Twitter Thread by All Possums Go to Heaven



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Capitalism demolishes society and, with it, itself.

A thread.

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Prior to capitalism, there were plenty of elite-centric, exploitive systems in place. European and Japanese feudalism. Roman mass slavery. The corvee labor of the ancient hydraulic state. Etc.

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But as exploitive and repressive as these systems were, they still retained some sense of mutual obligation among classes. Elites depend on the masses to survive and thrive. You can only exploit them up to a certain point, beyond which you threaten your own labor supply.

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Consider this quote from Kenneth Jupp on European feudalism. Feudalism entailed *mutual obligations* between rich and poor.

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These obligations were not equal, uniform, or always universally respected. But they were at least *there.* In return for labor and agricultural surplus, a feudal lord was obligated to protect his villeins, provide them justice, and respect their usufruct land rights.

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From Jupp again, feudal lords were also obligated—by self interest as much as ancient custom—to provide the basics of production—homes, tools, etc—to their villeins.

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If you're living off the labor of others, *it doesn't make sense to leave the ability to produce or even reproduce labor up to chance.*

But then along comes capitalism.

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I've written about the late medieval price revolution elsewhere, but to sum up: there came a point where the value of the poor's obligations to the rich dropped below the opportunity cost of the rich's obligations to the poor.

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So the rich revolted against the poor, seized their lands, outsourced security to the state, and basically canceled all their obligations to the poor.

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People like to justify their actions, so they concocted an ideology—liberalism, the Enlightenment, etc—that held that *no one* had any a priori obligations to anyone else. It was all voluntary!

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It's not hard to see what a bait-and-switch this was. The poor still had to labor for the rich to gain access to the resources they needed to live. Their obligations were de jure but not de facto eliminated. Only the obligations of the wealthy were actually erased.

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So we end up with a society dominated by the sociopathic idea that none of us have any obligations to each other and we're all just atomized, alienated individuals with no ties to each other. (Cue an epidemic of suicide, depression, substance abuse, etc.)

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In the centuries since then, this ideology has only gotten more extreme and encompassing. Even *Friedrich Hayek* argued in favor of state-run social welfare, environmental protection, worker rights, etc, in "Road to Serfdom."

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He'd basically be considered a communist in today's political landscape, because we have taken this ideology of *no obligations* to its logical, fanatical extreme.

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To wit: the (now former) mayor of a Texas town—what's the point of having a mayor if not for situations like this?—making this point crystal clear in real-time.

15/ https://t.co/yYv44pqvNW

> Texas mayor tells freezing townfolk: "sink or swim" but no town resources to help as that is "socialism." Private capitalist energy firms fail to deal with cold, but right-wingers block town help as socialism. Crazy dangers of capitalist ideology.https://t.co/ocZvKS1Kni
>
> — Richard D. Wolff (@profwolff) February 19, 2021

We hang on to scraps of our primordial sense of mutual obligation. The rich have privatized resources we'd otherwise be free to access, but in emergencies we still drop the pretense a bit and (temporarily, marginally) de-privatize essential resources.

16/

So consider that we marshal public resources to help people in disasters, disrupt markets with laws against price gouging, etc. But for people like this Texas mayor, *even that is too much.*

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Go watch the brilliant Chernobyl miniseries if you haven't already. It deftly illustrates the ways that the late Soviet ideological package—secrecy, siege mentality, careerism and bureaucratism, suspicion and surveillance, etc—all add up to an inability to confront disaster.

18/

And then consider the ways that *we in America* have boxed ourselves into an ideological corner, in which the most basic elements of living in a society together are viewed as the worst forms of tyranny.

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We could easily make billions of N95 masks, but we still don't have enough. The disaster in Texas was easily predictable & avoidable, but children are freezing or suffocating to death *right now* because of a fanatical ideological commitment to a stunted vision of "liberty."

20/

Over and over, we find ourselves unable to address challenges, not because we lack the resources but because we have been led to believe that even the mildest of collective action is communist tyranny.

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All of this so the rich can justify holding on to every scrap of marginal wealth, no matter how many people die from an avoidable virus or freeze to death in their homes while the rich vacation in Mexico. There is nothing *substantive* stopping us. Just ideas.

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Marx observed the contradiction inherent in capitalism: the profit motive drives the capital class to lower wages as much as possible, but this leads to immiseration that undermines the capital class' ability to sell anything. It would eventually undercut itself.

23/

Was Marx too optimistic? We're going to destroy ourselves first by stubbornly refusing to respond to avoidable disasters. We're passengers on a sinking ship refusing to bail out the water because it would "violate our individual liberty" to take care of each other.

24/end

PS: The main ideological difference between the two main political parties in the US hinges on this: do we dismantle *all* obligations and let the rich suicidally accumulate wealth to the point of immiserating and destroying the labor that creates their wealth?

Or only *most*?

PPS: LOL https://t.co/AIIrX6cAVv

> When did flatten the curve turn into stay home until you\u2019ve learned to accept Communism?
>
> — Matt Couch (@RealMattCouch) February 20, 2021