

## Reply to the Reviewers: With Supplements

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I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Tomohito Baji, Prof. Ryuichi Yamaoka, Dr. Shinji Nohara, and Ms. Dongsun Lee (Hannah) for their astute queries and criticisms, and to Dr. Baji for organizing the panel out of which this symposium has emerged. The space of this response does not allow me to exhaustively address all the points they have raised. I thereby restrict my comments to the themes that cut across their reviews or occasion more general theoretical reflections.

As one would expect, the reviewers have raised concerns with the book's deployment of "liberalism" to characterize John Locke and Edmund Burke's political thought. Linguistic contextualism — the so-called "Cambridge School" approach — triumphant in intellectual history has made it a cardinal sin to step outside the linguistic protocols available to past thinkers in choosing our labels for describing their thought. Liberalism has been the prime suspect because of the ubiquity of postwar accounts that have stretched its provenance to John Locke who, of course, did not know the term "liberal," let alone identify as one. Baji and Nohara openly call out the book's decision to do the same despite decades of contrarian scholarship.

These are valid concerns, some of which the book anticipates. To put it front and center, my analysis fundamentally departs from Cambridge School historiography in its conceptualization of liberalism. From a linguistic contextualist perspective, liberalism is a particular political lexicon that comes to its own in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, I draw inspiration from critical theory in conceiving of liberalism as an *ideology of capitalism*, that is, a mode of ethico-political reflection that corresponds to and undergirds capitalist institutions, above all, private property, market exchange, and wage labor. A few caveats and implications should be noted. First, we can expect to find what I call "primal norms of liberalism," i.e. juridical equality and contractual freedom, where we encounter capitalist social forms. Second, these norms are less fully articulated doctrines than protean dispositions that have found expression in multiple political and economic languages. Third, precisely because capitalism is a contradictory totality of heterogeneous social forms, liberalism as its historical ideology displays inconsistencies and tensions. These premises triangulate the book's principal object of inquiry, namely, the contradictory co-constitution of liberalism and capitalism, which is at once more and less than a study of liberalism as a political language. "Less" because its target is the liberal conception of capitalism, which is a narrower construct than liberalism understood as a polyphonic discursive field. "More" because this

conception exceeds merely mapping production, circulation, and appropriation of statements (*parole*) within this field, and contours the fundamental grammar (*langue*) of liberalism in its ideological function. The liberal “disavowals” of capitalism’s violence mark the sites of ideological containment.

In other words, the theoretical construction of the inquiry is of a different order than historicist studies which have dominated the field to the point where they have become coextensive with “intellectual history” as such. The book’s break with this historical method is intentional. It does not, however, readily amount to “intentional anachronism” as Nohara suggests, because “anachronism” as an analytic limit is applicable within a historicist framework. As I elaborate with reference to Walter Benjamin’s idea of “stereoscopic history,” a strict historicism is precisely what the book rejects. For such historicism functions as a methodological barrier to tracing the persistence of ideological undercurrents from the dawn of colonial capitalism to the present global capitalist order, which is postcolonial but arguably not post-imperial. To put it provocatively, my analysis is not primarily about Locke, Burke, and Wakefield but targets the liberal ideology of capitalism as it has emerged in and through a world of colonial empires. The examination of the three figures, situated in imperial contexts reconstructed through critical social theory, functions as entry points or mineshafts down to the ideological undercurrent. Such construction does not entail disregarding the particularities of context or linguistic conventions, but it does part ways with linguistic contextualism as a stricture on what counts as a valid framing of historical ideas.

The last point begins to answer the question Yamaoka’s poses about the book’s turn to intellectual history, rather than sociology of ideology, for unraveling the problem at hand. I would consider the two projects complementary rather than parallel, as I make no secret of the fact that the book’s intellectual history is informed by categories of social theory. All that said, I agree that the book’s argument could benefit from a more explicit elaboration of the theory of ideology behind it. My reliance on Althusser’s notion of “necessary misrecognition” is admittedly implicit and practical, though I believe it suffices for a notion of ideology as the “opiate of the elite.”<sup>2</sup> A kindred, and perhaps more productive, explication of liberalism’s ideological function could leverage on Theodor Adorno’s definition of ideology as socially necessary false appearances, especially for explaining its sway beyond the political and intellectual opinion.<sup>3</sup> Either way, the trade-off in addressing this lacuna would be to add another layer of theory on top of the theory of colonial capitalism. My doubt there was whether the theoretical framework of the book would bear the load of that additional layer without losing the clarity of its message. The alternative path that I took is to embed the texts under study in the British imperial imaginary woven out of languages of political economy and civilization, through which the British made sense of the origins and ends of their empire as well as its social, political, and legal heterogeneity. Within these discourses, I treat the three thinkers as offering relatively coherent formulations of the assumptions, orientations, and normative priorities embodied in the institutional-ideological make-up of Britain’s imperial political economy. The tensions that we encounter in their works express

not so much individual inconsistencies or a disjoint between ideation and practice as contradictions *internal* to the British imperial formation. Viewed thus, detecting and dissecting disavowals can be considered a mode of ideology-critique inasmuch as it unveils the enabling myths or necessary misrecognitions that reproduce institutional practices.

Yamaoka also raises a couple of questions about the book's analysis of Locke's writings, namely, how my reading differs from that of C. B. Macpherson and the place of consent in Locke's theory.<sup>4</sup> The two questions can be addressed together. Macpherson's optic of possessive individualism is too narrow and potentially misleading, for it misses the overarching teleological construction of Locke's theory of property, which at times overrides a putative commitment to the values of property and consent. James Tully is in my opinion correct to point out the presence of "utilizable individuals" in late-seventeenth century mercantilist England who are left beyond the protective remit of possessive individualism.<sup>5</sup> But perhaps more dramatically, Locke's possessive, productivist, and progressive teleology becomes evident around the colonial question. Locke's labor theory of property — the non-consensual, unilateral appropriation of the natural common — is a direct reputation of the compact theories of original appropriation advanced by Samuel Pufendorf. "Possessive universalism" more accurately encapsulates the totality of Locke's vision that prioritizes the global appropriation of nature, expenditure of labor, and accumulation of value.<sup>6</sup> This is a vision that implicitly differentiates the social field into possessive individuals, utilizable individuals, and disposable individuals. Locke's emphasis on monetization and his peculiar notion of universal tacit consent, I maintain, can be decoded as an attempt to reconcile the aforementioned capitalist differentiation with the liberal commitment to individual rights and consent. The ideational tension in question is not an abstract one but emanates from an institutional-ideological contradiction — namely, the same principles of consent that puts up a crucial bulwark against executive encroachment on property in England becomes an ideological stumbling block in justifying the appropriation of American land. It therefore needs to be upheld in the metropole while dispensed with in America in order to place English colonialism a sound moral basis. The universal tacit consent to money is Locke's solution to this dilemma: the element of consent that was originally expunged from the theory of appropriation is brought back in as the reason why America is still natural common and therefore open to appropriation without injury to its inhabitants.

Yamaoka also probed into the possible normative conclusions of the book. A key critical animus behind the book is to bring into view the ideological work behind the essentially liberal conception of capitalism as a universal system of market freedoms. In stark contrast to capitalism's idealized image is its violent history. A sober assessment of the latter reveals, first, that the "actually existing capitalism" was as much a vanguard movement as its vilified Cold War nemesis, and second, that it has systematically employed the power of the state to consolidate those regimes of property and labor that have pressed the socio-ecological capacities of the planet into the relentless accumulation of capital. Once one admits the role of political-legal force in the

*constitution* of a capitalist economy (as opposed to its mere *regulation*), then it becomes more difficult to assail broad-based redistributive projects (be it Keynesian or social democratic) on the grounds that they are top-down, coercive, paternalistic, or hubristic; or for the same reason, to marvel at the “authoritarian capitalism” of China as if “authoritarian capitalism” were a contradiction in terms. Such presentist concerns resonate with Yamaoka and Nohara’s remarks on the continuities between past and present ideological formations, especially on the persistent sway of the basic antinomy between liberalism and imperialism in mainstream political and economic thinking today.

Lee’s questions on the periodization of the English/British Empire and on Wakefield neatly complement the previous interventions. Lee asks if the conceptual framework of colonial capitalism could be extended back to the English invasion of Ireland in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, or put differently, when the English “empire” begins in my analysis. The semantic history of the term “empire” is complicated and tangential to the main argument of the book. As a heuristic, I follow Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s definition of “colonial empire,” which denotes a relationship of political dependency and economic extraction.<sup>7</sup> In this narrow sense, I would trace the makings of the English empire to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, when Cromwell’s conquest of Ireland and Western Design in the Atlantic were informed less by classical Roman conceptions of imperium than by modern ideas of imperialism and the commercial reason of state. It is around this period that the critical, if unstable, alliance between the merchant classes and the English state was forged, and English (and later British) commercial capitalism projected its power outwards, first against the Dutch in the seventeenth and then against the French in the eighteenth century. The colonial status of Ireland after the Cromwellian conquest is reflected in the reference to the island as England’s “plantation” in the same manner of referring to England’s Atlantic colonies. The modern, capitalistic view of the plantations, on the other hand, is evidenced by William Petty’s famous survey of Ireland, wherein he tabulated the island’s potential wealth both in land in moveable property. The subordination of Ireland’s production and trade to English commerce would suggest mid-17<sup>th</sup> century as a more plausible moment for looking for primitive accumulation in Ireland.

Lee also expresses skepticisms regarding Wakefield’s “liberal” commitments given his endorsement of heavy-handed state intervention in the settlement of colonies – an emphasis on “law and order” that would seem to align him with a Tory position. Wakefield’s utilitarian intellectual pedigree admittedly complicates the matters a little, given the allegations of “despotism” levelled at Jeremy Bentham’s epistemic imperialism and his theory of the legislator. His utilitarianism notwithstanding, Wakefield remained a liberal thinker who adopted the Smithian fidelity to private property, free trade, and free labor, though he departed from Smith in arguing that commercial society required a more comprehensive institutional scaffolding than the latter was comfortable admitting. Wakefield was a liberal in another sense, that is, in his utilitarian critique of the “old colonial system” as oppressive and unproductive (a critique that he inherited from Bentham and James Mill).<sup>8</sup> He ardently advocated for free trade not only between Britain

and its colonies but also between British colonies and the rest of the world. His favoured policy package, so to speak, included the abolition of all production and trade monopolies, colonial expansion through private land companies (including the ones he co-founded), and self-government for white settler dominions. Together, these traits fit the liberal bill both in the narrow sense in which it is used in the book as well as in the broader sense of family resemblances of liberalism.

I hope my responses would, if not fully satisfy the commentators, then at least provoke new questions and further exchange. I would once again like to extend my thanks to the discussants for their considered comments and criticisms, and to the organizers for making the panel possible.

## Notes

1. Bell (2014).
2. Althusser (1971); Drayton (2012).
3. Adorno (1983).
4. Macpherson (1962).
5. Tully (1993).
6. Caffentzis (1989).
7. Subrahmanyam (2006).
8. Winch (1965).

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