

# Marx view on capitalism assignment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

? Miller is a social inquirer, he sees a lot and he chooses accordingly, what was it about his character Joe Keller that makes *All My Sons*, written in 1947, so important to us that we are reading it in University in 2009? History speaks to the present, and this text takes us into the past to help us understand the flaws of our socio economic system of capitalism and questions the social responsibility of businesses under capitalism. Social responsibility of a business is the willingness of a business to accept responsibility for its actions and their impact on a range of stakeholders.

In *All My Sons*, Arthur Miller narrates a story of Joe Keller, who is caught in a dilemma of choosing in between his social responsibilities and familial obligations and ends up making an unethical business decision. In this paper, in order to analyze the rightness and wrongness of Joe's actions, I will be dwelling upon the work of Karl Marx and Milton Friedman in regards to capitalism. (I will be dwelling upon Karl Marx's and Milton Friedman's view of capitalism. )In this paper, I will justify Joe's actions as either right or wrong by comparing/contrasting views of Karl Marx and Milton Friedman on capitalism.

Marx, in capital, described profit motive of capitalists as, " Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets! " Marx's statement neatly explains the dilemma of Joe, who owned a manufacturing business with his partner Steve Deever and sold defective airplane parts to the US military during World War II. Joe's unethical business conduct not only results in loss of 21 soldiers but also tiers his family apart. Joe justifies his crime by claiming that it was done for the family. Joe wanted his sons to inherit his business so that they would not have to struggle to make money.

However, in quest for abundance and prosperity for his sons, Joe forgets that he is answerable to the society as a whole and it is this negligence of Joe, an ordinary man that Marx raises in his work. Marx despised the idea of pursuit of self interest put forth by advocates of capitalism as he believed that every individual is connected to the society; thus, when he acts in his self-interest, he indirectly neglects his social responsibilities, which result in breach of ethics and create chaos in social order.

Marx viewed human beings as connected to one another and; thus, when humans act solely in their self interest then they do not promote good in the society. Capitalism is a contradictory system since what is apparently rational at the level of the individual unit is demonstrably irrational for human society as a whole (Pg 87). Marx would have agreed with this statement. However, Marx didn't view individuals as selfish, instead he blamed the capitalist system for corrupting individuals by encouraging and promoting pursuit of self-interest.

Marx believed that capitalism infused so much egocentrism in people that they forgot their social and moral duties. Marx questioned the notion of freedom put forth by the capitalists who claimed that no one is forced into anything every individual has a free choice to live his life, as he would like to live. Marx didn't view the freedom as an actual freedom since capitalist society has few fundamental elements, which prevail everywhere in every single walk of life. These elements include: self-interest, competition and profit maximization.

According to Marx, capitalist system enslaves individuals in a way that people end up doing things which they know are unethical and morally unacceptable. Marx saw the institute of competition as a mechanism that promoted self-interest because competition forced people to compete against each other to maximize monetary profits and in order to maximize profits individuals would engage in fraud, deceit and unethical conduct. Contrary to what Marx believed in, Milton Friedman envisioned capitalism as a system in which individuals promote social interest while pursuing their self interest.

Milton Friedman believed that self-interest combined with competitive markets and freedom is the key ingredient that triggers economic prosperity. According to Friedman, " Consumer is protected from coercion by the seller because of the presence of other sellers with whom he can deal, The seller is protected from coercion by the consumer because of the other consumers to whom he can sell" (pg41). In the preceding quote, Friedman emphasis on the advantages of the mechanism of competition. Competition has numerous advantages.

Due to competition consumers have wider variety to chose from, cheaper products, and above all consumers are protected by the monopoly power of one giant firm. However, one must bear in mind that it is the same mechanism of competition that leads business to engage in unethical conducts consequently creates negative externalities. As in the case of All My Sons, if Joe was not afraid that US military would place future orders to his competitors, Joe would not have supplied broken cylinders.

Friedman viewed businesses as self interested entities with only one social responsibility and that is to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits as long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud. However, Friedman's rules of the games are quite controversial as he gave priority to the shareholders interest of profit maximization over everything else, Friedman even justified lobbying if it is done for the sake of profit maximization.

Thus, if Friedman was to defend Joe's case in All My Sons, he would have justified Joe's unethical action of supplying broken airplane parts as Joe made a decision in the self interest of his company that is to maximize profits, he didn't let his competitors' takeover his client and gave his family (shareholders) priority over his social responsibility. According to Friedman's view Joe's action was an important business decision because if Joe wouldn't supply parts on time, military wouldn't place orders to his company in the future consequently he will lose market share.

Milton said that the consumer is protected from coercion by the seller because of the presence of the other sellers with whom he can deal. But what about the ugly strategies and selling techniques that a seller might use to keep his customer as in the case of All My Sons. Friedman defended egocentric nature of capitalism yet he also believed that individuals obey the rules embodied in ethical customers of that society however capitalist society is a secular society and secular society doesn't believe in ethics, morality and religious values.

So in that sense Marx is right, it is the religion of capitalists to maximize profits, it is everything for them and thus ethics and morality are things of the past. Unlike Marx whose work emphasized on the collective well being of the society as a whole, Friedman focused on the prosperity of businesses only. Karl Marx's work emphasized on the environment created by capitalism that results in egoist behavior of individuals in a society whereas Milton Friedman saw selfishness as a positive aspect of human nature which can be exploited to maximize profits.

As Friedman says, " Individuals are effectively free to enter or not to enter into any particular exchange, so that every transaction is strictly voluntary" (pg 14) Hence, for Friedman every individual living in a capitalist society has a freedom of choice to decide whether he/she wants to engage in particular transaction or not; however, Friedman didn't take into account that despite the fact that capitalism promotes economic freedom, it actually enslaves people.

Capitalism has created needs and wants that force people to engage in transactions which focus merely on profit maximization leading to unethical business conduct and neglect social responsibilities. Milton Friedman must have forgotten that the motive behind profit maximization is after all pursuit of happiness and happiness can never be bought. Having robbed our lives of meaning, capitalism pretends to sell it back to us in the form of things.

Mere means of life- cars, clothes, jewelry and so on are offered up as life's end (pg 83). Advocates of capitalism forget the fact that no matter what the economic system is, human beings can never be turned into automated

machines. Deep down inside every human has a conscience and this is what Arthur Miller has tried to portray through his character Joe. Joe pursues his self interest of accumulating wealth by deceiving, and eventually killing innocent people but what did wealth do for him?

His own son, who pretended to be conscientious, morally responsible man enjoyed the fruit of his dad's lie but abandons Joe because of his self interest. I agree with Marx, it is the fault of the social system that leads people like Joe into conducting unethical behavior but that doesn't justify Joe's actions because what Joe did is wrong. The issue is not rightness or the wrongness of Joe's action, rather the issue is about several Joes, ordinary men, acting in their self interest that creates negative impact on the society as a whole.

Capitalism has manipulated humans into thinking that while pursuing self interest they are actually doing good for the whole society but every person who has ever been bitten by the capitalist system knows the bitter truth that what capitalists boast about is totally different from what capitalism is all about. We are human beings not animals thus egocentrism is not for us because human beings are social, and cannot survive without relationships. Businesses affect societies but are not greater than societies.