

# **Capitalism, Health and Wellbeing**

For those interested in health and wellbeing, this book is a must read. Drawing upon a wide range of sources, and through his simple and accessible writing style, Noonan explains how our current economic system drives many of the health and wellbeing issues we now face. Whether one speaks about growing income inequality or physical inactivity, one needs to understand the root causes of such problems. By eloquently explaining such causes – and offering solutions – Noonan enlightens the reader on how we can change society for the better.

—*Dr Lorcan Cronin, Lecturer in Psychology, Mary Immaculate College, Ireland*

*Capitalism, Health and Wellbeing* is a book aimed at health professionals, students who aspire to work in health promotion and the general public. While individual responsibility for modern health problems continues to be invoked, this book demonstrates that it is, on the contrary, collective choices, in particular of an elite, which make us sick. The link between capitalism and poor health no longer needs to be proven. We feel through Noonan's words the author's deep desire to fight against inequities. It is remarkable scientific work that he shares with us.

—*Dr Mélissa Mialon, Research Assistant Professor, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland*

While there is now an extensive literature on how economics and politics drive the health – for better or worse – of populations, Rob Noonan of the University of Bolton has provided an accessible volume that brings all of this work together and links it to how we live our everyday lives. How is it that in nations such as the UK wealth has never been greater, yet at the same time the numbers of poor are increasing? For Noonan, the answer is our economic system with its relentless drive for growth that leads to excessive consumption for some and deprivation for many others. Such an analysis is long overdue, and the volume will open up many eyes to the sources – and possible solutions – of our growing health and social problems.

—*Professor Dennis Raphael, School of Health Policy and Management, York University, Toronto, Canada*

Robert Noonan has written an engaging and robust book which explains how the current economic system is damaging our health. It is a rebuke to those who argue that simply achieving more economic growth will improve the health of populations. It is essential reading for local and central government officials who want to understand how to make our populations healthier and how to reduce health inequalities.

—*Professor Gerry McCartney, University of Glasgow, UK*

Rob Noonan has written a book that should be read by all those of us who struggle to make sense of the economic model that governs how we live our lives. He describes in detail how governments have acquiesced in a system that disregards the welfare of the vast majority of their citizens while complaining about the growing cost of fixing the damage that their policies inflict on health and well-being. This book provides an excellent agenda for the things that must change.

—*Professor Martin McKee CBE, Professor of European Public Health, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine*

A vital and sobering analysis of the impact of rising affluence: why is economic growth exacerbating health crises and how can the issue be fixed?

—*Stewart Lansley, Author of The Richer, The Poorer: How Britain Enriched the Few and Failed the Poor*

We are living at a time of multiplying crises in which the economic, social and environmental converge; global conflict is back to haunt us. This timely contribution challenges the capitalist paradigm that frames our health choices and offers a way out.

—*Professor John Ashton CBE, Former PFPH, Independent Public Health Consultant*

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# **Capitalism, Health and Wellbeing: Rethinking Economic Growth for a Healthier, Sustainable Future**

BY

**ROB NOONAN**

*University of Bolton, UK*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*For my family.*

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## About the Author

**Rob Noonan** grew up in Liverpool, England. He is a Reader in Health and Education at the University of Bolton. He earned his PhD from Liverpool John Moores University, and in 2018 was awarded the Professor Tom Reilly Doctoral Dissertation of the Year Award by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences. His main areas of research are the behavioural and environmental determinants of health. He has a long-standing interest in the promotion of physical activity and wellbeing and tackling health inequalities, and has written and lectured extensively on these topics.

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# Acknowledgements

I've spent many years mulling over the ideas presented in this book. Come to think of it – well over a decade. They started to flourish after a (wise) friend posed some very radical ideas. At the time, I wasn't overly convinced that they had much mileage, because they really did challenge my thinking and understanding. But on reflection, it was these very ideas that in many ways gave me the motivation to set off on my own journey to discover what's really happening here and why. I'm pleased I listened.

I have so many people to thank for making this book possible. I have always considered human interactions as opportunities to learn. And there are many people I have been fortunate to speak to and learn from throughout my life. Whether that be on the street, up a mountain, on the golf course or over a coffee. At the gym, the park or whilst out cycling. All of these short conversations have framed my outlook on life and shaped my values. They have made me the person I am today.

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*xiv Acknowledgements*

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Finally, a big thank you, to you, for giving my book your time and attention. I really hope I have done justice to what I think are the most formidable social injustices and challenges of our time.

## Epigraphs

The theories that drunkenness, laziness or inefficiency are the causes of poverty are so many devices invented and fostered by those who are selfishly interested in maintaining the present states of affairs, for the purpose of preventing us from discovering the real causes of our present condition.

Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 1914

When one individual inflicts bodily injury upon another, such injury that death results, we call the deed manslaughter; when the assailant knew in advance that the injury would be fatal, we call his deed murder. But when society [ruling power of society] places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death by violence as that by the sword or bullet; when it deprives thousands of the necessities of life, places them under conditions in which they cannot live – forces them, through the strong arm of the law, to remain in such conditions until that death ensues which is the inevitable consequence – knows that these thousands of victims must perish, and yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual; disguised, malicious murder, murder against which none can defend himself, which does not seem what it is, because no man sees the murderer, because the death of the victim seems a natural one, since the offence is more one of omission than of commission. But murder it remains.

Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1845