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BUDDHIST FUTURES

The Black Hole of Post-Capitalism

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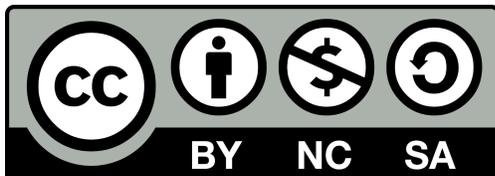
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Buddhist Futures: The Black Hole of Post-Capitalism

What happens after Capitalism? What is life like? Now that Capitalism has captured and colonized, appropriated (stolen), marketed and sold back to us every facet of our own lives, our relationships, needs, desires, cultures, even our “spiritualities,” what is left to us when Capitalism dies? As Joe Brewer wrote, “the pain you feel is Capitalism dying.”

Are we left with nothing but a black hole of Emptiness? Is there nothing to replace it? What alternatives are there to fill the void left by the death of Capitalism? It is like the death of God, an existential crisis.

I question and challenge those who beg for the end of Capitalism. Yes, Capitalism will come to an end, but what it will be replaced with might be even worse. Be careful what you wish for, you might get it.

I see the end of Capitalism as a naturally occurring process of Science overtaking Capitalism, and this is from a functionalist perspective. As science and technology (STEM) grows, it begins to take over all those social functions that used to be managed by Capitalism. STEM will become the new Overlord, controlling every waking (and sleeping) moment of our lives, what we produce and consume, what we do with our bodies and our leisure time, how we identify ourselves, how we relate, how we think.

Then Capitalism will be seen for what it is in terms of Resource Allocation: a crap shoot, a wild guess, and not even—a blind shot in the dark compared to STEM. STEM will out-perform Capitalism at every level. STEM will have the capacity to allocate resources far more efficiently with greater exactitude and productivity than Capitalism ever could. Capitalism, with its “Economics,” which is nothing more than a self-reinforcing religion consisting of unnamed and untested premises (doctrines), will seem quaint and archaic, like the remnants of an old religion that one discovers between the dusty leather bindings of an ancient book in a library. We will look back and laugh

at the hocus-pocus of “Economics” and how it pretended to manage the allocation of extreme complexity, how it was used to obfuscate and mystify its abject failures.

Capitalism has only been able to remain productive and profitable because STEM came to its rescue in the mid-twentieth century and began to take over many of its resource allocation functions, via computer technology and artificial intelligence. STEM will out-manage and out-perform Capitalism in every sector, but unlike Capitalism, its goal will not be profit—it will be CONTROL. The STEM-controlled world will be run not by Capitalists, but by Netocrats*, the technological elite. (See The Futurica Trilogy.) Entities (corporations?) that control resources will have access to everything they need and want, without having to buy or own anything. Stockpiling stuff (and “money another quaint Capitalist invention that will become useless and extinct) is inefficient and counter-productive, a waste, and STEM will not tolerate waste of any kind. Its sworn enemy is Entropy.

Eric Weinstein, a mathematician and investor began a recent video for BigThink.com: “We think of capitalism as being locked in an ideological battle with socialism, but we never really saw that capitalism might be defeated by its own child — technology.”

Is there any shred of evidence to support this foregoing conjecture?* We already have a perfect foreshadowing of a STEM-controlled world: China’s new “social credit system.” Communist China has figured out that people will submit to any authority, conform to any rule, if there are steep social consequences to pay for violating them. China is using social networking to note every action a person takes, every email, social media post, chat, purchase, bank transaction, phone call, every security checkpoint you pass through, how you behave in a queue, the expression on your face when you approach a clerk at a train station, every move you make is recorded and calculated to create a “social credit” ranking. If what you do is counted as cheating, stealing, lying, failing to pay debts, disobeying the rules, hostile or simply “untrustworthy,” you will receive a low social credit rating. Because of your low social credit rating, you will be denied access to jobs,

apartments, credit, public transportation, and public services. China's social credit system is the first to operationalize a totalizing system of social control using STEM.

And that's only the beginning, because STEM technologies can be used to "produce the subject" that is engineered to meet the demands of STEM-controlled system, turning humans into a kind of raw meat robot. Robots are not taking over the world; rather, we are becoming the robotic subjects of a STEM-controlled world.

New computers could delete thoughts without your knowledge, experts warn. New human rights laws are required to protect sensitive information in a person's mind from "unauthorised collection, storage, use or even deletion." Now two biomedical ethicists are calling for the creation of new human rig...

The Enlightenment is over; Neoliberalism is doomed. Techno-Fascism is the new fungus growing over the dried bones of Capitalism. Japan has decided that all its public universities will no longer teach arts, humanities, languages, or social sciences. Not even law or economics. Only science, engineering and technology. Why not? Because STEM doesn't need law or languages, economics or psychology. It doesn't need art or stories; it doesn't need human culture. Because essentially, it doesn't need humans. STEM is a post-humanist worldview.

Capitalism, with its Enlightenment ideals of individuality, freedom, equality (cough), rights, law, and justice will seem downright romantic compared to the technological nightmare that replaces it. Surrounded by the digital flicker of a techno-dystopia, we may be nostalgic for the gilded glory that was Capitalism.

So that brings me back to the initial question: What happens after Capitalism? What is life like? Are we left with nothing but the black hole of Emptiness?

Ah, Emptiness! How can we use Buddhist Dialectics (as opposed to Buddhist religion) to deconstruct—counter-construct—what life is like

after Capitalism? Is it possible that what we need to do is embrace the emptiness of chaotic change, the void of having nothing to replace Capitalism, so that we can actually let go of it and begin to create something utterly new, alternative, and totally unlike what is surely going to replace it, an uber-technological dystopia?

The end of Capitalism is the end of paid labour for profit. It is the end of paid work, as John Holloway says in *Crack Capitalism*. Sometimes we will work for wages, sometimes for barter, but “jobs” will be scarce. Now we must fend for ourselves. What will we do with our lives without jobs? How will we survive?

Can we enter the darkness of nothingness, the hunger of lack, of risking everything that is known and familiar, to search in the wilderness for some other way to live, post-capitalism?

Can we collectively work out our values, our desires, our existential imperatives, the basic ground of being, relating, communicating, cohabiting and subsisting? What kind of societies can we create while scarcely surviving on the margins of an over-developed world teetering on the brink of eco-cidal extinction post-capitalism?

Resistance involves renunciation. Will we live like feral monks, not [just] deprived of food and shelter, but renouncing and resisting cooperation with a totalizing technological system that would turn us into raw meat robots?

It is not just the refusal to participate in a corrupt system, but the deployment of a critically conscious resistance to the ideology that operates the codes and programs of a system which metes out reward and punishment for [non]compliance.

Will we refuse to be vector vermin co-opted into Mindlessly reproducing the social credit system? Or will we develop a Critical Mindfulness that makes a cognitive break with a totalizing system?

Will we be able to create relations of mutual pleasure and support? Of creativity and play? cultures of wild imagination? Or will it be an existence of brute survival?

*Note: I'm certainly not the first to propose that Science will overtake Capitalism as the basic operating system of society. Read Alexander Bard and Jan Söderqvist's *The Futurica Trilogy* for a fascinating glimpse into the STEM-controlled future dystopia.

Author

Shaun Bartone holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of New Brunswick. His areas of expertise are systems theory, networks, and ecological sociology. Shaun has been practicing Buddhist meditation and yoga for ten years. He is also a multi-instrumental musician and composer. Shaun is the coordinator of Queer Dharma Circle at Bird Hill Farm in Ware, MA, a multi-lineage dharma program for queer and trans people. Shaun blogs at [*Engage! Critical Dharma for Thinking People*](#).



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