

Capitalism vs Socialism

Key Words

Responsible

- Degrading
- Exploitative
- Trivialises matters (unimportant)
- Values materialism over compassion
- Absolve (free from) responsibility
- Unscrupulous (immoral)
- Self-serving outlook
- Exploit for capitalist advancement
- Prejudicial treatment
- Unlawful
- Arrogant
- Safeguarding their position in the capitalist hierarchy
- Preys on the disadvantage
- Obdurate (stubborn)
- Oppressive
- Oblivious
- Negligence
- Remorseless (no guilt)
- Social superiority
- Propagate a segregative ideology
- Individualistic desire

Irresponsible

- Interconnectedness
- Social reform
- Compassion
- Liberation
- Collective social conscience
- Scrupulous (moral)
- Social justice
- Freed
- Metamorphosis (change)
- Proxy (take on someone's role)
- Aware of the systemic consequences of capitalism
- Moral compass
- Inextricably (closely) linked with responsibility
- Humanistic outlook (value people)
- Rebel against unjust social systems
- Redemption (save from sin)
- Remorseful (feels guilt)
- Introspective (look into themselves)
- Personal accountability
- Foundation of morality
- Return to moral and civic duty

Other Key Words

- Political diatribe (criticising politics)
- Archetype (typical person of)
- Paragon (perfect example of)
- Epitome (perfect example of)
- Microcosm (represent something bigger)
- Personification
- Propagate (spread)
- Dramatic irony (audience knows something character doesn't)
- Satire (humour/irony to criticise someone)
- Exacerbated

Priestley's intentions

- Priestley aims to **vilify** capitalism through making immorality, irresponsibility and exploitation synonymous (closely linked) with the characters he constructs to hold these beliefs. He aims to **scrutinise** how detrimental this ideology is to society and how it causes society to **regress rather than progress**.
- In Priestley's **political diatribe**, he condemns the **laissez-faire** (lack of intervention in businesses) governmental approach endorsed by capitalist ideologies, highlighting its neglect of the weak and vulnerable in society. Through the cyclical structure, he advocates that **socialism is the remedy for breaking the metaphorical vicious cycle of capitalism** that encourages social inequality opposed to social justice.
- Throughout the play, Priestley intricately ties the concept of progress to socialism. The **motif** (recurring symbol/theme) of change is **catalysed** (caused) by the introduction of socialist ideals, positioning socialism as a **moral compass for society**. Priestley illuminates to his audience that its emphasis on **liberation, interconnectedness, and social reform** serves as a driving force for building a **compassionate and progressive society**.

Mr Birling

"As if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive - community and all that nonsense" Act 1

- **Zoomorphism:** Mr. Birling employs **zoomorphism (giving a human animal qualities)** to characterise society, particularly likening the lower classes to "bees." This direct comparison reflects Mr. Birling's **degradation** and **mockery** of the concept of collective responsibility, portraying it as an **animalistic** and **primal behaviour** fit only for insignificant creatures like "bees."
- He dismisses the idea of **intertwining his responsibilities** with those of others and perceives the notion of ending his negligence as **trivial** (unimportant) "nonsense."
- **Hyphen:** The deliberate insertion of a hyphen prompts a **theatrical pause**, compelling the actor portraying Mr. Birling to hesitate before articulating the word "community." This pause emphasises his **physical repulsion** to the concept, suggesting an inability to even verbalise it.
- Acting as a **microcosm** (something small representing something larger) for capitalist ideologies, Mr. Birling becomes vilified for his rejection of the idea of "community" and his preference for **materialism over human relationships**.

"Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges' (Act 2 said by Inspector)

- **Syntax:** The **syntax** (word order) of the phrase places "responsibilities" before "privileges," reflecting the direct order of importance emphasised by the Inspector to Mr. Birling.
- However, Mr. Birling **inverts** this sequence, prioritising his privileges and **materialistic gains** over his responsibilities and the development of a **collective social conscience** (knowing right from wrong in society).
- **Short fragmented sentences:** The concise, fragmented structure of "public men" followed by "Mr. Birling" mirrors Mr. Birling's **fragmented perception of responsibility and accountability for his exploitative treatment** of the lower classes.
- He perceives his social status as granting him the authority to **dehumanise** those beneath him and **absolve (be free from)** himself of any responsibility for the suffering he causes them.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Responsibility:** Serving as a microcosm exemplifying **capitalist** ideologies, Mr. Birling faces condemnation from the audience for his dismissal of the fundamental societal value of **responsibility**, alongside his prioritisation of materialism over human relationships
- **Social class:** Mr Birling personifies **capitalism** and thus prioritising his privileges and materialistic gains over his **social** responsibilities and the development of a collective social conscience (knowing right from wrong in society)
- **Older vs younger:** Mr. Birling persists in his **self-serving capitalist outlook**, thus is presented as a stagnant (doesn't change) character as he is entrenched in the traditional values of his **generation**.
- **Guilt:** Mr Birling is so entrenched in his **capitalist ideologies** that he absolves (frees) himself from feelings of **guilt** and remorse. He perceives his social status as granting him the authority to dehumanise those beneath him.

Mrs Birling

“I don’t suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class—” (act 2)

- **Repetition on “girl”**: The term “girl” conveys notions of innocence and vulnerability, shedding light on Mrs. Birling's understanding of the innocence inherent in individuals like Eva, while simultaneously showcasing her **willingness to exploit them and rationalise it for capitalist advancement**.
- Additionally, the repetitive use of “girl” showcases how this **exploitative and prejudicial treatment of lower social class** individuals repeatedly commences within society, with figures such as Mrs. Birling shielded from the consequences by their elevated social status.
- **Demonstrative adjective on ‘that’**: She groups together the lower classes through the demonstrative adjective “that” to dismiss them as **an aggregate** (meaning they are all grouped together as one) **inferior and homogeneous (all the same)** group that all behave in the same way.
- The demonstrative adjective not only emphasises the **distinctions in their social classes**, but also illustrates how Mrs. Birling is entirely governed by the **arrogance of her social status** – she can't even bring herself to specify Eva's social class, considering it so far beneath her.

“He certainly didn’t make me confess” (Act 3)

- **Connotations of “confess”**: The verb “confess” has connotations of crime, and by stating she hasn't committed any **unlawful acts**, she subtly implies her lack of responsibility.
- Her firm denial of accountability comes **effortlessly**, reflecting the acceptance and even promotion of selfishness and consequently, irresponsibility within **capitalist ideologies**, without **moral or legal condemnation (punishment)**.
- **Imperative verb “make”**: The imperative verb “make” hints at another reason as to why she so actively rejects responsibility- **it is a way of keeping afloat in the power struggle between her and the inspector**.
- Mrs. Birling's choice of words subtly suggests that admitting responsibility would be **conceding** (admitting something is true) to the inspector, posing a threat to her status in the **capitalist hierarchy** – she is safeguarding her position within the societal structure dictated by capitalist ideologies.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Responsibility:** Serving as a microcosm exemplifying **capitalist ideologies**, she is conducted entirely under the arrogance of her social superiority opposed to **responsibility**. Her adherence to capitalist ideologies not only supports but also fosters and encourages this behaviour.
- **Social class:** For **capitalists**, upholding the **class system** was paramount, thus for Mrs Birling, her duty and personal responsibility may be to uphold the class gap by refusing Eva help.
- **Older vs younger generation:** Her firm denial of accountability comes effortlessly as she has practised this for years as a member of the **older generation**. This reflects the acceptance and even promotion of selfishness and, consequently, irresponsibility within **capitalist** ideologies.
- **Guilt:** Mrs. Birling consciously evades empathy and understanding to absolve herself of **guilt** for her dehumanising and exploitative treatment of the lower classes. Despite her outwardly philanthropic stance, she prioritises the **capitalist ideology** of prioritising self-interest over the needs of others.

Sheila

“What he made me feel. Fire and blood and anguish” (Act 3)

- **The Inspector's proxy (taken on someone's role when they leave)**: Following the Inspector's final speech, Sheila serves as his **proxy**, exemplified by her precise emulation, including the deliberate repetition of the polysyndeton on "and."
- This illuminates Sheila's desperate attempt to emphasise the **relentless consequences of lacking social conscience to her obdurate (stubborn) parents of the older generation and her fiancé indoctrinated with capitalist beliefs**.
- **Personal pronoun**: Sheila is now a **moral compass** to her family, showcasing her evolution towards empathy as her use of the personal pronoun "me" shows she now experiences genuine remorse.
- However, her **awareness extends beyond personal remorse**, she has developed an understanding of the **systemic consequences of capitalist ideologies on society as a whole**.

“But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people” (Act 1)

- **Connotation of "girls"**: Sheila's vocabulary shift, particularly her focus on "girls," exposes her father's **exploitative capitalism**. "Girls" connotes innocence and vulnerability, suggesting Sheila now recognises how the upper class, imbued with capitalist views, **preys on the disadvantaged social classes**.
- This revelation, unimaginable for her sheltered past self, fuels her disgust with the **dehumanising and unscrupulous behaviour** of capitalists.
- **Humanistic perspective**: The Inspector's arrival **frees her from the shackles of her oppressive privileged existence**. Exposed to the **human cost** of excessive capitalism, she sheds her former self-serving docile perspective and embraces a humanistic outlook, valuing individuals over profit.
- Thus, act one's docile Sheila, **cocooned** (wrapped) in privilege, undergoes a **metamorphosis** (change) under the Inspector's scrutiny. Her **infantile facade crumbles**, revealing an emerging champion for **social justice**. This symbolises the advancement of **women's rights in 1945**, depicting women's empowerment and their role in advocating for social justice for all oppressed members of society.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Responsibility:** Sheila becomes disillusioned with **capitalist** ideologies as she recognises that everybody is inextricably linked to their **responsibilities**. Socialism has freed her from the shackles of her oppressive privileged existence
- **Social class:** The Inspector's arrival frees her from the shackles of her oppressive privileged existence. Exposed to the human cost of excessive **capitalism**, she sheds her former self-serving docile perspective and embraces a **humanistic outlook**, valuing individuals over profit
- **Older vs younger generation:** Socialism emancipates Sheila from the shackles of **capitalism's** inherited oppressive ideals, allowing her to grasp the systemic consequences of capitalist ideologies on society at large. She comprehends how the **older generations** strive to preserve this dehumanising system.
- **Guilt:** Sheila begins to understand that **capitalism** favours self-interest, even in the face of neglecting others. This revelation, unimaginable for her sheltered past self, fuels her disgust and **guilt** towards the dehumanising and unscrupulous behaviour of capitalists

Eric

“Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices” (Act 1)

- **Rhetorical question:** Eric is questioning the ethics behind his **avarice** (greed) father’s **exploitative attitude** towards business and relationship with lower social classes. This is a pivotal turning point for his character, as the audience begins to see him **deviate** from the [*half shy*] presentation into the [*assertive*] one foreshadowed at the beginning.
- The emergence of socialist ideals within Eric's consciousness is **dismantling his prior obliviousness to the suffering inflicted upon others** by capitalist ideologies.
- **Alliteration:** The alliterative phrase “*possible prices*” illuminates Eric’s emphasis on the **outdated and unjust social systems** that have been created and upheld by older generation members like his parents.
- He exposes and questions the **systemic bias** that favour the wealth accumulation of upper-class capitalists, leveraging a **laissez-faire (minimal intervention)** governmental stance. He has realised this enables figures like his father to exploit and silence working-class individuals for **personal monetary gain**.

“I did what I did. And mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her” (act 3)

- **Personal pronoun on “I”:** The recurrent use of the personal pronoun “I” serves not only to illuminate Eric's growing sense of **personal accountability** and **social awareness** but also signifies the maturation of his **introspection** (reflecting on yourself) – he is on a quest for **redemption** (save from sin) from his capitalist sins.
- Eric is transitioning from the [*half shy*] demeanour initially presented in Act 1, now **compelling his family to confront their own moral failings** and take ownership of their unethical behaviour.
- **Parallelism (repetition of “did what” in each part of the sentence):** The parallelism, characterised by the repetition of “*did what*” in each segment of the sentence, showcases the **interconnected nature of everyone's responsibility** – Eric emphasises that their **negligence and exploitation are burdens** they must collectively accept.
- The parallelism surrounding ‘*did what*’ introduces an almost **ambiguous** quality as there is no details on what they specifically “*did*”. This compounds how they are **microcosms** (something small representing something larger) of the upper-middle class and therefore symbolises how they “*did what*” they pleased to the lower classes **without remorse or accountability** from anyone.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Capitalism vs socialism:** Eric's deep disillusionment and embarrassment arise from his realisation of **capitalism's** inherent exploitation of individuals and its prioritisation of self-interest over **responsibility**.
- **Social class:** The emergence of **socialist** ideals within Eric's consciousness is dismantling his prior obliviousness to the suffering inflicted upon the **lower classes** by capitalist ideologies
- **Older vs younger generation:** The emergence of **socialist ideals** within Eric's consciousness is dismantling his prior obliviousness to the suffering inflicted upon others by capitalist ideologies – he's realised this exploitative system is actively sustained by the **older generation**.
- **Guilt:** Despite Eric's prior alcohol-fueled perspective, the Inspector enlightens him with a fresh outlook on society and how **socialism** can encourage societal flourishing. His **guilt** plays a pivotal role in opening up this new perspective, as it disillusiones him from capitalist ideals.

Gerald

[The easy, well- bred young man about town] (Act 1 stage direction)

- **Animalistic image on 'bred'**: For Priestley's contemporary audience, the stage direction "bred" evokes **imagery of animal breeding**, conjuring a metaphorical image of Gerald as a product of **meticulous cultivation**, much like a carefully bred animal.
- This suggests that Gerald has been groomed from birth to embody the **archetype of the aristocratic and charming "man about town."** Thus, he is a **victim to capitalist ideologies** ingrained within him, as he is unable to escape the persona crafted for him before he even had **agency** (a choice) over his own identity.
- **Adjective on 'easy'**: The adjective on 'easy' implies that Gerald easily **assimilated** (blended) into the higher echelon of society as he is a **paragon (perfect example) of social superiority**. This ease and comfort in his current circumstances foreshadow his resistance to change, contrasting with the more **malleable** (able to change) qualities of other members of the younger generation.
- This reluctance to embrace socialist principles may stem from a fear of **jeopardising his social standing and being ostracised (isolated) by the elite**.

"We're respectable citizens and not criminals" (Act 1)

- **Collective pronoun "we're"**: The utilisation of the collective pronoun "we're" serves to **propagate a segregative ideology**, as Gerald employs it to unite the Birlings against perceived "criminals." However, the **irony** lies in Gerald's unfounded assertion of the Birlings' respectability, which **unveils aristocratic biases as fundamentally ignorant**.
- Additionally, it underscores how the wealthy, consumed by materialism, often lack insight into morality or even real life itself, this belittling their **perceived shrewdness** (having good judgement).
- **Alliteration on 'citizens' and 'criminals'**: The alliteration of "citizens" and "criminals" creates a sense of similarity, reflecting Priestley's portrayal of **blurred lines between morality and criminality** as one ascends the social hierarchy.
- Much like Priestley's use of **dramatic irony and satire** to mock Mr. Birling, he **subtly ridicules Gerald's pretentious demeanour**, revealing how the wealthy often harbour biases that align only with their narrow worldview. Priestley highlights this is only **exacerbated** through capitalist ideologies.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Responsibility:** Gerald's segregative ideologies and strong belief in the infallibility (inability to be wrong) of aristocracy and **capitalism** are clear. He cannot conceive of a world where equality, fairness and **responsibility** could be extended to the upper classes
- **Social class:** He is a victim to **capitalist** ideologies ingrained within him, as he is unable to escape the persona crafted for him before he even had agency (a choice) over his own identity – he is a marionette (puppet) of his **social class**.
- **Older vs younger generation:** Gerald can be seen as a product of meticulous cultivation, much like a carefully bred animal, to be a paragon (perfect-example) of an aristocratic **capitalist**. Despite being a member of the **younger generation**, he remains inextricably (closely linked) tied to this persona.
- **Guilt:** Gerald shows a hint of remorse, yet he falls back into the familiar self-prioritising **capitalist ideologies**, favouring the preservation of a flawless facade over acknowledging and confronting his **guilt**.

The Inspector

“It’s better to ask for the earth than take it” (Act 1 said to Mr Birling)

- **Syntax on ‘ask’:** The **syntax** on “*ask*” prior to “*take*” is used by the Inspector to highlight the hierarchical order of importance crucial for societal collective responsibility. It emphasises that it is imperative to “*ask*” and share resources, in contrast to the **individualistic capitalist notion** of “*taking*” for personal gain.
- The Inspector demonstrates that the act of “*taking*” often exacerbates inequality and perpetuates the cycle of poverty for those in lower social classes. Through his direct critique of Mr. Birling, who embodies capitalist ideology, the Inspector **condemns the prioritisation of individual greed** and self-interest over community well-being.
- **Connotations of ‘take’:** To “*take*” carries connotations of stealing, a notion **vehemently** (strongly) condemned in biblical teachings as a **mortal sin**. As religion was the **foundation of morality** in the Edwardian era, capitalist ideals often disregard these teachings, **prioritising individual gain** over ethical considerations.
- Juxtaposingly, socialism can be viewed as a return to society's moral foundations, emphasising communal values and collective responsibility over **individualistic desire**.

“We are members of one body” (Act 3)

- **Biblical allusions:** He also **directly relays the biblical teaching**, used in baptism, that we are “*members of his body*” in Christ. This is parallel language to “*we are members of one body*”. Thus, the Inspector, alike to Jesus, promotes the union of society and togetherness– reinforcing his spreading of Christianity and its **foundational teachings**.
- Alike to Jesus providing **salvation for mankind**, the Inspector’s final speech can be seen as being the **salvation for the Birlings**’ as he reminds them to “*Remember that. Never forget it.*”
- **Singular image on ‘one’:** The singular image of “*one*” serves as a poignant reminder of the profound interconnectedness that binds humanity together. Therefore, he teaches the Birlings it is their **moral imperative** to recognise and **fulfil their duty to care** for their community and members of society regardless of their social class.
- By understanding that we are all interconnected, the Inspector teaches both the Birlings and the audience that society can strive towards a **society built on empathy, compassion, and social responsibility opposed to hatred, segregation and irresponsibility**.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Responsibility:** The Inspector's teachings makes socialism appear to bring society back to the foundations of reality – religion. He is presented as a moral agent of God, and through his clear **socialist** stance, it makes socialism seem inextricably linked with religion, morality and **responsibility**.
- **Social class:** The Inspector demonstrates that the individualistic **capitalist** notion of 'taking' often exacerbates inequality and perpetuates the cycle of poverty for those in **lower social classes**.
- **Guilt:** The Inspector personifies **socialism** as he encompasses and propagates (spreads) socialist ideologies of fairness, developing a collective social conscience and being united in social reform. He is able to galvanise support for these ideals by evoking powerful emotions of **guilt**, remorse, and self-reflection from the younger generation, who start to recognise the flaws in their behaviour.