict involves reconfiguring the relationship between capitalist firms, families, and states to provide social welfare. Capitalism tends to undermine and disavow the social reproductive capacities on which it relies.

The strength of the socialist feminist argument is to point out that capitalism is contradictory, so liberals are whiggish in their optimism about true gender equality within it. This tradition is at its best in dealing in social theory. Indeed, it is the social theory that creates the dividing line between socialists and liberals here. But its weakness is that the normative basis of disagreement is not clear. Specifically, it's still not clear why a contradiction is a problem that cannot be evaluated through a liberal lens. Why can't liberal feminism simply claim that what is wrong with capitalism as it exists is that it fails to internalize the costs of social reproduction? An enlightened capitalism would fully take on board the need to pay for reproduction. If all capitals were forced to do so, then one could level the playing field of competition and therein eliminate gender inequality. If the central claim is that the costs of reproduction are excluded from the costs of production, which produces a gendered division of labor, then inclusion of those costs should eliminate the

[265] Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capitalism and Care," *New Left Review* 100 (July/Aug 2016): 100.

problem. Liberal feminism may be an ally toward this end, arguing that realizing women's autonomy demands it.

Socialist feminists unwittingly reproduce the logic of externalities, which might mean that liberal feminism can be part of the solution rather than the problem. If the problem is one of externalities, then why isn't it right for feminists to reinterpret liberal norms to incorporate the costs of reproduction? Capitalism has already created so many opportunities for gender equality in politics, the workplace, and the welfare state. I wonder if socialist feminists have really made their case that capitalism cannot be reformed in the right way. It is a heavy weight for a theory to bear to depend on denying such a counterfactual. Indeed, there is as much evidence of progress in inclusion as there is of exclusion. An increase in women's autonomy seems to accompany all of the structural transformations with which socialist feminists rightly take issue. Moreover, the contradiction that socialist feminists point out might be less of a contradiction and more of a market failure. I contend that there is a real antinomy in liberal feminism that socialists have yet to resolve.

### *What's in a Contradiction?*

The antinomy of liberal feminism, then, is that capitalism does really transform gender relations in such a way that it creates political openings to agitate for equality. It also creates opportunities for parity among sexual partners. It's also true, however, that it tends to undermine equality and parity by transforming the conditions of production. Whatever women have done to secure the conditions of reproduction on a more equal basis, the imperatives of production tend to superimpose themselves on whatever status quo

arrangements exist. If both are true, liberal feminism is half right, but it misjudges the second half as a progression toward the realization of the first.

The modernization thesis is how liberal feminism resolves this antinomy. Indeed, Cudd says as much explicitly, which is why she supports an "enlightened capitalism" that does better to live up to its ideal. Autonomy is still the goal, however unrealized it still may be in many cases. On the other hand, socialist feminists have challenged the usefulness of this idealized conception of the system for making sense of persistent sexism within it. Its social theory says that capitalism cannot fully emancipate women. When I ask, "What's in a contradiction?" I am asking what the socialist feminist criteria are for fully emancipating women. Why are contradictions so bad? Hegel, for instance, would not say that a contradiction is bad. They just exist as conflicts that get resolved in higher stages of human self-realization, but that also produce new conflicts. Contradictions are a part of the structure of human consciousness itself. One might argue from this point of view that what exists right now is the concept autonomy that has yet to be realized concretely. What socialist feminists seem to want to do is to complete liberal feminism, not to undermine it. The point of contention is the range of what's possible under capitalism; the debate is about how liberal criteria are applied with the wrong social theory, not about the criteria themselves.

Indeed, socialist feminists rely on the dominance of a particularly narrow and elitist normative archetype of liberal feminism to make their objections to it. They often target the popularized "lean-in" feminism, where in their philosophical argumentation, liberals almost uniformly support strong state support for women and their dependents, as well as for value pluralism regarding family form. So, there is some discrepancy here between what socialists claim that liberals believe and what they do believe, which lends itself to trumped up normative charges. But in fact, liberals *also* challenge the formal and informal gendered division of labor, the nuclear family unit, and essentializing gender norms. Change is not

always bad, so the fact that capitalism undermines some historical solutions to these problems over time does not necessarily indict the system as a whole. A case in point would be the patriarchal nature of the early welfare state. If it was so patriarchal, as many feminist scholars in the 1980s claimed, then why is capitalism wrong to undermine it, given cultural changes in gender norms and sexual mores?

What socialist feminists would need to prove is that capitalism has a *fatal* contradiction. As I understand it, the search for a fatal contradiction is what tends to make functionalist arguments attractive here as well. They argue that capitalism is so dependent on reproductive labor that it would collapse without its support, which is why there is a socialist history of demanding wages "against" housework. One could say that capital is the grossest free rider, so if it stops getting a free ride, then it may buckle under its own weight.[266] I have already said why I think this sort of counterfactual hypothesis is a weak grounds for critique in both the previous chapter and in the previous section. What I argue here is that socialist feminists have undersold the normative problem that they raise. What is needed is not to double down on the functionalist reasoning, but to use the social theory to shift the normative parameters for how one thinks about problems of reproduction in our lives.

One way of making such a shift would be to focus on quality and scope of capitalist democracy. Fraser argues that capital oppresses women through the "three D's" – division, dependence, and disavowal – to say that the system is systematically undemocratic. She claims that capitalism (a) divides production and reproduction, (b) depends on reproduction, and (c) disavows reproduction practically and ideologically.[267] Practically, capital

[266] Fraser is the most contemporary advocate of this position, but something like it is implied in the "Wages for Housework" campaign of the 1970s, when socialist and autonomist feminists argued that it was revolutionary to demand compensation for reproductive labor. The point was that it is impossible for capitalism to do so, which means that such a demand is implicitly pushing against the boundaries of the system. See Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," in *Revolution at Point Zero* (Brooklyn, NY: PM Press, 2012) and Selma James, *Our Time is Now: Sex, Race, Class, and Caring for People and the Planet* (Brooklyn, NY: PM Press, 2021).
[267] Fraser, *Capitalism*, 152-5.

externalizes the costs of reproduction by refusing to pay for it. Ideologically, capital justifies this move by making reproduction a matter of choice and cultural value, not of system inputs. Fraser goes on to argue that the system "truncates the political agenda" by undermining public autonomy.[268]

But one need not only look to highly educated women to create problems for this story. Women with college degrees are able to compete best with men the in sectors of industry that create the most interchangeability and time-flexibility among employees. Claudia Goldin has broken down the gender pay gap in the United States in a way that reflects these trends. Women lawyers struggle to achieve parity with their peers, but veterinarians and pharmacists do not. The difference, she suggests, is the standardization of the work, the flexibility of the hours, and the absence of a "winner take all" model for one's time commitment to one's job in getting promotions, tenure, etc. There is a zero-sum trade-off between career and family, but gender parity in negotiating it is possible. Indeed, one might argue instead that capitalism is more democratic than any previous mode of production and is therefore the best possible alternative. Capitalism creates flexibility in labor markets that allows people to attain more caregiving parity than ever before. For example, some professions, like pharmacy and veterinary medicine, have become more flexible and standardized, thereby lessening the effect of the disadvantages that women may incur as a result of familial demand for reproductive labor. [269]

I argue that the needed shift in normative perspective is a republican one. The normative ambiguity in the socialist feminist case results from being an instance of the tail wagging the dog of the argument. That social contradictions exist does not give adequate grounds for normative critique.  are not the normative grounds for critique. Rather, contradictions

[268] Ibid., 131.
[269] Claudia Goldin, *Career & Family: Women's Century-Long Journey Toward Equity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

illuminate a more fundamental problem in the relationship between capitalist production and reproduction. This problem is one of domination. Recall that I have argued in earlier chapters that the republican concept of domination reducible to the deliberative democrat's criteria of there being a lack of public autonomy. Domination is an interest and a capacity to exercise arbitrary power in an asymmetrically interdependent relationship. I quite agree with the deliberative democrat that democracy is an entailment of what it means to live free of arbitrary power. Nonetheless, I think democracy is just that – an entailment, and that its relative absence is symptomatic of domination, which does not mean that lack of democracy simply *is* what domination *is*. Said otherwise, the presence of domination and the absence of democracy are strongly related but conceptually distinct problems.

First, socialist feminists should emphasize different normative criteria for diagnosing sexist oppression. Where liberal feminisms emphasize heteronomy, socialist feminists should emphasize domination. The competitive constraint superimposes itself on processes of reproduction. Women do work that is simultaneously fundamental to production and marginal to the system as a whole. This work depends on having access to the labor market, so market competition is a gravitational force around which women and their families organize their lives. The extent to which there is capitalism-specific sexist oppression is the extent to which women confront their vulnerability to market competition in a way that is gender-specific. If I am right to argue that market competition is a gravitational force pulling on women as individual workers, family units, and on the resources that both need to care for dependents, then there is a social basis for thinking through why these capitalism-specific trends are harmful to women as a form of arbitrary power.

Indeed, I suggest that the following problems emerge based on my analysis of the effects of the competitive constraint. First, the interplay between inter- and intraclass conflict incentivizes political strategies for women that (a) prioritize capital's interests as a means to

inclusion within the system and, (b) prioritize men's competitive advantage in the system over their own. Capital need not return the concern in kind, which can also be true about the men who have a relative competitive advantage over women. Thus, there is a developmental tendency for core structural practices to reinforce non-reciprocal social relationships on both levels. If one assumes that autonomy is good and heteronomy is bad, then it is difficult to avoid paternalistic judgments that women are harming themselves, given that women often choose to subordinate gender-related interests to other kinds precisely because they want to preserve forms of heteronomy that they find valuable and that capitalism undermines.

Why the immanent contradiction ought to be condemned as unjust is that it enables capital to intervene arbitrarily in women's lives, particularly in their reproductive lives. What I mean by "intervene" here is that capital can superimpose itself on processes of social reproduction without having to make decisions with due consideration for women's interests. Indeed, what it means for capital to subordinate processes of reproduction to those of production is to have a relatively high capacity to change, enforce, and motivate the priorities of the productive process over and against other concerns. In Marxian parlance, domination is occurring when the law of value takes precedent over other ways of valuing in the vital institutions in which humans cooperate together to reproduce their lives. Capacities for independence are valuable relative to the extent of domination, which means that they are not always in themselves emancipatory. What the republican concept of domination does is allow feminists to take a step back to evaluate the background conditions for the choices that women make.

Second, one ought to emphasize a different ideal of freedom. Where liberal feminists emphasize independence, socialist feminists should emphasize non-arbitrary dependence. If economic independence is not a one size fits all normative ideal, then what is needed are some criteria for forms of dependency that do not qualify as domination and instead expand

the scope of freedom under conditions of domination. My approach is indeed different from many classical republican approaches that also emphasize independence, as the traditional ideal of independence is not viable from a feminist perspective. The substance of reproductive labor is care. It is about caring for one another in our moments of greatest vulnerability and need. If feminists are right about the latter, then republican feminism cannot endorse freedom as independence. But it can endorse freedom as non-domination, which seeks to eliminate capacities and interests in exercising arbitrary power from interdependent social relationships. What the feminist perspective does is make a micro point into a macro one. Economies are intrinsically interdependent structural practices, so it is not only unrealistic to say that independence is the key to the solution but doing so may reify the inside/outside way of thinking about what the economy is.

One might even re-frame what independence means from a republican feminist perspective. In this view, one might say that independence is a derivative concept that only makes sense within a society that is free of arbitrary power. To republican feminists, economic independence may be one possible strategy within a more fundamental effort to reduce the effects of arbitrary power that reinforce sexist oppression. As Bruno Leopold, James Muldoon, and Mirjam Müller, write of the women in the *Union des Femmes* of the Paris Commune,

> "Unlike liberal and bourgeois republican feminists, the women of the Union des femmes did not primarily define their programme in terms of a campaign for universal suffrage. Instead, they focused on social improvements to women's lives such as greater access to education and new economic institutions that would enable women to retain the fruits of their labour. In particular, their experience of marginalisation within the workers' movement convinced them of the need to form women's producer co-operatives to ensure women's economic independence as part

> of broader plans for the socialist re-organisation of the economy. This political programme made the Union des femmes the first large political group of women to theorise the distinctive oppression of working-class women and to struggle for their collective liberation."[270]

The working class women in the Paris Commune did emphasize economic independence, but in the service of new, collective institutions that reduce domination. This vision is a far cry from forcing women into the workforce to go it alone while abandoning communal ties in the service of becoming a self-sustaining professional or a small business owner. It is a way of reimagining social ties on women's terms, i.e., reproductive self-determination, with due materialist respect of actually existing conditions and what is historically possible. Today, one might say that this point of view is in stark contrast to existing empowerment schemes like micro-credit financing or NGO work that is consistent with capitalist domination. Instead, feminists can use the principle of non-domination to justify alternative economic arrangements, like women's producer cooperatives that allow women to maintain valuable relationships by transforming them.

The counter to liberal feminism is not, therefore, that it has the wrong social theory for realizing norms of autonomy and genuine democracy. Rather, it is that liberal feminism mystifies market imperatives, which helps to keep up the charade of economic independence as an emancipatory ideal under capitalist conditions. In a word, economic independence should never be endorsed as an ideal out of context. Freedom, as Wollstonecraft put it, has to do with the absence of arbitrary power and having capacities to have different desires and to want different things. It is not about telling women what to want or what the feminist good life is. Republicanism, too, endorses value pluralism, but it has different criteria for what it

[270] Bruno Leopold, James Muldoon, and Mirjam Müller, " 'Aux Ouvrières!': Socialist Feminism in the Paris Commune,": DOI: 10.1080/17496977.2021.2017702

considers to be freedom in the background conditions that make it possible. It avoids being missionary while maintaining universalist aspirations.

## *Building on Socialist Feminism*

In this section, I once more describe sexist domination on three different levels. I discuss the family, demographics, and the state. I am building on the points of agreement in socialist feminist theory to argue that each level reflects a specific way that capital superimposes itself on processes of social reproduction. My own innovations on this theory appear mostly in the way that I articulate the norms that I take to be immanent to reproductive practices in this context. These are particularly present in the second two levels after the family, where I put a finer point on the normative development demographic trends and the various iterations of the welfare state. These are themes that are far from new in socialist feminist theory, but they have received less attention in the contemporary revival of interest in "social reproduction theory" than previous generations have given them.

*The Family.* To begin with the family, my view is that working class families have an asymmetrically interdependent relationship with capital. The form of this relationship is similar to the one that holds between capital and labor. One difference between my view and other similar views is that others argue that this interdependence is more symmetrical than I think it is. They claim that capital is so dependent on reproductive labor that such labor produces the preconditions for capital to appropriate surplus value, so one can envision a social reproduction strike that has as much of an impact on capital as strike of wage earners. I disagree, as I think this position conflates social preconditions and strategic impact. Theories underestimate the interdependence within families that prevent women from holding out in a

sustained strike of this kind. Families are composite economic units, so at some point that is nearer in time to the time it would take to have a meaningful effect on capital, refusing to feed, bathe, and assist one's children is more of a strain on a family than it is on an employer. If these sorts of strikes are to be effective, they have to disrupt the productive process directly, which means that they need the cooperation of wage-earners. That women's strikes tend to only last for a day or two shows that families are more dependent on capital than the reverse.

Having said that, this form of dependence is systematic. On the one hand, capitalism pulls women out of the home and into the workforce. On the other hand, it pushes them back out of it to do housework. Dalla Costa and James argued that all women are housewives, so one can think about housewives as a personification of economic relations in the same way that one would normally think about capital and labor as such personifications. I believe that what they meant by this is that women experience this push and pull dynamic, so the position of the housewife is a position that someone must occupy. The person who occupies it is a woman. The woman experiences separation from children and family members who are also pulled out of the house to work or go to school, which is a radical shift in historical precedent from peasant societies. Women do socially productive labor that produces labor-power as a commodity, but they do it through "privatized care," not unlike labor-power produces commodities through a privatized labor process.

Liberals often depict capitalism as individualistic because laborers present themselves on the labor market as individuals. But feminists have pointed out that such individualism is only possible by taking for granted the collective organization of labor within the family. Formally put, liberal autonomy relies on familial heteronomy. The norms that are immanent to this dynamic involve not only equality and a sense of just desert in the remuneration for one's work, but an inflated sense of familial responsibility. Equally as important as norms

surrounding the value of one's labor are normative expectations that private families should takes responsibility for reproduction outside of work. In this context, families appear as timeless moral foundations amidst the otherwise cold and changing winds of capitalist competition. As Angela Davis writes, capitalism situates the domestic sphere and the women within it at its utopian fringes (nurturing, self-sacrificing), thus making the home seem like the antithesis to the capitalist performance principle (efficient, self-interested).[271] Historically specific expectations emerge of women, too, who are primarily responsible for childrearing and reproductive labor. These are modern "gender roles," broadly construed along the gender binary. If socialist feminists are right to point out an empirical contradiction, then it also makes sense to say that there is conflict rather than harmony between what one expects from the market, what one expects from the family, and therefore, what a society expects and perceives of women.[272]

The push and pull dynamic of the competitive constraint on women is one reason why working class women have never pursued political equality on the basis of economic independence on a synchronous track with their middle class peers. Indeed, there is nothing specific to the global South about fighting to maintain community ties over and against the competitive constraint. In the global North, working class women were not as highly engaged in the women's suffrage movement as other demographics and, in the United States, they fought the women's liberation-era Equal Rights Amendment right up until the end of the "second wave" in the late 1970s. In both North America and in Europe they tended to first support gendered workplace protections and male-dominated welfare laws.[273] It was a later development of women's response to a more modern workplace that these institutions fell

[271] Angela Davis, *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 175-81.
[272] Fraser, *Capitalism*, 89-90.
[273] See Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

victim to feminist critique on the basis of a gender-blind ideal of equality. Likewise, women in developing countries resist breaking up their networks of support to avoid labor market dependency, are skeptical of micro-entrepreneurship development schemes, use gender-specific roles as leverage for social protection, and so on.

Further, as contemporary social reproduction theory argues, women have a distinctly volatile relationship with the labor market because their capacities for childbearing threaten to diminish their contribution to the process of appropriation.[274] Child bearers must exit the labor market during birth and during the earliest phases of childcare, which means that when and if they re-enter the labor market anew, they do so through competition. But now employers see them as unreliable, expendable, and willing to work for less to "get back in the game." Where they can reduce the time of absence from the workforce, childbearing continues to represent a potentially costly decline of a woman's capacity to work. Reproductive cycles are often under surveillance, with pregnant women seen as a slowdown problem for the labor process.[275] For these reasons, gender-based labor struggles in capitalist societies characteristically emphasize reforms like parental leave without penalty, healthcare, and early childhood care.

What families look like in terms of gender composition or number of members will depend on some combination of the state of the labor market, what social protections exist, and cultural shifts in sexual morality. Nonetheless, one can trends in market-dependent family life relative to these other factors. The superimposition of capital's interests over the reproductive ones of working people is a background condition for imbalances of power and influence in families and in intimate relationships. Men may take for granted that their career matters more than women's or develop feelings of entitlement that women play a subservient

[274] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 151.
[275] Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 85-7.

role in their household. In some cases, this role may be more affective and emotional than anything else, but the context creates reasons for such expectations to have real effects on women's well-being. Lack of moral reciprocity, I take it, is what many feminists mean when they argue that misogyny disciplines women's behavior to provide gender-coded goods as services like esteem, honor, support, and sex to men.[276]

There is a material basis for this in the gendered division of labor, to be sure, but it exists more fundamentally in the structural processes in which the gendered division of labor persists. To the extent that women and men adopt complementarian gender roles/attitudes and find them valuable, it does feminism no good to accuse them of false consciousness or to disproportionately amplify the responsibility of their husbands for gender inequality. They are responding to real constraints. Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas explain how a 19th-century trade union in Britain where unionists chose to exclude women workers from their ranks. The strategy ostensibly protects higher wages for men and enables women to stay at home with the children. More women in the workforce would mean that their families would now rely on two sets of lower wages instead of one higher wage, which would also entail an increase in childrearing costs because women must leave the home. Thus, childcare and schooling become an issue where they were not before. Considering these pressures, it is not irrational for women to support their own exclusion in response.[277]

The results of inter-class conflict shift the terrain upon which people enter into and develop family structures, as well as the expectations of their members. the gender-based struggles to challenge the subordination of reproduction to production affect the family form.

[276] Cf. Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[277] Johanna Brenner with Maria Ramas, "Rethinking women's oppression," in *Women and the Politics of Class* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 19-25; See also Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslet, "Gender, social reproduction, and women's self-organization: Considering the U.S. welfare state," *Gender and Society* 5(3) (1991): 311–333.

For example, mid-twentieth century welfare states often provided for women and dependents in a manner that reflected patriarchal expectations regarding the male bread-winner's role in the family. The laws sanctioned the idea that some women were not expected to work consistently throughout their child-bearing years, so the welfare state reinforced these expectations by providing social services for single women, widows, and their dependents. The famous "family wage" was higher for men, which is what allowed the state to assume that its dependents would be unmarried, widowed, and have children that were unsupported by a father. These norms were challenged as women further integrated into the occupational structure and fought against sex discrimination.

*Demographics.* Capitalism has different demographic laws than other systems. What emerges from these changes is a modern moral economy of reproduction that is rather specific to capitalism. By moral economy, I mean a political logic that tends to justify and enforce gendered social presumptions about men taking and women giving valuable goods and services like sex, household labor, childbearing, and emotional support. The notion of a moral economy helps to reconstruct how the moral features that one normally associates with the traditional morality of an abstract past become, in my story, quite modern; or the old becoming new again.

Labor market dependency means that childrearing increasingly relies on a family structure to ensure both economic security and social betterment for fewer children as well as for the family across generations. What follows is that this dependency has some peculiar effects on the practical aspects of human fertility. Centrally, it makes the number of children one can support dependent on the access that one has to the labor market. Such circumstances cast the bearing of children in a different economic-strategic light than before; individuals and families begin to calibrate how many children to have and when they should have them

in response to the resources that are available.[278] In other words, the safety-first strategies of peasant-producing societies, like having as many children as possible to work land, to ensure inheritance, or to ward off the effects of disease (given the limits of medical science), fall to the wayside in favor of family planning.

This incentive structure creates a different sense of *value* around children that is likewise calibrated to the resources available to the family in which they are born. Normative expectations emerge that one should not have more children than one can afford, which brings with it an appeal to sexual restraint in the service of material prosperity. What these transformations amount to are expectations that families ought to prioritize the quality over the quantity of their children unless they have the resources to do both. Expectations also emerge that families should be socially cohesive and self-sustaining sites of reproduction, which is why families appear to many as somehow timeless moral foundations amidst the otherwise cold and changing winds of capitalist competition. As Angela Davis writes, capitalism situates the domestic sphere and the women within it at its utopian fringes (nurturing, self-sacrificing), thus making the home seem like the antithesis to the capitalist performance principle (efficient, self-interested). One also expects families to procreate the right amount to create value in quality children, which involves socializing them to internalize the norms of market competition.[279] Once again, one can see here that the moral language that identifies a successful individual is thus remarkably transferrable to whole families — "hardworking families." The flip side, however, is that the *irresponsible* family can carry the blame of social instability and dysfunction.

Historically specific expectations emerge of women, too, who are primarily responsible for childrearing and reproductive labor. Indeed, they once made it possible to redefine

[278] Rosalind Pollack Petschesky, *Abortion and woman's choice: The state, sexuality, and reproductive freedom* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990).
[279] Davis, *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, 175-81.

women's social role as primarily motherhood. This cultural phenomenon was obvious in the Victorian period, known for its glorification of domesticity, however, a "cult of motherhood" persists for women with means. Twenty-first century mothers similarly report pressure to supplement contracted labor markets with increasingly perfect and exacting maternal nurturing to increase their child's social capital. One expects that they should be responsible for accommodating and facilitating changes to the economy that they are not, in fact, responsible for. These are gender norms, broadly construed, and they invite various reactions that are directed toward women when women are perceived as unrestrained, irresponsible, or otherwise failing in their capacities as reproducers. Indeed, one such reaction is the pro-natalist urge to preserve "family values" when normative expectations of family life and the women within it are not met. The flip side to pro-natalism is anti-natalism, which tries to eliminate bad women from reproducing too much or in the wrong way.

The result is that working class women are in the unhappy position of generating normative conflict over the status quo when conditions of capitalist production, and thus the labor market, change. Conflicts emerge when it becomes clear that working class families tend to undermine these various, contradictory expectations and make a different set of demands on the rest of society, and it is the women of this class who bear the brunt of the blame for perceived reproductive failures. Indeed, the moral consequences of their supposed irresponsibility differ significantly by class; working class women are liable to turn to the public sphere for social protection.

*The Welfare State.* Unlike their wealthier counterparts, they are more likely to raise the question implicitly or explicitly of what the state is doing to protect women and children from precarity than, for instance, hire additional domestic help or write an op-ed to ask whether there is a lifestyle solution to being a good mother. The reproductive behaviour of working class women has thus been an object for public concern, as the history of middle-class moral

reformers, feminist or otherwise, shows. Working class women are often the target of reform movements lead by middle-class women to prevent alcohol consumption, encourage the use of birth control, spread eugenic practices, and stabilize marriage rates by instilling religious values in the sexually promiscuous.[280] Other social strata often perceive the reproductive behavior of the working class as a threat to feminine decorum, decency, and the sanctity of motherhood.[281] Working class women tend to threaten the norm that families can and should take sole responsibility for social reproduction.

Unlike capital, the state tends to play a proactive political role vis-à-vis both biological and social reproduction. Capital militates to keep reproduction as far away from production as they can, but modern states have incentives to the contrary. They feel pressures of decreasing tax revenue if capital's contribution weakens, an aging population in need of social services, declining birthrates that make future taxable income uncertain, and surplus populations that cannot integrate into the labor market. As a result, there is a predictable collision course between working-class families and the state. The institutional form that this collision generates varies, but it revolves around the plight of working class women and their position within and around the labor market. Changing conditions of production tend to upset whatever norms of entitlement to social protections prevail. In this context, states (particularly welfare states) and NGOs develop strategies to encourage desirable reproductive behaviors. They also discipline those behaviors that threaten existing norms regarding the institutional boundaries between state, family, and economy.

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[280] See the classic study by Angela Davis, *Women, race, and class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 127-36, 202-21 for an overview of Black middle-class reformers in the 19th century women's club movement in the U.S and the interest of their white peers in eugenics as well as the state of working class fertility and marriage rates. See also Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, reproduction, and the meaning of liberty,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997, 56-103) for an in-depth analysis of the dark side of the birth control movement.
[281] Lisa Gordon, *The moral property of women: a history of birth control politics in America* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 305.

Many feminists look upon the welfare state as patriarchal by virtue of being yet another way of imposing dependency relations onto women. The welfare state puts working class women in the unhappy position of generating normative conflict over the status quo when conditions of capitalist production, and thus the labor market, change. It does so because it reifies cultural norms that may have been acceptable at one point in time and move slowly to correct for cultural change. Conflicts emerge when it becomes clear that working class families tend to undermine existing normative expectations of their reproductive behavior. Therefore, working class women often bear the brunt of the blame for social crises.[282] It is for these good reasons that feminists are justifiably suspicious of the welfare state. There is no shortage of cases where it has encouraged forms of dependency that are explicitly misogynistic and patronizing.

The other side to the story is that the welfare state has been a key mechanism for protecting women and their dependents from the oscillations of capitalist competition. Despite the prevalence of feminist critiques of the welfare state, few feminists actually *condemn* it and see it as a necessary tool for feminist ends. It is not possible to make inroads against the subordination of reproduction to production without de-commodifying basic social resources. Without it, it is impossible to guarantee universal social supports for women, dependent children, and the elderly. As Steven Klein has recently argued, the welfare state can also be an object of democratic world-building. Working-class women have often used the internal mechanisms of the welfare state to militate for social reforms that reduce dependency. As Klein writes,

> "…[F]eminist activists within the state were able to use welfare institutions as mechanisms for unearthing and challenging structures of domination. Welfare

[282] Patricia Hill Collins (1990), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge), esp. 171. As she writes, "Symbolic means of domination become particularly important in mediating contradictions in changing political economies."

> institutions provided a language and a set of institutional frameworks for making public how male domination enabled the exploitation of female work. The struggle of Swedish feminism has been to compel democratic institutions to confront those exploitative structures with the same force as they have confronted exploitative relationships between workers and capital."[283]

Klein goes on to explain the context in which male workers were willing to break solidaristic wage setting strategies at the expense of women. In the Swedish case, the issues undermining profitability had to do with confronting inflations, fiscal expansion, and underinvestment. In the 1970s, the welfare state provided a way of negotiating these background conditions relative to the specific condition of women. There were real conflicts of interest here that did not get resolved because the issues of gender justice had to be measured against those of competitiveness and profitability. My point is that the forms of dependency that have existed within the welfare state must be put into context relative to these background conditions.

Amidst these conflicting norms and attempts to ameliorate their inconsistencies lie appeals to tradition that remain compelling. Tradition does not simply "melt into air," as Marx put it, but adapts to capitalist constraints. The process of adaptation involves attempts to resolve conflicts over social reproduction that form the basis upon which a society deliberates about the next crisis and the next. The sexual behavior of working families is evaluated based on earlier shifts in the scope of familial responsibility and state intervention, plus their accompanying sexual mores. These dynamics suggest that any given political coalition that tries to resolidify what they take to be traditional family values is better

[283] Klein, *The Work of Politics*, 168. A classic treatise on Swedish social democracy's perspective on family politics can be found in Alva Myrdal's *Nation and Family* (London and New York: Routledge, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd, 1945).

understood as a way of resurrecting cultural imaginary of what is traditional. How people try to put that image into practice shifts accordingly, based on contemporary conditions.

For instance, it is common for American conservatives to argue that welfare programs are responsible for undermining (what they assert are) traditional Black family structures by incentivizing Black women to "marry the state" instead of husbands and for Black men to neglect their responsibility as fathers. They are outraged on the public's behalf if they, by proxy, feel that they are being taken advantage of or manipulated by irresponsible women and families. What is in the background of this appeal to a traditional family structure (and thus attributing social ills to the lack thereof) are normally important shifts in the political economy, like the Great Society programs of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration. These were implemented concurrently with the onset of deindustrialization, which, according to conservatives, made Black women too dependent on the state and Black men unmotivated to work. But what was really happening was a diminishing of the tax base that supported the meager welfare state by way of underemployment, stagnant wages, and capital flight. I believe that the conservative arguments are completely upside-down in their diagnosis of the problem, but their appeal to tradition was a response to a real contemporary one.[284]

In sum, appeals to tradition obscure and reconcile normative conflicts over what people expect from women, family, and the state. Capitalism is the precondition for these conflicts rather than being antithetical to them, so traditionality emerges and re-emerges in a dynamic way. I think that it makes sense to try to see the normative side to this development as a moral economy that reflects on and tries to reconcile with shifting political-economic terrain in a manner that is path dependent but not necessarily serving one coherent interest. A gendered moral economy as one in which men take and women give valuable goods and

[284] Melinda Cooper offers a similar analysis of the ethic of familial responsibility in the transition to neoliberalism away from the welfare state in *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2017).

services, and in which women incur discipline if they violate certain prohibitions, like refusing to give those goods and services or taking masculine-coded perks and privileges instead. I think that this giving and taking of gendered goods and services maps on well enough to what one expects of women under current conditions of social reproduction, and disciplinary reactions to their failure to live up to these expectations runs the gamut from social disapproval to violence.[285] The stakes of this discipline are a society's moral intuitions regarding reproductive responsibility, irresponsibility, and what it considers to be a legitimate public concern.

## *Conclusion*

To summarize, all working class women face a dilemma. Capitalism compels them to become vulnerable to market competition, which often involves doing what hurts themselves and their kin by disrupting existing communal ties. This dilemma is due to the superimposition of capital on processes of social reproduction. Like labor on the whole, women are at a structural disadvantage in responding to these imperatives. As a result, they may seek to adhere to complementarian reproductive roles within kinship networks so as to protect themselves and their families from the vulnerability that comes along with market competition. Or they might organize on the periphery of the productive process to support labor organizations. Another strategy is to organize within extended or chosen families to redistribute the burden of reproductive labor within working class itself.

[285] Kate Manne, *Down Girl*: *The Logic of Misogyny* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 62-7, 98-101, 110-121.

In any case, the values of care that workers need and that women have traditionally both provided and represented are a morally charged, distinctly gendered aspect of capitalism's total social reproduction. That capital has the capacity to set the terms upon which one reproduces life is a source of sexist domination. It also poses an existential question, which is what it could mean to live in a society organized around human kindness rather than market competition. To follow up on the socialist feminist concern with contradiction, the problem with the existing contradiction is that capital sets the terms for social reproduction, which reduces the extent to which our way of caring for each other is in our hands. In fact, it is hostile to many ways of caring that we might find valuable. What would a world look like that shifts the terrain of care so that we can look at the problem differently, or even recognize our common vulnerability as a problem? We cannot go back, but perhaps we can return from capitalist realism to a future that still holds a promise of freedom.

# Conclusion: The Fact of Solidarity

*"Solidarity is not a matter of sentiment but a fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper. If the basic elements, identity of interest, clarity of vision, honesty of intent, and oneness of purpose, or any of these is lacking, all sentimental pleas for solidarity, and all other efforts to achieve it will be barren of results."*

- Eugene Debs, "A Plea for Solidarity," *The International Socialist Review* 14(9)(1914)

## *Overview*

In this book, I have focused on capitalism's core features to develop an account of domination. This account emphasizes the role that capitalism plays in reproducing social group inequality by creating the social basis for it anew. I only expanded my account away from core features when I thought it was necessary to account for institutional boundaries between the economy and the family, civil society, and the state. These institutions play a large role in explaining and reinforcing the social basis of social group inequality. But I kept them close to home. I emphasized how these institutions relate to, rather than diverge from, the core features of market dependency and competition at all levels of society.

At several points, I resisted fashionable trends to go beyond the economy. It is quite common in the existing academic literature to insist that capitalism is not *just* an economy. Proponents of this analytical strategy present it as though it is rectifying a narrow, provincial view that prevailed among radical generations past. It is now setting us right to broaden our horizons outward, which will assist critics in making more expansive normative arguments and to avoid economic reductionism. I reiterate now why I thought my different approach to be necessary, so that I can explain more clearly what I believe is the upshot of my account of

domination. In a word, I started by asking what the economy is so that I could ask what is wrong with it. Then, I built on that, rather than assuming that I know what the economy is and making the "beyond" the starting point for my theoretical architecture.

It is an unfortunate legacy of the New Left that the academic world we now inhabit takes the problems that they saw in the Old Left, i.e., "orthodox Marxism" as a new orthodoxy. While I intend no disrespect to that generation and believe that they had real reasons to criticize the earlier orthodoxy in the way that they did, I also believe that this new orthodoxy emerged regardless of what they intended. The New Left orthodoxy is as follows: The Marxian base and superstructure metaphor is wrong because it makes the superstructure out to be a morally superficial part of the causal story of oppression. It produces an undemocratic epistemology. This undemocratic epistemology cannot address the problems of race, gender, environment, colonialism, and so on. Not everything is economic. Rather, culture matters a great deal, as do other institutions. A theory of the social totality must go beyond the economic to bring in everything else. If it doesn't, the theory is really only addressing itself to a privileged few, not to those who are most oppressed in capitalist societies.

I now believe that it is time for this new orthodoxy to also submit to criticism. It is no longer helping to make things clearer, just as the technological determinism of the older generation stopped making things clearer for them. It has reified "the economic" as a category and reproduced explanatory strategies that share weaknesses with earlier ones. In Chapter 6, I focused on functionalist explanations as one such strategy, also touching on the problem briefly in Chapter 7. Most importantly, however, it has made the economy into a black box that is unintelligible to a new generation of theorists who want to talk about capitalism but do know how to open it. The New Left likely had more of a common sense about what's going on in there, which is why their criticisms of orthodox Marxism carried

water. They wanted to make the theory bigger, not smaller. But intellectual history is cruel to the losing team. Fifty years of anti-systemic thinking and hostility to Marxism has kept the black box of the economy firmly shut, leading to the reification of both concepts and debates. This contextualizes my intervention, which some readers may even find basic and frustrating if they were sympathetic to the Old Left to begin with.

Sticking to capitalism's core features helped me to develop a normative through-line in the republican idea of freedom as non-domination. The relationship between market dependency and market competition was particularly important in developing this through-line. Indeed, one compelling feature of the republican concept of domination is that it shifts the normative lens away from heteronomy to dependency. Dependency has specific features, which include being vulnerable to arbitrary power. Capital has arbitrary power in a manner that is both structural and agential, which means that it has a capacity and an interest in interfering in the lives of working people and their dependents in pursuit of its own interests. In this context, those who are subject to capital's caprice are also obliged to prioritize its interests over their own. From the trade union that cannot demand such high wages that its employer goes out of business to the woman who prioritizes her partner's ability to work for capital over hers, capital's interests are what matters most in a capitalist society. "Domination" is how I described this general trend in social movement.

The upshot of my perspective is that it is generative rather than degenerative. If one does not have a clear idea of what's in the black box, then the social theory that results from going beyond it turns into more of an exercise in circling around, tacking on, or adding in ad-hoc categories to fill in gaps in the theory. Ad hoc explanations are degenerative because they lead the theorist away from explaining the world toward theorizing into order to save the theory as a way of explaining the world. At some point, critics notice this problem and they argue that the theory is no longer viable. My view is that such was the case in the 1980s,

when New Left ideas morphed into poststructuralist ones. A generative research agenda is, by contrast, one that helps theorists think more systematically about new cases, directions, and challenges. For instance, thinking through the competitive constraint allowed me to answer the question with which I started, which was "In relation to what are individuals and groups discriminating against one another for access to resources?" Shifting the theoretical lens toward capitalism's core helped me to reframe the class dimension of social group inequality from a negative light to a positive one. Instead of "It's not just…it's also…", one can say "It compels…which incentivizes….then aggregates into…"

## *Political Solidarity*

I began by arguing that class fits poorly within the disparity paradigm, which I identified as the prevailing view of social group inequality among political philosophers. I do not think that this prevailing view is unique to political philosophy, so I now want to explain why I think my criticism of it should make a difference to how people think about this problem more generally. Indeed, the disparity paradigm is something of a common sense in public debate, at universities, and among activists. People tend to think of it as a maximally inclusive way of broadening our understanding of social justice.

To recapitulate, my problem with the disparity paradigm is that it is neoclassical in its fundamentals, which obscures and presupposes the class structure. It sees the class structure and the economy as a whole as primarily an opportunity structure rather than a constraining one. Even when theorists condemn what they see as illicit advantage-taking, like resource closure, they see it as a distortion of the ideal of free equality of opportunity, not as a matter of imperative or compulsion. I discussed further how liberalism conceptualizes the perfect market as a mirror for ideal justice. Then, I argued that other traditions that are critical of

liberalism do much of the same thing. This conceptual situation not only mystifies capitalism, class, and labor, but it undermines the express aims of understanding the very social group inequality that concern the "non-ideal" theories of justice that try to break from ideal theory to focus on injustice in "the real world."

Put simply, the normative language of disadvantage, disproportionality, and marginalization are poor conceptual tools for rectifying this conceptual problem. On its own terms, the disparity paradigm excludes class because it does not take class to be the kind of injustice that is at issue. The abolition of class society is not desirable in the same way that putting an end to discrimination or arbitrary disadvantage is desirable, so the theoretical pursuit of eliminating or rectifying disparities along non-class axes is bound to remain relative to the existing class structure. This framework yields an exceedingly narrow idea of not only justice, but social freedom. It is not an expanded ideal of socialist democracy and equality as radical liberals once hoped. In real time, radical liberalism reinforces rather than undermines the ideological front of capitalist realism. "Freedom" remains implicitly measured against the competitive constraint.

That the competitive constraint is the implicit background condition for the disparity paradigm is why political solidarity is so elusive to this view. When the language of advantage and disadvantage, or the margins and the center, primarily describe shifting internal boundaries among the terms themselves, it is not clear what organizes the terms into a relationship in the first place. The militant pluralism of radical liberalism refuses the question, but I argued that the idea of organizing principles is extremely important for conceptualizing why advantages and disadvantages exist. One must be able to perceive a system logic to bring rhyme and reason to social group relations. Without a system-logic, it cannot become clearer why people are advantaged in one way, disadvantaged in another, but nonetheless might share the same political goal.

From what I gather, political solidarity is primarily a matter of moral sentiment in the disparitarian worldview. People are either going to support causes that are not their own or they are not. Ideally, they form the right moral orientation toward inequality, see that their relative advantages are at someone else's expense, and recognize that the situation is unjust enough to do something to change it. Solidarity is more like an acknowledgment that leads to sacrifice rather than a vested interest in opening up a universal horizon of freedom. The latter, of course, is what the socialist movement always claimed as its political project. Rejecting socialism and class politics has had the morbid effect of shutting this horizon down for at least two generations. Hopefully, it will open back up before a third and a fourth are subject to its law of diminishing expectations. The verdict is still out on this question but let me clarify how I hope to contribute something to the unmaking of this generational status quo.

It has always made more sense to me that Eugene Debs would say that solidarity is like a skyscraper. To build a skyscraper, one must dig deep into the earth below to create a foundation. This foundation is typically made up of columns of granite stone or concrete that support most of the weight of the building, allowing it to stand upright with its steel frame on top. One then erects the steel frame, which is made of vertical columns and horizontal beams that extend upwards. Atop this core skeleton, one adds various types of cladding materials to create the outer walls of the building, which must be tested beforehand to make sure that they can withstand the harsh weather conditions at high altitudes.

When I was a kid, the tallest building in the United States was still in Chicago. It was called the Sears Tower. I have this memory of walking beneath its imposing, two-tiered frame with someone in my family when they asked me, "Did you know it can move?" "It does NOT!" said I. Nothing as strong, enormous, and *definitely* stable could move. Surely, what makes something strong is that it does not move. Strong things bend to the will of no man or nature, least of all something so trivial as a Midwestern blizzard. Even *I* could

withstand those. But then it was explained to me that the skyscraper is strong because it moves. Just like tree branches that sway in the wind, the steel frame of the skyscraper allows for swaying without endangering the building's structural foundations nor the occupants inside. While it might be unsettling to notice a tall building swaying in the wind, the movement actually means that the skyscraper is working as designed. They are designed to stand tall against high wind pressure, withstanding even extreme geological events. The higher the floor, the more the sway.

Labor is like the granite foundation. Without it, all of the flexibility of tactics and strategy in the world will not cohere into an emancipatory movement. They will sway against the wind without an anchor, which means that they will collapse and get blown away by the elements. Let me be more explicit. The labor movement coheres a political project because it is what brings vulnerable parties together into a structure that can withstand the pressures of market competition. It creates a basis upon which other movements can pivot, shift, and reorient themselves to pressures coming from different directions. It burrows deep into the dominant social property relations so that that one can build to new heights. Other buildings don't burrow so deep that they protect their occupants from geological disasters. In this case, other social movements don't protect their constituencies from deskilling, capital mobility, technological change, crises of profitability, and so on. Insofar as these processes reproduce social group inequality, labor is not just one interest group among others. It is the social basis for a counterhegemonic movement in society as a whole.

Without flexibility, however, labor is just a foundation, not a skyscraper. In criticizing the Old Left, the New bucked like a mustang yet to be broken by its institutional discipline. Frustrated by the bureaucratic nature of communist parties, unsure of how to enliven the trade union establishment, responding to a changing world of women in work, considering the needs of post-colonial economic development, they launched a restless attack. I want to

suggest the obvious: This attack by the New against the Old was made possible by the fact that the Old was already there. No one imagined that it would collapse, that the foundation would crack. The demand for flexibility emerges when the foundation is already in place.[286] Perhaps these oscillations were and are inevitable – healthy, even! At the same time, it strikes me as anachronistic to our times to talk about political solidarity as though one inhabits the same world that the New Left did, like we are picking up the steel beams on the construction site where they left them. Instead, we live in the intellectual world that they built and to which there has been 50 years of reaction. One cannot proceed as though the old foundation is still there. It's not. It is a shadow of its former self, so one must ask why something like it was needed in the first place, even if it also cannot be duplicated.

## *Interest Aggregation*

The most challenging thing for an argument like mine to do is to convince readers that the working class as I have defined it shares an interest in the common political project that I am describing. Theorists will tend to be immediately suspicious about positing common needs or interests. Experiences are vast, cultural differences are large, and it may be impossible to put the pieces together. I give two reasons for why I think there are normative grounds for class politics based on the argument that I advanced in this book, Then, I turn to how I think one ought to think about interest aggregation given those two reasons.

1. First, class politics undermines the unequal logic of collective action that pervades the class structure. I analyzed the structural disadvantage of labor relative to capital as a pattern of vulnerability for a diverse, interdependent, and non-voluntary group. If I am right to say

[286] Cf. Terence Renaud, *New Lefts: The making of a radical tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

that interdependency within the working class is as constitutive of their position as their interdependent relationship with capital, then it is plausible to also claim that there is a general interest among workers. Workers are more vulnerable alone than they are together. That they are not always willing to take the risk of collective action or that they do so in partial ways is not sufficient evidence to write off this conclusion. There is a temporal dimension to market competition. In the short run, workers may be better off alone or in a defensive posture in a small group. For a time, they may be able to meet their material needs in that way. In the long run, these are untenable strategies for all individuals within the group. They cannot each meet their material needs on an individual basis forever. The ground will shift underneath their feet.

Thus, the normative argument for aggregating long-term interests is not reducible to meeting material needs. It is rather that one ought to meet material needs in a way that

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expands the scope of self-determination for each member of the class relative to the competitive constraint. Self-determination is a learning process that enhances capacities to generalize about these conditions. It does so by weakening the pull of necessary labor on individuals, which frees them up to want and imagine different things. The general gets more breathing room for consideration when one relaxes the pressure of the dominant social imperatives that systematically militate against giving the general its due. It is in so relaxing these pressures that people can become more open to the needs of others. One creates the social basis for perceiving others' interests as one's own when the starting point is recognizing joint vulnerability to domination. What class politics does that other political models cannot do as well is convert a fundamentally defensive posture on the part workers into an offensive one.

2. Indeed, my second justification for working class politics is that such a politics is never just about the working class. At its best, class politics *both* improves material well-

being *and* strives for political hegemony. There is an irreducibly political dimension to class politics that has to do with bringing other social groups into the orbit of labor. In doing so, it undermines the logic of externalities. Unlike capital, labor is forced by its structural disadvantages to aggregate a wide variety of needs among its constituents, which means that it must denaturalize the imperatives of market competition for a wider public. It politicizes those matters of social value that capital sees as external to the production process. In doing so, labor brings a wider normative horizon into view than the self-determination of the working class itself. It forces a new type of value pluralism onto the political stage.

The normative horizon that this process opens up is *freedom*. Freedom is not reducible to the self-determination of the working class, but the self-determination of the working class is a necessary condition for prefiguring a free society under the conditions of domination of the present. All socialist, anarchist, and syndicalist politics involves some level of prefiguration. Historically, all of these political tendencies try to build real utopias in the present that they think will plant the seeds of the future and help them to grow. What class politics does is prefigure the future in a distinct way. It antagonizes the central, centrifugal forces that undermines the success of other strategies. It also changes the character of the people involved. In republican terms, character formation involves cultivating virtue. What labor solidarity does is cultivate fellowship and establishes solidaristic obligations in a specific way throughout society.[287]

How ought one to think about interest aggregation in light of the two reasons above? At its strongest, class politics instantiates a fundamental shift in how people think about what the economy is, which changes how people see themselves in relation to it. The twentieth-century shift in liberal common sense from focusing solely on political rights to believing that

[287] See also Eugene V. Debs, "The Solidarity of Labor," published as "Labor: Is Its Solidarity Impossible of Realization?" in *The Railway Times* (2)(9)(1894): 1-4.

there is a more expansive set of social rights is an example of this dynamic. I have argued that the economy is a nexus of practices in which one makes political judgments about how a society organizes its collective life. Working class organizations facilitate a change in social ethos wherein individuals learn to see themselves as the sorts of people who can make such value judgments and who can engage in contests over their terms. Thus, it forces agents to confront value pluralism, not deny it.

In orthodox terms, the process of interest aggregation makes political agents fit to rule. Said otherwise, class politics creates the social basis upon which a polity can come to see itself as capable of living freely while still under conditions of domination. Importantly, it creates opportunities within the competitive constraint to act in a way that is no longer as primarily a reaction to the arbitrary power of capital. As a result, it shifts the normative horizon toward freedom. If labor is instead factionalized and therefore impotent, it reinforces its own dependency on capital. In its wake, an impotent labor force reinforces the dependency of the rest of society on capital as well. That there is historically some messianic messaging involved in socialist arguments to this effect is no accident. One is learning to have faith in oneself, which is utopian in the most realistic sense possible.

### *Hegemony*

Why labor's hegemony should matter to other social groups that are not confined to the working class requires a more detailed argument. I will discuss middle class members of oppressed groups, women, and their dependents, as well as sexual and gender minorities. In a word, I think that critics of the classical socialist position on the leadership of labor are probably right that such leadership cannot and will not resolve all of their problems. But the argument for labor's hegemony does not hinge on it providing such comprehensive answers,

especially since many of the relevant issues require long-term experiments in ways of living, associating, and perceiving that no political program or macroeconomic policy can straightforwardly deliver or engineer. I also don't think it would be desirable to engineer them, even if it were possible to do so. The argument hinges on removing the existing social bases for discrimination and for improving the social conditions for value pluralism to the greatest extent possible.

Critics often raise the fact that gender and racial oppression cuts across the class structure is evidence of labor's limits. For instance, it is common to posit the example of a Black man on Wall Street who cannot catch a cab due to discrimination, despite his class position. I do not believe the evidence warrants this conclusion. In Chapters 6 and 7, I argued that the inner logic of sexism and racism tend to have a class character. Sexism and racism track class, even when they target non-working class members of the relevant groups. For the forms of racial domination that have their origins in the exploitation of labor it is clear that the normative perceptions of racial minorities reflect how people perceive the working class and poor members of these groups: Unreliability, laziness, stupidity, hypersexuality, violence, and so on. For women, these norms are those of the gendered moral economy, where men take and women give in the right way at the right time. In combination, it is common for women who are racial minorities to be perceived as lascivious, independent, and angry, or backward, in need of cultural tutelage, and victimized, given differing historical positions in the class structure.

Middle class persons who are subject to discrimination won't escape these norms, though their class position can radically diminish the negative effects that they have on their quality of life. That middle class people have resources shields them from the worst effects of discrimination. Nonetheless, I do not know of any professionals in these groups for whom sexism, racism, or some combination thereof, does not rear its ugly head in their work

environment. Often, I do my research, contribute what I can, and while I do so, I think that I am being taken seriously by my peers. One moment I'm in the club and then, suddenly, the misogynistic condescension, sexual objectification, or cosmopolitan elitism drops. It feels terrible. My point, however, is that it feels less terrible now than when I was much more worried about getting a job. I would like my colleagues to have better manners and better boundaries, but the lack thereof makes much less of an impact on my upward mobility than they once did. The burden of discrimination lessens the farther up the class structure one goes.

Why middle class people should align themselves with a working class political agenda is rather straightforward. It benefits them, even if one does not see the positive effects of this alliance in their immediate work environment or social circles. When the situation of the poor improves, the perception of them by the whole of society changes. This situation is good for middle class people, who may not share the same immediate concerns that are likely to emerge in labor struggles. It can be hard to imagine, for instance, why fighting over seniority rights, overtime, or the scope of managerial prerogative affects someone who already has a clear idea of how to get a promotion, works overtime voluntarily because they are salaried, or has a lot of autonomy over when they work and how they do it. But something like seniority rights are essential for racial minorities to attain and maintain positions of leadership in their workplaces and communities. My mother, who is white, once told me that when she joined the machinist union as a mechanic at the airlines in the 1980s, it was her first encounter with Black Americans who were in leadership roles. Collaborating with her colleagues in this environment denaturalized assumptions about what Black people are like and what their interests are that she didn't even know she had. I think this sort of social change resonates beyond the workplace. It undermines the social basis for racism.

There are some things that, if women at the top of the class structure were to prioritize them, would serve to make common cause among women across class lines. I give just one example. There is a zero-sum tradeoff between work and family for many middle class women. They may not face enough sexist discrimination to prevent them from attaining degrees, credentials, and professional jobs. Indeed, the per capita rates of women graduating for universities is higher in numerous rich countries than it is for men. Increasing numbers of graduating classes have more women than men. Nonetheless, women struggle to keep up in their careers in comparison to male partners once they have children. A lot of professional work requires being on-call, which is impossible for parents who have childcare needs. One can imagine universally accessible childcare programs that suit the needs of these women as much as they do the working class. Its success, however, would depend on labor putting forward a program that addresses this need outside of the private sector, which is another option for many middle class women. Such an argument would involve saying to middle class women that one could ameliorate the racist and sexist norms that they encounter if working class women were not the targets of misogynistic and racist abuse in the public sphere for not being the right kind of responsible, good mother.

There is a basis, then, for the middle class to throw their lot in with a working class project. It depends whose side they are on – capital or labor's? Without labor, many progressive ideals that emerges within middle class milieus will fall into line with the bourgeoisie. That's the default in a capitalist economy. By "default," I mean that there are modes of living that capitalism forecloses, even if it creates some new opportunities. Capitalism has one way of measuring value – the law of value – that precludes other kinds from being in the mainstream of how we think about what is valuable to us. Care is one of these values that capital marginalizes at the same time that it often commodifies and relies on it as a precondition for social reproduction. This argument does not only have to do with care

*work*, but with the kinds of lives that a society sees as worth caring about, like who is worth loving, supporting, and grieving, or what sorts of relationships are real, successful, and romantic. This point has implications for sexual and gender diversity. It is usually in a moment of capitalist crisis leading to social decomposition when experiments in living along the lines of gender and sexuality become more of a "mainstream counterculture." People stop seeing why they should reproduce family life like they might have before. There also tends to be cultural resistance and backlash to such changes rooted in anxiety surrounding fertility and the stability of family life.

What the universalist program of class politics does is diminish the extent to which such reactions can lay claim to something real in the class structure that is harming the majority of people at the same time that minorities receive wider acceptance. Put bluntly, widening social acceptance is good, but it is not good that it often happens under conditions in which the majority of people are experiencing precarity, alienation, loneliness, and have little hope for the future. It would be better if people encountered social changes in their intimate life or the intimate lives of their friends, coworkers, and children along with a higher standard of living, decent jobs, real choices about whether to have a family or not, or what kind of family to have, and so on. These are the kinds of social conditions that lead people to see social change not as a threat, but as a way of expanding their capacities to love and care for one another.

In sum, capital's hegemony allows for one kind of pluralism, but not another. Of course, one could object that the historical record of the labor movement has been patriarchal and heteronormative, like with the family wage. I concede that it can be but I ask readers to consider the historical context in which the family wage was a way of definitively resolving dilemmas surrounding child labor and protective laws surrounding women's work. It was seen as progressive at the time. As more women entered the workforce and civil rights

expanded for racial and sexual minorities, it became regressive. These are the sorts of dilemmas that capital continues to create for the working class, which is why labor must transcend the normative axis of inclusion and exclusion. The horizon – freedom – demands the abolition of class society, or else capital will indeed continue to demand compromise on its terms and, further, undermine the social basis for whatever compromise one reaches. Labor should not be condemned to the dustbin of history for reaching them. Instead, it should be strengthened in an effort to transcend the social conditions in which class compromise is necessary. Without labor, there is only capitalist pluralism and the political reactions to it.

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One might wonder what, after all I've said, the post-capitalist socialist republic will be like. The republican concept of domination has proven fruitful as a critical tool, but it's not clear what freedom as non-domination would entail. Normally, this is the point of the book where the author says that they cannot know and that it's important to not make blueprints for the future. Not in this book. There are many interesting debates about the alternative that readers should pursue and develop further. I favor market socialism, which leaves some scope for markets in consumer goods. But it would definitively not subject the whole of the social movement of society to the competitive constraint. Market competition would be circumscribed under the auspices of democratic governing bodies of consumer councils, bank councils, and producer councils, like a republican separation of powers but for political economy. These bodies could form partial plans that decide where and how much to invest to meet social needs. I would understand "needs" capaciously, so that there is room for citizens to demand investment in leisure, art, and so on, rather than only in production and consumer goods. Maybe there are competitions for who can carry out the plans the best.

It is beyond my capacity to say more, but I am curious to see if it can be worked out as a model. I hope my saying so inspires curiosity in others, as there are many alternatives,

including some neoclassical ones. Although I've maligned neoclassicism as a bad framework for understanding the economy as it exists, there are socialists from the early twentieth century and in the former Eastern bloc who saw it as a useful tool for designing a more democratic model of socialism. Perhaps it can be. In any case, I think it's time to employ some cooks in the cookshops of the future, or else we may not be able to envision how we will meet our needs amidst a rapidly changing climate, economic stagnation, and geopolitical rivalry relative to both. I believe it to be urgent that social movements coalesce around some hopeful vision of the future, so that we can once more believe that the world we live in can become more fit for human beings to live in, who need not suffer any more than they do.

It is not easy to be hopeful. Hope, like solidarity, is a virtue that one must learn. Today, for instance, Chicago's working class is tending bar, shipping freight, packing meat, just like they've always done. But the harsh wind of deindustrialization, underinvestment, and corruption have taken their toll. They are cold, hungry, and vulnerable to violence. They are sleeping on the El and under highways. It is hard to imagine change. And yet sometimes, when I go back to visit, I look up at that two-tiered tower and I think of Nelson Algren's poem, *Chicago*, "You may well find lovelier lovelies. But never a lovely so real." Working people built it. And they built it to move.