

Infectious and competitive mindsets

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Published: 2024-06-25

Dear friends,

Participation in civil society demands capitalist participation. Indeed, as I have discussed elsewhere we are ontologically infused with capitalism from birth, at least in the majority of the globe. This infusion, or perhaps infection, limits our epistemology, our thinking, and conditions the way we see the world around us. Scholars argue that since the 1960s we have seen the progressive increase of individualism. Literally people looking out for themselves. Over time, this has become increasingly militant, and as the bourgeois find ways of making this useful for the advance of capital as does our social structure.

We live in a system which –ontologically –demands reproduction. This comes in the form of the deep seated demands for the creation of human life, the production of surplus labour, the manufacture of consent, and the replication of systems and processes which reinforce the system itself. It is a kind of ouroboros, to borrow from Fraser [1], which demands production – babies, knowledge, food, excess resources, and so on. We have seen the ever amplifying affect of this system of production on our ecology and allowed the capitalist class to drive us ever faster off the cliff of ecological safety.

The infection of our thinking, though, is perhaps the most concerning to me. Not only are we now, without thinking –and often literally subconsciously, competitive, but we are also in a position of such disillusionment with our own cognitive processes that we perceive individualist and competitive behaviour as normal, valuable and meaningful for progress. This is something that compassionate, thinking, and caring people spend a great deal of time working to counteract. However, this is not enough. Moreover, I have chosen words in this sentence particularly carefully –before I mentioned scholars thought on these matters, however I believe that much of this thought is done without genuine compassion or true commitment to an anti-capitalist modality.

For those scholars who work in the academy, precarity [2], instability, and a continued marginalisation of ethics [3] are contemporary hallmarks. These are carried forward by the only class holding stable employment in the academy –management. These managers are universally capitalist aspirants. I mean this in the sense of class treachery (where they were working class) and oppressors (where they continue to be capitalists). At best, they act and feel human as they work. Most of the time, however, they value and select for sociopathy and psychopathy. Finding space to create mental anguish and distress amongst precarious, contract, and bona fide workers in the academy. This has many affects – predominantly, however, it means for those with a predilection towards considering themselves ‘middle class’ (a faux group of class traitors) that they tacitly and epistemologically absorb the militant individualism.

I genuinely believe the greatest barrier to socially transformative thought in the academy is the proliferation and en masse creation of class traitors. Those who believe they can lift themselves in higher education through engagement with the performed values of the capitalist class, and their henchmen, to receive personal benefit. But this is not simply a cluster of behaviours or ways of thinking. Rather, the process of capitalist production can be so obscured by this way of thinking and working that the system itself does not resemble a producer of surplus value – simply a surplus of mental anguish. We have entered an era of ontic capital, a vicious, vile and anti-human way of thinking, working and understanding. Moreover, the deeply corrupted and sick system deliberately and with malice uses this modus operandi –over- those who are already more disadvantaged. Literally exploiting the

intersection to foster competition, infectious capitalist epistemology, and sociopathy at the margins.

To draw away from this requires such reconfiguration of our thinking and working patterns that we become fundamentally incompatible with higher education, corporate work, and capitalism at large that we are easy to brush away -lazy, arrogant, or at best eccentric. Because the compassionate, reflective and proactive care mindset is so antithetical to the capitalist machinery, those class aspirants (traitors) who have 'drunk the university kool aid' themselves do the work of deriding and undermining the thinking and working of compassionate thinkers.

I want to be clear that I am as much part of this problem as others. Though, I hope, through service, analytical thinking, and sharing observations from the front lines of (higher education) hell that others may come to similar reflections and assert a new working-classness that enables a future not controlled by the ever tighter constrictions of the ouroboros.

We have literally run out of time. Not only do we desperately -need- change in order to ensure humanity, but we require change to not be a footnote to history. To some, humanity's hubris and eventual self-destruction provides comfort, in that the true ontic reality will continue, but to me, I feel a sense of duty of care to try and create change that enables us to be better, to do better, and to make a better future for those who come next (human or otherwise). I don't know what is possible, but I do know we can use the tools of education and research to foster genuinely uplifting capacities in others, and we can throw away competitive, cutthroat and aggressive behaviour in favour of mutual aid, collaboration, and positive futurism.

Your friend,

Aidan

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1. Fraser, N. (2022). *Cannibal Capitalism: How our System is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet and What We Can Do About It*. Verso Books.
 2. Cornelius-Bell, A., & Bell, P. (2021). The academic precariat post-COVID-19. *Fast Capitalism*, 18(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.32855/fcapital.202101.001>
 3. Morley, C. (2024). The systemic neoliberal colonisation of higher education: A critical analysis of the obliteration of academic practice. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 51(2), 571-586. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-023-00613-z>