

**The Illusion and Reality of Freedom Under Capitalism:
An Attempt at Existential Marxism**

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I pledge my word of honor that I have abided
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Introduction

There are many absurd economic conditions within the world today, conditions that highlight the apparent meaninglessness of one's actions or of certain policies. In America, many individuals struggle to purchase necessities such as food, medicine, or even an apartment; it was estimated that in 2018, 13.1% of Americans lived in poverty.¹ This data was collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, before the COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of people who are unemployed.² Contrastingly, the total wealth of the U.S.'s almost 700 billionaires increased from 2.95 trillion on March 18, 2020, to 4.01 trillion on December 7, 2020.³ Extreme levels of wealth inequality and poverty are not the only apparently absurd conditions present within our contemporary neoliberal capitalist society. Homelessness exists alongside the proliferation of empty housing developments, hunger exists while America wastes 40% of its food annually, and environmental destruction occurs alongside both overproduction and overconsumption.⁴ The pervasiveness of these market failures indicates that the current, capitalist economic system is not producing efficient and equitable outcomes for most of the population. Why then is capitalism defended by so many contemporary economists as the best economic system available to us? Can a more useful and productive economic system be realized?

When pressed about the usefulness of Capitalism, both Liberal philosophy and Neoliberal economics strongly emphasize the efficiency and freedom that supposedly comes along with

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Estimated Percent of People of All Ages in Poverty for United States," FRED, (December 2020) <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PPAAUS00000A156NCEN>.

² Emily A Shrider et al., "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020," Census.gov (United States Census Bureau, October 18, 2021): 1 <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html>.

³ Institute for Policy Studies & Americans for Tax Fairness, "Net Worth of U.S. Billionaires Has Soared by \$1 Trillion-To Total of \$4 Trillion-Since Pandemic Began," Americans For Tax Fairness. (2021), <https://americansfortaxfairness.org/net-worth-u-s-billionaires-soared-1-trillion-total-4-trillion-since-pandemic-began/>.

⁴ Dana Gunders, "Wasted: How America Is Losing Up to 40 Percent of Its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill," NRDC, (2020), <https://www.nrdc.org/resources/wasted-how-america-losing-40-percent-its-food-farm-fork-landfill>.

market-based economies. There have been many economists and philosophers, such as Friedrich August von Hayek and John Locke, who have argued that capitalism produces the most desirable outcomes, namely efficiency and freedom. However, the writings and philosophy of nineteenth century German philosopher Karl Marx and twentieth century French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre suggest otherwise. By examining Marx's most theoretically developed work, *Das Kapital*, and Sartre's works, *Being and Nothingness* and *A Search for A Method*, the mechanisms that causes our contemporary suffering and situational absurdities should become evident. Capitalism prevents those who live under it from experiencing Material freedoms and from exercising their own Radical, existentialist freedom. This Radical freedom is distinct from the simple freedom to choose within a market (which we may call Capitalist freedom) as described by Locke or Hayek. It is also different from Marx's conception of Material freedom, which is tied to the equitable distribution of resources (which we may also call Marxist freedom). Quite uniquely, Sartre's existentialist version of freedom (Radical freedom) can only be cultivated, rather than obtained, through the philosophical examination and practice of Existentialism, a philosophy which rejects all ideology and encourages the recognition of one's responsibility in the world. This rejection of ideology and emphasis on responsibility allows individuals to fight for society's Material freedom in consequential ways. Radical freedom, and its potential power to combat Capitalism's ideological influence, is the interest of this work.

French Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical relationship with both freedom and Marxism allows for an exploration into a kind of behavioral prescription for the contemporary economic actor. Sartre's two works, *Being and Nothingness* and *A Search for A Method*, delve into the unique concept of Bad Faith, an idea which can be applied to individuals living under Capitalism, where individuals do not act according to their own desires or will but according to

the expectations imposed on them by themselves, others, the market, and oppressive institutions. These expectations are ultimately reinforced through society's passive acceptance of Liberal and Neoliberal ideology that is prevalent in the contemporary landscape of economics. Recognizing that these ideological expectations are unobtainable and volunteering one's time and energy into the project of Radical freedom and responsibility may provide those suffering under our current economic conditions with an increased sense of optimism.

Before we can arrive at such conclusions, we must first tackle the claims and defenses made for Capitalism by the Liberal and Neoliberal thinkers, who represent the majority of contemporary economic thought today. Chapter one of this text identifies the flawed Neoliberal/Hayekian assumptions held by contemporary economists in their understanding of the term efficiency, which can be seen by examining three significant market failures: working poverty, wealth and income inequality, and climate change. Once these Neoliberal assumptions are shown to be inaccurate, a Marxist explanation of why these assumptions are inaccurate is offered. Chapter two continues this work of disproving inaccurate assumptions held by economists today by focusing on assumptions given to us by the Liberal philosopher John Locke with his limited understanding of the term freedom. By contrasting Liberalism's conception of freedom (the freedom forfeited to us by Capitalism) with Marx's conception of a Material freedom, we will begin to see the inhibitory dangers of Capitalist ideologies. Chapter three identifies the inability of Marxist philosophy to combat the absurdities created by Capitalism on its own. Marxism's failure to emphasize one's power and responsibility as an individual to create change proves to be a flaw. This critique is offered through the philosophy and work of Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, who endorses a version of Radical freedom that differs from the freedom of the Capitalist or the Marxist. Chapter four contemporizes this conflict by introducing

the struggle between individual action and Capitalist ideology that has been observed by many Leftist philosophers today, namely Mark Fisher and Slavoj Žižek. It is shown that the only way to navigate such restrictive ideologies is to use Sartre's Radical freedom to search for and practice an alternative to our current absurd system.

Chapter I: Hayek and the Contemporary Economists

Economic Absurdities

Markets, while mostly unnoticed, are one of the most widely utilized economic concepts today. With the aid of technology, someone can become a buyer or seller in almost any market imaginable without ever needing to leave their house. Within this market-saturated world, most assume that markets are beneficial entities that generally tend to produce efficient, or at the very least acceptable, outcomes. Neoliberal ideology specifically is a ubiquitous

ideology that values market exchange as ‘an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs’...that embraces the idea of the self-regulating free market, with its associated values of competition and self-interest.⁵

If this is the case, why do so many different markets seem to create absurd or extraordinarily meaningless, economic outcomes? For example, within the U.S. alone there are a countless number of market failures. The housing market has failed to provide homes to those in need, the prices of many life-saving drugs and procedures are significantly higher than they are in other developed countries, food is wasted on a massive scale even though people still go hungry, and the country is suffering from a man-made climate-crisis because of overproduction and consumption.⁶

These market failures are absurd because scarcity is no longer a significant issue within these types of markets, especially in developed countries like the U.S. In the beginning of 2020, there were 580,466 homeless people in America.⁷ At the same time there were 15,967,000 empty

⁵ Tejaswini Ganti, “Neoliberalism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43049564.91>.

⁶ Andrew W. Mulcahy et al., “International Prescription Drug Price Comparisons: Current Empirical Estimates and Comparisons with Previous Studies,” Rand Corporation (2021): xi, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2956.html.

⁷ National Alliance to End Homelessness, “State of Homelessness: 2021 Edition,” August 16, 2021, <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2021/>.

houses in the U.S.⁸ That means for every homeless person in America there were at least 27 empty homes that they could have lived in. The only factors preventing these individuals from living in these houses are markets and private property, both of which are ideas that come from and are reinforced by Liberal and Neoliberal philosophy.

This chapter uses a Marxist perspective to examine three absurd market failures—specifically the current state of working poverty, income and wealth inequality, and climate change. The method of reproduction for capital within the context of the Capitalist mode of production inherently causes absurd economic outcomes and leads to “inefficient” outcomes. For instance, in *Das Kapital*, Capitalism is shown to require the social, physical, and financial exploitation of laborers while also necessitating their participation within the markets so that the Capitalist may continue to produce commodities. The sale of these commodities to the working class creates more capital/financial resources. As a result of this system, poverty among the working class is the natural byproduct of the larger accumulation of capital by the few on top of our economic hierarchy. Essentially, under Capitalism, there must be poor and underprivileged people for the economy to function in a way that benefits Capitalists. These poor people must also continue to consume goods for their economy to grow. Consumption and production must always increase, in order to appease the Capitalist’s desire to accumulate more capital, despite the finite number of resources on the planet. As a result of this never-ending loop, no one is truly, materially free under Capitalism.

Liberalism and Neoliberalism as a Background

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, Housing Inventory Estimate: Vacant Housing Units in the United States [EVACANTUSQ176N], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, accessed November 2021, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/EVACANTUSQ176N>

The purpose of this paper is not to delve too deeply into the arguments made by Liberal and Neoliberal thinkers, but to critique contemporary economics' understanding of freedom and market failures. As a result, it is necessary to briefly review the assumptions that are made by most economists today by looking at two thinkers, Hayek and Locke, who represent some of the popular arguments on the side of Neoliberalism and Liberalism respectively. To understand the failings of contemporary markets, one must first understand the supposed purpose of these markets. As philosopher Duncan Bell notes:

Liberalism is a spectre that haunts Western political thought and practice...signifying either the vicious logic of Capitalism or a squalid descent into moral relativism. For others still, perhaps the majority, it is a mark of ambivalence, the ideological prerequisite for living a reasonably comfortable life in affluent democratic states.⁹

This “ideology” comes with assumptions that tend to contradict reality. As it will be shown, inaccurate assumptions involving one’s freedom of choice within markets and the nature of private property can be traced back to nineteenth century philosopher John Locke. Neoliberal theory prioritizes similar contradictions:

many accounts of Neoliberalism refer to the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947 by Austrian economist Friedrich August von Hayek as the key moment in the formulation of Neoliberal philosophy... [Hayek] argued that individual freedom could be preserved only in a society that protected private property and had a competitive market as the foundation of economic activity.¹⁰

Through an investigation of Neoliberal and Liberal philosophy it will become evident that both frameworks have inaccurate understandings of freedom and Capitalism.

Markets and Freedom

⁹ Duncan Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” *Political Theory* 42, no. 6 (2014): 682, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24571524>.

¹⁰ Tejaswini Ganti, “Neoliberalism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 91-92, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43049564.91>.

One aspect of this inconsistent understanding comes from the imagined relationship between the freedom of choice within markets and market efficiency. Neoliberal economists continually argue that one's "freedom of choice across all domains of production and consumption—of the producer, worker, and consumer—was imperative for the efficient and satisfactory production of goods and services."¹¹ Even if one is not entirely free to do as they please, a Neoliberal economist such as Friedrich August von Hayek would assert that an individual would only need to have the freedom to choose what they would like to buy or sell in a market to produce an efficient outcome for society. Hayek claims, within his work "The Use of Knowledge in Society," that markets are efficient precisely because individuals make decisions with varying amounts of information, without the aid of unimaginably complex mathematics or inefficient centralized planners.¹² It is thus the case that:

a rational economic order is determined precisely by the fact that the knowledge of the circumstances of which we must make use never exists in concentrated or integrated form, but solely as the dispersed bits of incomplete and frequently contradictory knowledge which all the separate individuals possess.¹³

What is supposed to occur within this de-centralized system of exchange is that prices reflect subtle differences in knowledge.¹⁴ Consequently, one of the main arguments made in defense of Capitalism by Neoliberal thinkers is that markets produce efficient outcomes by encouraging individual economic actors to use their freedom to buy or sell within various markets. To the Neoliberal Hayek, efficiency "depends mainly on the question under which of them [economic systems] we can expect that fuller use will be made of the existing knowledge."¹⁵ However, it is

¹¹ Ganti, "Neoliberalism," 91.

¹² Friedrich A Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," *The American Economic Review* 35, no. 4 (1945): 526-527, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1809376>.

¹³ Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," 519.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 526.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 521.

certainly not the case within our contemporary economy that markets are making full use of everyone's localized knowledge.

Irony Poverty

Hayek's definition of efficiency talks about the individual's use of knowledge, which is hard to evaluate and measure. In order to better understand Hayek's usage of the term, we may ask ourselves, "what do contemporary economists mean when they say that markets are efficient?" One common and widely accepted definition of efficiency (which is predicated on Hayek's definition) is called Pareto efficiency, which is achieved "when resources are used over any given period of time in such a way as to make it impossible to increase the well-being of any one person without reducing the wellbeing of any other person."¹⁶ Here the notion of "wellbeing" references economic utility which includes not only one's physical wellbeing but also their financial wellbeing.¹⁷ When imagining an efficient economy, or at least a pareto optimal market, it would be reasonable to assume that everyone would be able to obtain the resources that they would need to survive comfortably, especially given that there are more than enough resources available to satisfy the basic needs of everyone. However, this is not the case for many Americans.

¹⁶ David Hyman, *Public Finance: A Contemporary Application of Theory to Policy*, (Cengage, 2021), 51.

¹⁷ The definition of the term wellbeing is also necessary to define in this context because "In [contemporary] economic analysis, it is usually assumed that each individual's well-being depends on her or his own material resources. In actual life, each individual's well-being depends also on other factors, among them material resources that belong to other persons." Sven Ove Hansson, "Welfare, Justice, and Pareto Efficiency," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 7, no. 4 (2004), 361, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27504326>. In this paper I will use the term wellbeing in reference to both understandings of the term (contemporary economists' understanding being of one's own wellbeing, and Hansson's understanding of a more holistic approach to an individual's wellbeing, for example as it is compared to others'). Thus, the idea of efficiency encompasses one's wellbeing in terms of "access to food, shelter, healthcare... generally speaking, the necessities and perhaps luxuries of life" and one's "mental state... such as happiness or satisfaction" Ibid, 362.

One group that is uniquely affected by the current inefficient allocation of scarce resources is the working poor in America. Using data from the 2009 Luxembourg Income Study, researchers David Brady, Andrew S. Fullerton, and Jennifer Moren Cross found that:

In the United States, there are more than twice as many people in working poor households as in single-mother poor households, and more than four times as many as in poor households where no one is employed. In 2000, more than 11 percent of the U.S. population resided in poor households with at least one employed person, while only... 2.6 percent resided in poor households with no one employed.¹⁸

In this study, “one is defined as working poor...if s/he resides in a household with less than 50 percent of the median household income and at least one household member is employed.”¹⁹

Here the poverty threshold is set at the yearly income level of \$39,250 which is higher than the U.S. government’s official poverty threshold of \$26,695 for a family of four adults.²⁰ It is also higher than the income threshold for Medicaid eligibility in 2020, which stands at \$36,839.²¹

This study reveals that the majority of families who live at or below the poverty line, who struggle to maintain a socially acceptable level of wellbeing for themselves, are employed and economically productive members of society. This data begs the question: why would this result be considered an efficient outcome of the labor market or of an economy’s resources?

If the labor market was truly efficient, wouldn’t employed individuals not have to worry about living in poverty? Returning to Hayek’s definition and reasoning, the price of labor (wages) should reflect the individualized demand of every firm and company who has positions that need to be filled. Hayek argues that:

¹⁸ David Brady et al., “More Than Just Nickels and Dimes: A Cross-National Analysis of Working Poverty in Affluent Democracies, Social Problems,” (2010): 560.

¹⁹ Ibid, 564.

²⁰ Emily A Shrider et al., “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020,” Census.gov (United States Census Bureau, October 18, 2021): 51, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html>.

²¹ Katherine Keisler-Starkey et al., “Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2020,” Census.gov (US Census Bureau, October 18, 2021): 9, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-274.html>.

in a system where the knowledge of the relevant facts is dispersed among many people, prices can act to coordinate the separate actions of different people in the same way as subjective values help the individual to coordinate the parts of his plan.²²

Would not the result of a localized knowledge of poverty lead to an increase in localized wages?

If the Capitalist knew that their workers were struggling to make ends meet, and suffering as a result of their low wages, would not the Capitalist raise the wages of his workers? Even if our imaginary Capitalists are completely selfish, suffering from poverty would logically reduce a workers' productivity. If the efficiency of production relies upon the worker (who acts as both the consumer and producer of goods), and the worker is suffering from low wages, it would make the most economic sense for a firm's owner to alleviate this suffering by raising the wage (which would reflect his valuing of the worker's productivity). In other words, neither individual workers nor firms would "value" poverty. It seems that the prices are not coordinating actions that reflect the "subjective value" that Hayek argued they would. Even for Hayek, this cannot be called an efficient outcome, as it still produces absurd economic outcomes, namely the significant amount of poverty and working poor within America. This is not to say that Hayek's theory is always inaccurate: the labor market does act to encourage individuals to work jobs that most people don't want to work, but whose output is needed by society—for instance, jobs that incorporate hazard pay in their wages. This example may be seen as an efficient outcome for Hayek, as values are reflected in the outcome in the market. However, in the case of working poverty, it appears that the market fails to reflect society's valuing of anti-poverty measures. This is evident in the fact that working poverty exists and makes up the majority of poverty situations within America. Even by Hayek's own standard, the market fails to reflect society's priority to eliminate poverty.

²² Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," 526.

The question remains: why does this failure occur within markets? One may try and dodge this question by claiming that markets still act efficiently. However, even if this statement is accepted as true, the outcome of this “efficient” market is still absurd. Even if one calls the labor market pareto optimal or efficient, as both the worker and the capitalist are seemingly better off after their market transaction than they were before (one receives a wage, the other a sellable commodity), the labor market still appears to leave people for the worse in some cases. This was quite evident during the pandemic, when some Republicans pushed to end temporary increases in unemployment insurance benefits in an attempt to boost labor force participation:

If you were a low-wage worker, why aggressively attempt to go back to work at a lousy, low-paying job, when you can make more money collecting unemployment benefits...Through March of this year, most of the private sector jobs eliminated during the pandemic that haven't been restored are production and “nonsupervisory” jobs that offered weekly pay averaging less than \$750 pre-pandemic. There are more than 45 million low-paying jobs like these, constituting roughly 43 percent of all production and nonsupervisory jobs in the country. This is not about a mere, unfortunate corner of the jobs market. Twenty-three million of these jobs paid under \$500 per week pre-pandemic: That's \$26,000 per year...When you add normal state unemployment benefits and the federal supplements together, \$750 per week from the government is a fairly typical benefit for an unemployed American. (Some states go lower, others higher.) And it is safe to assume that someone getting \$750 per week for not working is not eagerly jumping up to go back to work for potentially hundreds of dollars a week less.²³

In this scenario, the worker's financial wellbeing was hurt by getting a job and having to give up unemployment benefits that were provided during the pandemic, which indicates that this particular labor market cannot have been pareto efficient or optimal under the conditions present during COVID-19. One may indeed argue that the government's involvement within the market is what makes this specific outcome inefficient. However, even if the labor market was truly

²³ Daniel Alpert, “Americans Don't Want to Return to Low Wage Jobs,” The New York Times (The New York Times, June 1, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/01/opinion/labor-shortage-jobs-biden-covid.html?searchResultPosition=8>.

efficient, by pareto standards the outcome of the market is still absurd since people can live in poverty while being employed. What this abnormal COVID-19-scenario highlights is that the nation—and thus the U.S. economy—does have the resources and power to increase the incomes of a significant amount of people, meaning it has enough resources to eliminate or at least significantly reduce the existence of working poverty. What is absurd is the fact that people with useful skillsets must choose between not working and being poor and working while still being poor. Unfortunately, poverty among the working class still occurs in the U.S. because of this market for labor.

Working poverty is not the only issue facing Americans today. Economic inequality has increased dramatically since the 1970's. Looking at data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau we find that in 1967, the average household income for the bottom twenty percent (also known as the lowest quintile) of income earners was \$10,736, while the average household income for the top five percent was \$188,651.²⁴ In 1999, both these numbers increased, albeit one significantly greater than the other. In 1999, the lowest twenty percent of income earners on average earned \$15,261 while the top five percent earned on average \$361,842.²⁵ In 2019, the lowest twenty percent of income earners earned on average only \$25 more than they did twenty years before, while the average income for the top five percent increased to \$451,122.²⁶

²⁴ Jessica Semega et al., "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2019," Census.gov (US Census Bureau, October 18, 2021), 40-43, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2020/demo/p60-270.html>.

²⁵ Ibid, 40-43.

²⁶ Ibid, 40-43.

Mean Household Income of Quintiles	2019	1999	1967
Lowest 20 percent	\$15,286	\$15,261	\$10,736
Top 5 percent	\$451,122	\$361,842	\$188,651
Difference in Mean Income	\$435,836	\$346,581	\$177,915

This staggering difference in average incomes highlights the true scope of economic inequality in our economy today. As average income for the poor has stagnated, median gross rent in the U.S. has increased significantly. In 1970, the median gross rent in the country was only \$415 when adjusted to the inflation level for the year 2000. Thirty years later, this number was \$602.²⁷ In 2019, this number was estimated to be \$1,097.²⁸ Wealth inequality paints an even crueler picture, as researchers from the Institute for Policy Studies point out:

The most visible indicator of wealth inequality in America today may be the Forbes magazine list of the nation's 400 richest. In 2018, the three men at the top of that list — Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Microsoft founder Bill Gates, and investor Warren Buffett — held combined fortunes worth more than the total wealth of the poorest half of Americans.²⁹

Let that sink in: the three richest men in America in 2018 had wealth, had more access to resources, than the whole poorer half of America. How could one possibly believe this is an efficient allocation of scarce resources? Returning to Hayek's definition of efficiency, it is clear that the markets do not value equality. Prices and wages do not reflect which workers or which sectors need more money than others. How could it? Markets cannot make moral judgments; they cannot make choices. Markets do not have free will.

This fact is clearly seen in one of the most serious market failures in existence today: climate change. Scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have

²⁷ US Census Bureau, "Historical Census of Housing Tables: Gross Rents," Census.gov (US Census Bureau, October 8, 2021), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/coh-grossrents.html>.

²⁸ US Census Bureau, "2019: ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables," Explore census data (US Census Bureau), accessed February 28, 2022, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=median+rent&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B25064>.

²⁹ "Wealth Inequality," Inequality.org, Institute for Policy Studies, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://inequality.org/facts/wealth-inequality/>.

warned that an increase in global mean surface temperatures of 1.5°C, relative to global mean surface temperatures experienced in the pre-industrial period, will lead to potentially catastrophic environmental disasters, such as an increase in flooding, land erosion, droughts, ocean acidification, and water scarcity; a rise in sea levels; a loss of species and biodiversity around the globe; a reduction in available food; and more.³⁰ Poorer countries will be hit hardest, as they lack the necessary economic resources to prepare for and deal with the aftermath of natural disasters.³¹ Despite the fact that the U.S. is a wealthy country, the nation has seen an increase in intensity of recent hurricanes/tropical storms along the east coast,³² an increase in dangerous heatwaves in major metropolitan areas,³³ and a migration of economically significant species for businesses along the nation's coasts.³⁴ These environmental catastrophes are not only significantly expensive, but are occurring more and more frequently. In 2020, a record-breaking 22 environmental catastrophes took place, costing both the public and private sectors at least \$1 billion U.S. dollars.³⁵ Since 1980, billion-dollar environmental events have cost the public and private spheres a total of \$1.9 trillion dollars.³⁶

³⁰ Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al., “Global Warming of 1.5°C an IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty,” (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018): 176-180, https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf.

³¹ Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al., “Global Warming of 1.5°C an IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty,” 180-182.

³² U.S. Global Change Research Program, “Atlantic Tropical Cyclone Days,” GlobalChange.gov, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.globalchange.gov/browse/indicator-details/4206>.

³³ U.S. Global Change Research Program, “Heat Waves,” GlobalChange.gov, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.globalchange.gov/browse/indicator-details/3983>.

³⁴ U.S. Global Change Research Program, “Marine Species Distribution,” GlobalChange.gov, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.globalchange.gov/browse/indicator-details/4141>.

³⁵ U.S. Global Change Research Program, “Billion Dollar Disasters,” GlobalChange.gov, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.globalchange.gov/browse/indicator-details/4049#metadata-interactives>.

³⁶ U.S. Global Change Research Program, “Billion Dollar Disasters.”

With the help of the palpable effects of climate change, one might expect—according to the logic of F.A. Hayek—that the prices for environmentally unfriendly commodities would be so high as to discourage their consumption. However, this is not occurring. In 2019, oil consumption in the U.S. was averaging 19,475.375 barrels per day, which is much higher than the 11,512.436 barrel per day average from 1965.³⁷ And while gas prices did increase from approximately \$0.533 per gallon in 1978 to \$2.827 in 2019, these prices are relatively low in comparison to the average prices seen in 2008, which spiked to \$4.65 per gallon in July.³⁸ Clearly there was no drastic response to climate change in the market for commodities, even though the IPCC estimates that the world could emit enough carbon to cause a 2°C increase in temperatures as soon as 2045.³⁹ As author Jonathan Park points out, this is partially because:

no one conducts a true cost-benefit analysis for each purchase that they make...It is simply not possible because there are way too many factors to consider, but also because there is no accepted way to assign a dollar value to our climate system and the services it provides. Meanwhile, it is also difficult to assign a dollar value to the cost of climate change, which the market has not integrated into the price of gas at the pump. The fundamental problem, however, is that without a healthy atmosphere and self-regulating climate, we would not be able to survive, and money would be worthless.⁴⁰

The market fails to create an efficient allocation of resources. The more people consume pollution-emitting commodities, the more environmental damages and catastrophes they cause. Hayek's argument that economic actors would alter their behavior with individual information is clearly inaccurate.

³⁷ CEIC, "United States Oil Consumption," www.ceicdata.com, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/united-states/oil-consumption>.

³⁸ CEIC, "United States Consumer Price: Average: Fuel Oil 2" www.ceicdata.com, accessed March 12, 2022, <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/united-states/consumer-price/consumer-price-average-fuel-oil-2>.

³⁹ Jonathan Park, "Climate Change and Capitalism," *Consilience*, no. 14 (2015): 202, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26188749>.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Park, "Climate Change and Capitalism," 203.

In our examination of three market failures, it was implied that under the theoretical framework of pareto optimality, losing money or potential profits is viewed as causing harm to an entity, no matter if they are a Capitalist or worker. So logically, changing the prices of goods or of labor in a manner where the Capitalist would have to pay the worker more or would make less money would be seen as an inefficient policy. According to Hayek, wages are directly informed by a system of prices that act as a:

mechanism for communicating information... its real function... is that in a case like that of a scarcity of one raw material, without an order being issued, without more than perhaps a handful of people knowing the cause, tens of thousands of people whose identity could not be ascertained by months of investigation, are made to use the material or its products more sparingly; i.e., they move in the right direction.⁴¹

Here Hayek would argue that a scarcity in jobs/materials, or a lack of scarcity in jobs/materials, would cause wages/prices to fall or rise, which may cause some individuals to not be able to purchase as many goods as they could before. The market making “individuals do desirable things without anyone having to tell them what to do.”⁴² Yet, questions remain: why might these absurd outcomes—the proliferation of working poverty within one of the wealthiest countries in the world, the increase in inequality, and the progressive worsening of the effects of climate change—be called a desirable or efficient outcome by neoliberal economists?

The True Purpose of Knowledge: Capital

Under capitalism, markets are influenced not only by one’s knowledge but by one’s desires. One of the most influential desires that can be found under Capitalism, identified by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*, is the compulsion felt by Capitalists to accumulate an ever-increasing amount of capital and wealth. Marx notes that:

⁴¹ Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” 526-27.

⁴² Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” 527.

As a Capitalist, he is only capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital. But capital has one sole driving force, the drive to valorize itself, to create surplus value, to make its constant part, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour.⁴³

There are expectations of what a Capitalist should do under a Capitalist society. All the Capitalist wants to do, and is expected to do, is to accumulate more wealth. According to Marx, capital first appears in the market, and begins its stages of reproduction, as money.⁴⁴ Marx explicitly states that:

The first distinction between money as money and money as capital is nothing more than a difference in their form of circulation. The direct form of the circulation of commodities is C-M-C, the transformation of commodities into money and the reconversion of money into commodities: selling in order to buy. But along this form we find another form...M-C-M...buying in order to sell.⁴⁵

When Capitalists spend their money on goods, such as labor and materials, they expect to sell these goods or the products of these goods at a higher price than what they bought them for. This difference between the price that the Capitalist paid for a commodity and the price at which the Capitalist sold the commodity for is called surplus value.⁴⁶ This money is not just invented purely by the Capitalist, however.⁴⁷ This surplus value must be generated by a source that can create value: the worker.⁴⁸ The value that the worker creates by producing a commodity from other commodities, such as art from paint or a chair from wood, is taken by the Capitalist when he sells the good at the market.⁴⁹ The worker is not paid for the value that they create. They are paid a lower value wage amount, which allows the Capitalist to pocket extra surplus capital:

⁴³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol 1 (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 342.

⁴⁴ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1:247.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 247-248.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 32-33.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 344.

⁴⁸ Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho, *Marx's 'Capital'*, 6th ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 33.

⁴⁹ Fine and Saad-Filho, *Marx's 'Capital'*, 35-36.

“surplus value is brought about by the exploitation of direct or living labour.”⁵⁰ The worker is not compensated for all of their work and is exploited by the Capitalist by and through the labor market.

Many bourgeois, and subsequently Neoliberal, economists will argue that the surplus value extracted from the workers belong to the Capitalists because they provide the workers with the machinery, tools, and the means of production that create commodities. They argue that these tools create part of the value of a product. As Marx points out, this perspective is inaccurate:

[t]he labour process...is a purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values...It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live.⁵¹

Before Capitalism even existed, men worked to create useful things. Goods were valuable because they were useful to others, and because men used their energy and talents to create that value out of a previously non-useful object. So, it is illogical for the Capitalist to assume that their machines and capital are what create the value of their commodities. Marx goes even further, arguing that:

However useful a given kind of raw material, or a machine, or other means of production may be... it cannot under any circumstances add more...to the value of the product...In the labour process it serves only as a use-value, a thing with useful properties, and cannot therefore transfer any value to the product unless it possessed value before its entry into the process.⁵²

Essentially, workers are the only part of the labor process that can create value. Neither machines nor resources can add value to the process that they didn't already possess. The worker, however, is not free to create what they want to create or what they need to create to survive under

⁵⁰ Ibid, 35.

⁵¹ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1:290.

⁵² Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1:314.

Capitalism. They must sell their labor to the Capitalist so that they may be able to buy what they need or want at the market. As Marx writes, “even the lightening of the labour becomes an instrument of torture, since the machine does not free the worker from the work but rather deprives the work itself of all content.”⁵³ The workers are restricted under Capitalism; they are forced to choose which Capitalist they wish to create surplus value for within the labor market.

Aside from knowledge, there is another significant microeconomic factor that affects markets, at least on the side of production: the desire to accumulate capital. Hayek’s claim that markets are tools to disseminate information is now complicated due to the power relationship between the worker and the owner of the means of production. The worker does not have the same freedom (Material/Marxist freedom) as the Capitalist does. Workers sell themselves as commodities in the labor market so that they may buy the food and provisions necessary to survive and live comfortably. Capitalists fail to raise wages not because they are trying to save up money to buy necessities, but because they are trying to generate more surplus value. These theoretical inaccuracies from Neoliberal economists are the result of the ideological forces inherent to Capitalism. According to Marx, the way one thinks, talks, and practices economics is influenced by:

their material behaviour...Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these... If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid, 548.

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, “Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook A. Idealism and Materialism,” in *The German Ideology*, vol 1, 1845, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#a1>.

Although Hayek's claim seems to account for some observations under Capitalism, that markets encourage people to act in certain ways, his claim does not fully capture the whole picture provided to us by the recognition of the influences that capital has within our society. Hayek's claim that markets encourage people to do what is desirable should be amended: under Capitalism, *markets encourage people to do what is desirable for capital*. Those who own capital obviously have more power in the market than those who do not own any capital or who have significantly less capital. As a result, absurd conditions such as poverty among the working class, inequality, and climate catastrophe are not so absurd. The desire of the Capitalist to accumulate more and more capital causes tension between what is desirable for society and what is desirable for their wealth. As Marx argues, "the relationship between exchange, prices and values is not exclusively, or even primarily, quantitative; instead, it reflects definite social relations of production, distribution and exchange."⁵⁵

The argument from historic and contemporary Neoliberal sources is thus too simplistic, or ideologically clouded, for reality. Arguing that market interactions always or at least on average lead to desirable outcomes, such as freedom and efficiency, allow for seemingly absurd economic outcomes to occur. By restating the true purpose of the market in light of Marx's study on capital, to maximize the amount of capital that is owned, it becomes clear that the desirable and efficient outcomes that are talked about by the Neoliberals are results that are beneficial mostly for the Capitalist, and not for society as a whole.

⁵⁵Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital*, 6th ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 20.

Chapter II: Locke, Marx, and Freedom

Private Property and Freedom

It is now time to investigate the assumptions and contradictions within Liberal ideology, specifically those that allow for market interactions to take place in our contemporary economy. These assumptions include the existence of private property, of equality, and of a specific type of Capitalist freedom. For those living within contemporary society, it is easy to assume that true equality and freedom are maintained, even though only a limited amount of people own land while the vast majority do not. These ideological conventions can be traced back to seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke, who contributed heavily to the formation of the Liberal tradition that influences global, and more exclusively American, politics to this day. These ideas are most clearly shown in Locke's work *The Second Treatise of Government & A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in which Locke endeavors to describe the origin of society while suggesting an ideal form of government. However, the question should be asked: do the premises presented in Locke's texts, concerning first equality and then freedom, reflect contemporary economic life? Marxian analysis and observations from the present day suggest not. Locke's notion of liberty, one of the principles from the state of nature that is supposed to be preserved within an ideal society, is shown to be made impossible by the economic relationships described by Marx in his relevant historical analyses of Capitalist societies.

It is important to understand that Locke's argument in favor of private property rests upon his understanding of pre-political and post-political societies, in other words, before governments and after governments. Locke asserts in his philosophical works that the principles of equality and freedom are theoretically preserved in a post-political community through the organization of an ideal society. Locke further claims that ideal society is predicated on the

existence of private property, which (by his own understanding) results from the seemingly sound argument that a person is entitled to the fruits of their labor. Through this observation of private property within Locke's ideal society, contemporary philosophers have been able to interpret Locke's writings as arguing for a Capitalist system, rather than the hypothetical barter system that other Liberals have interpreted his works as rooting for in the past. Private property is shown to prevent equality; the prevention of equality results from the limitation of one's Marxist/Material freedom within society. Thus, Capitalism fails to bring about equality as Locke hoped it would, which is evident in the historical observations from Marx and from contemporary observations on working conditions in the U.S. It has even failed to bring actual freedom, as Marx understands the term, to the people who own private property.

Locke's Hypothetical Society

Before we can begin to understand Locke and other liberals' arguments for private property, we must first analyze Locke's subtle metaphysical assumptions about human interactions before the establishment of any political body. According to Locke, in the "state of nature," humans are "in a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit...A state also of equality, wherein all power and jurisdiction is reciprocal."⁵⁶ Locke states here that human beings are inherently equal creatures.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government & a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Paul Neguri and Tom Crawford (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), 2.

⁵⁷ The assumptions that Locke and other liberals asserts here, that in pre-political societies everyone is inherently equal in their ability to exert power over other beings, obviously ignores many of the power imbalances between men and women, adults and children, able-bodied and disabled people, etc. Although I do not wish to go in-dept into this issue within this paper, I would suggest that one reads Carole Pateman's *Sexual Contract*, specifically the fifth chapter titled "Wives, Slaves, and Wage Slaves." Patemen puts forward the notion that the contemporary marriage, and thus sexual, contract is both similar to and distinct from the kind of oppressive contract that the worker enters in the labor market. "Or to make this point another way, the construction of the 'worker' presupposes that he is a man who has a woman, a (house)wife, to take care of his daily needs. The private and public spheres of civil society are separate, reflecting the natural order of sexual difference, and inseparable, incapable, of being understood in isolation from each other" Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 131.

Equality in the state of nature relies on everyone having the same amount of sovereignty over each other, which is to say no one has sovereignty over anyone else (as this society predates any sovereign power). People without any political restrictions are free in the sense that they may make their own decisions concerning things within their control. Control is limited, however, because of the “law of nature” and “reason” which orders that:

no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions. For men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker – all the servants of one sovereign Master...they are his property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's pleasure.⁵⁸

Locke claims that one may not harm others because they are the property of God. God, who has made us all for a specific purpose, would be violated if we were to harm others or ourselves.

Here Locke is assuming that the notion of private property is not only necessary in the state of nature, but also is a metaphysical feature of the universe. An assumption that, as you might guess, does not produce the most efficient, equitable, or free outcomes for individuals within a society.

⁵⁸ Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government & a Letter Concerning Toleration*, 3.

Private Property and One's Economic Labor

How does Locke understand the existence of private property? As we have seen, for

Locke, private property is the natural result of:

reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience...and nobody has originally a private dominion exclusive of the rest of mankind in any of them as they are thus in their natural state; yet being given for the use of men, there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other before they can be of any use or at all beneficial to any particular man.⁵⁹

Even though, originally, everyone has equal access to all the resources in the world, Locke proposes that individuals must own objects before they can utilize its benefits. To own an object, a person must use their labor to appropriate it. As Locke states, “the labour of his body and the work of his hands we may say are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his own, and thereby makes it his property.”⁶⁰ To acquire private property, one must work to produce some good or service from the resource, which grants them the right to use it however they so desire. Because a worker took the time and effort to modify and make productive a certain resource (such as land), they are entitled to claim that resource and its derivatives as their own. It might also be said that according to Locke, workers are entitled to the fruits of their labor.

Here Locke's argument may appear to reflect the economic reality of a kind of barter system, where everyone is initially equal in their ability to create items to sell at the market or to buy at the market. In this hypothetical reality, it appears that Locke's notions of liberty, freedom, and private property are minimally preserved. However, Locke does not argue for the development of this kind of economic system. Instead, Locke, and other classical Liberals, use the economic principle of scarcity to manipulate their notion and justification of private property

⁵⁹ Ibid, 12.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 12-13.

to encourage the accumulation of capital. This can be seen in the work of contemporary philosopher Jefferey Reno, who tries to resolve some of the apparent tensions between a few of Locke's philosophical ideas. Reno understands Locke to mean that "under optimal conditions, such as abundance of resources, a limited sense of need, and judgment guided by calm reason, there is a rational basis for social behavior."⁶¹ These optimal conditions allow, and thus compel, humans to be social and mutually beneficial creatures. However, these optimal conditions rarely, if ever, exist. Reno argues that:

Locke says that property is to be used 'to the best advantage of life and convenience'...(and) property is to benefit all of mankind...the purpose of property is to build up a surplus capable of benefiting others in need. The foundation of property is therefore, to some extent the common good.⁶²

This justification of private property is vastly different from the individualized perspective provided by Locke. Even Reno admits that this justification for private property "is puzzling in light of Locke's argument in the *Second Treatise* that property is to be owned individually and that ownership necessarily 'excludes the common right of other men.'"⁶³ Despite the confusing language surrounding Locke's notion of private property, the themes of both common and individual good are still expressed in the idea of private property. What is even more interesting is that the idea of surplus wealth is introduced as a direct result of the notion of private property. The accumulation of wealth, or capital, through the extraction of surplus wealth generated by a firm's workers, is present only under the capitalist mode of production.⁶⁴

Marx and Labor Exploitation

⁶¹ Jeffrey B. Reno, "Private Property and the Law of Nature in Locke's Two Treatises: The Best Advantage of Life and Convenience," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 68 (2009): 647.

⁶² Reno, "Private Property and the Law of Nature in Locke's Two Treatises: The Best Advantage of Life and Convenience," 649-650.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 650.

⁶⁴ Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital*, 6th ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 28-35.

Under capitalism, as Marx argues in *Das Kapital*, “surplus value is brought about by the exploitation of direct or living labour.”⁶⁵ Essentially, the Capitalist can make a profit only through not paying (or underpaying) workers. Before we can fully comprehend this point, however, we must understand how Marx conceptualizes this exchange. In Chapter 7 of *Das Kapital*, Marx states that “the use of labour-power is labour itself. The purchaser of labour-power consumes it by setting the seller of it to work. By working, the latter becomes in actuality what previously he only was potentially, namely labour-power in action, a worker.”⁶⁶ Labor is thus turned into an object (or commodity) that a worker can sell to a Capitalist. So far, this description is in line with Locke’s view of property; since labor power is the result of one’s labor, a person may choose to sell it if one wishes. Marx even uses similar language to Locke when he states that:

Labour is first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature...He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body.⁶⁷

Here Marx is saying, similarly to Locke, that labor is the action of an individual which transforms nature. This transformation may or may not be useful to society.

Marx disagrees with Locke about the nature of property, and Capitalism, when he observes how the worker and the Capitalist interact. Workers are paid by the Capitalist to create certain commodities. These commodities are then sold by the Capitalist for money, which is in turn used to buy or create more commodities.⁶⁸ The difference in value between the original cost of acquiring or producing the commodity and the money the Capitalist received from selling the

⁶⁵ Fine and Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital*, 35.

⁶⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 284.

⁶⁷ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 284.

⁶⁸ Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital*, 6th ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 29.

commodity can be called surplus value, which Marx asserts is generated completely by the exploitation of workers.⁶⁹ Marx even states that:

once Capitalist production has been introduced, it continues to develop at the same rate as that of private property and the mode of production based on it is destroyed, so that those immediate producers are expropriated in the name of the concentration of capital.⁷⁰

Marx is observing that former resource owners before Capitalism, namely localized agricultural workers, were being stripped of their own small plots of land due to the existence and expansion of the Capitalists' private property. The Capitalist must own materials for production before he can offer workers a certain amount of money to transform said materials into commodities. This may seem removed from the notion of individual property rights which Locke proposes, however, as philosopher Edward Andrew explains:

Marx explicitly presented his labour theory as an antithesis of Locke's. Marx writes: 'Nature is just as much the source of use values...as is labour...the man who possesses no other property than his labour power must, in all conditions of society and culture, be the slave of other men who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour. He can only work with their permission, and hence only live with their permission.'⁷¹

How could one "freely" choose to be a worker, a wage-slave, or a part of the Proletariat, when the Capitalist has already bought all the land, the resources, the factories, and the technology necessary for work? If all the wood in the world was already owned by one person, then everyone else does not have a choice whether they can buy wood from that Capitalist or not. Similarly, all wood workers, to the extent that they want to put their wood-working skills to use, have no choice but to sell their labor to the wood-owning Capitalist.

Locke's Misunderstanding of Freedom

⁶⁹ Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital*, 34-35.

⁷⁰ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1083

⁷¹ Edward Andrews, "Inalienable Right, Alienable Property and Freedom of Choice: Locke, Nozick and Marx on the Alienability of Labour," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 3 (1985), 543.

Here lies the ultimate contradiction within Locke and contemporary economists'

philosophies: the notion of consent. Locke argues that:

labour, in the beginning, gave right to property, wherever anyone was pleased to employ it upon what was common...and the leagues that have been made between several states and kingdoms, either expressly or tacitly disowning all claim and right to the land in the other's possession, have by common consent, given up their pretenses to their natural common right.⁷²

According to Locke, the people agreed to this certain arrangement of property ownership because they did not explicitly object or leave their state or area. Locke is justifying this apparent lack of freedom for the worker to choose what they want to do by claiming that everybody originally chose to give up this freedom by living in a society. Locke asserts that this choice is made "tacitly" when people decided to stay rather than create another society to live in.

However, the idea of tacit or implied consent between the workers and the owners of a resource is contradictory to Locke's prioritization of a Liberal (or Capitalistic) sense of freedom and liberty. As Locke mentions in an earlier chapter on slavery:

the natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule...For a man not having the power of his own life cannot by compact, or his own consent, enslave himself to anyone.⁷³

So, does the existence of private property result in Capitalists having power over the lives of their workers? Marx has already argued yes. Capitalism, which grows alongside the growth and concentration of private property, limits the Material freedom of the working class and those not rich enough to have an alternative to working for the bourgeoisie or the owners of capital.

⁷² Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government & a Letter Concerning Toleration*, 17.

⁷³ Ibid, 11.

In fact, Marx's objection to Capitalism is not that it is unjust but that it restricts the freedoms of the people who live under it. As the contemporary philosopher George Brenkert explains, Marx understands freedom as directly related to:

relations of production, the relations in which individuals stand to one another in their operation of forces of division and separation of individual and class interests. This has occurred through the institution of private property and the division of labor... 'personal freedom has existed only for the individuals who developed under the conditions of the ruling class, and only insofar as they were individuals of this class.'⁷⁴

One's Liberal sense of freedom, or range of choices, are therefore not controlled by oneself, but by the social and political implications of one's class. If a person is a worker, they may not be able to ever accumulate enough wealth to create and do things that they wanted to achieve, such as being able to travel the world or write a book. Contrastingly, Marxist freedom is not merely just the:

particular view of freedom which is characteristic of bourgeois society...free trade, free selling, and buying... 'for the communists ['free activity' is] the creative manifestation of life arising from the free development of all abilities of the 'whole fellow'. Or again freedom is the cultivation of one's gifts in all directions.'⁷⁵

Marx believes that Lockean ideas of liberty and freedom are warped by the Capitalist mode of production. Locke's argument for private property does not lead to the material and absolute freedom which Marx envisions and references. Instead, the practice of private property restricts certain individuals, namely those of the working class, from exercising their creative and humanistic endeavors.

This issue of freedom and liberty being restricted has not yet been resolved by the accumulation (and the implied eventual redistribution) of wealth on behalf of the Capitalists as

⁷⁴ George G Brenkert, "Freedom and Private Property in Marx," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 8, no. 2 (1979), 139.

⁷⁵ George G Brenkert, "Freedom and Private Property in Marx," 136-138.

suggested by Reno and Locke. Marx was even able to observe some of this lack of altruistic accumulation in the late eighteenth century, through the form of extreme and exploitative labor. Marx notes that there was an untold amount of child labor occurring in Europe during the late 1800s including the case of “William Wood, 9 years old, ‘was 7 years 10 months old when he began to work’...He came to work every day in the week at 6 a.m. and left off at about 9 p.m.... Fifteen hours of labour for a child of 7!”⁷⁶ Financial exploitation was not the only dangerous part of being a worker during Marx’s life. He recounts that:

In the last week of June 1863, all the London daily papers published a paragraph with the ‘sensational’ heading, ‘Death from simple over-work’. It dealt with the death of the milliner, Mary Anne Walkley, 20 years old, employed in a highly respectable dressmaking establishment.⁷⁷

The fact that a 20-year-old woman was worked to death to maintain the wealth of a property owner is just one of the many extreme examples of deplorable working practices detailed within *Das Kapital* that highlight the inability of wealth accumulation and private property to benefit the common good.

Unfortunately, these kinds of exploitative and unsafe labor practices still occur around the world today, despite advancements in regulation and policy designed to protect workers.

According to the results of a survey focusing on American working conditions in 2015:

Nearly three-fourths of Americans report either intense or repetitive physical exertion on the job at least one-quarter of the time. This burden is unequally distributed, with non–college graduates having substantially greater physical demands. But college graduates, older workers, and women are also affected.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 354.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 364.

⁷⁸ Nicole Maestas et al., “Working Conditions in the United States: Results of the 2015 American Working Conditions Survey.” (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2017), x, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2014.html.

Such intense and repetitive physical exertion can have adverse health effects on workers, which can decrease their quality of life over time. The study also finds that:

sixty-two percent of men and 46 percent of women are exposed to vibrations (from hand tools or machinery); loud noise (defined as ‘Noise so loud that you would have to raise your voice to talk to people’); extreme temperatures (high or low); smoke, fumes, powder, dust, or vapors (including tobacco smoke); or chemical products or infectious materials one-quarter of the time or more at work.⁷⁹

All of these conditions make a worker’s decision to enter certain labor markets more extreme. In Lockean terms, these Capitalists removed the worker’s freedom to choose by forcing workers to spend more money on restorative goods, such as necessities like healthcare, than the workers would otherwise desire to do.⁸⁰ As a result, many Americans not only have to worry about how they will make ends meet, but if they will be safe from the potentially dangerous effects of their work. If wealth accumulation over the past 100 years isn’t enough to benefit the common good of the working class, as Locke and other Liberal scholars have suggested it might be, then Locke’s assumption that such wealth accumulation based upon the notion of private property could benefit the common good can be thrown into doubt.

Concerning the Property Owners

One possible objection to this critique of Locke’s position on private property is that it ignores the Material freedom of the Capitalist or resource-privileged individual. Many people argue that Karl Marx’s Communistic principles and ideas harm the Capitalist class while attempting to help the working class; Marx’s proposals might lead to inefficient outcomes for those in the top tier of society. Capitalists would no longer have the Material freedom to use their

⁷⁹ Nicole Maestas et al., “Working Conditions in the United States: Results of the 2015 American Working Conditions Survey,” 30.

⁸⁰ Charles Hokayem and James P. Ziliak. “Health, Human Capital, and Life Cycle Labor Supply.” *The American Economic Review* 104, no. 5 (2014), 128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42920923>.

hard-earned wealth to do whatever they please, which may result in a reduction in capital and freedom of choice. Marx, in opposition, would argue that the freedom each Capitalist has as a wealthy individual is nothing but:

an illusory freedom because not all members of society enjoyed the benefits of that society's mode of production and, primarily, because it was predicated upon the separation of man from man, instead of upon a harmony of interests. Even the dominant classes in past societies have themselves been dominated by man-made and natural forces.⁸¹

The property owner who must exploit the worker to maintain a certain rate of wealth accumulation is also limited in his choices and abilities to act. For Marx, "one can only be free in and through the community, through one's rational, cooperative association with others...Capitalism and Capitalist private property are, then, condemned for limiting freedom."⁸² For Marx and Marxists, the urge to point out the negative results of private property is not an urge to oppress the wealthy as the poor have been oppressed, but rather to build a community that works to free everyone. A community where liberty, Material freedom, and the ideal 'good life' are achieved, rather than just referenced.

Locke's notion of private property may at first seem unrelated to the extreme exploitation experienced by workers around the world today. However, the assumption of private property within a society contradicts Locke's most basic principles associated with the state of nature: freedom and liberty. As Marx shows, Capitalism is based upon the exploitation of a business owner's workers. These workers are not able to give their tacit consent in the current market situation because they would be virtually enslaving themselves to the will of the Capitalist, who owns the only means of production. This is because the existence of private property has allowed wealthy people to accumulate, and continue to accumulate, available resources. As a result,

⁸¹ George G Brenkert, "Freedom and Private Property in Marx," 139-140.

⁸² Ibid, 139-140.

working-class people, and Capitalists, are limited in their choices and actions by this surplus of resources and the social and political relationship this growth in surplus wealth has caused. Thus, it can be said that liberty and private property are contradictory ideas. Through the recognition of this contradiction in liberal ideology, one may be able to reassess what it truly means to be free.

Chapter III: Sartre's Perspective on Freedom and its Significance

Existentialism as Another Option

While Liberal and Neoliberal philosophers promise an illusory freedom, Marx offers a different perspective. For Marx, there is a greater freedom in a state where private property as we know it does not exist and everyone has access to the same resources and material goods. Marxist freedom is achieved only after the end of Capitalism and is certainly not guaranteed for individuals living in today's economic reality. If Marxist freedom is only attainable to us after the fall of Capitalism, how can we conceptualize our ability to respond to the absurdities of Capitalism? In other words, how can one act against something if they are not yet free to do so? This problem encourages us to find a freedom that can be experienced and realized through actions, not just obtained. This freedom must allow us to be able to change the world around us, in face of the coercive forces within our world today. In essence, we are searching for a Radical version of freedom—a freedom which can only be found in French Existentialism.

Existentialism, and specifically the philosophy and experiences of French Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, are key to understanding the solution to this freedom problem. As a self-proclaimed Marxist and the “father of Existentialism,” Sartre's unique focus on the freedom and the experiences of individuals is what distinguishes his philosophy from Marx's.⁸³ While Marx reveals how Capitalism can restrict one's freedom to create and be productive through the mechanism of private property and ideological coercion, Sartre explicitly clarifies how humans are able to surpass these restrictions and exercise their freedom through the avoidance of bad faith, which occurs when one acts as if a person is not free. After establishing Sartre's basic metaphysical perspective on freedom—his Radical freedom—it will become clear that

⁸³Ronald Aronson, “The Philosophy of Our Time,” Boston Review, (November 19, 2018), <http://bostonreview.net/philosophy-religion/ronald-aronson-philosophy-our-time>.

Capitalism, and its adjacent ideologies—Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and even Marxism,—encourage such acts of bad faith. Thus, if individuals, societies, and especially economists, wish to become free, they must separate themselves from restrictive ideologies that require one to act in bad faith and to acknowledge their responsibility to rectify pervasive absurdities.

Where Does our Radical Freedom Come From?

Now we know that Sartre's Existentialist philosophy is needed to better understand freedom, but what exactly is freedom to Sartre, and where does it come from? To answer this question, we must first unpack Sartre's unique metaphysical perspective. In Sartre's iconic work *Being and Nothingness*, he outlines the two types of existences that can be found within our reality that help to explain the origin of our freedom: being-in-itself and being-for-itself.⁸⁴ Being-in-itself describes a type of being where "it does not refer to itself as self-consciousness does. It is this self. It is itself so completely that the perpetual reflection which constitutes the self is dissolved in an identity...It is what it is."⁸⁵ This type of being occurs for things that do not have consciousness or cannot reflect upon themselves. For example, a paperclip, a tree, and money are all items or phenomena that are being-in-itself. They are not aware of anything that could alter their existence, they just exist. These things do not and cannot strive to be anything other than what others perceive them as. They have a defined essence. Humans do not exist like this. Sartre focuses on the Hegelian concept of nothingness to explain this difference in being. For Sartre and Hegel, this nothingness arises in direct relation to being. Sartre writes, "one could view them as two equally necessary components of the real."⁸⁶ In other words, one cannot *be* a conscious

⁸⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: The Principle Text of Modern Existentialism*, trans. Hazel E Barnes (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1992), 25.

⁸⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: The Principle Text of Modern Existentialism*, 28-29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 49.

being without also containing some kind of non-being or experiencing negation.⁸⁷ Here, negation can be conceptualized as an act of interrogation or interaction within the world:

First it is not true that negation is only a quality of judgment. The question is formulated by an interrogative judgment, but it is not itself a judgment; it is a pre-judicative attitude. In posing a question I stand facing being in a certain way and this relation to being is a relation of being... If my watch stops, I can question the watchmaker about the cause of the stopping, but it is the various mechanisms of the watch that the watch maker will in turn question. What I expect from the carburetor, what the watch maker expects from the works of the watch is not a judgment; it is a disclosure of being on the basis of which we can make a judgment. And if I *expect* a disclosure of being, I am prepared at the same time for the eventuality of a disclosure of a non-being. If I question the carburetor it is because I consider it possible that 'there is nothing there' in the carburetor.⁸⁸

By questioning the world, we are faced with nothingness before we apprehend its reality. This nothingness, or lack of a predetermined or necessary outcome, distinguishes us from things that are being-in-themselves. Those objects cannot question reality; they are not forced to search for answers; they can be questioned and experienced by us. This interaction is crucial for Sartre's concept of Radical freedom. Because we as humans can experience nothing, we can as humans cause things to happen. For example:

If, for example, we consider *destruction*, we must recognize that it is an *activity* which doubtless could utilize judgment as an instrument but which can not be defined as uniquely or even primarily judicative. 'Destruction' presents the same structure as 'the question'. In a sense, certainly, man is the only being by whom a destruction can be accomplished. A geological plication, a storm do not destroy – or at least they do not destroy *directly*; they merely modify the distribution of masses of beings. There is no less after the storm than before. There is something else. Even this expression is improper, for to posit otherness there must be a witness who can retain the past in some manner and compare it to the present in the form of *no longer*. In the absence of this witness, there is being before as after – that is all. If a cyclone can bring about death of a certain living beings, this death will be destruction only if it is experienced as such.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid, 45-46.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 38-39.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 39.

Nothingness is a crucial part of our interpretive power as human beings. We experience nothingness so that we may interpret the world. This nothingness is only present in our own experiences; it cannot be experienced by things that are not conscious. We are therefore able to be free insofar as we are able to interpret freedom.

This power to interpret the world, through our experiences or nothingness or negation, can feel like a burden to many people. According to Sartre and Heidegger, nothingness tends to produce within us a feeling of uneasiness or anguish, “For *Dasien* there is even a permanent possibility of finding oneself ‘face to face’ with nothingness and discovering it as a phenomenon: this possibility is anguish.”⁹⁰ This is precisely because of the implication of such interactions with nothingness. Human existence is perceived through this nothingness:

Negation...springs from a consciousness which is turned back towards the beginning. If we remove from this original emptiness its characteristic of being empty *of this world* and of every whole taking form of a world as well as its characteristics of *before*, which presupposes an after, then the very negation disappears, giving way to a total indetermination which it would be impossible to conceive, even and especially as a nothingness.⁹¹

The very separation, which consists of nothingness, of our being from reality and other possibilities is what allows us to be human and what condemns us to be radically free. Sartre notes that:

If we are to assume that man is able to question this process – i.e., to make it the object of interrogation – he must be able to hold it up to view as a totality. He must be able to put himself *outside* of being and by the same stroke weaken the structure of the being of being...Man’s *relation* with being is that he can modify it. For man to put a particular existent out of circuit is to put himself out of circuit in relation to that existent. In this case he is not subject to it; he is out of reach; it can not act on him, for he has retired beyond a nothingness. Descartes following the stoics has given a name to this possibility which human reality has to secrete a nothingness which isolates it – it is freedom.⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid, 50.

⁹¹ Ibid, 49.

⁹² Ibid, 60.

What Sartre is trying to say here is that the condition for humans' existences, being-for-itself, relies on the existence of nothingness which separates the individual from both the past, present, future and even from expectation. Thus, it may be said that existing in a state of being-for-itself implies that one exists in a constant state of freedom.⁹³ As Sartre famously states, human "existence precedes essence,"⁹⁴ meaning that unlike a paperclip, a tree, or money, humans do not have a predefined essence. We serve no explicit function and we must choose what we want to do with our existence. Man is what "he wills himself to be."⁹⁵

This is where Sartre's Radical freedom originates: in our existence as self-reflecting creatures and our relationship with nothingness. Because we are a blank slate, we as individuals must choose who we are and what we do and what we will believe in every moment we continue to exist. As creatures that exist in a state of:

being-for-itself, to be is to nihilate the in-itself which it is. Under these conditions freedom can be nothing other than nihilation...Indeed by the sole fact that I am conscious of the causes which inspire my action, these causes are already transcendent objects for my consciousness...I am condemned to be free.⁹⁶

Therefore, even though some deterministic philosophers and economists may argue that certain objects or events would trigger our actions and behavior (essentially diminishing our freedom), Sartre argues it is our nihilation, or interpretation, of the event or object that presents us the opportunity to make a choice. Sartre argues this point to the extreme:

Some-one will say, 'I did not ask to be born.' This is a naïve way of throwing greater emphasis on our facticity. I am responsible for everything in fact...To make myself passive in the world, to refuse to act upon things and upon Others is still to choose myself, and suicide is one mode among others of being in the world.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid, 60.

⁹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (Yale University Press, 2007), 22.

⁹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 22.

⁹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: The Principle Text of Modern Existentialism*, 567.

⁹⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: The Principle Text of Modern Existentialism*, 710.

Despite the circumstances that one inherits through living, such as past actions, political realities, and even the certainty of one's birth, there are always choices that one can make upon discovering such information. This discovery of facts presents itself as an opportunity for choice and freedom:

Yet, I find an absolute responsibility for the fact that my facticity (here the fact of my birth) is directly inapprehensible and even inconceivable, for this fact of my birth never appears as a brute fact but always across a projective reconstruction of my for-itself. I am ashamed of being born or I am astonished at it or I rejoice over it... Thus in a certain sense I choose being born.⁹⁸

These states of unfreedom that we encounter in life, what Sartre calls our facticity, are actually opportunities for choice, and reinforce the fact that we are completely free. Radical freedom and unchangeable circumstances may seem contradictory at first, but their apparent contradiction arises from a distinction of circumstance and action. As philosopher Peter Jones notes within his examination of Sartre's ideas:

'Never were we freer than under the German occupation.' In other words, Sartre is saying, never were we freer than while we were the most restricted. This quote shows that Sartre is aware of, and comfortable with, this seeming contradiction, and he's encouraging us to try to find its truth without cleaving freedom in two.⁹⁹

The fact that we are free to change the world and are thus responsible for its condition, is a truth that many people seek to avoid and often refuse to acknowledge.

Responsibility and Bad Faith

Because we are all radically free, we are all radically responsible for the world around us.

As Sartre notes:

The one who realizes in anguish his condition as *being* thrown into a responsibility which extends to his very abandonment has no longer either

⁹⁸ Ibid, 710.

⁹⁹ Peter Jones, "Sartre's Concept of Freedom(s)." *Sartre Studies International* 21, no. 2 (2015), 87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24720576>.

remorse or regret or excuses; he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this very revelation.¹⁰⁰

Freedom is thus a distressing and anxiety-inducing realization for the individual. The term “anguish” is used by Sartre to represent the mental uneasiness that one would feel upon realizing the true responsibility that they possess.¹⁰¹ Because of the discomfort of freedom, Sartre emphasizes the prevalence of committing acts of internal deception, of acting as if one is not free. He warns that, “But as we pointed out at the beginning of this work, most of the time we flee anguish in bad faith.”¹⁰² For Sartre, bad faith is a type of “falsehood.” He writes, “We say indifferently of a person that he shows signs of bad faith or that he lies to himself.”¹⁰³ People lie to themselves about their freedom to quiet this feeling of anguish, because if they are not truly free then they cannot be blamed for the state of the world and their own actions.

While bad faith may seem easy enough to avoid, a further examination of its nature reveals the constant pressure one faces to slip into its *modus operandi*. This is because bad faith is not just self-deception:

It is best to choose and to examine one determined attitude which is essential to human reality and which is such that consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it towards itself. This attitude, it seems to me, is bad faith (*mauvaise foi*).¹⁰⁴

So not only is bad faith prevalent, but it also appears to be an essential part of human reality, which arises when people direct ideas inwardly to form a negative comparison of themselves. As Sartre demonstrates:

I am never any one of my attitudes, any one of my actions. The good speaker is one who *plays* at speaking, because he cannot be *speaking*...Perpetually absent to my body, to my acts, I am despite myself that ‘divine absence’ of which Valéry

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: The Principle Text of Modern Existentialism*, 711.

¹⁰¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: The Principle Text of Modern Existentialism*, 799-800.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 711.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 87.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 87.

speaks. I can not say either that I *am* here or that I *am* not here...On all sides I escape being and yet—I am.¹⁰⁵

Bad faith occurs when one denies or questions one's Radical freedom, in this case by interpreting one's actions or emotions as their purpose and most certain objective in life. While this sentiment may be apparent to some, identification with one's experiences and actions allows people to cope with the crushing weight of their responsibility.¹⁰⁶ If they are *just* a speaker, then they will tell themselves that they have no real power over others or themselves. They cannot change the world just by speaking well, so they absolve some of their responsibility—and freedom—by asserting to themselves that they are just a speaker.

This idea applies to all identities: student, professor, friend, economist, and bourgeoisie.

Sartre specifically notes the kind of bad faith that is so common among the working class:

Let us consider this waiter in the café. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes towards the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly...he is playing at being a waiter in a café...the waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to realize it.¹⁰⁷

This type of identification with one's occupation obviously counts as bad faith. It is nonetheless encouraged by society and the self:

Society demands that he limit himself to his function...What I attempt to realize is a being-in-itself of the café waiter, as if it were not just in my power to confer their value and their urgency upon my duties and the rights of my position, as if it were not my free choice to get up each morning at five o'clock or to remain in bed, even though it meant getting fired.¹⁰⁸

We can apply this notion to the Capitalist, too. It is also within his power to provide the workers with the tools necessary to create goods. This implies that the absurdities of Capitalism are the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 103.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 99.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 101-102.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 103.

result of both the working class and the bourgeoisie restricting their own freedom by adopting a predetermined view of the world and thus themselves. Their ideologies and worldviews prevent them from recognizing bad faith and the opportunities present within the “predetermined” aspects of the world. They restrict people’s ability to interpret the world in such a way that encourages them to improve it

Why then is Sartre Necessary?

Why is Sartre’s philosophy necessary to analyzing freedom under Capitalism? If the material condition and ideological traditions caused by Capitalism prevent one from being free, why not focus on dismantling Capitalism first, through Marxist means? As discussed, Marx does address the restrictive qualities that private property (and thus a Capitalist system that encourages the privatization of natural resources, corporations, and entire markets) has on both the proletariat and bourgeoisies’ freedom. Marx acknowledges that one’s range of choices are limited, ranging from what actions they can perform to what kind of viewpoints they may have in life. However, what Marx doesn’t answer for us is how we should dismantle Capitalism *if* we are not yet free to do so. For Marx, true freedom cannot be reached until man has been freed “from the yoke of scarcity.”¹⁰⁹ As Sartre continues to note in his text *Search for a Method*, “We are all acquainted with the passage in which Marx alludes to that far-off time: ‘this reign of freedom does not begin in fact until the time when work imposed by necessity and external finality shall cease.’”¹¹⁰ According to Marx, one will not be completely free to do as they please in society as long as Capitalism, and any form of economic scarcity, exists. Marx’s philosophy implies that freedom is a place or destination for society to look towards, or an object to long for,

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (Random House, 1963), 34. Here Sartre is quoting from page 873 of the third volume of Marx’s *Capital*.

¹¹⁰ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, 34.

rather than a state of action. One cannot act freely, but rather exists in states of freedom and nonfreedom. For Sartre, this is why Marxism is both necessary and unfinished: without Marxism it would be difficult to understand how unfree we actually are in society when only certain people are entitled to resources that not everyone can have. However, with the abundance of physical (such as the relative worsening of the material conditions of the working class) and ideological (the prevalence of Liberalism and Neoliberalism) forces preventing individuals from successfully enacting meaningful economic reform (the unfreedom that Capitalism causes), how can the contemporary Marxist hope to create change?

A philosophy that recognizes freedom above the influence of material conditions is thus necessary to promote and enact progress. Marxism's almost deterministic perspective between economic conditions and human behavior may at first appear inherently contradictory to Sartre's Radical viewpoint that "Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes himself...man is responsible for what he is."¹¹¹ An orthodox Marxist would immediately reject this statement by Sartre because it would imply that the worker—or any other systematically oppressed group—is responsible for their own suffering. However, for Sartre, this responsibility is not a moral one but a *necessary* one for change. There is no apparent contradiction between Marxism and Existentialism if one accepts that Marx's and Sartre's definitions of the terms "freedom" and "responsibility" significantly differ. For Sartre, "absolute freedom is not a 'freedom' to obtain. The freedom that we are is the act of choosing itself, not what may or may not be chosen, and not the success or failure to achieve the goals of a chosen project."¹¹² This difference is why Sartre believed that

¹¹¹ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, 22-23

¹¹² Peter Jones, "Sartre's Concept of Freedom(s)." *Sartre Studies International* 21, no. 2 (2015), 90-91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24720576>.

Existentialism is necessary, even though Marxism is required for class consciousness and that it remains “the philosophy of our time.”¹¹³ Sartre even expressed that the foundations of Marxism were in congruence with the core beliefs of Existentialism and remarked how:

we are in full agreement with Engels when he wrote... ‘There does not exist, as one would like to imagine now and then, simply for convenience, any effect produced automatically by the economic situation. On the contrary, it is men themselves who make history...no matter how much influenced they may be by other political and ideological conditions—are nevertheless...the determining conditions.’¹¹⁴

Despite his agreement, the “convenience” to transform history into the study of economics has proven to be much too strong of a temptation for recent Socialist and Marxist thinkers:

For Sartre, his Marxist peers caused the philosophy to stagnate as “The contemporary Marxist, on the contrary, finds them clear, precise, and unequivocal; for him they *already* constitute a *knowledge*.”¹¹⁵ In essence, Marx’s philosophy has become limited in its ability to explain the world in any useful way:

Marxism, after drawing us to it as the moon draws the tides, after transforming all our ideas, after liquidating the categories of our bourgeois thought, abruptly left us stranded. It did not satisfy our need to understand. In the particular situation in which we were placed, it no longer had anything new to teach us, because it had come to a stop.¹¹⁶

Marxist theory was once able to identify and explain reality in such a way as to reveal hidden and useful information, such as the origin of capital and surplus value. However, according to Sartre:

Marxism stopped. Precisely because this philosophy wants to change the world, because its aim is ‘philosophy-becoming-the-world,’ because it is and wants to be *practical*, there arose within it a veritable schism which rejected theory on one side and *praxis* on the other.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, 30.

¹¹⁴ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, 31.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 35.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 21.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 22.

In other words, Marxism became an ideology used to support Socialist governments and its actions, rather than a method that allowed one to interpret the world in new and unprecedented ways. Sartre observed that:

On November 4, 1956, at the time of the second Soviet intervention in Hungary, each group already had its mind made up before it possessed any information on the situation. It had decided in advance whether it was witnessing an act of aggression on the part of the Russian bureaucracy...or with a counter revolutionary attempt...I have not heard it said that even one Marxist changed his opinion.¹¹⁸

It is because of this philosophical stagnation, this “twofold ignorance, Existentialism has been able to return and to maintain itself because it reaffirmed the reality of man.”¹¹⁹ In essence, Marxism as a tool philosophers and politicians use prescribe a specific world order, and in effect eliminated the role of the individual in history and society. This elimination of the individual (and their freewill to change the world) is an act of bad faith on behalf of the Marxist. As a result, a new philosophy, Existentialism, is needed to supplement Marx’s original insights about economics and philosophy. Without such supplementation, the relevance and usefulness of Marxism disappears.

By acknowledging this need for a reassertion of free will, Existentialism is able to revive Marxism in our contemporary world. This is because under our current economic structure, the universalization of the Capitalist’s notion of freewill has turned even the most progressive and Radical activist into cogs of the capitalist machine.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 23.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 28.

Chapter IV: Our Ideologies, Our Choices, Under Capitalist Realism

Contemporary Absurdities, Contemporary Understandings of Ideologies

Let us return to the contemporary economic landscape from which we started this endeavor. We all are participants in, and observers of, an economic system where significant market failures, such as working poverty, income and wealth inequality, and climate change, are seen as aberrant, or absurd, fixtures of an overall functioning market economy. The contemporary field of economics is concurrently pushing both Liberal and Neoliberal fallacies about the benefits of private property and free markets that have prevented individuals from obtaining resources that are present in the economy. However, it has been shown that such Capitalistic markets are the cause, rather than the solution, of these failures. Despite the fact that in 2020, 40% of Americans had a favorable view of Socialism, there has been no significant push in either the field of economics or public policy towards anti-Capitalist practices.¹²⁰ Why is this so? Contemporary theorists such as Mark Fisher and Slavoj Zizek offer us clues to this answer in their understanding of ideology. Ideologies such as Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and even Marxism, are being used by individuals to practice acts of bad faith under our current economic reality. The most ubiquitous acts of bad faith prevalent in western culture today are reduced to performative consumption.

As we have seen, Marx's perspective on ideology shows us how one's knowledge of reality can become inverted due to a person or group's "historical life-process" or, in other words, their situation within society and class structures.¹²¹ This perspective on ideology

¹²⁰ YouGov, "Annual Survey Shows Rise in Support for Socialism, Communism," Victims of Communism (The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, October 21, 2020), <https://victimsofcommunism.org/annual-survey-shows-rise-in-support-for-socialism-communism/>.

¹²¹ Karl Marx, "Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook A. Idealism and Materialism," in *The German Ideology*, vol. 1, 1845, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#a1>.

explains how members of the bourgeoisie, like Hayek and Locke, can create distorted economic theories that reflect a version of reality that is available only to them. This perspective on ideology fails to explain a clear lack of action towards the catastrophes caused by Capitalism—such as poverty, inequality, climate change—by any group, despite a rise in the popularity of anti-capitalist media and sentiments. In a world where everyone condemns poverty, inequality, and climate change, no one commits themselves to alleviating the severity of these problems.

Invisible Ideology

As Mark Fisher and Slavoj Žižek argue, ideology is much more insidious than just an inverted perspective. In Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, he explains that:

This is probably the fundamental dimension of 'ideology': ideology is not simply a 'false consciousness', an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological' - 'ideological' is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence.¹²²

Ideology has power and influence over us because it is invisible and already a part of our lives. Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and Marxism are not necessarily *the* catalysts of our bad faith, as they are not invisible to us. They are rather avenues for our bad faith to express itself.¹²³ What has become invisible to us is Capitalism itself. As Mark Fisher points out to us in his analysis of popular media:

Watching *Children of Men*, we are inevitably reminded of the phrase attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. That slogan captures precisely what I mean by 'capitalist realism': the widespread sense that not only is Capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to even imagine a coherent alternative to it.¹²⁴

¹²² Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008), 15-16.

¹²³ There are many other "isms" present in society today that are also avenue for bad faith, such as racism, sexism, et cetera. However, the subject matter of this paper is confined to the main avenues that the field of economics concerns itself with.

¹²⁴ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009), 2.

This web of ideological systems and ideas is what blankets Capitalism, protecting it with a cloak of philosophically loaded ideas and topics that people may be able to adopt and alter depending on what superficial set of beliefs they identify with.¹²⁵ These beliefs can be called superficial because of the nature of Capitalism, its tendency to deflate the significance of cultural objects:

The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history: One effect of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or *Das Kapital*, a monetary value...Capitalist realism is therefore not a particular type of realism; it is more like realism in itself...Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics.¹²⁶

Under Capitalism, everything has its price. Even the most passionate and reverent of belief systems are eroded and corrupted by the modus operandi of capitalism: markets. No longer is one a Christian or a Communist, but someone who consumes Christianity or anti-capitalist ideas. Under Capitalism, we are told there is no difference between these two experiences. This causes one to conflate identity, aesthetics, and consumption with effective actions (the hallmark of bad faith), which only reinforces and perpetuates Capitalism and its catastrophes. Building upon this idea, Fisher observes that:

anti-capitalism is widely disseminated in capitalism. Time after time, the villain in Hollywood films will turn out to be the 'evil corporation'. Far from undermining capitalist realism, this gestural anti-capitalism actually reinforces it. Take Disney/Pixar's *Wall-E* (2008)...It seems that the cinema audience is itself the

¹²⁵ Žižek points out a fascinating idea that should be noted at this point: "What creates and sustains the identity of a given ideological field beyond all possible variations of its positive content? Hegemony and Socialist Strategy delineates what is probably the definitive answer to this crucial question of the theory of ideology: the multitude of 'floating signifiers', of proto-ideological elements, is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' (the Lacanian point de capiton) which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning.... What is at stake in the ideological struggle is which of the 'nodal points', point de capiton, will totalize, include in its series of equivalences, these free floating elements. Today, for example, the stake of the struggle between neo-conservatism and social democracy is 'freedom': neo-conservatives try to demonstrate how egalitarian democracy, embodied in the welfare state, necessarily leads to new forms of serfdom, to the dependency of the individual on the totalitarian state, while social democrats stress how individual freedom, to have any meaning at all, must be based upon democratic social life, equality of economic opportunity, and so forth." Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Second (London: Verso, 2008), 95-96.

¹²⁶ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009), 4-5.

object of this satire...But this kind of irony feeds rather than challenges capitalist realism. A film like *Wall-E* exemplifies what Robert Pfaller has called ‘interpassivity’: the film performs our anti-capitalism for us, allowing us to continue to consume with impunity...So long as we believe (in our hearts) that capitalism is bad, we are free to continue to participate in capitalist exchange.¹²⁷

The result of Capitalism is that even the most Radical art and ideas end up only as consumable goods. One can think of the interaction between Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and Marxism within the field of economics in the same way. Contemporary economists (and the public at large) may adopt Liberal, Neoliberal, or even Marxist ideas to support their work, but in the end, this only propagates Capitalism (and its catastrophes) further. This is because in consuming these ideas, one feels like they have performed their belief system. One can read all the Marx and Hayek and Locke that they wish but still never come closer to “solving” the issues that are found within society. Consuming these ideological frameworks (that are subsumed by capitalism) leads one to commit acts of bad faith. All three subordinate ideologies under the influence of Capitalism, Liberalism/Neoliberalism, and Marxism prevent one from recognizing our Existentialist Radical freedom to do things, not just consume them.

¹²⁷ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, 11.

Ideology as Bad Faith

We can say that this “performative” consumption—including the consumption of goods, art, media, and ideologies—is an act of bad faith because it restricts our true freedom as individuals and limits the responsibility that one has to the world. Liberalism and Neoliberalism allow us to believe that we can utilize our Capitalistic freedom within the market while simultaneously denying ourselves the Material freedom that comes along with owning the means of production (society’s potential Marxist freedom). Marxism allows us to believe that we will live in a Communistically free society someday, while denying our ability and responsibility to create such a society, through the Radical freedom that Sartre presents us with. This denial of Radical freedom is what allows Capitalism to adapt to and sell these ideologies, making them marketable. As Fisher points out, “What needs to be kept in mind is *both* that capitalism is a hyper-abstract impersonal structure *and* that it would be nothing without our co-operation.”¹²⁸ Our co-operation is encouraged and constructed through our blind interaction with these ideological fabrics that make up capitalist realism in an interaction that results in bad faith.

We can see the bad faith of the different economists when they analyze the main three market failures that we have examined. In the case of working poverty, it is clear that Liberal and Neoliberal economists/philosophers view the issue of sub-living-wages as a result of market forces, rather than the choice of the Capitalist to exploit their workers’ labor. Here the act of bad faith occurs when the economist believes that poverty is a result of some abstract and unknown force, rather than the choice of economist themselves. The economist, as Sartre and I would argue, has the ability and the responsibility to not only interpret the world in such a way as to recommend the Capitalist to submit and pay the worker a living wage, but to actually make this

¹²⁸ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, 15.

action occur. Marxist economists would argue that the phenomenon of working poverty is a direct result of the exploitation of workers, not of any one individual Capitalist or any one individual market. Here again we find bad faith: while Capitalism is indeed the mode by which one alienates themselves, at the end of the day, the worker is the one who *chooses* to alienate their labor to survive. Despite this, economists cannot play the role of spectator by hiding behind their objective profession. Marxists are responsible for making the worker revolt, by first revolting against their own passivity. Fisher notes this in his work arguing that, “To reclaim a real political agency means first of all accepting our insertion *at the level of desire* in the remorseless meat grinder of Capital.”¹²⁹ The worker may not have the Marxist freedom to object to this alienation without a viable alternative, but they do have the Existentialist Radical freedom to create their own alternative. They have the freedom to want to revolt, and the responsibility to act on their desires.

Analyses of our other two market failures, income and wealth inequality and climate change, can be applied in the same fashion. We will find that both the Liberals/Neoliberals and the Marxists both place the responsibility of fixing this issue on two lifeless entities: the markets and an abstract revolution. Liberals/Neoliberals are enthralled in this “fantasy being that western consumerism, far from being intrinsically implicated in systemic global inequality, could solve them. All we have to do is buy the right products.”¹³⁰ Both of these solutions are objects that exist in states that are being-in-themselves. Markets cannot decide to do what is right because they are not aware. Likewise, the prophecy of an eventual revolution is not enough to create itself, it takes people to decide to create a revolution. These “things” do not have the Radical freedom that us humans have to interpret the world and recognize their freedom. Therefore, both

¹²⁹ Ibid, 15.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 15.

solutions should be rejected in favor of a solution that is led by people that have the ability to fix the world.

It is up to the individuals to solve these issues; reliance on a faraway revolution or on the markets' amalgamation of capital (two impersonal, unconscious constructions without free-will) will only continue to reinforce the Capitalist realism that we are currently stuck under. We cannot just sit back and consume our way out of these catastrophes; new political theorizing and action is needed. We need to imagine alternatives to Capitalism and stop engaging in acts of bad faith via performative consumption. It is our fault, as a society, that poverty and inequality and climate change exist; without this soul-crushing responsibility no one would ever try and fix these problems. As Mark Fisher points out, reinforcing Sartre's conclusions, we really have no other choice but to be free:

Nothing contradicts capitalism's constitutive imperative towards growth more than the concept of rationing goods and resources. Yet it is becoming uncomfortably clear that consumer self-regulation and the market will not by themselves avert environmental catastrophe...In any case, rationing of some sort is inevitable. The issue is whether it will be collectively managed, or whether it will be imposed by authoritarian means when it is already too late... The long, dark night of the end of history has to be grasped as an enormous opportunity.¹³¹

This opportunity is one that allows us to see ourselves not merely as members of the proletariat or the bourgeoisie or as consumers or as economists or philosophers. We are nothing except for our own Radical freedom; we have nothing left to do except act on this freedom in order to escape capitalist realism, the prescriptive nature of our dominant ideologies, and to our own bad faith.

¹³¹ Ibid, 79-80.

Conclusion

The current state of our country and economy seems absurd to those who are taught and who believe that markets are an efficient way to allocate resources. When one is told by thinkers like F.A. Hayek and John Locke that, for the most part, markets make people's lives better, market failures such as working poverty, income and wealth inequality, and climate change seem complex and unfixable. However, once one realizes, as Marx did, that markets under Capitalism organize society in such a way that allows for the perpetual accumulation of capital, these market failures no longer seem so absurd. Rather, they are the natural result of the established incentive structures under Capitalism. With limited private property available and a drive to exploit workers' labor, working poverty, economic inequality, and climate change make sense, or at least appear to be a natural byproduct of a growing economy.

Once one realizes that Capitalism is the cause, rather than the neutral background, of these market failures, anti-capitalist values and policies must be adopted. However, practicing anti-capitalist values is difficult under Capitalism. While Marx assures us that revolution is inevitable, such a successful upheaval of society's existing values has yet to occur. Through an examination of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy and contemporary philosophers Mark Fisher and Slavoj Žižek's views on ideology, it is clear that Capitalism causes us to act in bad faith. We cannot recognize our freedom to organize the economy in a way that isn't centered around markets. We deny our freedom to solve the numerously absurd market failures that effect our lives by believing Capitalism's lie that by consuming the right products these issues will fix themselves. We instead must choose to recognize our freedom and act to fix these problems, simply because we are the only entities that can. Humans are the only things (that we know of) that are capable of such Radical freedom and can thus choose what values they want to see being

honored and represented by our society. Markets cannot do this; they cannot freely act. They cannot interpret the world and determine how it should be organized. We as individuals under Capitalism are locked in this perpetual struggle to assert our ability to freely act, to freely desire, to freely exist. However, this struggle is a necessary one, as the failures of Capitalism, especially climate change, is something that we must choose to find a solution to if we want to survive.

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