

Banning Straws, Guns and Chicken Sandwiches: Betrayal and the Injustice of Marketplace Activism

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Nobody likes a rule breaker. And though few may realize it, “woke capitalism” chafes conservative Americans because it feels lopsided, like a betrayal, and in fact, the breaking of some social rule. In a 2018 column, Ross Douthat cites major airlines’ discontinuation of N.R.A. membership discounts and Apple CEO Tim Cook’s targeting of “a few random Indiana restaurants” over same-sex marriage as contributing to conservatives’ sense of “general besiegement” by hostile institutions.”¹ Warning about a woke capitalism in a 2019 *Washington Post* column, Megan McArdle observes conservatives fear being “declared anathema by employers” and “targeted for angry mobbings by the media.” There, she recalls the 2014 forced resignation of Mozilla’s CEO Brendan Eich and Google’s 2017 firing of gender politics dissident James Damore.² To these examples we could add more culture war touchstones, including sporting goods retailers no longer stocking controversial firearms, colleges and municipalities blocking fast food franchise Chick-fil-A because some perceive the brand as “anti-LGBT,” and Starbuck’s announced “ban” of plastic straws. At least for one tribe and its sympathetic observers then, an obnoxious if not outright menacing activism has thoroughly saturated the marketplace where much of life’s activity and even earning of livelihood occurs.

Some will find it easy to dismiss negative reactions to woke capitalism as much ado about nothing. But such a dismissal requires ignoring that by crossing a hefty share of their

¹ Ross Douthat, “The Rise of Woke Capital,” *The New York Times*, February 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/28/opinion/corporate-america-activism.html>.

² Megan McArdle, “Woke capitalism sells out conservatives. It can sell out their opponents, too,” *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/woke-capitalism-fears-dont-justify-selling-conservatism-to-trump/2019/08/27/878f90ce-c902-11e9-a1fe-ca46e8d573c0_story.html.

customer base, firms routinely contravene bedrock wisdom that “the customer is always right.” If nothing else, prudence would suggest that businesses should forge a middle path rather than take sides in America’s decades-long culture war. So even for the dismissive, businesses’ and others’ embrace of marketplace activism needs explanation. Digging a bit into sociology and social theory—it was a sociologist who gave us the term “culture war” after all—turns up that more than a passing cultural moment, revulsion against “woke capitalism” corresponds to systemic deterioration of social order.

This paper will examine that deterioration largely through the social theory of economist F. A. Hayek. First I’ll sketch his view of how knowledge relates to social order and rules. Second, I’ll draw on liberal theorist Kevin Vallier’s account of social trust to see how citizens on the wrong side of woke capitalism might appropriately resent activists’ demands and ostracism as a kind of betrayal. Third, we’ll define social roles and distinguish them according to Boris Holzer’s analysis of political consumerism. Fourth, we’ll see how economist Thomas Sowell articulates the value of fidelity to duty in one’s role as a rebuke of the stakeholder theory of business ethics and corporate social responsibility. Finally, I’ll suggest that reflective and conscientious citizens—among which marketplace activists probably want to rank themselves—have excellent reasons to restrain themselves from engaging in “woke” or any other kind of marketplace activism. Such activity—from the left, right, or otherwise—is never an unalloyed good and always threatens to come with significant social costs. Ironically, we may conclude that of all people, activists who demand “social responsibility” of corporations, consumers, and their fellow citizens may be the ones who ought most to be more responsible with their own words and actions.

Hayek on Knowledge, Social Order, and Rules

Twentieth century economist F. A. Hayek is well known as a critic of the notion of social justice, and his skeptical stance has informed another well known economist and social critic, Thomas Sowell. It's fitting then that we consider whether Hayek's thought supplies a sound basis for critiquing woke capitalism as a practice. Among the sources Sowell draws from to articulate Hayek social thought is *Law, Legislation and Liberty*. Foundational to the first volume of that work is the cognitive limitations of human beings. In contrasting his view against constructivist approaches to social order, Hayek observes:

To talk about a society about which either the observer or any of its members knows all the particular facts is to talk about something wholly different from anything which has ever existed—a society in which most of what we find in our society would not and could not exist and which, if it ever occurred, would possess properties we cannot even imagine.³

So, for Hayek, the conventional way of comprehending social order through the device of an omniscient observer is unintelligible and a non-starter. Put another way, the human “intellect is not capable of grasping reality in all its complexity.” Further, much of what we desire for society is not something that we can know exhaustively so as to predetermine an outcome in advance. As Hayek puts it, to have the kind of free society that America has long enjoyed requires minimizing “deliberate control of the overall order of society to the enforcement of such general rules as are necessary for the formation of a spontaneous order, the details of which we cannot foresee.”⁴ Thinking that a central administrator could know all facts and command a consciously planned order on that basis is anathema for Hayek. Finally, we should observe that while he lauds economists for emphasizing a division of labor's contribution to social flourishing, Hayek

³ F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 13.

⁴ Hayek, 32.

finds they have neglected the importance of fragmentation of knowledge, “the fact that each member of society can have only a small fraction of the knowledge possessed by all, and that each is therefore ignorant of most of the facts on which the working of society rests.”⁵ So, while knowledge cannot be had and utilized in the way constructivists desire, nonetheless social reality is such that desirable kinds of order emerge spontaneously even while the requisite knowledge to achieve it remains widely dispersed among many persons.⁶

To comprehend the actual nature of human knowledge, Hayek invokes a concept of social processes, that, like much else of his thought, Sowell also picks up. Hayek’s well known skepticism of the notion of social justice is based not on any rejection of a certain income distribution or any other stated ends per se. Rather, what ends up being unacceptable is the process entailed by it: “[T]he attempt to create such preconceived results means creating processes which “can destroy a civilization.”⁷ Hayek operates with the mind of a sociologist when he turns attention to the unconscious processes that may arise from pursuit of rationally or otherwise consciously articulated intentions. For as Steve Bruce accounts of sociology, the discipline emphasizes among other things the “hidden social causes” of human behavior.⁸ Contrasting himself again against constructivists, Hayek asserts that abstractness—a key determinant of order—is not confined to conscious thought but “is a characteristic possessed by all the processes which determine action long before they appear in conscious thought or are

⁵ Hayek, 14.

⁶ For a quick and vivid illustration of spontaneous order from fragmentation, consider Milton Friedman’s account of how a pencil comes into being. Free to Choose Network, “Milton Friedman – I, Pencil,” YouTube, July 31, 2012. <https://youtu.be/67tHtpac5ws>.

⁷ Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 212.

⁸ Steve Bruce, *Sociology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.

expressed in language.”⁹ Complementing this elevation of unconscious process is Hayek’s observation that

We never act, and could never act, in full consideration of all the facts of a particular situation, but always by singling out as relevant only some aspects of it; not by conscious choice or deliberate selection, but by a mechanism over which we do not exercise deliberate control.¹⁰

So, for Hayek, unconscious processes, operating without anyone’s foresight let alone planning, can be a desirable source of social order. And conversely, well intended plans thought to be of great benefit can unleash processes destructive of social order and therefore be undesirable.

One way Hayek sees that rationally derived processes can be undesirable is when they *interfere* with beneficial spontaneous orders. This is due to the nature of social rules. In Hayek’s view, rules have a life of their own long before they are ever articulated by anyone who becomes aware of them:

Only when individual intellects begin to differ to a significant degree will it become necessary to express these rules in a form in which they can be communicated and explicitly taught, deviant behaviour corrected, and differences of opinion about appropriate behaviour decided.¹¹

For Hayek, rules come prior to another source of order, the authoritative command. Even in rigidly structured organizations, rules regulate individual members’ actions toward the ends “commanded” by the organizational authority.¹² Contrary to the constructivist assumption that complexity necessitates more central planning, complex orders are better served by indirectly enforcing rules rather than by immediately “directing the members.”¹³ According to Hayek, when commands from above prevent members from using their knowledge to achieve their ends,

⁹ Hayek, 30.

¹⁰ Hayek, 30.

¹¹ Hayek, 43.

¹² Hayek, 49.

¹³ Hayek, 50-51.

it can constitute “interference.”¹⁴ So, adequate respect for members of a social organization, which means allowing them to regulate themselves rather than be micromanaged, is essential to Hayek’s view of social order.

Betrayal and Resentment

Hayek’s work on social rules indicates that at minimum, they have value because they may be beneficial to the social order. But there is also a way in which rules are central to the phenomenon of woke capitalism. When it comes to moral rules, citizens can be appropriately resentful at someone who breaks them. This is plausibly the case with “woke” style marketplace activism. Inasmuch as such activism consists of inappropriately making moral demands and ostracizing others for failing to meet them, activists themselves act inappropriately. Those toward whom the activism is directed in turn appropriately resent the breaking of longstanding moral rules that have maintained social trust and social peace.

For decades political philosophers have been keen to articulate how coercive laws can be reasonably justified for the citizens they govern. The most popular instance of this work may be John Rawls’ *Political Liberalism* and its associated idea of public reason. Public reason liberal Kevin Vallier has recently taken the political question of justification in a decidedly sociological direction in his book *Must Politics Be War?* There, he looks beyond justification of laws, principles, and constitutions—traditional subjects of political study—to moral rules. The turn to rules should be broadly appealing to fans of democracy; whereas judging constitutions, principles, and laws requires a lot of expert knowledge, it doesn’t resemble how people think and

¹⁴ Hayek, 51.

act from day to day. Vallier's steering the question of justification away from construction by intellectuals echoes Hayek's decentralizing impulse:

Our cognitive limitations provide the simplest reason for fine-grained individuation at the level of moral rules. People are built to evaluate rules with quick applications of implicit cognitive judgments and emotional reactions.¹⁵

As we find given whether by evolution as Hayek stresses or just by our very nature, moral rules—particularly whether others around us are keeping them or breaking them—are the kind of things people in general regularly exercise judgments on. On this basis philosophers who value a democratic ethic, be it “consent of the governed” or otherwise, will be compelled to agree that not just political rules, but moral rules too need to be publicly justified.

Vallier sees his turn toward public justification of moral rules as abetting the core and guiding values of trust, interpersonal respect, and “social peace.”¹⁶ To encapsulate this part of his project roughly: if fellow members of society don't exhibit respect for each other as trustworthy, then there can be no social peace. As we'll see, one way that someone can end up undermining mutual respect is by treating another as obligated to a moral rule when in fact she lacks sufficient reason to accept the rule as binding for herself.

For Vallier, moral obligations license authoritative moral demands by which people may enforce moral rules upon on each other. Enforcement is not necessarily an exercise by the power hungry; the kinds of transgressions against rules that people react to include everyday things like cutting in line or littering in a public space. What makes a rule enforceable is it's being a shared obligation. If a rule is an obligation, it is an intrinsically social duty that is in a sense stronger than a mere duty:

¹⁵ Vallier, 81.

¹⁶ Vallier, 85.

Authoritative moral demands issue from *obligations*, distinguished from mere duties. Duties are moral requirements, but they are not *necessarily* requirements that others are permitted to enforce through criticism, ostracism, or punishment; nor is a duty necessarily the appropriate subject of the reactive attitudes when violated. John may have a duty to worship God, but his failure to comply with the duty does not license the reactive attitudes in others. On my view, obligations are a type of duty with an inherently social component. Obligations are duties *to others* that others may hold us to; obligations thereby generate the rational reactive attitudes when violated.¹⁷

The example of failing to worship God fits the longstanding character of America as a pluralistic, liberal democratic society. It helps explain for us just why a theist may take it as a duty for himself to worship God, yet does not try to ostracize or punish the fellow countryman who fails to do so.¹⁸ As Vallier explains further, such enforcement activity is “only appropriate if others have some sufficient reason to endorse the rule upon which the ostracism is based.”¹⁹ And, at least as far as social peace goes, the theist regards the atheist as genuinely not having sufficient reason to endorse so as to accept for himself a rule that ostracizes a person for failing to worship God.

So, what happens when one person ostracizes another for failing to follow a moral rule despite the ostracizer having known—or seeming like she should have known—that the person lacks sufficient reason to endorse the moral rule? Gerald Gaus and others after him consider this behavior to be “browbeating”:

To take others to be morally required to acknowledge obligations that they have no internal reason to acknowledge is not to treat them as moral agents, but, in Gaus’s apt term, to “browbeat” them; and to browbeat fellow moral agents is to disrespect them.²⁰

¹⁷ Kevin Vallier, *Must Politics Be War?: Restoring Trust in the Open Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) 84-85.

¹⁸ It’s true that some theists may issue demands and ostracize nonbelievers in the course of evangelism, as they might in the hopes of being used to kindle a conviction of guilt unto repentance. I take it that what matters to sustain mutual respect and social peace for Vallier is that *most* theists don’t go out of their way to issue demands and ostracize atheists *most* of the time.

¹⁹ Vallier, 85.

²⁰ Robert B. Talisse, “Religion and Liberalism: Was Rawls Right After All?” in Tom Bailey and Valentina Gentile, *Rawls and Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 64. See also Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 151. Eberle observes “In that light, it’s

So, we in general and activists in particular must be cautious in appealing to a putatively shared obligation, for in the event that those being spoken to lack good reason to endorse the obligation, the activist is browbeating and disrespecting others.

As marketplace activism goes, appeal to any number of disputed obligations may end up coming off as browbeating. Let's consider two general examples that underlie hard feelings of some the controversies listed in this paper's introduction. First as a matter of sexual mores, an activist may see it as an obligation—binding on all others in society—to “affirm” sexual minorities and avoid even the appearance of negating or degrading them. The activist may take it that everyone agrees that eating at Chick-fil-A appears to negate sexual minorities, and therefore everyone accepts an obligation to not eat at Chick-fil-A. But since it is not the case that everyone accepts that as a widely shared obligation, it follows that ostracizing people in general for eating at Chick-fil-A constitutes browbeating.

Another example of potential browbeating comes over disagreement over just what we're obligated to do to protect the environment. When Starbucks announced it would discontinue supplying plastic straws because they have been found to end up in the ocean, many responded by fact checking just how much of ocean plastic comes from straws and where those straws actually come from.²¹ Inasmuch as there are those in the marketplace—typically consumers—who are unconvinced that the putative obligation to applaud or otherwise accept plastic straws

plausible to suppose that imposing the doctrine of restraint on religious citizens is itself a violation of the norm of respect: given the lack of anything like an adequate justification for the doctrine of restraint, and given that the doctrine of restraint would require of many theists an extremely burdensome willingness to violate their most fundamental commitments, advocacy of the doctrine of restraint might very well constitute the kind of **browbeating** associated in some of the literature with those who refuse to exercise restraint.”

²¹ As examples of popular responses to marketplace browbeating, consider the Chick-fil-A appreciation day orchestrated by Governor Mike Huckabee in 2012 or John Stossel's article representative of fact checking in the wake of Starbucks's decision to discontinue offering plastic straws. John Stossel, “Banning Straws,” Townhall, July 18, 2018, <https://townhall.com/columnists/johnstossel/2018/07/18/banning-straws-n2501183>.

bans is binding on them, activism based on perceiving that obligation as widely shared will come off as disrespect.

Now in a liberal, pluralistic society with a strong value of equal dignity, to disrespect someone may be to break a moral rule. When a society aspires to maintain equal dignity as a function of social contract, as many liberal theorists do, disrespect comes off as a breach of trust and may license resentment as a “rational reactive attitude.” To see that people might appropriately resent a breach of trust, we need to realize that the gap between moral obligation—which is always social—and moral duty—which doesn’t necessarily involve social others—is filled in substance by a notion of moral liberty. Rather than being an optional space that could be contested by competing activisms, there is something about that liberty proper to moral agents such that that liberty could be infringed, or as Vallier puts it, “interfered” with.²² It’s when a person’s moral liberty is unduly interfered with that they may feel “appropriate resentment.” That feeling, in turn—at least according to Stanley Benn—“is supposed to be evidence that some agent or another has committed a moral violation.”²³ Here, we see Vallier channel Hayek again. As Hayek posited for social organizations, a command may interfere when it displaces a rule that would better serve social order. For Vallier, at least in a society characterized by social peace, browbeating interferes with moral liberty.

To conclude our consideration of moral rules, we can observe that there’s something about moral liberty that makes duties held in that liberty less than public. As a private possession of a member of society, the duty binds that member but not necessarily any other. An obligation, by contrast, has something very public about it; at the very least it is publicly justified. Plausibly,

²² Vallier, 86-87.

²³ Vallier, 86.

much of the tension around woke capitalism comes from the ambiguous status of the moral rules that underlies its controversies. If we could just determine that the moral rule is public, then activists would be right to demand we conform. But if we could determine that the rule is private, then activists would be wrong to demand conformity for everyone. Just as with the culture wars at large, the stakes of moral action are all or nothing.

From rules to roles

We've seen now the ways in which rules contribute to social order and some ways in which they establish boundaries that when transgressed, may be regarded as interference. The most highly developed notion of interference examined in this paper comes in Boris Holzer's analysis of political consumerism through social roles. Holzer's work cuts close to marketplace activism; whereas woke capitalism typically evokes the decisions of firms, political consumerism is a pattern of activism conveying itself through choices people make in the role of consumer. To understand the mechanism by which this activism is communicated, and just what is meant by the interference integral to that process, we'll need to define roles and distinguish between Holzer's two types.

Sociologist James Davison Hunter defines roles as "patterns of behavior associated with certain tasks." Roles, in turn, mediate between cultural institutions and individuals. For Hunter, institutions are simply "patterns of thought, behavior, and relationship." Examples of roles someone might take up or identify with include "son, daughter, mother, father; tennis player, golfer, bass fisherman; carpenter, teacher, preacher, executive; and so on."²⁴ In the preceding

²⁴ James Davison Hunter with James K. A. Smith, "The Backdrop of Reality," Comment, September 1, 2013, <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/the-backdrop-of-reality/>.

example we see roles grouped by social spheres: family, sport, and professional work. Even within a single sphere, someone may take up multiple roles, as a woman may be both a mother and a daughter. Even if not all at once, a person typically plays many roles across multiple spheres, “donning many hats” so to speak.

Now that we know that different roles, along with their respective behaviors and tasks, are often held simultaneously by one individual, we might suspect that roles can clash or otherwise be incompatible with each other. After all, there is general public consciousness of conflict between the competing demands of being say, a mother and a CEO. Sheryl Sandberg’s book *Lean In* exemplifies wrestling with this particular tension. In theorizing about the interaction of the roles of citizen and consumer, Holzer identifies conflict between roles as role interference.²⁵ He observes that modern society handles these conflicts by sorting roles into two categories, complementary and professional.²⁶ Importantly for modern society, a complementary *role context* is private and considered to be at the complete discretion of individual, while professional role contexts are public and require certain separation.²⁷ Because modern society treats complementary roles as private, when they interact with one another we get a chance to see different *patterns of interference* among individuals. It’s even the case from a sociological perspective that individuals are defined by their particular pattern of interference, that is, how they choose to or end up combining the myriad roles they’re involved in.²⁸

²⁵ Boris Holzer, “Political Consumerism Between Individual Choice and Collective Action: Social Movements, Role Mobilization and Signalling” in *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 30:5(2006), 408, <http://www.doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2006.00538.x>.

²⁶ Holzer, 409.

²⁷ Holzer, 408.

²⁸ Holzer, 409.

Although one may be involved in many spheres and many roles, modernity does impose some mutual exclusion when it comes to professional roles. The most familiar instance involves the integrity of professional conduct. As far as modern professional roles go, the decision-making they entail must not be interfered with by another role. As Holzer discusses it:

Regarding the question of blending roles, there is an important asymmetry between professional and complementary roles. The transfer of evaluative and motivational criteria from one role context to another obviously is a problem in a functionally differentiated society based precisely on the separation of role contexts. Accordingly, it is usually an important normative element of a professional role not to let other roles interfere with it. The scientist would be a bad scientist indeed if she or he decided to oppose a theory because of political loyalties or religious beliefs, or because her or his spouse does not like its implications. Undue transfers between a professional role and other roles are deemed 'corrupt' and thus inhibited. This is possible because we usually only hold one professional role at any given time.²⁹

So, it's in professional life that an individual faces normative pressure to not let other roles interfere in decision making. And there's a way in which modernity regards professional roles as public, such that if they're interfered with, it will undermine the basis of functional differentiation. Put another way, a functionally differentiated society is one that enjoys a useful division of labor. Arguably, without separation of public role contexts, there would be no functional differentiation, and no modernity. Any benefits—such as increased productivity, efficiency, technological innovation—that we collectively enjoy from this kind of societal organization would vanish. Yet, probably few professionals consciously suppose that they are undermining the very basis of modern society if they happen to breach their profession's code of conduct. We see again that sociology trades on dynamics that people in society tend to give scant attention to.

²⁹ Holzer, 408.

Fidelity to Duty in One's Role

With a sketch of roles and the prospect that roles often interfere with one another, we now consider Thomas Sowell's view of how certain roles need to be protected. In his *A Conflict of Visions*, Sowell synthesizes many of Hayek's concerns—about the limitations of knowledge, the characteristics of processes and unforeseen benefits—into an account he calls the constrained vision. Doing a kind of intellectual history, Sowell contrasts this vision with the unconstrained vision, represented by an intellectual camp contiguous with the constructivists that are the repeated focus of Hayek's critiques. Sowell's work is especially relevant to marketplace activism because it contains an explicit criticism of the stakeholder theory of business ethics, situated in a section titled "Sincerity versus Fidelity." It is stakeholder theory, which underlies talk of corporate social responsibility, that justifies for many firms involvement in putatively moral causes.

Businesses once understood themselves to be bound foremost by a duty to maximize profits to the benefit of whomever holds shares in the firm. This is classic shareholder theory famously defended in the late 20th century by economist Milton Friedman.³⁰ A competing ideal, stakeholder theory, has gradually displaced it. In this paradigm, a business should balance maximizing shareholders' profits with an array of others' interests, including employees, customers, the environment, and any other claimant plausibly impacted by the firms' actions.

What makes Sowell's critique of stakeholder theory remarkable is its explicit reference to social roles. In a preceding passage, he observes:

What is morally central to the constrained vision is *fidelity* to duty in one's role in life. There, within the sphere of his competence, the individual can make the greatest

³⁰ Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1970, <http://www.umich.edu/~thecore/doc/Friedman.pdf>.

contribution to the social good by serving the great systemic process which decides the actual outcomes.³¹

Here, Sowell clarifies that being faithful to the duty entailed in performing one's role ends up serving a "great systemic process." But what does Sowell mean by "one's role in life"? To some the phrase might evoke an unduly stoic or fatalistic acceptance of whatever station one happens to find oneself in. More plausibly, he's simply referring to a non-complementary professional role of the sort Holzer describes, one that enjoys a separation of role contexts imposed by modernity. Nearby, Sowell speaks of "division of labor," and this seems to get at the same dynamic Holzer describes as functional differentiation. Much that's good about modern society rides then on faithful execution of duties entailed by one's professional role.

Sowell's first example of this faithfulness involves the business operator's primary charge to maximize stockholder profits:

In the constrained vision, the businessman's moral duty is fidelity to the stockholders, who have entrusted their savings to him, not sincere pursuit of the public good through charitable donations or investment or hiring decisions which compromise that trust. Similarly, the judge's moral duty is to faithfully carry out the law he was sworn to uphold, not sincerely change that law to produce better results as he sees them. Within this vision, a scholar's moral duty is to faithfully promote the intellectual process among his students and readers, not lead them to specific conclusions he sincerely believes to be best for society. For similar reasons, advocacy journalism or liberation theology are also anathema to those with the constrained vision, since both are seen as misuses of entrusted roles.³²

Here, to execute one's role faithfully—that is, not deviating for the sake of some greater good you happen to have in mind—is to be trustworthy and preserve the integrity of a larger social process. Like Vallier's interest in the role of trust in maintaining social peace, the considerations going into fidelity, whether in the role of businessman or otherwise, seem decidedly moral.

³¹ Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions*, 56.

³² Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions*, 57.

But while Sowell's emphasis on fidelity seems very moralistic, he also finds it moral that not every decision point be made on a moral basis. Early in *Conflict*, Sowell represents 18th century moral philosopher and economist Adam Smith this way:

In his classic work, *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith went further. Economic benefits to society were largely unintended by individuals, but emerged systematically from the interactions of the marketplace, under the pressures of competition and the incentives of individual gain. Moral sentiments were necessary only for shaping the general framework of laws within which this systemic process could go on.³³

Whether fidelity to duty in one's role must be morally motivated is an interesting question but not necessary to answer here. Perhaps Smithian incentives could do all the work in bringing about faithful execution of one's role. But implicitly, it seems that being unfaithful and betraying trust are quite liable to engender among the betrayed what Vallier identifies as the rational reactive response of resentment.

Reasons to Refrain from Moralistic Capitalism

In conclusion, we can see that good intentions notwithstanding, anyone claiming to act in the name of social responsibility or moral reform must beware of moral pitfalls. As a constructive measure, those betrayed and appropriately resentful can challenge would-be browbeaters with several duties. First, in the broadest scope, social reformers ought to strive to promote plans of action that are consistent with how humans actually think and behave. Further, if Hayek and those after him are correct, then there is always much that is already right about human society, unbeknownst to most people let alone most activists, prior to the identification or remediation of any injustice. Calls for reform ought to be tempered in proportion to the light of this truth.

³³ Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions*, 14.

In a narrower sense, marketplace activists have a second duty, an obligation to consider how their demands may unduly interfere with the moral liberty or prerogatives of others. In any society, no less than a free one, much good comes from letting others make decisions according to the rules they have rather than the command of a distant observer. In a society enjoying social peace, much good comes from withholding enforcement of rules when others are likely to not find themselves obligated to obey them. And in a society enjoying functional differentiation or a division of labor, much good comes from the separation of role contexts that also manifests as the value of fidelity to duty in one's role. It's with these last goods in mind that we might conclude that marketplace activism—left, right, and otherwise—is never an unalloyed good and comes with social costs. Nonetheless, to act against any of these goods in each case is to interfere with a rule that brings general benefit to society as a whole. Activists then seem to be under a *prima facie* duty to not interfere with spontaneous orders of the market.

A third duty to restrain oneself from interfering with others' relative social autonomy cuts both ways. If it's wrong to demand that everyone boycott Chick-fil-A, then it's also wrong, all else equal, to issue as a counter obligation that everyone must buy their sandwiches. But in between the extremes of thinking everyone obligated one way or another is to suppose everyone enjoys moral liberty in a large swath of social issues. To do this will militate against getting swept up in either totalizing browbeating or totalizing resentment.

Fourth, there is a duty for activists to carefully assess just public—that is shared or otherwise legitimate—the moral rules motivating the reform are. As Holzer relates it, the activism of political consumerism—recall that it trades on changes in private interferences—can

elevate “private troubles into public matters.”³⁴ The normative problem is which moral rules are public so as to obligate everyone, and which are private so others can opt out without fear of punishment? Activism on the environment exemplifies the problem. It’s a conversational nonstarter to simply assert that the prestige of science is on your side and that any disagreement constitutes “science denial.” To do so hastily threatens to be a power move, the illiberal marginalizing, disrespecting, and browbeating dissent.

The prospect of marginalization can hit close to home for historically sidelined groups. It may be inconvenient for their critics to concede it, but as a group religious conservatives have long had their views routinely dismissed due to the rationale of secularization and overreaching privatization.³⁵ This is a final obligation woke capitalists have to consider. For any other group it would go without saying that to be dismissed is often to be disrespected, or else often to be made to feel invisible or irrelevant. Many conservatives too undoubtedly feel this way when businesses represent themselves as socially responsible but appear as if they couldn’t be bothered to address conservative concerns. It’s the unilateral silence that stings and feeds the judgment that marketplace activists are being hypocritical.

All these reasons then militate against uncaredful use of the aegis of social responsibility in advocating social reform. Ironically, it turns out that activists who demand “social responsibility” of corporations, consumers, and citizens may be the ones who need to be more responsible with their words and actions.

³⁴ Holzer, 410.

³⁵ For an enlightening discussion of secularization see Eberle chapter 2. For an example of how U.S. courts of law disqualify rationales simply because they happen to coincide with religious motivation, see Francis J. Beckwith, *Taking Rites Seriously: Law, Politics, and the Reasonableness of Faith* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015), chapter 3.