

## 17. Responses to the Contributors

*Andrew Sayer*

I hadn't expected to be the subject of a festschrift so it was a lovely surprise when Gideon and Balihar suggested it. I feel honoured, uplifted and very grateful. I am touched by the care and attentiveness the contributors have given to my work and have enjoyed reading their contributions and the stimulus of their criticisms and differences. Often they have spotted connections and implications – and gaps and errors – that I hadn't noticed. I would like to thank them for making me think further, both in the past and now. Writing academic books and articles can be a lonely pursuit, especially when you're not sure if there's anyone out there who'll be interested, but the whole collection is a reminder of how our work is thickly intertwined with that of others. In this context, I would like to thank others not present here: former colleagues at Sussex University including Tony Fielding (also my DPhil supervisor), Mick Dunford, Peter Dickens and Fred Gray; and at Lancaster, Norman Fairclough, Anne-Marie Fortier, Betsy Olson, Larry Ray, Celia Roberts, Beverley Skeggs, Sylvia Walby, Alan Warde, Ruth Wodak, Linda Woodhead and the late John Urry; also John Allen and the late Doreen Massey at the Open University, Costis Hadjimichalis and Dina Vaiou in Greece, Frank Hansen in Denmark, and Eric Clark in Sweden.

As Dick Walker notes, our early careers owed much to the institutional and wider political environment of universities in the 1970s and early 80s, before neoliberalism, the New Public Management, and online working eroded so many key ingredients of university life – in particular, the time for daily agenda-free conversations with colleagues, through which we picked up invaluable ideas and information and formed a sense of belonging. I was

particularly lucky to start my career at Sussex University at the time of its exciting experiment (now sadly abandoned) of ‘redrawing the map of learning’ by making both teaching and research interdisciplinary, so that by 1978 I realised that I did not want to identify as a member of a single discipline (I was originally a geographer), but as a social scientist. While I moved to a department of sociology at Lancaster University in 1993, it has always been an adventurous and open-minded department that accepted my ‘postdisciplinary’ stance and has never tried to ‘discipline’ me in either teaching or research. My distaste for identifying with any single discipline is not meant to deny that they have something to contribute; it’s just that while adopting disciplinary blinkers allows one to focus, it also invites reductionism, disciplinary imperialism, and misattributions of causality (Sayer, 2000c).

Dick Walker, Kevin Morgan and Steve Fleetwood also mention the crucial role of friendships and life outside academia, and here I would like to thank Hazel Ellerby, John Sayer, Liz Thomas, Richard Light, Norman Fairclough, Bridget Graham, Sue Halsam, Iain Hunter, Grazyna Monvid, Jill Yeung, Pat Batteson, Ann McChesney, the Lancaster Millennium Choir, and especially my daughter Lizzie Sayer.

But to come on to the contributors’ chapters, given space limitations I can only respond briefly, and inevitably I have more to say about disagreements than agreements. I have grouped the responses into six themes: space, theory and economic development; critical realism; ethical life, habitus and naturalism; moral economy; inequality and the rich; and environment.

#### Space, theory and economic development

This concerns a debate that took place in geography in the 1980s, concerning the place of space in social science, and which some have seen as a challenge to geography's *raison d'être*; **Dick Walker** and I have argued many times about it. I hold that we can't expect social scientific *theory* to say much about space, beyond noting that it makes important differences that must be taken into account in concrete research, because most social phenomena have a considerable degree of flexibility as regards their particular spatial forms – and necessarily so if they are to exist in many different contexts; as critical realists would say, they exist in open systems in which there are never more than temporary and approximate regularities. And since one of the characteristics of theory is that it seeks to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of its objects, then usually it can only say that an object must be accessible to those conditions, though that of course says very little about how that works out spatially. Thus, labour markets can take a variety of spatial forms – particularly so with the development of the internet and home working – so there's not much that 'spatial theory' can say about them in advance of particular empirical studies of their contingent forms. And this is borne out in practice: words like 'geographies', 'space' and 'scalar' are *mentioned* frequently in the theoretical literature in geography, without saying anything specific *about* their referents, other than to give a few examples of *contingent* spatial forms. I still believe that *empirical research on concrete situations* needs to take the difference that space makes into account, so in supervising PhD theses – with topics ranging from women and the 'dual shift', neoliberal economic policy, gentrification to multiculturalism and migration – I have often urged students to do so. So my line on space and social theory doesn't mean that I think geography doesn't matter, a conclusion some jumped to when I joined a sociology department!

As **Jamie Peck** notes, I cut my teeth in the 1970s developing a critique of positivist models in geography by drawing on critiques of mainstream economics, particularly those by

Maurice Dobb and Joan Robinson, and later critiques developed through critical realism. When it came to substantive theory capable of understanding capitalism's production of inequalities and uneven development, Marxism provided a much more plausible account than mainstream economics and traditional economic geography. After an initial phase of exploring Marxist and other radical theory, some of us sought to develop empirical studies of concrete cases. As Jamie and Dick note, this became a source of much contention in the 1980s, as some researchers were not willing to venture far from what was already contained in that theory and regarded those who found they had to consider things beyond it as guilty of both lapsing into empiricism and deserting radicalism. *Microcircuits of Capital* (which I co-authored with Kevin Morgan) was very definitely a concrete, empirical study, and it was informed by that radical theory (Morgan and Sayer 1988), but as Jamie indicates, some readers were not sure what the theoretical conclusions were.

Perhaps what puzzled some, I imagine, was that the book scarcely mentioned 'Fordism' – then a key concept for so much political economic research. That was quite deliberate, because we felt that particularly with reference to labour processes, the concept was greatly overstretched in the radical literature, to the point where it became the subject of a lazy grand narrative that obscured more than it revealed. Only a small minority of workers in capitalism were ever mass production workers, and while work intensification (speed-up) and automation are common responses to capitalist competition, for many of the electronics firms we studied the main problems were not how to reduce labour time through process innovations and controlling the workforce – the classic challenge of Fordist labour processes – but how to innovate products, form ties with customers (mostly other firms), and break into distribution networks and markets or form new ones; contrary to Marx's account in *Capital*, commodities are never merely 'thrown onto the market'. While capital-labour relations are quite understandably the focus of radical political economy, and while these are strongly

related to competition between capitals, responses to competition are often not centred on the labour process.

Implicit in all this, was a broader theoretical lesson, one which was developed in *The New Social Economy*, and *Radical Political Economy* (Sayer and Walker 1992; Sayer 1995): the underestimation in radical economic theory of the effects of an enormously complex, geographically-extended, social division of labour. This really does divide labour, and eludes centralised control, as was found both in theory (Hayek and others) and in practice (the former Soviet Union). It is also far too complex to be planned democratically. Alternatives to capitalism need not only to change the ownership of the means of production but to find ways of coordinating vast numbers of producers, users and products in socially just and sustainable ways. So, all in all, though it may not have been apparent, *Microcircuits of Capital* was not only theoretically-informed but in the long-run theoretically-informative – and politically suggestive.

### Critical realism

As critical realist philosophy of social science implies, the besetting sin of positivism and its strange rationalist variant in economics is its casual attitude to how it conceptualises its objects, and in particular how it goes about the tricky business of abstraction. Ordinary language is full of abstractions, and while they may be good enough for getting by in everyday life, a much more careful approach is needed in social science. **Steve Fleetwood's** forensic analysis of abstraction complements his earlier important work on the realism of assumptions, an issue that is central to explaining the dire state of mainstream economics.

I see abstraction as particularly important for non-experimental science, inasmuch as it tries to provide a substitute for experimentation, so that instead of physically separating the object

of interest from other objects not of interest in the experiment, we do so in thought.<sup>1</sup> Here, as Steve notes, it's important to ask whether the social phenomenon A that we have abstracted from B and C in our theorising could actually exist independently of them. Sometimes there may be real situations where A does exist independently of them, but even where A is always found with B and C in all known cases, I would argue that it is still important to ask if this is an historical accident or because B and C are necessary conditions for the existence of A. It's no surprise that capitalist businesses in England use English as their language, but it doesn't follow that using English is a necessary condition of being a capitalist business. If we don't know an entity's conditions of existence, we don't know much about it. What I have termed 'associational thinking' assumes that what is found together must go together (Sayer 2000a); it fails to distinguish 'can' from 'must'. This is particularly common in radical social science interested in 'bads' like race, class and gender: to be sure they commonly intersect, often in ways that reinforce one another, but it is still important to ask if these combinations are necessary ones. There is a danger in radical research that in wanting to show what is problematic about some situation, it is tempting to claim that its component parts all *necessarily* depend on one another, as this seems grander and more radical than an account which says there are several bads, some of which can or could exist separately. This is far from an academic point of no practical import: if the former is the case, then nothing can be changed until everything is changed; or if the latter, change is easier.

Notwithstanding the importance of abstraction and the move back to the concrete, it is only part of what is needed, for developing powerful concepts also requires imagination and metaphor. Some objects of interest – the meaning of discourses, for example – are too

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<sup>1</sup> I'm not sure that the difference between extracting the thing of interest and removing the things not of interest is a difference that makes a difference.

indivisible and open to ‘the play of difference’ for abstraction to be appropriate. And while abstraction narrows down what we think about, when it comes to analysing concrete situations we must also draw upon all we know, which requires an opening out. We need both careful analysis (left-brain dominant) – as illustrated in Steve’s paper – and a more open kind of thinking (right-brain dominant).

**Bob Jessop** discusses further how we move from abstract concepts, through hybrid ones, to concrete concepts. While he has provided an excellent summary of my own work on this – and on the connections to moral economy and ethics – he doesn’t mention some of his own contributions on the subject. I think critical realists – and others – should take more note of his ‘strategic relational approach’ and use of evolutionary concepts in explaining how structures are selective with respect to actions, how actions can be selective with respect to structures, and how the interaction of different elements of a conjuncture interact depends on their spacing and timing (Jessop 2006).

**Doug Porpora** raises a more philosophical basic issue: my take on truth as being about practical adequacy (Sayer 1992; 2000b). I would say that the latter should not be interpreted in instrumentalist fashion as simply that which is ‘useful’ to believe, as if it were a matter of convenience, but as what appears to be the case, based on the fullest and most rigorously assembled evidence, the best arguments we can find, and the best practical tests we can conduct. Hence, I believe the statement that ‘six million people were murdered in the Holocaust’ is true because the evidence and arguments provided by historians and witnesses put it beyond reasonable doubt that this happened; their accounts are the most adequate.

Ethical life, habitus and naturalism

This theme, owing much to Bourdieu, Adam Smith, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, and the feminist ethic of care literature, was explored in my *Why Things Matter to People*, building on initial work in relation to class in *The Moral Significance of Class*. Both books were critiques of reductive accounts of behaviour in social science, especially sociology.

**Nick Crossley** raises some important issues about how we should understand everyday morality, and regarding the limitations of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. I accept that I probably should have taken Mead's work on morality into account. However, I continue to find the distinction made by some moral and political philosophers between the right and the good unhelpful. Why would we consider something to be obligatory – for example, respecting others' autonomy – if we didn't think it was good for people? It seems to me that the right is just a lowest common denominator form of the good, one that attempts to identify a kind of minimum requirement for people, whatever their culture; I don't see it as qualitatively different from the good.

I agree with some of Nick's reservations about the concept of habitus, particularly regarding our lack of understanding of the formation of dispositions, and indeed the wider fundamental question of how socialisation works. Too often, social scientists assume a blank slate model of socialisation, which completely fails to explain what it is about human beings that allows them to be socialised. Trying to explain socialisation without answering this question is like trying to clap with one hand. Somewhere, Bourdieu said that the concept of habitus was a social-psychological one, and that further investigation was needed into the processes that form what it identifies. I agree, but the black box is beginning to be opened up. The exceptional neuroplasticity of humans enables learning and socialisation, but the paradox of neuroplasticity is that it can also allow the development of durable neural circuits and hence dispositions that are difficult to change (Doidge 2007). Also in neuroscience, Antonio Damasio refers to 'somatic markers' that code experiences positively or negatively, and



which then come to shape our spontaneous, rapid responses to events. This suggests our dispositions - and hence our habitus - are evaluative (Damasio 2000). Studies of attachment processes in developmental psychology – which are precisely about the key, formative social relations in our early years when neuroplasticity is at a peak – also need to be taken seriously by sociologists if they are to understand socialisation. In psychology, according to ‘dual process’ theories there is both fast action, based on acquired dispositions that enable us to do much with little or no conscious monitoring, and slow responses based on deliberation. This supports the position of those who have argued against Margaret Archer that we need to acknowledge the dual roles of habitus and reflexivity in determining action (Archer 2009).

Regarding Nick’s doubts about the match between social position and dispositions, it’s clear from the diagrams in Bourdieu’s *Distinction* and subsequent empirical studies of the sociology of taste, that this is usually only approximate (Bourdieu 1984). I suggest the relationship is complicated and blurred by two things: firstly, as I argued in the *Moral Significance of Class*, by the concern people may develop for the internal goods of certain practices regardless of their social coordinates in terms of relations of proximity/distance in the social field; and secondly, by the visible, substantial *relationships* between people (for example, within families and among friends) that Nick notes and Bourdieu often ignored, and which have a major formative influence on us. Nevertheless, while social location does not uniquely determine dispositions, it does have significant influence.

Although there is a lot on dispositions and the habitus in *The Moral Significance of Class*, I don’t see any conflict between this and acknowledging the importance of social relations and interactions. The book is also about relations of recognition and associated *social* emotions such as pride, guilt, shame and sense of (in)justice, and their dependence on empathy or fellow-feeling. As I argued in *Why Things Matter to People*, we are relational beings, but our interactions are not determined just through conversation, negotiation and power but in

relation to our capacities to flourish or suffer; this naturalist element cannot be ignored, as is it so often is in social science and philosophy.

Virtue ethics, particularly via the work of Martha Nussbaum, was another major influence on both books. Like Bourdieu, this emphasises the importance of acquired dispositions (virtues and vices), but it acknowledges that the acquisition involves a mix of habituation through repetition and conscious learning, and it recommends that the exercise of those dispositions in actions requires some conscious monitoring to make adjustments for specific contexts. It also emphasises the importance of emotions in relation to dispositions: the exercise of virtues like kindness or justice involves or should involve appropriate emotions, like compassion and resentment at injustice.<sup>2</sup> This was one of the reasons why I felt that Bourdieu's concept of habitus needed to be modified to take account of the way in which our learned responses can also be emotional, and how emotions mediate their acquisition. We do not just accommodate indifferently to prevailing situations as Bourdieu implies: we feel good or bad about them in various ways, so, for example, we do not adjust to contempt and exploitation as easily as we do to respect. Unless we acknowledge this, it is hard to explain resistance in social life.

I agree that there is a tendency in Bourdieu to underplay culture in the sense of shared meanings and practices, but there's also a tendency in cultural studies and sociology to reduce morality to mere norms, conventions or power, as if it had no particular connection to human flourishing. Morality has a multi-level character, involving dispositions, emotions, fellow-feeling, meanings, norms, and discourses, and in practice these are all influenced by our biological affordances and constraints, attachment processes, socialisation and power

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<sup>2</sup> Dispositions and emotions are not quite the same thing: in critical realist terms, dispositions are causal powers or potentials, while moral sentiments or emotions may be involved in their activation/actualisation.

relations. The challenge of understanding everyday morality is to work out how to synthesise these elements. It needs a postdisciplinary approach to avoid the biases produced by the restricted concerns of particular social science disciplines.

**Justin Cruickshank's** thoughtful discussion of practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge within academic life, and of relations between academics and lay people links some of the concerns of *Why Things Matter to People* to the issue of critical social science. Perhaps academics do need to reflect more on how their own thought can become habitual and resistant to change, even though they believe that it is open to revision. I very much agree that education needs to be more dialogical. As regards the relation between academic and lay thought, Justin draws upon Freire and Gadamer, to discuss the issue in critical social science (CSS) of the asymmetry of knowledge and cognitive resources between experts and lay people in addressing problems, and the danger of CSS becoming a monologue rather than a dialogue. Habermas' discourse ethics is relevant here in that the ideal speech situation requires equality, including equality of cognitive resources, amongst participants so they can seek the best arguments and evidence and arrive at 'uncoerced agreement'. While I still think they also need some conception of flourishing and suffering as objective forms of being, I was wrong to say that Habermas's discourse ethics was neither necessary nor sufficient for flourishing. While it's not sufficient, being able to discuss with others as equals, so that each person both listens to others and feels listened to by them, is certainly an important ingredient of flourishing (See Fricker 2007). The problem is how to move closer to such an ideal? Justin mentions cooperative universities as a way forward for higher education; citizens' juries and assemblies are another way of reducing cognitive inequality and empowering lay people on specific issues.

The difficulties are particularly severe in highly unequal societies like the UK where the everyday political arguments one sees in both traditional and social media have more in

common with a brawl than a seminar. Dog-whistle populist political discourse encourages anti-intellectualism in order to silence science-based critiques. In this regard, as George Lakoff shows, responses to political issues are often influenced less by evidence and argument than by how they are framed in relation to underlying values and emotions (Lakoff 2014). But then discourse is not always the best way of changing minds – exemplary individuals and actions may make a bigger impact.

As **Doug Porpora** notes in his generous comments on *Why Things Matter to People* and on emotions, it was primarily subjective mattering – caring or being concerned about things – that I discussed in that book. In retrospect, I think it mainly showed *how* things matter to people. Although I did say that the reason why things matter is that they affect whether we flourish or suffer, that is a somewhat truncated explanation, for it omits what makes us care about this. I now realise that *at base*, things matter to us because of our biology: as living beings we are kept alive by bodily homeostatic systems that produce responses to the world that tend to keep us safe and well; in addition, as a highly advanced form of life, we have the capacity for oversight, reflexivity and learning to guide our responses. So normativity is at base biological, as philosophers like Philippa Foot, Hans Jonas and Mary Midgley have argued, though of course through emergence and our capacities for reasoning and for forming commitments and attachments, normativity goes far beyond this (Foot 2001; Jonas 2001; Midgley 2003). In social science and much of philosophy, a combination of the scholastic fallacy and neglect of biology ('biophobia') makes it impossible to understand this. At the time I wrote the book, I was unaware of this biological underpinning, so my account of emotions, which was heavily influenced by Nussbaum, made too little of the physiological aspect of emotions. Although this is different from their cognitive aspect, it is not generally irrational from the point of view of flourishing, for emotions involve some of our homeostatic systems, and as evolved capacities they generally help protect us by forcing problems and

opportunities into our consciousness. Even those social practices and norms that appear to have nothing to do with human biology draw some of their power by recruiting emotions, though to do this they have to be compatible with our socialised mind-body's powers and susceptibilities; otherwise they do not 'push our buttons'.

I think we can worry too much about what distinguishes us from other animals, and of course human exceptionalism has had disastrous effects on our behaviour in relation to the global ecosystem; we should be open to both our similarities and our differences, and the extraordinarily complex webs of dependence that link us to other species. Biological normativity applies to all living things, which is not to say that everything from viruses to humans have equal worth; there is a hierarchy of worth, as Andrew Collier argued (Collier 1999). I didn't intend to base normativity wholly on sentiments, though, for there are other considerations at a social level regarding how we live with others in ways which promote the flourishing of all. Here I agree that I need to say more about personhood as a distinctive element of *human* flourishing, though I think it was implicit in what I wrote on dignity. I take it to be emergent from our social being (and as such dependent on it), and again, to involve the recruitment through downward causation of our emotions. All in all, and unlike Doug, I'm inclined to shift *further* towards naturalism.

Like **Ted Benton**, I was much impressed not only by realism but Marx's ideas on our relation to nature. Regarding concepts of nature, Ted recommends paying more attention to 'attempting to specify some underlying feature or condition in virtue of which the being in question is able or liable to manifest the range of behaviours or powers that we can observe or expect.' Explaining social life without considering what it is about us that makes us susceptible to socialisation and enables us to do the things humans do, including developing an extraordinary variety of cultures, leads to one-sided explanations, and sociological reductionism. So I agree that biology should certainly not 'be held at arm's length', indeed

there needs to be a dialogue between biologists and social scientists. ‘The social’ covers a number of ontological levels, including the biological affordances and constraints which make us and many other mammals ‘social animals’, dependent on other members of our species throughout our lives. Again, our exceptional neuroplasticity allows our extraordinary variety of forms of socialisation or acculturation. This involves a process of morphogenesis in which, at each moment, how we experience the world and what we can do are constrained and enabled by our brain-bodies, which in turn have been modified by experience and actions at previous times. Here it is not only necessary to acknowledge emergence – in particular, mind or thought from the workings of the brain-body – but also downward causation through which what we think, do and experience, modifies those workings (van der Kolk 2014). I also accept that social science should take more interest in paleoanthropology and evolutionary biology, so we are open to the possibility that some things we generally regard as wholly cultural phenomena, such as love of nature, are in fact emergent cultural elaborations of universal biological tendencies or affordances.

#### Moral Economy

As **Bob Jessop** notes, this interest grew out of a longstanding interest in political economy and coevolved with ideas about critical social science’s need for a normative basis, but I should add that it was also a delayed product of having to teach a course at Sussex called Foundations of Social Science, covering some key texts of Smith, Marx, and Mill. Having been strongly influenced by Marx’s political economy, I later went back to Smith and his work on *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*. It seemed to me that these pre-disciplinary authors’ work on classical political economy or what was once called moral philosophy was a good model for contemporary postdisciplinary studies of political and moral economy. An additional influence was conversations with **John O’Neill**, and

reading his book *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics* (O'Neill 1998), which got me interested in Aristotle, not just in relation to economics, but social science generally.

John's contribution on unfree labour shows the value of bringing philosophy and social science together, albeit in a different way from most approaches. First, it differs in emphasising 'patency' (vulnerability and dependency) rather than just agency. Secondly, because of its separation from social science, moral and political philosophy today is dominated by ideal theory, which tends to ignore social structures or adopt idealised versions of them. Such philosophy also tends to focus on the good, as if injustice and evil were just the absence of the good. By contrast, in most social science disciplines, oppression, exploitation, injustice and violence are discussed with little or no discussion of *why* they are bad, perhaps because of a misguided belief that value-freedom is necessary for objectivity. Hence, philosophy and social science have complementary strengths and weaknesses that invite resolution. Examining a concrete example of injustice, John demonstrates that to explain what unfree labour is and how it arises we need to *evaluate* it, and in a way that includes the structures and contexts in which it occurs. This also helps us realise that in addition to more obvious solutions of improving employment legislation, there are more indirect ones – for example, providing support for the dependants of unfree workers in order to reduce the economic pressure on such workers to resort to such work. He also notes that in thinking about labour and freedom, one can get much further by considering actual forms of *unfreedom* – a conclusion also arrived at by Amartya Sen in his book on justice (Sen 2007). I had the same experience in trying to make sense of *dignity* in *Why Things Matter to People*; philosophical definitions of it were unenlightening and it was only when I looked at how the word and especially its antonyms are used in everyday life that it became possible to understand its nature and significance.

**Dave Elder-Vass** has made important contributions to both critical realism and moral economy (Elder-Vass 2016). As he notes, I initially defined my version of moral economy as addressing the influence of morality on economic behaviour, and the effects of economic forces on morality. However, in the last ten years, I have come to see it primarily in terms of interrogating the constitutive norms, rules and power relations governing economic practices – particularly property rights in capitalism – to assess how reasonable or unreasonable the justifications of them are. More specifically, Dave rightly draws attention to the importance of gifts in the contemporary digital economy, though when it comes to assessing the new gift economy, I would add that it is vital to acknowledge the extent to which this is coupled with the harvesting of platform rents – an economic process for which there is no moral justification in terms of payment for work. This source of unearned income is a key component of contemporary rentier capitalism (Christophers 2020).

Regarding his query about my reservations about Universal Basic Income policies, these include the belief that work – that is, contributing to the good of community/society through provisioning and care – should be seen as both a duty for those able to work, and a fundamental component of individual well-being; a duty because otherwise it allows unwarranted free-riding on others' labour, and a right or capability in that being able to contribute to society in ways that benefit others as well as oneself is a source of dignity and self-worth. To enable this, the state – local or national – needs to be the employer of last resort, and to provide appropriate welfare support for those unable to work. There also needs to be adequate support for those doing unpaid childcare and eldercare work. As regards poor quality jobs (unpleasant/hazardous/insecure/low paid), the solution is to improve their quality or, if the tasks are unavoidably unpleasant, etc., share them out among all workers so each has some pleasanter, more fulfilling tasks too. We need not only distributive justice but 'contributive justice' (Gomberg 2007; Sayer 2009).



I agree with **Kevin Morgan** that the idea of the foundational economy (FE) has much to commend it from a moral economic point of view. Kevin and I explored the zero-sum competitive tendencies of high-tech industry in our research on electronics in the 1980s (*Microcircuits of Capital*), and while many have noted these features and the predictable failure of regional development policies based on them, promoting high-tech unfortunately remains the default option for many economic policies, despite the limited numbers employed in such industry. If we are to stop runaway global heating we have to abandon this fetish, and work towards combining a green new deal and FE.

A striking feature of the thinking behind the FE movement and one that differs from most radical political economy is that it is prescriptive about the kind of *use-values* that should be prioritised, instead of focusing just on exchange value and how much money different groups get out of the economic process – a focus which mirrors capitalism’s pursuit of money as its ultimate goal. Green imperatives also oblige us to consider the nature of *what* is produced and consumed. Real economic wealth consists of use-values, but some of these are much more important for our well-being than others. Accordingly, FE champions universal basic services rather than universal basic income, which could – as right wing advocates hope – co-exist with a radically shrunken public sector, where what used to be provided collectively has to be purchased by individuals. Of course, as Kevin notes, ways of financing FE have to be devised, and here I would suggest that green or FE Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs)<sup>3</sup> issued by local and central government to fund FE and greening the economy may win popular support and give people a stake in its success. At the same time, especially for the

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<sup>3</sup> This idea was proposed by Caroline Lucas, Clive Lewis, Colin Hines and Richard Murphy in 2021: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/14/a-green-recovery-bond-will-enable-the-government-to-fund-its-climate-pledges>

foundational sector of housing, it is important to shift finance *away* from promoting asset inflation and indebtedness, and more generally to reverse the shift towards rentierism. In view of the current hold of rentier interests and big capital over governments, this is an enormous challenge.

**Balihar Sanghera** and **Elmira Satybaldieva** are right: in writing about inequalities and moral economy, I have said far too little about resistance, whether in research on the lived experience of class or moral economy and the rich. One reason is probably an overreaction against the tendency of radicals to exaggerate and romanticise the rebelliousness of the oppressed and exaggerate the precariousness of the social order (forecasting 6 of the last 3 crises . . . as the joke goes) and to suppose that, but for strategies of legitimation, mass resistance would surely break out. E.P.Thompson, who popularised but did not originate the concept of moral economy, was as an example of this tendency, though in response to critics, he did acknowledge he had ignored the ‘flag-saluting, foreigner-hating, peer respecting side of the plebian mind’ (Eastwood 1995). I also felt that radical political economists tended to gloss over divisions within classes, including the division of labour and skill, and differences in cultural capital among those who were at least in a Marxist sense workers. The same surely goes for gender and race. Research on intersectionality highlights these divisions.

In opposition to radical wishful thinking, I was much taken with Bourdieu’s explanation of the lack of resistance by reference to the naturalisation of contingent social forms and limitation of individuals’ horizons and aspirations by ‘the sense of reality’, as Balihar and Elmira note. But Bourdieu took this too far – and not surprisingly, because as already noted, he treated the formation of the habitus as indifferent to whether its formative conditions were harmful or beneficial, as if we could accommodate to being despised and exploited as easily to being respected and empowered. He therefore ignored emotional resistance. Even then, emotional resistance does not always transform into political resistance; problems may just

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be registered as personal misfortunes. Resistance can also be deflected by divide and rule strategies, such as the Right's attempt to stir up 'culture wars' and deflect working class attention from the financial upper class onto the liberal Left, a tendency facilitated by the remoteness of the upper class from the rest of the population but also sometimes reinforced by middle class 'class racism'. Further, given that emotions are often mixed, there can be complex mixes of resistance and consent, willing or reluctant. For my part though, I accept that while I have written about emotions such as shame or resentment of injustice, I have not gone into what determines how they are acted upon, if at all, or how they are contingently politicised.

**Gideon Calder's** paper illuminates why anyone interested in what is problematic about inequality will not find many answers in political theory, despite its focus on justice. I have to agree that sadly, in many cases, political theory comes across primarily as a vehicle for demonstrating cleverness rather than identifying actual injustice. In its dominant focus on 'ideal theory' - models of ideal forms of social organization that support liberty and fairness - it shares a similar malaise to that of mainstream economics with its preoccupation with idealised models of markets and lack of attention to actually-existing economic processes and structures. Significantly, in neither case do they pose much threat to contemporary capitalism, which, of course, could account for their dominance. As I noted in my response to John O'Neill, it's a casualty of the divorce of normative thinking from positive social science that has emerged over the last 150 years. Hence, in trying to develop an approach to moral economy and economic justice I found that Aristotle, Smith, Marx, Tawney, Veblen, Hobson, and more recent authors such as David Graeber, Ann Pettifor, Nancy Fraser, Elizabeth Anderson and Michael Hudson had more to offer than the kind of political theory that Gideon critiques. And as he notes, starting from actual injustices requires a pluralistic approach to theory: as highly complex beings with diverse capacities, forms of dependence and

vulnerability, it is surely no surprise that what is required for us to live together justly and in ways that promote the well-being of all cannot be covered by the kind of one-dimensional theories that dominate contemporary political theory. I appreciate Gideon's generous comments on my work, but as for what a more pluralistic and realistic or worldly political theory should look like, I'm not currently able to say.

### Inequality and the rich

Health inequalities are not something I have studied before<sup>4</sup>, so it is gratifying to know that my more general work on inequality has been helpful in that field. As **Graham Scambler's** work has shown, much research on health inequalities doesn't go far enough back along the causal chain to identify what *produces* the inequalities in income, status, education and environment, etc., that correlate with health inequalities. Positivist research treats such correlations as in themselves the key to explanation. I suspect that most health researchers are reluctant to examine the underlying processes not only because they are schooled in positivist rather than critical realist methods, but because things like economic exploitation, class contempt and racism are seen as too far removed from their own topic and also 'too political'. While positivist research on health inequalities tends to suggest sticking-plaster policies involving allocating extra resources at various points so as to reduce the impact of things like low income, or lack of support, critical realist research implies more radical policies that change the *determinants* of low income or poor educational outcomes, etc.

Graham presents some interesting ways of examining the relations and processes that generate these common empirical associations, such as by reference to the 'seven asset flows' he mentions. In the case of material asset flows, these are of course very much the focus of

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<sup>4</sup> But see Sayer and McCartney (2021).

*Why We Can't Afford the Rich*. The complication of economic inequality and objective class relations over the last half century referred to by Graham owes much to the shift to rentier capitalism. This has been associated not only with the return of the rich but also with the rise of small-time rentiers, whose earned income is supplemented by capital gains in housing, and by private pensions based on rentier sources of income.

Graham mentions my distinction between identity-sensitive sources of inequality, such as those of racism and sexism, and identity-indifferent sources, such as market forces.<sup>5</sup> As regards the former, I should perhaps add a comment here, because I am sure some critics would want to say that this ignores the 'structural' aspect of racism and sexism. If the use of the word 'structural' is to be more than just a way of upping the rhetorical *ante*, we need to identify the structures that tend to anchor or embed inequalities of race, ethnicity, and gender. Examples are the unequal division of labour between better paid, good quality jobs and poorly paid, poor quality ones; the spatial segregation of urban areas by income and ethnicity; and selective schools and their catchment areas. In each of these, women and BAME people are over-represented in the more disadvantaged positions within these structures, so that *in addition to* conscious and unconscious racist and sexist discrimination, people's lives are shaped by their location in these structures in ways which reinforce racial and gender inequalities. In everyday life, differences in placement within these structures tend to be seen as a reflection of differences in what individuals deserve, and in turn, differences in recognition tend to reinforce inequalities in distribution.

**Diane Reay's** outstanding research on schools, class, gender and race has been a major influence on my work on the lived experience of inequalities. Regarding her observations on

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<sup>5</sup> A recent example of identity-indifferent sources of inequality is redundancies in the retail sector, which have been the consequence not of discrimination against retail workers, but of the rise of online shopping.

education, meritocracy and the view from the bottom set, I recall reading somewhere of psychological experiments on the effects of teachers' expectations on their pupils' performance: when teachers showed confidence in their pupils' ability it actually enhanced their performance, and when they communicated doubt in their ability, pupils performed worse than with teachers who were neutral or more positive about them. In practice, as Diane's examples indicate, this positive or negative feedback comes not only from teachers, but from the highly unequal structural contexts in which education takes place, where inequalities of class in terms of economic and cultural capital are misread as evidence of unequal potential and ability. The quality of the physical environment of the school and local area can also affect how pupils feel about themselves. Thus, the differences between the lavish grounds and facilities of the private school and the limited facilities of a cash-strapped state school<sup>6</sup> indicate how their respective pupils are valued and send powerful confidence-building or confidence-eroding signals to them.

Relations between the working and middle classes have been widely studied in sociology, but for various reasons relations between these and the upper class have not, even though in the case of upper class politicians we see it every day in the news media. Recently, some authors have argued that the upper class practice of sending children to boarding school – a form of deliberate parental neglect – creates certain common pathologies that can last into adulthood. Notable among these is a refusal of pupils to acknowledge their own vulnerability in order to avoid being bullied. Presenting an impression of impregnable confidence and assurance and lack of need of others is a vital form of self-preservation in the boarding school environment. This also leads to difficulties in accepting others' vulnerability and in

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<sup>6</sup> English public (i.e. private) school fees are 90% higher than state spending per school pupil (<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/oct/08/english-private-school-fees-90-higher-than-state-school-spending-per-pupil>).

sustaining relationships in later life (Duffell 2014; Beard 2021; Schaverien 2015). Ironically, when combined with a sense of superiority and entitlement, these pathologies tend to benefit them in the competitive struggles of public life. Of course, they also have all the advantages of economic, social and cultural capital, but I suspect more needs to be said about the social psychology of the upper class and their relation to members of other classes with whom they interact, and who often allow them to get away with assuming positions of dominance.

This brings me to the other topic discussed by Diane - the growth of corruption in politics. Since *Why We Can't Afford the Rich* came out in 2014, we have seen a strengthening of what I termed (adapting a phrase from Bob Jessop) 'plutocracy in the shadow of democracy'. As Diane shows, it has become increasingly corrupt and brazen in facilitating wealth extraction. This is particularly clear in the extraordinary expansion of cronyism (or 'coronyism') in which hugely generous contracts have been given to donors and friends of Conservative party with no competitive tendering or checks. Legal challenges to these practices have so far made little impression. To paraphrase a comment attributed to Frank Wilhoit, while for the rich, the law protects but does not bind, for the rest the law binds but does not protect. How do they get away with this? The usual explanations cite the combination of the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system, a weak and divided opposition, and a supine and sycophantic news media dominated by billionaires. But important though all these are, it is still difficult to understand why so many voters should vote against their own interests, and support such an irresponsible, dishonest, corrupt and manifestly incompetent group of politicians. The rise of populism is something I didn't mention in *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*; what I still find difficult to understand is the psychology of reception of this populism. Although we must never lose sight of the structural forces of the rise of rentier capitalism in deepening inequalities, nor should we ignore the strange psychology of the popular reception of a Right-

wing government packed with boarding school-damaged ‘reckless opportunists’, apparently able to ‘con’ the public through confidence and fake conviction (Davis 2018).<sup>7</sup>

In other words, although *Why We Can't Afford the Rich* was far too long<sup>8</sup>, as Dick Walker notes, there is so much else that needs to be said – ranging from the economic to the cultural and psycho-social – in explaining the return of the rich.

### Environment

**Jamie Morgan** expands and updates another theme from *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*: the diabolical double crisis of economy and environment. As Jamie – a heterodox economist – knows better than I do, mainstream economics retains its disastrous monopoly control of the subject, and one of the reasons I wanted to write the book was to present an alternative.

As he notes, I use a financial definition of wealth in the book, because that is most relevant to understanding the rich. However, from a normative point of view I would again want to emphasise that economic wealth consists of use-values. Prices are poor indicators of this kind of value, and the only reason why we treat them as if they were measures of value is that our dependence on money for access to goods forces us to do so. As K.W. Kapp wrote, capitalism is ‘a system of unpaid costs’, and however useful markets and prices are for

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<sup>7</sup> As Aeron Davis argues, there are also structural forces which tend to select and groom such individuals: in the case of those running major companies, these include the pressure to meet short-term demands of shareholders for profits, which encourages CEOs to sacrifice long-term strategy and to pocket their winnings and move on before the damage is revealed. Similar incentives exist in the public sector with the rise of New Public Management, while in Parliament, a host of constraints and incentives obstructs the pursuit of the public good (Hardmann 2019).

<sup>8</sup> I did think of bringing out an abridged version called ‘Why We *Simply* Can't Afford the Rich’, but that never came to anything.



coordinating the world's extraordinarily complex social division of labour, they fail to reflect the environmental and social costs incurred by capitalism (Kapp 1978). What mainstream economics sidelines as a matter of 'externalities' has never been more central. If I were to write a more academic book on moral economy, I would probably begin with economic evaluation as a matter of dealing with incommensurable things, such as the need for food and education, and hence which cannot be represented in a single value, such as a price. The growth of the division of labour and globalisation have concealed what is clear to subsistence producers – our total dependence on the biophysical environment. Further, the environment itself, including features that have no use to us for provisioning, is central to any conception of wealth that goes beyond the narrowly economic. We have not only to change the meaning of economic wealth but to resist the reduction of wealth to its economic aspect. As Ruskin said, 'There is no wealth but life.'

I fully accept the point raised both by Jamie and Dave Elder-Vass that particularly in view of the climate and ecological crises, we have to consider our dependence on other species and ecosystems, which also need to flourish, and physical systems such as those of climate. Hence, as regards the concept of flourishing, I agree that it must go beyond that of humans to other species, and not just to individual species but especially the flourishing of ecosystems.

I certainly agree with Jamie that unless a green transition safeguards the living standards and indeed benefits the working class, there is little chance of it gaining democratic approval. The response of the 'gilets jaunes' in France is salutary; it is understandable that those struggling to pay their bills put this before saving the planet. It is hardly surprising that workers in climate-harming sectors like aviation are reluctant to see their sectors radically downsized. Greening the economy will require rapid structural change on an unprecedented scale, and major changes in ways of life, so unless the state – central and local – provides those most affected with economic security and alternative work, it won't happen. I used to think

Gramsci's slogan – 'pessimism of the intellectual, optimism of the will' – was a bit too glib, but now, in the truly desperate situation we're in, there's no rational alternative.

Commented [GC2]: Intellect?  
AS: yes!

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