Who holds the ultimate pow-
er in this system? Is it heads of state? They seem to answer directly to the wealthy, protecting their interests at any expense. Is it the wealthiest ones, the mag-
nate who own corporations and profit on countless showed invest-
ments? They still have to scramble to maintain their positions as a thousand contenders struggle to replace them. How about the Fed-
eral Reserve, the bankers, the ones who administrate the system? When something goes awry, they seem as powerless and distrust-
ad everyone else. Is it a secret con-
spiracy of tycoons or Freemasons?
That sounds like lingering anti-Semitic rheto-
rical, implying that the problem is the power of a specific group rather than the dynamics of the system itself.

Or is it dice in control? People speak about the economy the way they speak about God or Nature, even though it’s comprised of their own activities and the activities of people like them. It is a sort of Ouija board on which the self-inter-
est ed actions of competing individuals add up to collective disembowlement. Has there ever been a dictator as tyrannical and destructive as 
capitalism? The economy reshapes the physical and social terrain in its own image: silicon valleys, motor cities, banana re-
publics. It erases the distinction between natural and synthetic: a cornfield in Iowa is no more natural than the con-
crete wasteland of Newark, New Jersey. It transforms human beings into workers, at the same way it reduces forests to toilet paper and pigs to pork chops.

Two centuries ago the vast majority of people were employed extracting res-
ources directly from the earth: farming, fishing, and mining. The industrial rev-
olution pushed much of this workforce into manufacturing. Today, more 
people are being made in manufacturing than ever, but thanks to technological progress it takes fewer and fewer employees to accomplish the same amount of production.

In a sensible system, this would mean more leisure for all of us, but in capitalism its just saves employers money and makes it harder for the rest of us to get a job. In poorer areas, slums and shantytowns serve as holding pools for the unemployed, keeping them close enough to sweatshops to drive down wages. In wealthier zones, all this cheap labor ends up in the service indus-
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The market rewards skill, brilliance, and dur-
ing—but only to the extent that they produce profit. The essential quality naturally selected for those at the top of the pyramid is that they make decisions on the basis of what concen-
trates the most power in their hands. They pass down all the costs of this accumulation of power that they can—not only to workers and consumers and victims of pollution, but also to their spouses and secretaries and house-
holds—but they can’t avoid the fact that they have to make decisions based on eco-
nomic constraints or else lose their positions.

So you could say capitalism puts power in the worst hands, but that misses the point. It’s not that the ones reared by the economy tend to be the worst people, but that—how-
ever selfish or generous they are—their posi-
tions are contingent on certain kinds of be-
havior. The moment an executive deprivatizes profit-making, he or her company is instantly replaced with a more ruthless contender. For example, in a world in which corporate deci-
sions are governed by the necessity of produc-
ing goods and services, CEOs are simply powerless to make decisions that place ecol-
ogy over profit. They might promote ecol-
ogical products or sustainable energy, but only as a marketing campaign or PR move. Genuinely eco-
centric decision-making can only occur outside the market.

So you don’t have to believe all executives are bad people, but you do have to con-
clude that capitalism itself is a problem. On the contrary, it’s the de-
fenders of the free market who have to make arguments based on human nature. To excuse the destructiveness of the economy, they have to argue that no other social system can mo-
tivate human beings and provide for their needs. Anthropologists already know that this is not true.

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The labor of those lower on the pyramid en-
riches the ones towards the top. To stay stable, the economy has to draw in more and more continuous social, economic, and political forces, and aspects of our lives. The resulting inequalities can only be maintained by ever-increa-
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Capitlism Is A Pyramid Scheme

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