

Socialism: A Logical Introduction

by

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For my mother, Vera Dellwig, and in memory of my grandfather, Will H. Hayden.

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Acknowledgments

As will be discussed in the introduction, this book has a pedagogical as well as a philosophical aim: I hope to help readers to see how to think critically about socialism and capitalism. Even if I convince no one of my beliefs, the book will have served a purpose if it helps any reader to better use the tools of argument and analytical thought.

Accordingly, I will begin by acknowledging some of the most influential people in my own education in this realm. My very first philosophy class in college was a course on formal logic taught by Warren Goldfarb. Although I was always very argumentative (as my mother, brothers, and high school friends can attest), learning symbolic logic from Warren was like having the scales fall from my eyes: by better understanding the nature of logical inference, I began to really grasp what made an argument good or bad. My next philosophy teacher, Paul Hoffman, first showed me the amazing utility of breaking a philosopher's argument down into numbered steps. OK, I will not go on, teacher by teacher, enumerating and elaborating on what each did for me, but I will name a few of them: Paul Benacerraf, Mark Johnston, John Rawls, Michael Smith, Jennifer Whiting, and George Wilson.

Returning closer to the present day, I would like to thank friends, family, and colleagues who read parts of the manuscript and gave me valuable comments: Vera Dellwig, Kristiana Filipov, Michael Morrison, Hayden Sartoris, Josephine Schon, Donald Stanley, and anonymous referees for Oxford University Press. I also benefited from detailed written discussion (often on Facebook, of all places) with many interlocutors, most notably Steve Davis. Three readers of the entire manuscript stand out for their insightful and detailed comments, comments that saved me from many a misstep: Sam Arnold, Kristen Ghodsee, and Kristi Olson.

My institution, Bowdoin College, has been helpful in a number of ways. First and foremost, they have provided me with a steady supply of intelligent and motivated students from whom I have learned a great deal while I was trying to teach them. I am particularly grateful to the students I taught in a class called, “Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy,” in which I tried out many of the ideas and arguments in this book. Bowdoin also granted me a sabbatic leave during which I wrote most much of the first draft. I have also been blessed with wonderful colleagues, both present and past, in the Philosophy Department at Bowdoin.

This book never would have come close to happening were it not for my partner, Kristen. Not only did she provide much needed emotional support throughout the writing and editing process, though that would be reason enough for substantial gratitude. Beyond that, the whole idea of writing this book was hers, and she gave me expert advice and substantive comments throughout the whole process. She remains my inspiration, my mentor, and my beloved.

Part I. Introduction

1. Logic and Arguments

This book is a *logical* introduction to socialism. As opposed to what, you might ask? An *illogical* introduction? By promising a logical introduction, I mean that I plan to introduce you to the *arguments* for and against socialism, where an argument is characterized by clearly identified premises that purport to logically imply a conclusion. (More on the nature of arguments below).

One way of introducing the arguments about socialism would be to stay studiously neutral: present the reasons and inferences offered by the opposing sides but take no stand on who is right. That will not be my approach. I will indicate which arguments I think work and which do not, and I will ultimately come down on the side of socialism: that we should move our political and economic systems in a strongly socialist direction. And I will try to convince you that the arguments support this conclusion.

On the other hand, this book is still meant as a general introduction to the contemporary arguments concerning socialism and capitalism. If this were simply a polemic in favor of socialism, then I would present those arguments for socialism that I think *work*, and I would aim to defeat prominent arguments for capitalism and against socialism. I would not bother to present arguments for socialism that, in my opinion, are dubious, even if they have currency among socialists. In fact, I will examine a broad array of arguments for and against socialism, and I will make an effort to cover some of those that have historically (or more recently) been given for socialism, even when I don't think those arguments are successful. In this respect, the book is more neutral.

Nonetheless, this book is not an introduction to socialism in a broader or more historical sense: I will not be taking you back to the writings of Karl Marx or the earlier utopian socialists, and I will not be providing anything like a history of socialist movements or even of socialist thought. Not that there is anything wrong with such historical introductions, and I can recommend a number of them if that's where your interest lies (see the *Suggested Readings* section at the end of the book). But this book is about the *reasons* for adopting socialist policies now, in our current political context; it is an introduction to the logic of the arguments for and against socialism. The arguments I present and analyze will draw on considerations and evidence from a number of fields: contemporary politics, economics, anthropology, psychology, and my own field of philosophy. Nonetheless, the book is still an introduction, not a specialized work of scholarship.

Argument *Ad Hominem*

This book is for people willing to go beyond slogans and dig deeply into the *arguments*, both for and against socialism. I'll try to make a case for socialism by convincing you that certain arguments for it are *sound* and that the arguments typically raised against it are *unsound*. I'll say more in Chapter 2 about what I mean by "argument" and by the technical terms "sound" and "unsound."

Analyzing arguments is not always easy. A.E. Housman is widely cited as having written the following: "A moment's thought would have shown him. But a moment is a long time, and thought is a painful process." I'm often reminded of this quote when I hear people talking about political issues. Especially in the United States but also in the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe, we live in polarized worlds, where your chosen political camp conveniently tells you

what to think about almost everything. Questioning that orthodoxy can lead to accusations of betrayal or fear of being canceled. When people do happen to run across evidence or arguments for the other side's position, they tend to dismiss them without engaging in any serious way. Perhaps they think, "I'm sure I could find a different article making my side's point, so I don't need to think about this." Or perhaps they just attack the source of the argument: if the source is not from their side, then it is biased, stupid, or evil.

This latter reaction, of attacking the source of an argument, even has a name: argument *ad hominem*. Despite having taught logic classes for decades, I'm not actually a big fan of classifying bad arguments into different types of fallacies and especially not of the tendency to refer to them by Latin names. But "*ad hominem*" is a useful phrase. Translated literally, it means "to the man" or "to the person," but, in the context of arguments, it means this: responding to an argument by making claims about the person who made the argument rather than the argument itself.

I should note that there are times when dismissing the source of an argument is not really a fallacy and makes reasonable sense. I have a friend in Germany who is a font of misinformation and half-truths concerning climate change, 9/11, and other topics; Gerhard never met a conspiracy theory he didn't like. If Gerhard tells me about a good *Hausbrauerei* in Freiburg, I will believe him, but when he presents data in favor of climate change denial, I have learned to be suspicious of his alleged facts.

But when someone makes an explicit argument and appeals only to facts that you accept or can confirm, then it makes far less sense for you to reject the argument simply because the person presenting it is not in your political camp. I can, of course, understand the attraction of *ad hominem* attacks: if you don't know how to refute an argument, but you do know how to make

accusations about the person making the argument, then it is tempting to let the latter substitute for the former. In principle, however, we should be able to evaluate arguments irrespective of the source. If an argument is a good one, then it doesn't matter whether it was produced by Albert Einstein or monkeys randomly hitting the keys of a typewriter. (For the record, I will note that Einstein was a socialist. I'm not sure about the monkeys.)

Within political debates, especially in the United States, *ad hominem* attacks often come in the form of conservatives dismissing ideas or arguments because they come from the "liberal elite," where this latter term typically refers to those espousing liberal views who are upper middle-class people with degrees from fancy private universities and who are thought to be out of touch with *real* people—you know, those Americans who work hard, own guns, and drink Bud Light. I say this because I know that some people will have a tendency to reject anything that I say in this book on the grounds that I am part of that hated liberal elite. And I am. For nearly 30 years I have been a philosophy professor at a prestigious east coast liberal arts college, teaching logic and all kinds of other philosophical material. I have a B.A. from Harvard and a Ph.D. from Princeton. Although I think I work hard, I don't have any firearms, and I drink artisanal craft beer and hard-to-find imported German pilseners.

However, for those who would hold all of that against me, I might also mention a few further aspects of my background. I grew up in the deeply red state of Kansas. The last Democrat to receive Kansas' electoral votes was Lyndon Johnson in 1964, and I was way too young to remember that election. My roots are middle class. My parents could only afford to send me to Harvard because Harvard offered significant financial aid. My grandfather and many members of my extended family were (and some still are) farmers. Throughout high school, I had a job working for minimum wage at a local janitorial supply company. My summers were otherwise

occupied playing baseball and fishing in my grandfather's farm ponds. I was never very good at either; my older brother was the far better fisherman, and my younger brother the far better baseball player. My lack of talent in baseball was undoubtedly a disappointment to my father, a conservative Republican who made his living as a baseball talent scout. In the offseason, Dad would pick up extra money by refereeing high school football games and occasional basketball games. I absorbed some liberal political perspective from my mother and my grandfather as a kid, but Kansas was not a particularly hospitable place for such views.

So, between my current position and my background, you have ammunition for two very different sorts of *ad hominem* attacks on me. You could dismiss anything I say because I am an egg-headed, east-coast intellectual. Or you could dismiss anything I say because I am an unsophisticated hick from Kansas. Or you could simply read the arguments, check the references for facts, and make up your own mind. I promise I will not exercise my philosopher-Jedi-mind-tricks on you. (I don't actually have any such tricks. I sometimes wish I did, but then I would undoubtedly get distracted with long hours of thinking through the ethical issues of when, if at all, it is okay to use such mind-control. I might also contemplate using it on myself when that seemed advantageous. Then I would start worrying about whether my past self has already done so. Actually, the more I think about it, the more I am sure it is a good thing that I have no such abilities.)

What Is an Argument?

What exactly does it mean to consider the *arguments* for and against socialism? What is an argument? One might start with a famous treatment of the issue from the iconic British comedy group Monty Python. In their sketch, a man (played by Michael Palin) walks into an office where you can pay to have an argument. He gives his money to buy a five-minute

argument from a character played by John Cleese, who immediately begins to contradict everything Palin says. The Palin character complains, “An argument is not the same as contradiction.” Cleese answers, “It can be.” Palin replies: “No it can’t. An argument is a connected series of statements intended to establish a definite proposition.”¹

The word “argument” can clearly be used in different senses. One might agree with the John Cleese character that in *one* sense of the term, mere contradiction is an argument. In another sense of the term, perhaps an old married couple hurling unrelated insults can also be said to be having an argument. In the context of a moral or political debate, simple gainsaying and exchanging insults might or might not have a place, but it is not an application of reason and logic. The sense of the word “argument” that I have in mind is very close to that proposed by the Michael Palin character in the skit: “An argument is a connected series of statements to establish a definite proposition.” Specifically, I will take an argument to be a series of premises—claims assumed to be true—along with a conclusion that is said to follow logically from those premises.

Here is a very simple example of an argument: All people are mortal; Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a person; therefore, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is mortal. The argument has two premises, each of which is, I am pretty sure, true; and the conclusion follows logically from the premises. I will often lay out arguments in very explicit form as follows:

¹The full skit is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpAvcGcEc0k>.

Ocasio-Cortez

- (1) All people are mortal. [P]
- (2) Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a person. [P]
- (3) Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is mortal. [1,2]

The “[P]” at the end of steps (1) and (2) indicates that those claims are assumed as premises for the sake of this argument. The “[1,2]” at the end of step (3) indicates that this line is taken to follow logically from lines (1) and (2). Laying out arguments in numbered step form has some very clear advantages: we can see exactly what is assumed to be true, and we can see exactly what is being claimed to follow logically from those premises.

The latter idea—of one statement *following logically* from one or more other statements—is critical. When I say that I am providing a *logical* introduction to socialism, I mean “logical” in a very specific sense. When one hears the term “logical,” one might conjure up images of *Star Trek’s* Mr. Spock, calmly and coolly reasoning, as if the ideal is to drain any emotion from one’s reasoning. That’s not what I have in mind. In the specific sense in which I am using the concept, “logical” is a term that applies (or fails to apply) to the argument itself, irrespective of the emotional state of the person presenting the argument. One could very calmly and coolly reason in a grotesquely fallacious manner, or one could scream out a perfectly valid syllogism even in the throes of passion.

In the argument I have denoted as *Ocasio-Cortez*, statements (1) and (2) logically imply (3) in the following sense: given the assumed truth of any two statements of the same form as (1) and (2), the statement of the corresponding form of (3) would *have* to be true. The fact that (3) follows logically from (1) and (2) has nothing to do with the nature of mortality or Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez; any two statements of the same form would imply the corresponding third statement. It is not possible that (1) and (2) could be true while (3) is false, and we can see this simply by looking at the *form* rather than the specific *content* of the statements. For example:

Scholz

- (1) All German politicians are human beings. [P]
- (2) Olaf Scholz is a German politician. [P]
- (3) Olaf Scholz is a human being. [1,2]

Here is another argument of the same logical form:

Mets Fans

- (1) All Mets fans are long-suffering. [P]
- (2) Scott is a Mets fan. [P]
- (3) Scott is long-suffering. [1,2]

The arguments *Ocasio-Cortez*, *Scholz*, and *Mets Fans* have the same form. In completely abstract form it is this:

- (1) Anything that is *A* is *B*. [P]
- (2) *x* is *A*. [P]
- (3) *x* is *B*. [1,2]

And this form of argument is valid, meaning precisely that any conclusion of the form of (3) logically follows from the premises of the form of (1) and (2). For example, even those inclined to doubt the conclusion of *Scholz* have to admit that the conclusion does follow from the premises; if the premises are true, then the conclusion *must* be true.

Indeed, an argument can be valid (in the sense just defined) and thus perfectly logical, even if we know that one or more of the premises is false. For example:

- Beards*
- (1) All socialists have beards. [P]
 - (2) Karl Marx is a socialist. [P]
 - (3) Karl Marx has a beard. [1,2]

This argument follows the same form, and if the premises are true, then the conclusion would have to be true. So it counts as valid. Moreover, the conclusion is in fact true. However, the first premise of the argument is clearly false—Alexandra Kollontai and Rosa Luxemburg were socialists without beards. So, although *Beards* is valid, it is not *sound*, where we define “sound” to mean a valid argument whose premises are true.

There are only two ways in which an argument could fail to be sound: either one or more of its premises could be false, or one or more of its claimed inferences could be logically fallacious. For example:

- Vaudeville*
- (1) If Karl Marx was a vaudeville comedian, then he was an entertainer. [P]
 - (2) Karl Marx was not a vaudeville comedian. [P]
 - (3) Karl Marx was not an entertainer. [1,2]

Both premises of *Vaudeville* are true, as is the conclusion (though I rather like the image of Karl Marx tap-dancing). But the argument is nonetheless invalid, because the premises do not

logically imply the truth of the conclusion. Here is a parallel argument to make the fallacy clearer:

No Clouds:

- (1) If it is raining, then there are clouds in the sky. [P]
- (2) It is not raining. [P]
- (3) There are no clouds in the sky. [1,2]

Premise (1) is true: if it is raining, then there are clouds. But we also know that there can be cloudy days with no rain; so (1) and (2) must not actually imply that there are no clouds in the sky. Both *No Clouds* and *Vaudeville* fail to be valid arguments. Of course, the mere fact that an argument is invalid does not show that its conclusion is false. Perhaps there are no clouds in the sky, and it is true that Karl Marx was no entertainer; but the arguments above do not establish those propositions.

In *Vaudeville* and *No Clouds*, there was an identifiable fallacy. In abstract terms, those arguments both had this form:

- (1) If p , then q [P]
- (2) Not- p [P]
- (3) Not- q [1,2]

And both examples show that this form of argument is indeed fallacious, in the sense that it is possible for the premises to be true while the conclusion is false. This particular type of fallacy even has a name: *denying the antecedent*. However, I will typically not be concerned with naming fallacies or with specifying the abstract logical form of arguments using variables. Most informal arguments, if they are invalid, have a relatively simple problem: the premises don't imply the conclusion because the argument fails to include a needed implicit premise.

A Sample: Socialism and Starvation

I'll give you an example of the sort of argumentative analysis we can do with these tools. One tactic you often see against socialism in the comments section of a social media post: whenever someone says something good about socialism, just bring up starving people in Venezuela. A cartoon by A.F. Branco illustrates the idea.² On the left side of the drawing one sees a scraggly young white man with bad posture, six whiskers on his chin, and a sign saying "Feel the Bern"; the young man's dialogue bubble reads, "DUDE!". Next to him is a middle-aged man wearing ragged and dirty clothes with "Venezuela" written on his shirt. The man holds a sign saying, "Hungry Please Help!" and he says in answer to the BernieBro: "BEEN THERE DONE THAT." The implicit idea is that Bernie Sanders' socialist ideas have been tried in Venezuela, and they led to widespread hunger, or, at least, food insecurity. If we try to see some sort of argument against socialism embodied in the cartoon, we could start by reconstructing it this way:

Socialism and Starvation 1.0

- (1) Venezuela has a socialist economic system and Venezuela has rampant food insecurity. [P]
- (2) Socialist governments should be rejected. [1]

However, this argument is clearly not valid; (2) does not follow logically from (1), for the argument does not contain a premise making any sort of connection between food insecurity and

² You can see the cartoon at: Branco, A.F. "Venezuela Crisis | Political Cartoon | A.F. Branco." Comically Incorrect, June 1, 2016. <https://comicallyincorrect.com/venezuela-crisis/>.

the claim that socialism should be rejected. Branco would need to fill in the gap in some way to make the conclusion logically follow from the premises. For example, one might rerun the argument with an intermediate premise:

Socialism and starvation 2.0

- (1) Venezuela has a socialist economic system, and Venezuela has rampant food insecurity. [P]
- (2) If there are countries with an economic system of type *X* that have rampant food insecurity, then economic systems of type *X* should be rejected. [P]
- (3) Socialist economic systems should be rejected. [1,2]

Now the conclusion indeed follows logically. Premise (2) is a universal proposition about any sort of system of government, claiming that if some countries with that system of government have rampant food insecurity, then that system should be rejected. That premise, combined with (1), would indeed logically imply that socialist governments should be rejected.

Let's set aside the question of whether premise (1) is actually true, whether Venezuela is socialist. Even if we granted Branco that point, he has a different problem: premise (2) of his argument can be used against capitalism, for we need merely note that there are countries with capitalist economic systems that also have food insecurity. For example, the country of Botswana is widely regarded as capitalist,³ but it has food insecurity issues. According to the

³ See, for example, Tupy, Marian. "Botswana's Success Is Remarkable — and It's Down to Capitalism." *cato.org*, August 21, 2020. Accessed March 18, 2023. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/botswanas-success-remarkable-its->

Global Food Insecurity Index, run by the British publication *The Economist*, 22% of the population is undernourished, meaning that they do not receive the minimum number of calories required for an average person.⁴ In fact, even in the United States, over 10% of households are deemed “food insecure” by the United States Department of Agriculture, where by this they mean that these households did not always have “enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.”⁵ Perhaps we could agree not to count the United States as an instance of *rampant food insecurity*, since 10% of *households* not *always* having enough food for an *active, healthy* life is not as bad as having more than one in four individuals be undernourished. So, to show the problem for Branco’s argument, we will go with Botswana:

[down-capitalism](#). The Heritage Index of Economic Freedom ranks Botswana as “moderately free”, giving it a higher ranking in this regard than various European countries including Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, France, and Italy: <https://www.heritage.org/index/ranking>.

⁴ “Global Food Security Index (GFSI),” n.d. Accessed March 18, 2023. <https://impact.economist.com/sustainability/project/food-security-index/explore-countries/botswana>.

⁵ “USDA ERS - Key Statistics & Graphics,” n.d. Accessed March 18, 2023. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/>.

Capitalism and starvation

- (1) Botswana has a capitalist economic system and Botswana has rampant food insecurity. [P]
- (2) If there are countries with an economic system of type *X* that have rampant food insecurity, then economic systems of type *X* should be rejected. [P]
- (3) Capitalist economic systems should be rejected. [1,2]

The cartoonist Branco, and other defenders of capitalism, can protest that Botswana and Venezuela are different sorts of cases. There certainly are many differences between Botswana and Venezuela. Botswana is in Africa and Venezuela is not; Botswana's name starts with a "B" whereas "Venezuela" starts with a "V". My point: there are *always* differences between any two distinct things. But the differences between these two countries are utterly irrelevant to evaluating *Capitalism and Starvation*. Premise (1) of *Capitalism and Starvation* is true. The two premises of the argument do logically imply the conclusion that capitalist economic systems should be rejected. If defenders of capitalism want to reject that conclusion, they must deny premise (2); they have no other choice. But premise (2) of *Capitalism and Starvation* is exactly the same as Branco's own premise in *Socialism and Starvation 2.0*. Is he going to deny the premise when it appears in *Capitalism and Starvation* but affirm it when the very same claim is made in *Socialism and Starvation*? That would be simply inconsistent and logically contradictory.

So Branco will probably want a different intermediate premise — some other way of connecting the existence of starvation in Venezuela to the claim that socialism should be rejected. One might complain that Botswana is but one minor example of a capitalist country and

point out that it is surely not enough to say (as does premise (2) in both arguments) that the mere existence of an example or two of a country with an economic system of type *X* having widespread hunger does not mean that the economic system is to blame. Branco might, for example, revamp (2) as follows:

- (2) If *all* countries with an economic system of type *X* have rampant food insecurity, then economic systems of type *X* should be rejected.

But now, to make *Socialism and Starvation* still be valid, he needs to change premise (1) as well, and have it claim that *all* socialist countries have rampant food insecurity:

Socialism and Starvation 3.0

- (1) All countries with socialist economic systems have rampant food insecurity. [P]
- (2) If all countries with an economic system of type *X* have rampant food insecurity, then economic systems of type *X* should be rejected. [P]
- (3) Socialist economic systems should be rejected. [1,2]

This version is valid (the conclusion follows logically from the premises), but now mere mention of Venezuela and its problems does not support premise (1). We would need to know which countries count as socialist and then investigate the existence of food insecurity in each of them. Indeed, premise (1) seems obviously false: even ignoring controversial cases for the moment (e.g., whether the Nordic countries count as socialist), I need merely point out that Cuba (which Branco presumably counts as socialist) does not have rampant food insecurity (the

International Food Policy Research Institute said that Cuba’s Global Hunger Index was “very low”).⁶

So, to sum up the situation so far, all three versions of *Socialism and Starvation* fail. Here were the results:

Version:	Problem:
1.0	Clearly not valid.
2.0	Premise (2) would also imply that capitalism should be rejected as shown by <i>Capitalism and Starvation</i> ; so the conservative will want to reject (2).
3.0	Premise (1) is obviously false.

One thing Branco or other anti-socialists might try: take the plausible premises from each version of the argument and put them together this way:

<i>Socialism and Starvation 4.0</i>	
(1)	Venezuela has a socialist economic system, and Venezuela has rampant food insecurity. [P]
(2)	If all countries with an economic system of type <i>X</i> have rampant food insecurity, then economic systems of type <i>X</i> should be rejected. [P]
(3)	Socialist economic systems should be rejected. [1,2]

Now both premises (1) and (2) are plausible. But the conclusion no longer follows; version 4.0 is logically invalid: premise (2) allows us to say that if *all* socialist countries have rampant food

⁶ Global Hunger Index (GHI) - Peer-reviewed Annual Publication Designed to Comprehensively Measure and Track Hunger at the Global, Regional, and Country Levels. “Cuba,” n.d. Accessed March 18, 2023. <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/cuba.html>.

insecurity, then we should reject socialism; but premise (1) only gives a single example, rather than even attempting to claim that this is a feature of all socialist countries.

So, when Branco and other conservatives think they can refute socialism just by making quick references to Venezuela, what *do* they have in mind? What *is* the argument? What are they thinking? I honestly don't know. One might suggest that they are illegitimately sliding back and forth between the versions: when one points out the problem with 2.0, they move to 3.0; when they see the problem with 3.0, they move to 4.0; when one points out the logical problem with 4.0, they slide back to 2.0; and around they go.

To be clear, I have not in this chapter presented any sort of argument *for* socialism, nor have I by any means refuted all possible arguments *against* socialism. A more serious effort could, for example, try to marshal systematic evidence that the more socialist a system is, the more food insecurity results. But that would be an entirely different argument. Venezuela would merely be one data point, as would Botswana. Later in the book, I will be looking at evidence in a systematic fashion like this, attempting to make the case that socialism actually leads to *better* health and well-being outcomes. The point here is that some anti-socialists think that they can refute socialism without bothering with any careful analysis of that sort, that they need merely point to Venezuela. They may think they gained rhetorical points and somehow scored a “gotcha,” but mere reference to Venezuela provides no coherent argument against socialism (even apart from the question of whether Venezuela counts as socialist).

A Look Ahead

Not all arguments concerning socialism are so, well, cartoonish. Before diving into the much more substantive arguments for and against socialism, I will take you through a brief introduction to some basic ideas in moral philosophy that are directly relevant to evaluating

socialism and capitalism as ideologies in Chapter 3. That chapter will also present two parallel arguments: *The Master Argument for Socialism* and *The Master Argument for Capitalism*. The rest of the book will be devoted to analyzing the reasons for and against those arguments, with a great many sub-arguments discussed along the way.

Before getting into those arguments, you might have a rather fundamental question: what exactly *is* socialism? In fact, you *should* be uncertain about that. Readers who start with a strongly fixed idea of the nature of socialism may well misinterpret or misunderstand the claims made by this book. Different people use the word “socialism” (and “capitalism”) in rather different ways, and if we are to make progress in analyzing relevant arguments, we will have to be very clear and explicit about the meanings of our terms (see Chapter 2).

While I do hope to convince you of the wisdom of socialism, I also have three broader goals. First, I hope you will come away with a better understanding of the reasons and arguments concerning this issue. If you are opposed to socialism, then, even if you don’t change your mind by the end of the book, I hope you will at least better comprehend the reasons many find it plausible. You will learn, I hope, that some of the traditional arguments against socialism crumble rather quickly under close analysis; other arguments against socialism or for capitalism are more serious but rely on substantive assumptions that might have escaped your notice. If you come to the book already in favor of socialism, then I trust that there is value in exploring more analytically the reasons you might have for your belief. You might, for example, conclude that some of your reasons for being a socialist are less compelling than you thought, and that the best reasons for socialism lie elsewhere. You might even come away with a better understanding of why so many people oppose socialism, even if I also endeavor to explain why their reasons are ultimately wrong.

My second goal goes further than understanding some of the specific reasons for and against socialism: I hope to help you to see *how* to think critically about the things people say about capitalism and socialism. In our hyper-polarized world, political debate often seems to produce more heat than light. If more people applied the tools of reason and analytical thought, political debate might become more civil and more productive. Applying those tools is not easy, but I hope to provide you with both implicit and explicit lessons in how to do that.

Finally, third, I'll admit to one more hope that I have in writing this book: that some will come to see that there is a certain beauty to a carefully constructed argument, and that there is something rewarding and even fun about uncovering and truly understanding the structure of a piece of reasoning.

Key Takeaways:

- This book is an introduction to contemporary *arguments* for and against socialism. I hope you will learn something about the substance of these arguments and that you will also gain insight into how to use the tools of logic and analytical reasoning.
- An argument is not just contradiction, nor is it just shouting at or insulting each other. An argument is a connected series of premises leading to a conclusion.
- Conservatives sometimes bring up Venezuela as a quick refutation of socialism, but there is no obvious way of interpreting their argument that makes it sound: on some readings the argument is logically fallacious; on other readings, one of the premises is obviously false.
- Yes, I'm from Kansas; but I've never seen a tornado, and I've never been able to get back home by clicking my heels three times.