

Sociological philosophies in Charles Dickens's hard times

[People, Charles Dickens](#)



The novel *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens presents very interesting views of industrialism, capitalism, and social justice. Although most of the characters were not fully developed and the challenges the characters faced were pretty extreme, Charles Dickens successfully wrote this novel as a form of satire. In this novel he poses his opinion that industrialism is not as wonderful as it was made out to be and that capitalism is a corrupt system designed to elevate the unworthy. Dickens believes that social justice is unimportant and that mercy overcomes the need for justice.

Stephen Blackpool is a member of the working class. Through this character, Charles Dickens presents the faults he sees with industrialism. One example is when Stephen refuses to join the union at the factory and goes to talk to Mr. Bounderby. During his visit with Bounderby, Stephen mentions that the factory workers should be treated more kindly. Bounderby ignores Stephen's comment and fires him. This shows that the owners of industry mistreat the makers of industry, and benefit from the unhappiness of others. Another example of Dickens' opinion of industrialism appears when Stephen falls into a deserted mine shaft and later dies from the ensuing wounds. The mineshafts were created as part of industrialism to better society but were later abandoned when no longer needed, leaving huge holes in the ground. When in function, the mineshafts would kill people, and when not in function they were still deadly. Through Stephen's experience, Dickens shows that industry is built on the backs of the poor and ends up killing those who make industry happen. Through Stephen Blackpool, the author successfully presents his opinion of industry as something that benefits the rich and causes extreme suffering and even death of the poor.

Dickens' opinion of capitalism is an interesting one. He is not a supporter of communism, but he presents severe flaws in the system of capitalism. One of these flaws is apparent near the end of the book when Tom Gradgrind is disguised in the circus. While talking to his father, Tom says that in any society where some people are entrusted with more responsibility and privileges than others, there will always be a certain percentage of those people that become dishonest, and he is merely fulfilling that quota. Through Tom's statement, Dickens poses the opinion that the successful people in a capitalist system are not always the good and worthy ones. Stephen was a poor, unsuccessful factory worker, but he was one of the most good and moral characters in the book, while Tom was a gambler, a thief, and a liar, but had the most money and success. Another example is presented in the same scene when Bitzer arrives. He wants to take Tom to jail, not because it's the good and right thing to do, but because it will help him get ahead and earn more money. Here Dickens shows that capitalism is based on the idea that everyone is trying to move up in society by pushing others down. Through these two examples, Dickens comments that capitalism pushes down the hardworking and genuinely good people, and elevates those who are dishonest and greedy.

The most obvious example of social justice is presented in the same scene mentioned in the last paragraph, when Mr. Gradgrind tries to help Tom escape, and Bitzer tries to turn him in to the police. Tom Gradgrind is completely guilty and unrepentant, yet he is allowed to escape. If justice had prevailed, Tom would have gone to jail and been punished for his actions.

After escaping though, Tom repents of his hostility towards his sister.

Through this, Dickens essentially says that mercy is more important than justice and that it creates a better chance for the individual to change and repent than justice does.

Charles Dickens successfully presented his ideas of industrialism, capitalism, and social justice. He showed the world of the working class through Stephen Blackpool. He presented the flaws with capitalism through Bitzer and Tom Gradgrind. And he stated the opinion that mercy is more important than social justice through Tom's escape