

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.