

Why did envy become taboo in so many traditional societies? What causes concepts of envy to change over time? G. W. F. Hegel, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Friedrich Nietzsche offer intriguing suggestions, but these fall outside the scope of the appendix. To raise these questions is to historicize the contemporary debate in which Protasi is engaged. Did any ancients defend envy? (Yes, in fact, the sophist Hippias does, so Plato and Aristotle may criticize envy in full knowledge of his opinion.) Protasi offers the appendix as a starting point for a historian unfamiliar with the intellectual history of envy (5). It would be better to start by dispelling the myth that contemporary defences of envy like Protasi's make an unprecedented break with a long unexamined, however variously construed, traditional moral prejudice.

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*Capitalism: The Story Behind the Word*  
Michael Sonenscher  
Princeton University Press, 2022, 248 pp.

'Capitalism is a nineteenth-century word with a twenty-first-century charge' (viii). Though the word sits at the centre of much modern debate about politics and economics, it is a 'compound term' with a long and oft-forgotten history. Re-acquainting ourselves with this history and picking apart its multiple layers of meaning deepens our understanding of present debates about capitalism and expands our vision of what might be possible within politics. Such is the claim of Cambridge historian and political theorist Michael Sonenscher, whose recent book, *Capitalism: The Story Behind the Word*, offers a much-needed historical account of the contentious concept and encourages a reframing of current political discussion. The book provides a fascinating backstory by revisiting little-known nineteenth-century debates about commercial society and the division of labour, terms which—though distinct at their conception—were gradually subsumed under the broader 'problem of capitalism'. Sonenscher argues that 'the distinction between capitalism and commercial society is worth making' because capitalism refers to a theory

of property, whereas commercial society is (or at least was) a theory centred on the problem of the ‘division of labour’. For Sonenscher, the ‘problem’ of division labour is that it engenders ‘markets’ and ‘prices’ that are ‘relentless and remorseless’, because ‘they are not the types of thing that can really be owned’, making it difficult to mitigate their effects (11). Sonenscher’s aim is to re-open discussion of commercial society, challenge our uncritical acceptance of its premises, and refocus our intellectual energies on the challenges posed by the division of labour. As Sonenscher reminds us, unlike capitalism, for which one can conceive of many alternatives, division of labour and the commercial society it brings about, is ‘more deep-seated than it seems’ (14). Far more than an etymological exercise, this book charts a path towards constructive political thinking by diversifying and sharpening the conceptual tools at our disposal.

In the first part of the book, Sonenscher shows how ‘there was once a clearer conceptual distinction between capital and the division of labour than has become usual now’, and retells the process by which this distinction was lost, as the ‘concept of capitalism’ shifted from the political right to the political left (12). His goal is to show that the problem of capitalism was really two problems: the ownership of capital, on the one hand, and the division of labour and markets on the other (72-73). The term *capitalisme* first appeared in 1830s French debates about the right to work, though it harkened back to ‘the eighteenth-century preoccupation with the nexus of capital, war, and debt’, whereby individual ‘capitalists’ financed government debt through privately owned capital (43). The term came into vogue among French royalists who looked with concern on the commercialization of political society (43-45). For Louis de Bonald, commercial society with its fluctuating markets and prices was characterized by a ‘collective power’ that relies on ‘reciprocity and concord’, in contrast to the ‘unitary’ power of political society (46). Bonald and other royalists like Alphonse de Beauchamp and Armand Francois, comte d’Allonville, viewed the combination of the two forms as a ‘weakness’ likely to degenerate into ‘uncertainty and instability’ (47). For these conservatives, the term ‘capitalism’ served as a shorthand for the ‘moral and political choices that France now faced’; they used it to counter the influence of a growing commercial society (48-49). Thus, in Sonenscher’s words, ‘the concept of

capitalism began as either a French royalist nightmare or a royalist political threat' (50).

The turning point for the development of the term came when 'the subject of capitalism move[d] from the French right to the French left' (52). This exchange occurred in debate between political economist Alphonse de Lamartine and socialist leader Louis Blanc about the 'right to work'. By the 'right to work', Blanc meant the right to have a job, ensured and enforced, like other rights, by the government. Lamartine viewed this right to work as inherently opposed to individual liberty, because the former could not be enforced without destroying the latter. Blanc responded by drawing a distinction between 'capital' and 'capitalism'. He understood capitalism—his real enemy—to be 'the private appropriation of capital', the destruction of which could actualize the right to work (64). *Capitalism*, in other words, could be neutralized by nationalizing or socializing *capital*, and allocating it in ways that ensured work for all (among other societal benefits).

This history shows how the term 'capitalism' crystalized as a theory of property, but still did not address what Sonenscher calls the 'real problem', which 'was not capital or capitalism, but the division of labour' (70). As Blanc's proposal to use capital to neutralize capitalism showed, solutions to the private ownership of capital could be imagined. However, as Sonenscher puts it well, 'solutions to the problem of capitalism are...not necessarily solutions to the problem of the division of labour' (71). It is for this reason that the term 'commercial society' is useful. Capitalism is a term 'more fluid than it looks' and for which myriad alternatives can be proposed (14). In contrast, 'it is far from clear that there is any alternative to the division of labour, other than, simply, its absence' (172). It is hard to disagree with Sonenscher on this point, and it seems that much fruitless debate about 'capitalism' that centres on who owns what could be avoided by adopting Sonenscher's proposed reframing. Using the term 'commercial society', as opposed to the catch-all 'capitalism', recognizes the fact that the division of labour is a 'different type of problem' and, in many cases, the one underlying modern political anxieties.

In the second part of the book, Sonenscher sketches the arguments of several influential thinkers from the early nineteenth century to 'throw more light on capitalism' and to show how mod-

ern theorists might begin thinking anew about the problem of the division of labour. He begins with Marx, not to present him as a thinker concerned about the division of labour, but to contrast him with those who were and to characterize his concept of capitalism as ‘midstream’ (94). In Sonenscher’s reading, Marx largely accepted the existence of commercial society, and was instead primarily concerned with the problem of property, particularly the ‘peculiar type of property’ Marx called ‘labour power’. For him, the ‘the ultimate solution to the problem of property...was to be supplied by the division of labour’, an arrangement he glorified through vivid descriptions of the unlimited diversity of human potential in terms borrowed from the anthropogenic theology of Feuerbach and Schleiermacher (78, 90-93). In this, Marx reversed the problem and the solution, as they had been conceived by earlier thinkers, and—at least to his followers—offered a path towards a world where property no longer existed. Thus, Marx can be thought of as dealing primarily with the problem of capitalism while offering little help towards solving the problem of the division of labour. In contrast, Adam Smith, G. W. F. Hegel, David Ricardo, and Lorenz von Stein—the four thinkers visited in the final chapters of the book—were primarily concerned with the problem of the division of labour and ‘commercial society’. Smith is useful for Sonenscher’s argument not for offering a clear solution to the problem of the division of labour, but for showcasing the difficulty of doing so. Sonenscher suggests that countless efforts to solve the ‘Adam Smith Problem’, arising from an apparent contradiction between the ‘expediency’ of *The Wealth of Nations* and the ‘justice’ of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, were largely unsuccessful. He argues that the Adam Smith Problem was ‘more generic than specific’, since the dichotomy fits the thought of figures like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant equally well (113, 115). Thus, in Smith—at least according to Sonenscher—we get not a solution, but a reminder of the difficulty of bridging ‘the moral and material dimensions of the two parts of a single economic and political system’ (116).

For Sonenscher, substantive solutions began with Hegel, who sought to bridge the gap between the two dimensions by theorizing the ‘administration’ which, through finance, was ‘part of both civil society and the state’ (119). The contribution of this idea to political thought, Sonenscher suggests, is ‘easy to underestimate’: Hegel

embraced the division of labour in order to ‘horizontally’ separate powers within the administration, but he did so for the sake of social stability, thereby overcoming the apparent opposition between collective and unitary power that had so troubled the French royalists (126). Sonenscher, pulling from his extensive knowledge of French political thought (evinced in his recent volume on Rousseau), shows how Hegel’s concept of administration was a development of similar ideas employed by Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Sieyès, each of whom wrestled with how to bridge the gap between commercial and political society.

The final two chapters, on Ricardo and Stein, bring in the concepts of comparative advantage and monetary sovereignty, respectively. Ricardo, who recognized that comparative advantage could bring about dependency and exploitation if exploited imprudently, proposed a financial system with bullion-backed paper money that would allow the state, through financial intermediaries, to impose taxes and ‘bring the relationship between needs and values into... moral alignment’ (153). This was a novel conception that built on Hegel’s notion of the administration, but with a primarily financial emphasis. Stein likewise advocated a large financial administration based on the state’s power to create money that would provide unity and stability while ensuring that state and society could maintain their distinct personalities (163). Sonenscher sees both Ricardo and Stein as creative thinkers grappling with the problem of the division of labour and holds them up as examples of how modern thinkers might do the same.

That these conceptions of a bureaucratic administration, comparative advantage, monetary sovereignty, and fiscal policy are quite close to those currently in use in modern liberal democracies reinforces the urgency of Sonenscher’s call to revisit these debates. The ideas and institutions that emerged through engagement with the problem of the division of labour have shaped the way our modern societies operate. Unfortunately, with the conceptual fusion that gave capitalism the weight it currently possesses in political discourse, we have seemingly lost the ability to take up similar challenges. Sonenscher is right to remind us at the close of the book that returning to the problem of the division of labour will be a challenge, due to its complexity. This ought not deter us, but should instead spur us to undertake the kind of interdisciplinary and collaborative work that is

necessary to understand and come to terms with the ongoing social effects of the division of labour. It has been three decades since the ‘end of history’ and the declaration of ‘no alternatives’ to capitalism. Determining just what triumphed, and sifting what is truly without alternative from what is merely provisional and contingent requires more focused attention on the heart of the problem. A revival of the term ‘commercial society’ and a return to the problem of the division of labour is a step in the right direction. Political theorists, social scientists, and anyone interested in understanding the commercial society in which we live will benefit from this book.

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*A Commonwealth of Hope:  
Augustine’s Political Thought*  
Michael Lamb  
Princeton University Press, 2022, 431 + xiii pp.

Michael Lamb wants to overturn a consensus on Augustine’s political thought three-quarters of a century old. Since the dawn of the postwar era, he argues, commentators both sympathetic and hostile have consistently interpreted Augustine’s attitude toward secular affairs in general and politics in particular as deeply pessimistic, otherworldly, and antipolitical. Thinkers as diverse as Reinhold Niebuhr and Herbert Deane, John Rawls and Martha Nussbaum, Hannah Arendt and Judith Shklar, John Milbank and Stanley Hauerwas, he contends, inadvertently collaborated in painting a picture of Augustine as ‘an otherworldly, sin-obsessed pessimist who encourages us to renounce the world and seek the City of God’ (xi). Under their influence, ‘Augustinianism’ has acquired a set of fixed connotations in contemporary political theory: ‘The world is a vale of tears, and government is nothing but a remedy for sin. Politics remains tragic, limited, and hostage to necessity. Citizens must do the “lesser evil” so that good may come or retreat from politics altogether, finding refuge in an otherworldly vision of heaven or the purity of the institutional church’ (xi).