



“Social Reproduction Theory,” Social Reproduction, and Household Production

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ABSTRACT: In redefining social reproduction to mean only the reproduction of labor-power, Social Reproduction Theory has deemphasized a central insight of Marxist feminism — the necessary role that household production plays in the reproduction of capitalist society. A model of production in capitalism — in which households, capitalist firms, and the state rely on inputs from the other sectors in their production process to perpetuate their own existences and in turn that of capitalist society as a whole — shows that it is necessary to tie the household and household production to the dynamics of production and reproduction in capitalist society. There is no social reproduction without “societal reproduction,” as all production and reproduction in capitalist society are shaped by accumulation. Thus, promoting human and environmental well-being requires fundamentally changing the production processes that take place in households and elsewhere, not merely redistributing the costs and benefits of that production.

KEYWORDS: Marxist-feminism; household production; social reproduction; capitalist society

Introduction

A KEY CONTRIBUTION of the past five decades of Marxist thought has been the insight that the household plays an integral role in the reproduction of class society. Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) borrows aspects of Marxist–feminist scholarship to theorize class struggle in our contemporary moment, emphasizing the working-class position and revolutionary capacity of people outside

the “productive” economy (Bhattacharya, 2017a; 2017b). Bhattacharya’s SRT has in recent years been the subject of substantial popular and academic interest. However, by following Brenner and Laslett (1991) and Brenner (2000) in redefining “social reproduction” from meaning the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole to mean *only* the reproduction of labor-power (Bhattacharya, 2017a, 6–7), Bhattacharya’s conception of SRT deemphasizes a central insight of Marxist feminism — the necessary role that household production plays in the reproduction of capitalist society — thus reviving the need for scholarly debate over the multiple meanings of “reproduction” (Barrett, 1980, 19–29).

Bhattacharya’s SRT (2017a; 2017b) provides a critique of distribution from the standpoint of a transhistorical conception of both productive and reproductive labor. What I will present here is a critique of capitalist society in terms of the organization of production and reproduction. Whereas Bhattacharya valorizes the labor involved in production and reproduction, I extend Marx’s insight that to be a productive worker is “not a piece of luck, but a misfortune” (Marx, 644) to argue that the same misfortune is also true for reproductive workers. From this it follows that even if Bhattacharya’s notion of SRT were to offer an account of the reproduction of capitalist society — which she alludes to in places without a fully formed analysis — it would be a foreshortened account in which exploitation and domination are extrinsic to the organization of production and reproduction, and the activities involved therein. The basis for my argument here is the view that exploitation and domination are inherent in the organization and processes of production and reproduction in capitalism, and thus that the reproduction of capitalist society proceeds by perpetuating these forms of organization, no matter the rates of exploitation or the amounts of redistribution.

Recent work by Quick in this journal (Quick, 2018) highlights the importance of household production to class society in general and the capitalist economy more specifically. This is just the latest in a lengthy effort on the part of Quick (1972, 1992, 2004) to formulate a Marxist theory of the household that emphasizes the household production process rather than domestic labor alone. Like Bhattacharya (2017a; 2017b), Quick (2018) expands her definition of the working class to include workers whose work contributes to the reproduction of labor-power but who do not contribute to accumulation via waged

work for a capitalist firm. However, Quick (2018) points to the specific role of household production processes in meeting the day-to-day and intergenerational needs of the working class in capitalism, *one* input into which is unwaged domestic labor and *one* output of which is the reproduction of labor-power. As Quick (1992, 1) points out, “the study of domestic labor must begin with an understanding of production as a whole.” Rather than focusing on women’s domestic labor as the sole input into the reproduction of labor-power, Quick emphasizes this unwaged work as just one input into a household production process that also relies on commodities purchased with money from waged work, both of which are necessary for household survival in capitalism. In shifting the subject of Marxist–feminist inquiry from domestic labor as a self-contained whole to assessing its role in household production, Quick’s work provides an opening for a more detailed theory of the mechanics and dynamics and interdependencies of household and non-household production processes in capitalism.

However, a key difference between the theory that is presented here and those of Quick and Bhattacharya is in my understanding of capitalist society. In their traditional Marxist theories,¹ class struggle involves workers attempting to recapture a portion of the value created through their labor for their own use and enjoyment, while the capitalist class uses the state as an instrument to allow the continued “theft” of the surplus (Postone, 1993). For Quick and Bhattacharya, the short-term amelioration of this theft can be achieved through the redistribution of both monetary wealth and political power from capital to workers. This redistribution appears to be conceived of as a stepping stone towards the ultimate end of workers — now broadly defined to also include those engaged in the work of reproducing labor-power — seizing power and centrally planning an equitable form of distribution while leaving the existing production processes intact. This expanded definition of the working class to include people whose waged and unwaged work contributes to the reproduction of labor-power has helped to overturn the stereotypical “bad” Marxist convention of associating productive labor exclusively with the male factory worker. However, in examining capitalism from the standpoint of waged and unwaged labor, Quick and Bhattacharya have refrained from examining how this labor relates to the larger whole, and as a

1 For an overview of the critique of traditional Marxism, see O’Kane, 2018.

consequence how the household itself and the breadth of household production relates to the whole of capitalist society.

The underlying understanding of household production employed here is situated instead in terms of a larger critique of labor and production in capitalism. It can be distinguished from other strains of Marxist–feminist scholarship that seek to theorize women’s oppression while celebrating and valorizing tasks related to household production. Instead, labor in capitalism — whether waged or unwaged — should not be viewed as the virtuous and morally enriching source of all wealth, but rather as a key input into the reproduction of capitalist society and its attendant social misery and environmental destruction. Thus, the matter at hand is not the correct assignment of “credit” for production and social reproduction and the design of redistributive policies on that basis — although such scholarship has added much to our understanding of inequality and the importance of women’s unwaged work to the economy as a whole. Rather, the theoretical orientation employed here points to the interrelated and overlapping ways in which capitalism organizes production and social reproduction in our day-to-day lives (Glazer, 1993, 38). Glazer points out that when we conceptualize all socially useful tasks as “work” or “labor,” we evacuate these concepts of their theoretical power in political economy. There is a troubling productivist tendency on the part of some feminist scholars to define all socially useful activities as “work,” with the implicit assumption that “work” is somehow honorable and superior to “non-work” (Glaser, 1993, 37). If the reproduction of capitalist society is incumbent on the perpetuation of household production, capitalist production, and the state, then activities that are valorized by others as forms of “work” — whether waged or unwaged — are integral to this negative process.

In the theory proposed here (see also Munro, 2018), the household and its production processes are implicated in the reproduction of capitalist society. The state, capitalist firms, and households² are inextricably linked to one another via their own processes of production and reproduction, with these processes shaped by the imperative of endless accumulation. Ultimately, the household in capitalism is

2 The term “household” rather than family is used here to reflect both the relatively recent emergence of the idea of “the family” as a nuclear family of related people living together in a dwelling (Flandrin, 1979), as well as to highlight the multitude of other kinship and living arrangements that have existed historically and continue to exist.

forced to rely on capitalist firms and the state to ensure the survival of its members, both day-to-day and intergenerationally; it in turn contributes to the perpetuation of capitalist society. In part one of this article, I substantiate the key differences between Bhattacharya's SRT and this theory of social reproduction and the household by explicating a model of production and reproduction in capitalist society. In this model, production is carried out by households, capitalist firms, and the state, with each sector reliant on the other sectors for necessary inputs into the production process of that sector. Following work by Glazer (1984, 1993), Gimenez (1990), and Collins (1990) on the relationship between unwaged work and capitalist society, I argue that the interdependencies between households, capitalist firms, and the state in these production processes lead to the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole. In part two, I present a new model of household production that critically adapts the theory of household production from neoclassical economics (Becker, 1981, Reid, 1934) to a Marxist–feminist analysis that highlights the varying proportions of inputs relied on by the household in its production process. The working-class household can substitute the inputs of unwaged work, commodities purchased with money from waged work, and state inputs in its household production process. Contra Bhattacharya, redistribution of surplus leading to changes in the proportions of these inputs do not change the underlying production process, let alone the organization of capitalist society. These changes merely alter the intensity with which the household uses one input or another (Collins, 1990, 17).

This systematic model of production in capitalism carried out by households, capitalist firms, and the state shows that it is necessary to tie the household and household production to the dynamics of production and reproduction in capitalist society. There is no social reproduction without “societal reproduction,” as all production and reproduction in capitalist society are indelibly shaped by accumulation. While the lines between them are blurred, capitalist firms, the state, and households in capitalism are each historically specific configurations of people and production that emerged in their current form as part of the process of the historical development of capitalism. The main inference drawn from this model is that, contrary to the claims of Bhattacharya, it is not possible to disentangle the reproduction of labor-power from the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole. And in contrast to the conclusions of Bhattacharya and

Quick, redistribution of wealth and power from the capitalist class to the working class does little to change the underlying production processes that constitute capitalist society as a whole, just the proportion of inputs relied upon in those processes. This points to a different set of strategies and paths forward for the promotion of well-being — showing that it is necessary to abolish the organization of production and reproduction that constitute capitalist society, not merely to reassign the benefits and costs.

Working Class Households, Firms, and the State in Capitalism

Capitalist society is defined here as not just a capitalist division of labor within the so-called “formal economy” but divisions of labor that compel and constrain the activities of people within society as a whole. These divisions of labor are a consequence of the specific organization of society’s productive capacities in capitalism, in which the imperatives of capitalist accumulation ultimately shape institutions and dictate the activities of people. Within the larger social division of labor in capitalist society, there are further divisions of labor within each sector that comprises it. Households must purchase commodities using money from waged work and combine these commodities with their unwaged labor in order to survive, and are thus reliant on firms for both these wages and the commodities purchased with these wages. Firms must purchase labor-power, must drive down costs to earn profits from the sale of commodities, and must constantly reinvest these profits to avoid being put out of business by other firms. The state provides services designed to reduce the welfare losses attributable to the conflict between households and firms, and between actors within each sector; it also provides public goods and infrastructures. Each sector is compelled by the larger structure to act in particular ways to ensure its own survival, and in doing so perpetuates the existence of the whole.

This can be elucidated through a simple model of capitalist society comprised of three sectors, each of which must reproduce itself to perpetuate the existence of the sector: working-class households, capitalist firms, and the capitalist state. This follows the convention in classical political economy that starts with Quesnay and ends with Marx’s critique of classical political economy, in which the capitalist economy is conceived of as a system with interconnected parts. What I

mean by “sector” is a site of production made up of individual instances that use a production process unique to that sector. The production process of each sector is dictated by the imperatives of accumulation. This imperative arose out of the historical process of primitive accumulation that divided people and production into these sectors. It is this imperative of accumulation as a law of the whole — rather than one sector or another or one class or another — that ultimately prescribes and constrains the possible actions taken by people, firms, and institutions. Each sector must use inputs from other sectors in their production process to produce outputs that are in turn used by other sectors. These sectors are not “separate spheres,” but rather should be seen as interdependent subdivisions with distinct production processes but with boundaries that are fluid (Glazer, 1984). The way each sector goes about reproducing itself involves mutual reliance on the other sectors, perpetuating *their* existences, and in turn — though for the most part unintentionally — that of capitalist society as a whole. At the same time as the sectors are reliant on one another, each sector has interests that are at odds with the others, resulting in conflict. Furthermore, there are tensions within each sector, as firms must compete with other firms for their survival and workers compete with other workers for theirs.

The capitalist firm must compete with other firms, both for the supply of workers and in the market selling commodities. The firm does this by driving down costs and by reinvesting profits to perpetuate its own existence. Firms must hire workers to produce commodities, and firms pay wages to the workers that are equal to the value of the commodity labor-power. Because the value of the commodity

TABLE 1
Inputs into the Production Processes of Each Sector

Sector	Inputs
State	Taxes from <i>firms</i> , taxes from <i>households</i> , labor-power from <i>households</i> , commodities from <i>firms</i>
Capitalist firms	Labor-power from <i>households</i> , infrastructures from the <i>state</i> , tools owned by the <i>firm</i> , commodities from other <i>firms</i>
Households	Commodities from <i>firms</i> , unwaged time from the <i>household</i> , welfare state goods/services from the <i>state</i> , infrastructures from the <i>state</i>

TABLE 2
Outputs of the Production Processes of Each Sector

Sector	Outputs
State	Laws and their enforcement, infrastructures, welfare state programs
Capitalist firms	Commodities that must be sold to realize profits
Households	Labor-power that must be sold to buy commodities

labor-power is less than the value of the commodities produced by these workers during the working day, the firm realizes surplus value in the form of profit when the commodities are sold. Contra Bhat-tacharya (2017, 71) exploitation described in this way is not “theft” by capitalist firms of surplus value that rightfully belongs to workers. Rather, workers — as they are forced to compete with one another for jobs — are being paid the market price of the commodity that they are compelled to sell to capitalists (Heinrich, 2012). The market price of labor-power is equal to the money price of the commodities used as inputs into the household production function, though this price may be higher or lower depending on the portion of the household’s subsistence provided by inputs from the state and unwaged work of household members. Firms contribute to accumulation by purchasing commodities from other firms as inputs into their production processes. They contribute to social reproduction by remitting payments to the state in the form of taxes. They also contribute to social reproduction by paying wages and providing other benefits to workers, who use the money from wages to buy commodities needed for inputs into the household production process to reproduce labor-power.

The state contributes to accumulation by purchasing commodities from firms, and in doing so surplus value is realized in the form of profit. The state provides infrastructures that are necessary for both household production and production of commodities by capitalist firms. The state generates laws and their enforcement — such as property rights, contract law, and protections for workers. The state provides welfare goods and services to households that serve as inputs into the household production process, and thus reduce the amount of money wages that firms must pay workers. One point of disagreement with Quick (2018) is the extent to which the capitalist state is solely the instrument of the capitalist class. Quick (2018, 401) argues

that the state intervenes to protect the capitalist class as a whole against the interests of individual capitalists to ensure the reproduction of labor-power. In my formulation, the welfare state and laws to protect worker safety or to limit the length of the working day can be understood not only as an intervention to ensure the continued existence of the capitalist class but also to ensure the continued existence of capitalist society as a whole (Clarke, 1988; Heinrich, 2012; Cockburn, 1977; Wilson, 1977).

The working-class household in capitalism contributes to accumulation and is thus implicated in social reproduction in four main ways. First, household members who are compelled to sell part of their time for wages contribute to accumulation because their wage is less than the value produced with their labor-power over the course of the working day. Second, the household is the primary site in which the next generation of workers is raised, providing the future source of labor-power. Third, the household purchases commodities as inputs into its household production process, and in doing so surplus value is realized in the form of profit. Fourth, household members may have additional unwaged work shifted onto them by the firms from whom they purchase goods and services without a corresponding decrease in the purchase price of those goods or from the state in the form of volunteer work (Glazer, 1984, 1993). The household also contributes to social reproduction by remitting payments to the state in the form of taxes, providing labor to the state in the form of military service and other employment, and by reproducing the population.

Redistribution to households within the limits prescribed by the imperatives of accumulation in the form of higher wages or more welfare state goods and services may lead to an increased standard of living for working-class households. However, the interdependencies between the state, capitalist firms, and households — through which the continued existence of one ensures the continued existence of the others, and with this the continued existence of capitalist society — mean that such redistribution is not sufficient to change the underlying production processes that together constitute and reproduce capitalist society (Bonefeld, 2008, 70). Moreover, an examination of the specific role of household production and social reproduction in capitalist society suggests that these reforms in some cases may have the unintended consequences of increasing household labor

and environmental devastation while doing nothing to change the underlying household production process.

Household Production and its Role in Social Reproduction

The classical theory of wage determination states that the “natural price of labor is that price which is necessary to enable the laborers, one with another, to subsist and to perpetuate their race” (Ricardo, 1951 [1817], 93) or for Marx, that “the value of labor-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner” (Marx, 1976 [1867], 274). Ricardo writes that the wage is dependent on but not exactly equal to the money price of the commodities the waged worker and her household need to survive, and Marx argues that, at its minimum level of subsistence, the value of the commodity labor-power is “formed by the value of the commodities which have to be supplied every day to the bearer of labor-power, the man, so that he can renew his life-process” (Marx, 1976 [1867], 276). However, in making the simplifying jump from the means of subsistence generically to the value of commodities specifically, both Ricardo and Marx bypass the fact that commodities must be transformed through a household production process in order to be enjoyed by their end-users in the household (Reid, 1934, 14). The quantity of unwaged work spent in household production is dynamic as both a substitute for and complement to commodities purchased with money from waged labor, and thus also impacts the range of the ultimate and minimum levels of the value of labor-power in terms of commodities.

According to Quick (2018), the wage is not exactly equal to the full amount of labor time necessary for the production and reproduction of labor-power because of the unwaged time that household members spend in household production. State programs such as public education, healthcare, and other welfare state benefits also contribute to the non-equivalence of the worker’s wage and the worker’s subsistence level (Conference of Socialist Economists, 1977, 4). Just as the wage is not static, the quantity of unwaged household labor and the quantity of welfare state benefits involved in the subsistence of working-class households are not static. However, changes in these quantities do not change the underlying household production process or the production processes of capitalist firms, though they may

change the standard of living enjoyed by these households within the limits set by the imperative of accumulation. This section of the paper delves deeper into the process through which households transform resources to produce the intermediate goods that serve as inputs into the production and reproduction of labor-power, and ultimately into the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole.

Households are a single person or multiple people living together in a shared dwelling who share the responsibilities for meeting one another's needs on a day-to-day basis (Netting, *et al.*, 1984). Household members may or may not be biologically related or related via romantic partnership, and they may be any gender or no gender at all. Households may contain people across multiple stages of the life cycle living together, or only one life-cycle stage. They may engage in mutual aid activities within or between households, but they may also have interests that are not aligned or act in ways that are damaging to other household members, for example through conflicts over household resources, domestic violence, or rape. Most working-class households contain at least one member who sells part of her time for wages, but these households may also consist of former waged workers or people who would like to work for wages but are unable to find waged employment. Most working-class household members will need to spend at least part of their time engaged in unwaged activities related to household production.

All production involves the transformation of resources into something new that meets the wants or needs of people, and these resources must be combined in some fashion for productive transformation of the original inputs to occur. Households in capitalism are constrained in their productive capacity by market wages, prices of commodities, the hours in the day, and the goods and services offered by the state. The neoclassical literature on household production is usually presented in terms of partial equilibrium models in which wages and prices are taken as exogenous, and state inputs are not included at all. It does not look beyond the single household to system-level processes that determine the levels of prices, wages, or state inputs into household production. Here, by contrast, the levels of these inputs are not seen as fixed and exogenous, but rather as determined through an ongoing process of struggle. Critically adapting Becker (1981) to a Marxist–feminist framework, inputs in this model are both substitutes and complements in the household production process, and

can be used in varying proportions for the production of household wants and needs. In contrast to Becker, these varying proportions are not determined via a constrained maximization equation on the basis of market and shadow prices. Instead, how household production is carried out — and what goods and services are produced in the household — will depend on customs, habits, expectations, culture, and the availability of resources. In capitalism, households can be thought of as relying on three main inputs into their household production process: the unwaged productive efforts of household members; commodities — both goods and services — purchased from the market using money from waged work; and goods and services provided by the state on either a collective or individual basis.

Contrary to theories that see the household as primarily a site of consumption, here households do not consume either commodities or state inputs directly to satisfy their wants and needs. As Reid (1934, 14) points out, “money income will in itself satisfy few wants; goods in the retail store are not yet available for use.” Rather, household members must transform these commodities into the goods and services enjoyed by household members via a household production process. In fact, even the act of gathering commodities that will serve as inputs into household production demands the unwaged time of household members (Weinbaum and Bridges, 1979). Goods and services produced in the household for household members include comfort, cleanliness, nutrition, safety, health, education, entertainment, and cultural or religious training.³ Seen this way, the commodities purchased with money from waged work represent derived demand — they are desired not for their own sake, but as inputs into the household production process of the final-use goods and services enjoyed by household members. These final-use goods and services are themselves intermediate goods. According to Quick (2018), the household does not produce just use-values, but rather the intermediate goods and services akin to the intermediate goods produced by a firm that serve as inputs into the final product it sells. One final

3 Reid (1934) notes that not all goods and services produced by the household are necessarily “good” for individual household members or the household as a whole. Some examples include gay conversion therapy, smoking and drug use, alcohol and unhealthy food, dangerous hoarding and other compulsive behaviors, and forms of entertainment that annoy or even harm other household members. Likewise, inputs acquired from capitalist firms and the state are not necessarily “good” for all working-class households or their individual members.

output of these household production processes is the day-to-day and intergenerational reproduction of workers who are compelled to sell a portion of their time for wages — the commodity labor-power.

The unwaged productive efforts of household members may include activities such as gathering supplies, transportation, looking after non-workers, raising children (some of whom may be the next generation of workers), preparing food, transmission of knowledge and skills, cleaning one’s self and one’s environment, and maintenance or making repairs. But each of these activities involving unwaged work also requires additional inputs. Goods and services purchased with wages may include commodities in the form of durable tools and equipment such as automobiles or washing machines, non-durable commodities that are used up in the production process such as yogurt or soap, and the waged time of non-household members who provide services such as a babysitting or curbside trash pick-up. Inputs from the state may include infrastructures such as roads or the electrical grid, income insurance, public education, health care, and laws and their enforcement.

These inputs are both substitutes and complements in the household production process. They must always be combined but can be relied on in varying proportions as the household manages its resources to meet the wants and needs of its members. Additional unwaged work can be a substitute for commodities purchased with wages in the household production process, or state inputs for market commodities, or state inputs for unwaged work. For example, I can purchase premixed microwave instant oatmeal in a disposable container that requires relatively little unwaged time to gather, cook, clean, and discard. Alternatively, I can purchase, for a far lower money cost, bulk ingredients for traditional oatmeal, which will take more unwaged time to gather, cook, clean, and discard. I can look after an elderly relative with dementia, using my own unwaged time; I could pay a waged worker for this service, using money earned from waged work; or I could rely on the state to provide eldercare services. In household production, there is frequently more than one way to skin a cat.

What goods and services the household produces to meet the needs of its members is likewise dynamic. The components of what Bhattacharya (2017, 73) calls the “basket of goods” that comprise the subsistence standard of living for a household have changed considerably over time. Wages can be thought of as representing the money price of the

commodities a worker uses as an input, along with unwaged work and state-provided inputs, into production of this basket. The changing components of this basket — and the variations over time and context in methods used by the household to produce the basket — add an additional layer of complexity to a theory of household production. The “basic survival needs” of a household are dependent on customs, habits, expectations, cultural context, infrastructures, and existing or available technologies (Marx, 1976 [1867], 275; Stirati, 1992).

What the household produces and how it goes about that production also depend on what intermediate goods are viewed as culturally necessary and what production processes are viewed as culturally acceptable. In the 18th century even affluent Americans might never bathe, but by 1900 bathing practices had changed such that most Americans bathed fairly regularly — though still far less than we do today — as washbasins and bathtubs emerged as necessary household items and bodily cleanliness began to take on new social and moral meanings (Bushman and Bushman, 1988). While sending newborn babies to wet nurses was widely viewed as the most appropriate way to raise a young child in 18th-century France for all but the most impoverished households, state-funded crèches may be viewed as the best site for childcare in some contexts, while full-time care and extended breastfeeding from stay-at-home mothers practicing attachment parenting may be seen as the best way to raise a child by others (Badinter, 1981). Each method requires a different proportion of unwaged labor, inputs purchased with money from waged labor, and state inputs.

Technological progress and the expansion of the “basket of goods” is not always good for household members or the environment. New tools and technologies that purport to be unwaged-labor-saving devices frequently create new types of unwaged work and new expectations about who should be doing that work, at what site, on what scale, and with what frequency. For example, the introduction of vacuum cleaners changed the expectations about floor cleanliness, increased the frequency of floor-cleaning, and shifted that unwaged work onto women — work (rug-beating) that had previously been done infrequently and primarily by men and children (Cowan, 1983). “Consumption ratcheting” or the tendency for the household “basket of goods” to grow over time also has particular environmental consequences (cf. Shove and Warde, 2002; Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994) that should be considered prior to advocating wage increases

and an expansion of household “needs” as the primary short-term goal of class struggle.

Conclusion

Bhattacharya (2017a, 2017b) presents a traditional Marxist critique of distribution from the standpoint of both productive and reproductive labor, rather than a critique of productive and reproductive labor in capitalist society. She is correct in pointing to the important role played by labor outside the “formal” economy in the production and reproduction of the commodity labor-power. However, the separation in Bhattacharya’s writing of the question of social reproduction, by which she means the reproduction of labor-power alone, from the reproduction of capitalist society has led her to de-emphasize a central contribution of Marxist feminism: the role of the household in the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole. The seminal contributions of Quick have shown the importance of household production to the reproduction of labor-power in class society. Building on Quick, I have emphasized the necessary role that household production plays in social reproduction and the necessary interdependencies between the production that takes place in households, firms, and the state in capitalism. I have endeavored to show that the reproduction of labor-power cannot be divorced from the reproduction of capitalist society, nor from the human and environmental disasters inherent in it.

My theory calls into question the short-term strategies laid out by Bhattacharya (2017b), namely the redistribution of surplus from the capitalist class to the working class, inclusive of those who perform the work of social reproduction, and/or the provision of additional welfare state goods and services. Redistribution and the expansion of the welfare state may allow working-class households to enjoy a higher standard of living through purchasing additional commodities, or these households may enjoy additional free time if they are able to enjoy more services from waged workers as substitutes for unwaged time spent in household production.⁴ However, this may

4 If the redistribution involves an increase in real wages — in other words, if it is not accompanied by a countervailing increase in the prices of goods and services purchased by these households. It is also not clear that drawing additional people into waged work to perform additional waged work in the provision of services is desirable.

also increase the amount of unwaged work carried out by household members. Finally, such redistribution merely changes who gets the stuff by shifting the already fluid borders between the sectors within capitalist society. It would do nothing to change the underlying social reality or environmental consequences of the production processes that take place in capitalism in households and elsewhere.

This critique of production — including household production — in capitalism suggests a different set of questions for research and strategies for the promotion of human thriving than those advanced by Bhattacharya's conception of SRT. What are "needs," how are needs determined, and what determines the components of the "basket of goods" that meets these needs? What other methods, sites, and scales could be employed to meet the needs of people? Are, as Bhattacharya contends, waged and unwaged labor the source of all wealth? Or, is this labor — and the production processes that employ it — simply a means of reproducing the social reality outlined above that inhibits the further development of all of those people alive today and that threatens the very existence of the planet and future generations?

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