

*Philip Richlin*

**The Socioeconomic  
Guardians of Scarcity**

We live on a planet with finite resources, however scarcity is relative to the way we manage those resources. "Scarcity" as a condition is artificial in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Scarcity is artificial in the sense that it literally has to be enforced by a socioeconomic system of structural and behavioral violence. To quote the sociologist Philip Slater "Inequality, originally a consequence of scarcity, is now a means of creating artificial scarcities." Anti-authoritarians have traditionally defined themselves as opposed to socioeconomic hierarchy. However, by defining oneself as opposed to socioeconomic hierarchy, one is really saying that they want consent as a means to organize society. Anti-authoritarians want consent on every level of society, rather than consent being applied inconsistently. However the words "consent on every level of society" mean nothing if there is not an environmental context that allows consent based behavior to prosper via meeting people's needs and minimizing abuse. In our current economic system known as capitalism, the necessities of life are commodified. However if food/water/shelter/energy can be commodified, humans can be commodified. Capitalism is the buying and selling of people forced into contracts due to economic conditions of artificial scarcity. The state serves as the enforcer class of the economic warfare inherent in capitalism (protecting the upper classes from the lower classes). The state is based on the selective application of law and punishment. We reflect values of our social and economic systems which are interconnected. Rather than punishing people for reacting to a system that deprives people of their needs and creates abuse, we should focus our energy towards prevention/education/restraint of those harming others IF we want to create a consent based society. Capitalism and the state are both different yet interconnected incarnations of violent top down organization that inhibit well being and protect scarcity.

Capitalism is an authoritarian economic system, based on private property rights (property based on the threat of violence as well as money rather than needs or use), the private ownership of the means of production, economic competition, and a network of top down organizations that people are forced into in order to survive. The words "private property rights" do nothing to stop the root causes of theft. If we want to stop theft we need to meet people's needs (which can't be done in an economic system where scarcity in regards to the basic necessities of life keeps the economy going). Freedom from association is meaningless when your options are starve or associate within an association where there is no freedom within the association. To quote Noam Chomsky, "The idea of "free contract" between the potentate and his starving subject is a sick joke, perhaps worth some moments in an academic seminar exploring the consequences of (in my view, absurd) ideas, but nowhere else." Capitalism is not a consent based system, for the contracts that are occurring within capitalism are based on unnecessary work for a boss or suffer economic conditions; especially unnecessary given that we

live in an age where the majority of labor relevant to meeting human needs can be automated. Denying the necessities of life to anyone turns life into a privilege instead of a right.

We live in a system where 66 people have more wealth than 3.5 billion people. Around 20,000 people die a day from starvation. Somewhere between 30–50% of food humans produce on the planet is not eaten. In 1976 a study done on structural violence (avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs from hierarchical socioeconomic structures) found that 18 million people die a year from structural violence (and wealth inequality has doubled since then). David Pimentel's research shows that 1.2 Billion people lack access to clean water, 57% of people are malnourished, and Around 40% of deaths on this planet are from water/air/soil pollution. Yet we have the resources and technology to meet everyone's needs. We have clean energy technology such as wind/wave/solar/tidal/geothermal energy. We have the knowledge of hydroponic/aeroponic/aquaponic skyscrapers to ensure free clean food for all. We have the technology to purify water via water desalinization and rain water collection and purification. Then there is hemp which has thousands of industrial uses including eco friendly plastics/paper/housing/clothes/etc. We have 3d printing, and contour crafting which is the 3d printing of buildings. We can combine 3d printing with open collaborative design defined by the website [Adciv.org](http://Adciv.org) as a process that "involves applying principles from the remarkable free and open-source software movement that provides a powerful new way to design physical objects, machines and systems. All information involved in creating the object or system is made available on the Internet – such as text, drawings, photographs and 3D computer-aided design (CAD) models – so that other people can freely re-create it, or help contribute to its further evolution." We have the knowledge of using techniques like mycorestoration, which is "the use of fungi to repair or restore the weakened immune systems of environments" definition given by Paul Stamets in his book *Mycelium Running*. We have Maglev train technology for transportation, making transportation faster, more resource efficient and more energy efficient than current outdated modes of transport. Then there is the internet and the educational resources that it provides. And last but not least our ability to automate the vast majority of toil. You cannot argue with the fact that this technology exists, which is why our technical reality is consistently sidestepped by most people who critique post scarcity economics. This technology exists, but it is not being fully implemented because of inhibiting factors. It is important to note that "the scientific method applied to social concern" is a process constantly changing with new relevant information/technology.

We have the technology and the resources to live in harmony with the global ecosystem and each other, but socioeconomic hierarchy prevents this technical

reality from being actuated. For scarcity is a precondition of profit. The more scarce a specific resource/good/service is, the more one can sell the resource/good/service for. And this means an access abundance of a particular resource such as shelter or food is actually bad for profit maximization (which is the law of capitalism). Scarcity is literally reinforced due to the basic incentive system inherent within the capitalist market. Throwing a moral imposition of non violence onto an economic system that is based on the artificial scarcity of the basic necessities of life is about as much good as the laws “thou shalt not kill” and “thou shalt not steal”. Historically those who enforce “thou shalt not kill laws” tend to be exempt from their own laws. These verbal/written proclamations do nothing to alleviate the root causes of murder and theft. People consistently conflate laws with conditions that actually prevent violent behavior. Violent behavior is tied to a feedback loop of unmet needs/abuse and the systems that enforce unmet needs/abuse.

All ideas have been given to us by our environment. We are standing on the shoulders of giants who have stood upon the shoulders of giants who have stood upon the shoulders of giants. Yet we fight over the fruits of labor given to us by dead and living humans. Private property is not based on needs, nor is it based on use. Private property is based on violence and one’s position in an economic hierarchy. Use is real, but private property is really a metaphysical legal concept, the only thing physical about private property is the violence used to enforce it. If you don’t want people to steal the house you are using from you, you can’t declare it private property; you need to create an access abundance of shelter. The same goes for other resources. The way we manage our resources needs to be based on needs, use, and environmental concern rather than money and violence. And from the viewpoint of wanting to meet human needs and maximize resource efficiency, the more we share resources in library-esque access centers the better. And of course our human needs are dependent upon our global ecosystem. If we destroy our global ecosystem through the inefficient and violent use of resources, we destroy the foundation we are dependent upon.

When society deprives any community or individual of the necessities of life, there is a form of violence happening. When society commodifies the bare necessities of life, they are commodifying human beings, whose labor can be bought and sold. Underneath the pseudo-philosophical rationalizations for capitalism is a defense of wage slavery. For if your labor is for sale then you are for sale. To conflate capitalism with consent is to ignore the context that the market transaction occurs within (which is a context of the artificial scarcity of the necessities of life). And to ignore the context is to ignore reality altogether. Capitalism is not about meeting our demands with supply, it is about maximizing profit (which enforces artificial scarcity). Capitalism is nothing more than well dressed economic warfare backed

up by the physical warfare of the state. Within the quest to maximize profit is the very incentive structure that would inevitably create the state or some institution that performs the same functions as the state (for the state protects the privatized commons with violence, protects the rich from the poor, allows corporations to avoid liability, and the state applies “the law” selectively which makes those who control the state exempt from the state’s laws). When market economists use the term “Efficiency” they are speaking of cost efficiency, which is a phrase that really means “maximize profit at every level of production”. This really translates to “maximize profit” at the expense of resource efficiency and technical efficiency and human needs whenever possible. Underlying our current ecological crisis is an outdated hierarchical socioeconomic structure. Cost efficiency/economic growth are better measurements of ecocide than resource efficiency. It might be resource efficient for us to give everyone on the planet a clean energy supply/houses/clean food free of monetary charge but that does not maximize profit, and under capitalism profit must be prioritized above human needs. The problems aren’t the microcosms of corruption we see, but socioeconomic hierarchy itself. However the microcosms of corruption often help to reinforce/accentuate the system that created such corruption.

To quote Alfie Kohn “The more “means interdependent” the task, the more cooperation helps. In some instances, it is claimed, competition may produce better results—but only if the task is simple and not interdependent at all.” Economic Competition is inherent to capitalism, yet competition is inferior to cooperation in regards to task completion (and under capitalism the task is maximize profit). This is why there are certain degrees of cooperation even within hierarchies or amongst financial and political elites. People can cooperate as a mechanism to maximize profit/power within a competitive system, or people can cooperate to maximize well being/minimize harm. Competition does not just happen between competing businesses. The buyer/seller relationship is a form of competition, for the seller is trying to maximize profit and the buyer is trying to minimize cost. The employer/employee relationship is a form of competition, for the employer and employee haggle over the cost of the employee’s labor. Quoting Alfie Kohn’s summary of David and Roger Johnson’s meta analysis on competition vs cooperation: “65 studies found that cooperation promotes higher achievement than competition, 8 found the reverse, and 36 found no statistically significant difference. Cooperation promoted higher achievement than independent work in 108 studies, while 6 found the reverse, and 42 found no difference. The superiority of cooperation held for all subject areas and all age groups.” The idea that society needs competition (and the punishment/reward system inherent in competition) in order to be productive is completely backwards. Competition also enforces scarcity. Quoting Alfie Kohn again, “Structural competition usually involves the

comparison of several individuals in such a way that only one of them can be the best. The competition itself sets the goal, which is to win; scarcity is thereby created out of nothing.” Competition is based on punishing the losers and rewarding the winner (or winners). Which brings me to a quote by the former director of Harvard’s “Center for the Study of Violence” Dr. James Gilligan, “Punishment is the most powerful provoker of violence that we’ve yet discovered”. Capitalism punishes people for being victimized by capitalism. And the inability of many to trace the symptoms back to root causes leads parts of our society to blame victims of the system rather than the system itself. And this socioeconomic punishment only causes more violence which creates more punishment. In order to solve the problem of violence we need to look at violence from the perspective of “preventative medicine” rather than symptom suppression.

Capitalism is based on plutocracy concealed under the clever disguise of “voting with your money”. Under capitalism everyone votes with unequal amounts of money (and there is inequality in regards to how much people make per hour). “Philosophical” Capitalists will often criticize democracy as if it is a monolithic term that only has authoritarian forms ignoring participatory democracy based on freedom of/from/within within associations (based on consent but not necessarily consensus). And by freedom I do not mean freedom from context such as free will, nor do I mean the freedom to exploit others and freedom to perform acts of ecocide. I mean freedom FROM structural violence and freedom from ecocide. In the realm of the state there is also a form of pseudo democracy where we are given the choice to vote on masters but not given the freedom from having a political ownership class. Ignorance of participatory democracy and any kind of anti authoritarian solutions to capitalism serves the status quo, influencing people to think that the only alternative to capitalism is some other authoritarian system such as Leninism/Stalinism/Maoism/etc. Saying that our options are either the state or the market is a classic false duality fallacy.

To quote David Graeber, “This is the great trap of the twentieth century: on one side is the logic of the market, where we like to imagine we all start out as individuals who don’t owe each other anything. On the other is the logic of the state, where we all begin with a debt we can never truly pay. We are constantly told that they are opposites and that between them they contain the only real human possibilities. But it’s a false dichotomy.” We are given a false duality in our current socioeconomic conversation, that the only way to run society is some ratio of statist/capitalist control. However at the heart of statism/capitalism is violent top down organization. The feedback loop of hierarchy/ignorance/scarcity is at the root of the current socioeconomic system. We cannot solve violent top down social organization through violent top down social organization (and thinking that we can is tautological). The state/market duality is really just a

more sophisticated form of the republicrat/demopublican duality and it serves the purpose of tranquilizing any actual solutions to socioeconomic hierarchy.

The state is a monopoly on the use of legal violence in a given territory. Obviously such an institution is antithetical to non violent social organization. The state includes administrators (politicians) and enforcers (such as the police and the military). The state, like capitalism, is based on socioeconomic hierarchy. The state includes a governor class and a governed class. At the end of the day capitalism and the state complete each other, like the most romantic of lovers. Capitalism controls the state, and the state controls capitalism. Where does one begin and where does the other end? For the police are the physical extension of intra-national economic warfare, and the army is the physical extension of international economic warfare. Here is an Adam Smith quote that explains the romance between the state and capitalism, "Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defense of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all." Within a system of economic hierarchy and class warfare, there are going to be inevitable rebellions from those who have no property towards those who do have property. The state is what helps protect the inherent instability within a system of perpetual economic warfare. So according to the great philosophical priest of capitalism Adam Smith, capitalism is so inefficient and unsustainable that it requires a monopoly on the use of legal violence in order to maintain it. A relatively recent University of Hawaii study found that democide (which is the murder of people by states) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century killed over 250 million people. The state is a product and co-creator of structural violence that requires behavioral violence as a mechanism to enforce the privatization of the commons. The political representatives in a statist society are for sale just like any other commodity. Political representatives in the pseudo democratic regimes like the United States serve as a middle man between people and their ideas. This is not true bottom up organization, for people's demands are being filtered by politicians unable to represent such demands. Subtract the structural violence from the state and the state ceases to exist (or as Kropotkin said "It is authoritarian or it ceases to be the State."). Capitalism needs some institution that performs the same function of the state (protection of private property) in order to function (so there is really no such thing as stateless capitalism). "Stateless capitalists" talk about how they want to privatize the police/the army/nuclear bombs/courts/and all bathrooms/ and even have a free market of buying and selling starving children. Besides those solutions being absurd, they merely recreate the state under a separate name. The state is not violent because it is influenced by capitalism and nor is capitalism a violent system because it is influenced by the state. The state and capitalism are both structurally violent on their own, however state power and capitalist power

tend to merge due to the basic power consolidation tendency of both systems. Not only are markets in love with states, but states are also in love with markets. This romance is mutual. For the market forces the subjects of the state to feed/clothe/house themselves by competing amongst each other for survival. The state and the market aren't just married, they are practically inseparable.

The psychology behind statism involves the argument from authority fallacy (which is a fallacy that conflates credentials in a field with evidence). Politicians do not know what is best because they are politicians. As we have witnessed in the controversial Milgram experiment, a shocking amount of participants were willing to electrocute someone to a point that would cause extreme harm because they were told to do so by a person in a lab coat. In the realm of politics people apply a double standard towards political representatives by giving them moral privilege (privilege meaning private law). The state is an institution that is defined by gratuitous violence yet enforces thou shalt not kill laws (selectively). If we want to maximize well being, then we need to subtract the state, subtract capitalism, subtract sexism, subtract racism, and all other forms of bigotry from society, and use technology to automate the means of production and base production on human needs and environmental concern. We need highly organized consent based communities that check and balance technical efficiency with ecological efficiency at every stage of production. We need highly organized decentralized yet federated communities that harmonize the individual and the collective and the environment, rather than states. An important difference between a state and a community is that states are necessarily violent whereas communities are not necessarily violent. Part of how the state survives is through people conflating the will of the state with the will of the community the state governs. To conflate the will of the governors with the will of the governed is to conflate the will of the victimizers with the will of the victims.

One important guardian of scarcity is the belief system that socioeconomic hierarchy is a part of human nature. Markets, states and other forms of socioeconomic hierarchy are not inevitable institutions that arise when there are multiple people. Quoting Dr. James Gilligan, "Violence is not universal. It is not symmetrically distributed throughout the human race. There is a huge variation in the amount of violence in different societies. There are some societies that have virtually no violence. There are others that destroy themselves." Competition and Behavioral Violence are reactions to environmental conditions, and mechanisms for survival under certain environmental conditions (for example under capitalism people are forced to compete with each other for jobs in order to survive). However different contexts bring about varied mechanisms for survival including behaviors such as consent, cooperation and pan empathy. Quoting Robert Sapolsky, "It is virtually impossible to understand how biology works outside the context



of environment.” Our true human nature is to adapt to our nurture. We are not genetically determined towards socioeconomic hierarchy. Quoting Gabor Mate, “The genetic argument is simply a cop-out which allows us to ignore the social and economic and political factors that, in fact, underlie many troublesome behaviors.” This leaves us with the question: what contexts incentivize mutual aid and compassion, and which contexts incentivize parasitic competitive behavior? Mutual Aid and competition can be seen as survival strategies that can be reinforced and even eliminated depending on the environment. And to what extent are we able to share and give when we are under perpetual threats of absolute or relative deprivation of resources? To what extent can we build a library society when the market surrounding the library society creates the incentive to steal from the commons and the sell the stolen resources?

To hoard resources to the point where you are harming other individuals/collectives by creating artificial scarcity is to recreate a system of abuse since scarcity/unmet needs and socioeconomic hierarchy/abuse are inter connected. Take 10,000 vegan pacifists and put them on an island with no food resources and watch a culture of peace turn into a culture of cannibalism. Our actions are reactions to context, which is why it is absurd to enforce moral laws upon a system that creates the incentive to break such laws.

In order for consent based societies to exist, we need to meet everyone’s needs and minimize abuse. To create and enforce artificial scarcity is to create and enforce unmet needs and abuse. Yet the market forces us to act in ecocidal ways such as hoarding resources we barely use in order to have access to those resources, or forcing us to use the petro fascist economy in order to have access to relevant mobility, or forcing us to buy cost efficient goods (rather than resource efficient goods) through economic incentive, etc. Conspicuous consumption is a term coined by Thorstein Veblen that is used to define consumption for the sake of status rather than utility. It is a defining characteristic of the modern day market (especially the upper classes). If we subtracted this learned behavior from society, our global demand would go down immensely. But there is an incentive within the market to maximize this parasitic behavior, for maximizing consumption for the sake of status is a great way to maximize profit. The value system at the heart of conspicuous consumption is the exact opposite of the value system at the heart of post scarcity economics. Conspicuous consumption is both a result of scarcity based economics, and a mechanism that perpetuates scarcity. If we subtract conspicuous consumption from our society, while applying technology to meet the needs of humans and the environment that we are dependent upon, we can reach a post scarcity society. If people think they are entitled to have all of California as a backyard or other absurd demands such as 5 mansions and 5

cars we cannot (as much as that would be efficient in regards to market efficiency which shows how antithetical the market is to sustainability).

An important characteristic of a hierarchical socioeconomic model is the fact that some people can have the most absurd wants fulfilled while some people are denied their basic needs. Which ever routes can make the most money get priority. And unfortunately there is not a lot of money to be made in free food/free water/free energy/free shelter for everyone (not that there aren't steps we can take within the current cage of state/capitalist power, just that the entire point of the hierarchical socioeconomic model is to make sure those steps aren't made without resistance. To what extent can we build a new world within the shell of the old world when the old world prevents the new world from existing? That being said we still need to create the new world within the shell of the old to whatever extent is possible). Whether we live in a pure state economy or a pure capitalist economy, or some awkward form of love between the two, the same underlying problem of socioeconomic hierarchy persists.

Violent top down organization is damaging to collective and individual well being. For example, violent top down organization creates extreme stress especially within members of the lower castes. This extreme stress causes brain damage amongst other externalities such as increased risk of heart disease and cancer . Paraphrasing Richard Wilkinson's research, bigger income gaps within economic hierarchies lead to more child conflict, more homicide, more imprisonment, less trust, more drug abuse, more infant mortality, more mental illness, and a decreased life expectancy. And since we are all interdependent upon each other and our environment this winds up harming all of society. So from a purely naturalistic standpoint the governed/governor relationship, the employee/employer relationship, the rich/poor relationship and other forms of socioeconomic hierarchy cause harm. To Quote Albert Einstein: "Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth." Which leads us to the question: What form of authority is legitimate? The philosopher Bakunin says "Does it follow that I reject all authority? Far from such a thought. In the matter of boots, I refer to the authority of the bootmaker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or engineer." And most importantly the real authority is the scientific method and the natural laws we are all bounded by. Quoting Bakunin again "in recognizing absolute science as the only absolute authority, we in no way compromise our liberty." Not only do we not compromise our liberty by accepting the scientific method as our authority, we extend our liberty (for the scientific method can tell us what causes well being/suffering).

When we understand that our behavior has environmental context we start to look at the world realizing that there is no person to blame, for it is to incorrect and counterproductive to blame someone for reacting to environmental stimuli.

From no blame we can move into pan empathy, and from pan empathy comes the desire to maximize the well being/intelligence/compassion of all people. And there are certain rules we can follow to ensure contexts that minimize harm and maximize well being (such as informed meaningful consent on every level of society, lack of socioeconomic hierarchy, and technical efficiency checked and balanced by resource efficiency). Lack of socioeconomic hierarchy doesn't mean uniformity nor does it mean chaos. It means differences in abilities unified by non violent social organization.

So what would a world without the fetters of socioeconomic hierarchy look like? Quoting Murray Bookchin, "It is easy to foresee a time, by no means remote, when a rationally organized economy could automatically manufacture small "packaged" factories without human labor; parts could be produced with so little effort that most maintenance tasks would be reduced to the simple act of removing a defective unit from a machine and replacing it by another—a job no more difficult than pulling out and putting in a tray. Machines would make and repair most of the machines required to maintain such a highly industrialized economy. Such a technology, oriented entirely toward human needs and freed from all consideration of profit and loss, would eliminate the pain of want and toil—the penalty, inflicted in the form of denial, suffering and inhumanity, exacted by a society based on scarcity and labor."

Capitalism puts maximizing profit for some before the needs of all. Capitalism puts maximizing profit before resource efficiency, and before technical efficiency leading to artificial scarcity of the basic necessities of life, minimizing well being and forcing people into positions of economic servitude in order to survive. The state maximizes profit through rigging the market. Yet when you look closer the market creates the incentive system to rig the market, so the market isn't being rigged at all (for breaking rules set up within or outside of the market in order to maximize profit is a natural outgrowth of the incentives within the market. The one rule that does not get broken is the law that governs the invisible hand which is "maximize profit"). Capitalism leads to inevitable class warfare because of economic inequality and the unmet needs/abuse/psychosocial stress/death economic inequality creates. The state then serves the function of protecting the rich from the poor. The state and capitalism are interconnected systems used to privatize the commons via state owned property, private property, and enforcement thereof. Corporate power and state power merge via venn diagram (due to the power consolidation tendency inherent in socioeconomic hierarchy). All ratios of statist/capitalist power minimize well being via structural/behavioral violence (although some ratios provide comfier cages than others). Statism vs. capitalism serves as a false duality that distracts us from options such as post scarcity economics/non violent social organization. "Statism vs capitalism" is

also an incorrect lens to view the world from because the state and capitalism are interconnected (for capitalism needs a state to enforce private property laws). We have the technology to automate the vast majority of toil yet it is not being implemented because human wage slaves are sometimes cheaper than automating a particular chore (for now). Within the market we compete with each other and our technology for labor in order to survive, while scarcity of resources/goods/services creates profit. When our technology is applied towards human needs and environmental concern rather than the maximization of profit/power we will be able to maximize biopsychosocial well being and minimize suffering.

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