

# Four Futures

Visions of the World After Capitalism

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# RENTISM: HIERARCHY AND ABUNDANCE

Charles Stross's 2005 novel *Accelerando* begins in the twenty-first century, not too long from now.<sup>1</sup> The protagonist, Manfred Macx, finds himself facing down enforcers for the Copyright Control Association of America, a "Mafiya" that is on his tail for the unauthorized digital distribution of copyrighted material. Facing armed guards and a restraining order, he slips the noose only by a clever and convoluted set of corporate legal manipulations that he undertakes on the spot.

The notion of armed thugs apprehending people for distributing data over the Internet has only gotten less far-fetched since the novel was written. Macx's brilliant, idealistic hacker character now evokes the memory of Aaron Swartz, the activist and programmer who killed himself in 2013 at age twenty-six. Swartz was facing crippling legal fees, massive fines, and as much as thirty-five years in prison, all for the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Stross, *Accelerando*, New York: Penguin Group, 2005.

crime of downloading too many articles from an academic database. Unlike Manfred Macx, he couldn't see a way out.

This chapter is centrally about intellectual property and the laws that protect it—such as the laws that Swartz was charged under. If the previous chapter was about the utopian possibility of a society of pure abundance, this chapter is about what happens when that possibility is present but stymied by ossified class structures and the state powers that defend them. As we will see, intellectual property and the rents that flow to it are the central categories of that dystopia.

## Politics and Possibility

A characteristic failure of most mainstream economic discussions is their presumption that if human labor in production becomes technically unnecessary, then it will inevitably disappear. However, the system of capital accumulation and wage labor is both a technical device for efficient production and a system of power. Having power over others is, for many powerful people, its own reward. Thus, they will endeavor to maintain a system where others serve them, even if such a system is, from a purely productive standpoint, totally superfluous. This chapter therefore discusses how the current economic elite could maintain their power and wealth in an environment of total automation.

“Who owns the robots,” says Harvard University labor economist Richard Freeman, “owns the world.”<sup>2</sup> Hence the

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2 Richard B. Freeman, “Who Owns the Robots Rules the World,” WoL.IZA.org, 2015.

alternative to the communist society of our last chapter is one where the techniques to produce abundance are monopolized by a small elite. The concept of ownership, however, takes on a different texture in a highly automated world. When we talk about “owning the robots,” we’re not just talking about having control over a physical bundle of metal and wires. Rather, the phrase metaphorically describes control over things like computer software, algorithms, blueprints, and other kinds of information that are need to produce and reproduce the world we live in. In order to maintain control over the economy, then, the rich increasingly need to control that information, and not just physical objects.

All of this leads to the system described in this chapter, which relies heavily on the laws of intellectual property. Unlike physical property, intellectual property dictates not only rights to the possession of physical objects but also control over the copying of patterns. It can thus persist in a world where, for example, most objects can be cheaply and easily copied on 3-D printers. Those who control the most copyrights and patents become the new ruling class. But this system is no longer capitalism as we have traditionally understood it. Because it is based on the extraction of rents rather than the accumulation of capital through commodity production, I refer to it as “rentism.”

## The Art of Rent

I use the term “rent” in a technical sense, following in the tradition that goes back to classical economists like Ricardo

and was picked up by Marx. Originally, it referred specifically to the payments to the owners of land, which were distinguished from other kinds of payments that could flow to property owners. The most important insight is that the land itself wasn't produced by anyone. The crops grown on the land, or the factory built on it, might be produced by people, but there is value in the land itself that comes as a gift of nature. Whoever can claim ownership of that land can therefore demand payment simply for controlling access to property rather than doing anything with it.

The original theory of “ground-rent” to landowners was developed in the context of a society that was still dominated by agriculture. In a modern economy, the concept of rent must be broadened and made more abstract. There are many other ways that property can generate income without any action by the owner. The owner of this type of property is not what we traditionally think of as a capitalist, but rather a “rentier,” a term that first came into widespread use to describe the owners of government bonds in nineteenth-century France, who were able to live off interest payments; these people were neither workers nor bosses. In his 1893 book *Old and New Paris*, the English journalist Henry Sutherland Edwards compared the rentier to “the man retired from business.”<sup>3</sup>

The old-fashioned rentier was generally portrayed as someone of modest wealth. This image survives today as the

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3 Henry Sutherland Edwards, *Old and New Paris: Its History, Its People, and Its Places*, vol. 1, London: Cassell and Company, 1893.

coupon-clipping retiree surviving on a fixed income, a figure commonly invoked by those who decry low government and bank interest rates. In reality, however, income from rents is largely monopolized by a small number of rich people, as becomes clear when the full range of rent-bearing assets is examined. Rents accrue not just to land and government bonds but to distributed stock portfolios and, increasingly, to intellectual property, to which we will return.

The existence of rents and rentiers has always been something of an embarrassment to the defenders of capitalism. Defending the necessity of the boss who controls the means of production is easier, since ideologists can at least claim that they do something, whether it's organizing production or coming up with products, or merely taking economic risks. But rentiers create nothing, make nothing, do nothing; they just passively accept the rewards of ownership. Thus, there have historically been calls to tax away the rents from merely owning property, as opposed to the profits that come from doing something with it.

There is an entire intellectual tradition, originating with the nineteenth-century economist Henry George, that makes this policy central to its theories and proposals. In his 1879 book *Progress and Poverty*, George insisted that "the true remedy" to the problem of income inequality was nothing more or less than to "make land common property," thus eliminating the largest source of rents that existed in his day.<sup>4</sup> His contemporary followers similarly argue that since land "is not the

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<sup>4</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, HenryGeorge.org, 1879.

product of human labor, but . . . is needed for all production,” all rents on privately owned land should be appropriated through taxation and used for the common good.<sup>5</sup>

The existence of rentiers also troubled the great economist John Maynard Keynes. In a famous section of his treatise *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, he discusses the rate of interest—that is, the return to owning capital—and argues that “interest today rewards no genuine sacrifice, any more than does the rent of land.”<sup>6</sup> Interest, he thought, merely rewarded the owners of scarce productive resources. He hoped and called for “the euthanasia of the rentier, of the functionless investor,” which he believed would be possible when society had become wealthy enough that those resources were no longer scarce.<sup>7</sup>

## Scarcity and Property

Scarcity is central to the questions being asked in this book. Being the technocratic liberal that he was, Keynes believed that if paying interest to property owners couldn’t be justified by scarcity, then it should and would disappear. From his perspective, the only reason to have a capitalist market economy in the first place was to allocate scarce goods in a circumstance where everyone couldn’t simply have as much

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5 Council of Georgist Organizations, “Introduction to Georgist Philosophy and Activity,” CGOCouncil.org.

6 John Maynard Keynes, “Concluding Notes on the Social Philosophy Towards Which the General Theory Might Lead” in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, Marxists.org, 1936.

7 Ibid.

as they want. If rent serves no economic purpose, then why should it exist?

But this neglects the power struggle that is at the heart of a society based on private property. From the perspective of property owners, it matters very little whether their wealth is justified for some reason of economic theory or social welfare. They simply want to keep their property. And just as important, they want that property to maintain its value.

Here something of a digression on the nature of property itself is in order. Before you can understand what makes some piece of property valuable, you have to know what makes it property in the first place. For partisans of capitalism, it is often convenient to pretend that property is some naturally occurring fact, but it is a really a social construction that must be delineated and enforced by the power of the state. And the very idea that all of the physical and social world can be divided up into discrete parts, each tagged with the name of an owner, is a part of capitalism's ideological infrastructure that had to be painstakingly constructed over many years.

This point is frequently illustrated with a discussion of early English capitalism and what's known as the "enclosure of the commons." In medieval times, land was frequently treated as a commonly held resource which local residents could freely use for purposes such as mowing for hay or grazing livestock. The "enclosure" of this land originally referred to the literal fencing off of parcels to prevent access, but it also refers to the process by which land was legally transformed from something to which the community had a right

of access into private property under the control of large landowners, who were free to exclude others from using it.

Struggles over the commons in land continue today. The Movement of Landless Rural Workers in Brazil, which helped bring the leftist Lula government to power in 2003, built its power by demanding that unused private land should be taken away from its private owners and treated as a common good, in keeping with the Brazilian constitution's stipulation that "property shall fulfill a social function." And some enterprising businessmen are already trying to enclose land even beyond the Earth. Writing in *Dissent* in 2014, Rachel Riederer reports on Bigelow Aerospace, which has requested government approval for "a 'zone of non-interference' around their future lunar operations."<sup>8</sup> The moon's surface may yet be enclosed: the spacefaring nations of the world never ratified the 1979 Moon Treaty, which would have banned ownership of any part of the lunar surface.

For the most part, however, the total privatization of land is mostly taken for granted today, at least in the rich countries. The debate over how to define the meaning and scope of property continues in other ways, especially in the debate over so-called intellectual property.

The very definition of intellectual property demonstrates what a malleable concept "property" can be. While its defenders tend to speak of it as though it is broadly analogous

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8 Rachel Riederer, "Whose Moon Is It Anyway?," *Dissent* 61: 4, 2014, p. 6.

to other kinds of property, it is actually based on a quite different principle. This irks even some conservative libertarian economists, like Michele Boldrin and David K. Levine. In their book *Against Intellectual Monopoly* and other works, they observe that intellectual property rights mean something quite different from property rights in land or physical objects.<sup>9</sup>

The right to intellectual property is ultimately not a right to a concrete thing but to a *pattern*. That is, it does not just protect “your right to control your copy of your idea” in the way that it protects my right to control my shoes or my house. Rather, it grants the right to tell others how to use copies of an idea that they “own.” As Boldrin and Levine say,

This is not a right ordinarily or automatically granted to the owners of other types of property. If I produce a cup of coffee, I have the right to choose whether or not to sell it to you or drink it myself. But my property right is not an automatic right both to sell you the cup of coffee and to tell you how to drink it.<sup>10</sup>

This form of property is by no means new. The writer’s copyright has been a part of English law since 1710, and the United States Constitution explicitly delineates the government’s right “to promote the Progress of Science and useful

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<sup>9</sup> Michele Boldrin and David K. Levine, *Against Intellectual Monopoly*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Michele Boldrin and David K. Levine, “Property Rights and Intellectual Monopoly,” DKLevine.com.

Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries." But the significance of intellectual property has increased, and it promises to continue increasing as the physical productivity of the economy grows.

In an echo of the struggle over enclosure, there are ongoing fights over the expansion of intellectual property into more and more areas. Fashion designers have historically not been able to copyright their designs in the United States, but large designers and their legislative allies are pushing bills that would allow them to sue the makers of cheap knockoff dresses and shoes. More ominous is the move to extend intellectual property protection to nature itself. In the 2013 decision *Bowman v. Monsanto Co.*, the US Supreme Court upheld the conviction of Vernon Bowman, an Indiana farmer who had been found guilty of violating patents held by the agribusiness giant Monsanto.<sup>11</sup> His crime was to plant seeds from a crop of soybeans that contained genetically modified "Roundup Ready" genes that made them resistant to herbicide. The decision affirmed Monsanto's ability to force farmers to buy seeds anew every year, rather than use the seeds from the previous year's crops.

In other cases as well, the property rights to physical objects are being transformed because of the immaterial, intellectual property claims associated with them. Until regulators issued a 2010 exemption, provisions of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act apparently made it illegal for

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11 *Bowman v. Monsanto Co.*, 133 S. Ct., No. 11–796 (2013).

owners of Apple's iPhone to "jailbreak" the device in order to install new software on it. Similar litigation has revolved around the right of owners to modify the software that runs in modern cars and other vehicles. The John Deere Company, for example, has argued to government officials that it is illegal for farmers to make modifications or repairs to the software that runs their tractors. This is, they say, because nobody actually owns their tractor—they merely have "an implied license . . . to operate the vehicle." Thus does the property form mutate, so that even something as tangible as a tractor becomes not the physical property of its buyer, but merely a pattern to be licensed for a limited time.

All of this means that intellectual property is becoming an increasingly important component of the property held by the capitalist class. When we talk about the global "1 percent" and their wealth, we aren't just talking about owning land or factories or Scrooge McDuck's swimming pool of gold coins. We're talking about stocks and bonds whose value, in many cases, is backed by immaterial, intellectual forms of property.

In a 2013 report released by the European Patent Office, "[intellectual property–]rights intensive industries" were said to make up 39 percent of European Gross Domestic Product, and a whopping 90 percent of exports.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the US Commerce Department estimates that intellectual property-intensive industries account for 35 percent of US

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<sup>12</sup> European Patent Office, "IPR-Intensive Industries: Contribution to Economic Performance and Employment in the European Union," EPO.org, September 2013.

GDP, a number that will only continue to rise.<sup>13</sup> This includes obviously intellectual property-dependent businesses like pharmaceuticals and entertainment as well as things like apparel manufacturing, where the value of a Nike trademark can easily eclipse that of the physical shoe it is sewn onto. Even that seemingly most material of trades, the oil business, can in some cases be viewed as “intellectual property-intensive” due to the large numbers of patents held by companies like Shell.

Nor has the significance of intellectual property been lost on the repressive apparatus of the state. In a 2010 article in *Foreign Affairs*, US Deputy Secretary of Defense William Lynn discussed the military’s “cyberstrategy” explicitly in terms of the value of intellectual property to American corporations.<sup>14</sup> He predicted that while “the threat to intellectual property is less dramatic than the threat to critical national infrastructure, it may be the most significant cyberthreat that the United States will face over the long term” and warned that “sustained intellectual property losses could erode both the United States’ military effectiveness and its competitiveness in the global economy.”<sup>15</sup>

It’s worth stopping to contemplate what Lynn is referring to when he talks about “losses” of intellectual property. Google, he reports, “disclosed that it had lost intellectual

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13 Mark Doms et al., “Intellectual Property and the U.S. Economy: Industries in Focus,” USPTO.gov, April 2012.

14 William J. Lynn III, “Defending a New Domain: The Pentagon’s Cyberstrategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2010.

15 Ibid.

property as a result of a sophisticated operation perpetrated against its corporate infrastructure.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, someone accessed its computer network and copied something that he or she wasn’t entitled to copy. But presumably Google still had the information; it is unlikely that the hackers deleted it from the servers and that no backups had been kept. Describing this as a “loss” appropriates the same word that would be applied to physical property, but this is at best a metaphorical extension. What is really being talked about is the unauthorized copying of patterns, and the only thing being lost is potential future corporate revenue.

Obscuring this distinction is a common gambit of intellectual property maximalists, and it can have terrible human consequences. Vernon Bowman, the Indiana farmer who lost his case against Monsanto, faces \$85,000 in damages. Those pursued for the unauthorized downloading of music have faced life-crippling fines, like the \$220,000 charged against Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe employee Jammie Thomas-Rasset for sharing twenty-four songs. And then of course there is Swartz, martyred by a careerist prosecutor and an out-of-control intellectual property system.

### Anti-Star Trek

As we have seen in the earlier chapters, *Star Trek* provides a fable of an egalitarian, postscarcity society. But what does that look like without the egalitarianism? In other words,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

given the material abundance made possible by the replicator, how would it be possible to maintain a system based on money, profit, and class power?

Economists like to say that capitalist market economies work optimally when they are used to allocate scarce goods. So how to maintain capitalism in a world where scarcity can be largely overcome? This requires a kind of antithesis of the *Star Trek* universe, which takes the same technical preconditions and casts them in a different set of social relations.

As noted above, intellectual property differs from other property because it grants rights not just over concrete objects but over patterns and all copies and uses of those patterns. And the entire infrastructure of Star Trek is based on patterns that are fed into the replicator and used as the basis for fabricating a physical object, just as a blueprint provides the guidelines for building a house.

This is the quality of intellectual property law that provides an economic foundation for anti–Star Trek: the ability to tell others how to use copies of an idea or pattern that you “own.” So imagine that unlike Star Trek, we don’t all have access to our own replicators. And that in order to get access to a replicator, you would have to buy one from a company that licenses you the right to use it. You can’t get someone to give you a replicator or make one with their replicator, because that would violate their license and get them in legal trouble. What’s more, every time you make something with the replicator, you also need to pay a licensing fee to whoever owns the rights to that particular thing. Captain Jean-Luc Picard customarily walks to the replicator and requests “tea, Earl

Grey, hot.” But his anti–Star Trek counterpart would have to pay the company that has copyrighted the replicator pattern for hot Earl Grey tea. (Presumably some other company owns the rights to cold tea.)

Something like the anti–Star Trek world is seemingly portrayed in Warren Ellis’s turn-of-the-millennium comic book series *Transmetropolitan*. The story centers around hard-boiled journalist Spider Jerusalem as he makes his way through the grimy, violent, and hedonistic world some unspecified time into the future. Spider has a “maker,” which seems to be something like a replicator, although quite a bit odder and more unpredictable. And in addition to raw material, Spider must wait for a new season of “maker codes” in order to replicate new things.

The anti–Star Trek model solves the problem of how to maintain for-profit capitalist enterprise, at least on the surface. Anyone who tries to supply their needs from their replicator without paying the copyright cartels would become an outlaw, Aaron Swartz or Jammie Thomas-Rasset. But if everyone is constantly being forced to pay out money in licensing fees, then they need some way of *earning* money, and this brings up a new problem. With replicators around, there’s no need for human labor in any kind of physical production. So what kind of jobs would exist in this economy? Here are a few possibilities.

There will be a need for a “creative class” of people to come up with new things to replicate, or new variations on old things, which can then be copyrighted and used as the basis for future licensing revenue. But this is never going to

be a very large source of jobs, because the labor required to create a pattern that can be infinitely replicated is orders of magnitude less than the labor required in a physical production process in which the same object is made over and over again. What's more, it's very hard to make money in creative fields even now. So many people want to do this work that they will bid each others' wages down to subsistence levels. And lots of people will create and innovate on their own, without being paid for it. The capitalists of anti-Star Trek would probably find it more economical to pick through the ranks of unpaid creators, find new ideas that seem promising, and then buy out the creators and turn the idea into the firm's intellectual property.

In a world where the economy is based on intellectual property, companies will constantly be suing each other for alleged infringements of others' copyrights and patents, so there will be a need for a lot of lawyers. This will provide employment for some significant fraction of the population, but again it's hard to see this being enough to sustain an entire economy, particularly because of a theme that we saw in the introductory chapter: just about anything can, in principle, be automated. Watson, IBM's Jeopardy-playing computer program, is already automating the work of lower-level law firm staff. And it's easy to imagine big intellectual property firms coming up with procedures for mass-filing lawsuits that rely on fewer and fewer human lawyers, just as there are now systems that detect copyrighted music in online videos and send requests for removal. On the other hand, perhaps an

equilibrium will arise where every individual needs to keep a lawyer on retainer, because no one can afford the cost of auto-lawyer software but they must still fight off lawsuits from firms attempting to win big damages for alleged infringement.

As time goes on, the list of possible things you can replicate will only grow, but people's money to buy licenses—and their time to enjoy the things they replicate—will not grow fast enough to keep up. Thus marketing will become more important, because the biggest threat to any given company's profits will not be the cost of labor or raw materials—they don't need much or any of those—but rather the prospect that the licenses they own will lose out in popularity to those of competitors. So there will be an unending and cut-throat competition to market one company's intellectual properties as superior to the competition's: Coke over Pepsi, Ford over Toyota, and so on. This should keep a small army employed in advertising and marketing. But once again, there is the specter of automation: advances in data mining, machine learning, and artificial intelligence may lessen the amount of human labor required even in these fields.

Finally, any society like the one I have described, which is predicated on maintaining great inequalities of wealth and power even when they have become economically superfluous, will require a large amount of labor to prevent the poor and powerless from taking a share back from the rich and powerful. The economists Samuel Bowles and Arjun Jayadev

call this type of labor “Guard Labor” and define it as “the efforts of the monitors, guards, and military personnel . . . directed not toward production, but toward the enforcement of claims arising from exchanges and the pursuit or prevention of unilateral transfers of property ownership.”<sup>17</sup> It includes private security guards, police officers, the military, prison and court officials, and weapons producers. An estimated 5.2 million guards worked in the United States in 2011.<sup>18</sup>

These would be the main source of employment in the world of anti–Star Trek: creators, lawyers, marketers, and guards. It seems implausible, however, that this would be sufficient—the society would probably be subject to a persistent trend toward under-employment. Especially if all the sectors except (arguably) the first would be subject to pressures toward labor-saving technological innovation. Even high-level managerial functions can be partly automated: in 2014, a Hong Kong venture capital fund called Deep Knowledge appointed an algorithm, a program called VITAL, to its board, where it receives a vote on all investments.<sup>19</sup>

And perhaps even “creativity” isn’t such a uniquely human talent (if we reduce that word to the creation of replicator patterns). In a paper presented to a 2014 conference of the

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17 Samuel Bowles and Arjun Jayadev, “Guard Labor,” *Journal of Development Economics* 79: 2, 2006, p. 335.

18 Samuel Bowles and Arjun Jayadev, “One Nation Under Guard,” *New York Times*, February 15, 2014.

19 Rob Wile, “A Venture Capital Firm Just Named an Algorithm to Its Board of Directors—Here’s What It Actually Does.” *BusinessInsider.com*, May 13, 2014.

Association of Computing Machinery, a group of medical researchers presented a method for automatically generating plausible hypotheses for scientists to test, using data mining techniques.<sup>20</sup> Such approaches could eventually be applied to other formulaic, iterative processes like the design of pop songs or smartphone games.

What's more, there is also another way for private companies to avoid employing workers for some of these tasks: turn them into activities that people will find pleasurable and will thus do for free on their own time. The computer scientist Luis von Ahn has specialized in developing such "games with a purpose": applications that present themselves to end users as enjoyable diversions but which also perform a useful computational task, what von Ahn calls "Human Computation."<sup>21</sup>

One of Von Ahn's early games asked users to identify objects in photos, and the data was then fed back into a database that was used for searching images, a technology later licensed by Google to improve its Image Search. Later, he founded Duolingo, a company that provides free language training exercises and makes money by inviting its users to practice their language skill translating documents for companies that have paid for this service. Perhaps this line of research could lead toward something like Orson Scott

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<sup>20</sup> Scott Spangler et al., "Automated Hypothesis Generation Based on Mining Scientific Literature," in *Proceedings of the 20th ACM SIGKDD International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining*, New York: Association of Computing Machinery, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Edith Law and Luis von Ahn, *Human Computation*, San Rafael, CA: Morgan & Claypool, 2011.

Card's novel *Ender's Game*, in which children remotely fight an interstellar war through what they think are video games; indeed, the infrastructure for such a thing already exists, in the form of remote-operated drone bombers.<sup>22</sup> But that scenario is more appropriately revisited in Chapter 4, the chapter on exterminism.

For all these reasons, it seems that the main problem confronting the society of anti-*Star Trek* is the problem of effective demand: that is, how to ensure that people are able to earn enough money to be able to pay the licensing fees on which private profit depends. Of course, this isn't so different from the problem that confronted industrial capitalism, but it becomes more severe as human labor is increasingly squeezed out of the system, and human beings become superfluous as elements of production, even as they remain necessary as consumers.

Ultimately, even capitalist self-interest will require some redistribution of wealth downward in order to support demand. Society reaches a state in which, as the French socialist André Gorz put it in his 1999 book *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*, "the distribution of means of payment must correspond to the volume of wealth socially produced and not to the volume of work performed."<sup>23</sup> Or, to translate from French Intellectual to English: you deserve a decent standard of living because you're a human being and we're a wealthy enough society to

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22 Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*, New York: Tor Books, 1985.

23 André Gorz, *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*, trans. Chris Turner, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999, p. 90.

provide it, not because of any particular work that you did to deserve it. So in theory, this is one possible long-term trajectory of a world based on intellectual property rents rather than on physical commodity production using human labor. What Gorz is talking about is something like the universal basic income, which was discussed in the last chapter. Which means that one long-run trajectory of rentism is to turn into communism.

But here the class of rentier-capitalists will confront a collective action problem. In principle, it would be possible to sustain the system by taxing the profits of profitable firms and redistributing the money back to consumers—possibly as the universal basic income, but possibly in return for performing some kind of meaningless make-work. But even if redistribution is desirable from the standpoint of the class as a whole, any individual company or rich person will be tempted to free-ride on the payments of others and will therefore resist efforts to impose a redistributive tax. Of course, the government could also simply print money to give to the working class, but the resulting inflation would just be an indirect form of redistribution and would also be resisted. Finally, there is the option of funding consumption through consumer indebtedness—but this merely delays the demand crisis rather than resolving it, as all of us know all too well.

This all sets the stage for ongoing stagnation and periodic economic crisis in the world of anti-Star Trek. And then, of course, there are the masses. Would the power of ideology be strong enough to induce people to accept the state of affairs

I've described? Or would people start to ask why the wealth of knowledge and culture was being enclosed within restrictive laws, when "another world is possible" beyond the regime of artificial scarcity?