

From the *Slavic Review* Editorial Board:

Slavic Review publishes signed letters to the editor by individuals with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be restricted to one paragraph of no more than 250 words; comment on an article or forum should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. When we receive many letters on a topic, some letters will be published on the *Slavic Review* Web site with opportunities for further discussion. Letters may be submitted by e-mail, but a signed copy on official letterhead or with a complete return address must follow. The editor reserves the right to refuse to print, or to publish with cuts, letters that contain personal abuse or otherwise fail to meet the standards of debate expected in a scholarly journal.

To the Editor:

Johanna Bockman's review of my *Post-Soviet Social* (vol. 71, no. 4) gets many things wrong. It mischaracterizes the research on which my book is based; it attributes to me understandings of neoliberalism that I explicitly reject; it confuses the normative stance of my book; and it repeatedly misstates the scope of my claims. (For details on these points and others, see <http://goo.gl/4J8YU>.) These issues are hardly insignificant. But I was more struck by Bockman's treatment of the major conceptual and methodological claims of my book.

Post-Soviet Social's point of departure is a dissatisfaction with a "critical conventional wisdom" that understands neoliberalism as an ill-defined but pervasive force of radical marketization that can explain vast areas of recent history. Drawing on Michel Foucault's lectures of the late 1970s, the book proposes an alternative approach. It examines specific subtraditions of neoliberal thought and links these to post-Soviet reforms that sought to transform—or, alternatively, were constrained by—existing institutions of urban planning and social welfare. It shows how neoliberal reforms in mundane areas of state administration such as budgetary management and infrastructure provision sometimes reproduce existing social norms and patterns of provisioning. The resulting analysis runs against the grain of standard accounts that draw a stark contrast between neoliberalism and the institutions of the social state.

On one level, Bockman acknowledges the value of this endeavor. In studying "actual ideas and policies . . . of economists and international financial institutions . . . as they change in interaction with material and social structures," she writes, "Collier advances our understanding of socialism, postsocialism, and neoliberalism." But on another level her extensive criticism of my book simply recapitulates the "critical conventional wisdom" about neoliberalism while ignoring my arguments against it. Bockman argues that I neglect neoliberalism's connection to "new exclusions from state redistribution" and to "growing global inequalities." But she makes no attempt to square this admonition with my book's demonstration that this connection does not hold in many cases. Nor does she acknowledge my argument that taking this connection for granted has distorted our understanding of neoliberalism and its effects. Bockman criticizes me for "ironically" treating "Foucault's devastating critique of liberalism and neoliberalism . . . in which Foucault reveals their new forms of disciplinary power and biopolitics" as a "positive description." The real irony is this: *Post-Soviet Social* shows that Foucault's lectures advanced a "devastating critique"

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of precisely the position Bockman misattributes to Foucault, and that these lectures proposed an alternative that broke with his analysis of disciplinary power. Bockman questions the conclusions I draw from the supposedly “unique” case of infrastructure and calls for a broader approach. But she has not one word to say about my argument that we have far too many overly broad and underspecified analyses of neoliberalism. And she ignores my rationale for focusing on infrastructure and budgetary reforms: they provide insight into the largely neglected question of how neoliberals have understood the positive purposes of government. In sum, Bockman’s proposals for modifying my analysis entail reintroducing the tenets of the critical conventional wisdom that my book sets out to reject! One is left with the impression that Bockman has either misunderstood or simply missed the core of my intellectual project in *Post-Soviet Social*.

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Professor Bockman responds:

In his letter, Stephen Collier rejects my suggestion that the literature on neoliberalism, which he dismisses as “critical conventional wisdom” and as focused only on “radical marketization,” might contribute to his argument. In his words, his book “sets out to reject” this “critical conventional wisdom.” In my review, I sought to demonstrate what might be gained by engaging with this literature.

Since he does not engage with this literature, Collier, for example, assumes that the Russian state in its new liberal form would become separate from society, rather than perceiving the heterogeneous forms of global governance that link states, state agencies, corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and new entrepreneurial individuals. Collier examines negative, “illiberal” Soviet biopolitics, which, in his view, shares this negative illiberalism with “social welfare,” international development, and “twentieth century socialism” (20, 61). Yet, he does not recognize the ways that monopolistic, corporatized markets might also dominate society, thus creating an “illiberal” neoliberalism by his definition. Most scholars of neoliberalism have long recognized the apparent humanitarianism of neoliberalism, especially of the post-Washington Consensus, while simultaneously recognizing that it brings new exclusions and inequalities.

Collier does not acknowledge neoliberalism’s contribution to “new exclusions from state redistribution” and to “growing global inequalities” because he fundamentally redefines neoliberalism. According to his idiosyncratic definition of neoliberalism, these exclusions and inequalities happened *before* neoliberalism began. Collier restricts neoliberalism to the late 1990s and the 2000s, cleansing it of early 1990s marketization, deregulation, privatization, and the consequences of these structural adjustment policies (132–37), including increasing inequalities in his neoliberal period.

Collier bases his definition of neoliberalism on Michel Foucault’s understanding of neoliberalism as “critical reflections on government practice” developed primarily by economists in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, Collier does not engage with the many other neoliberalisms identified by scholars since Foucault’s death. Furthermore, Collier does not disagree with me that he transforms Foucault’s critique of liberalism into a positive description. In his letter, Collier refers to claims that in the late 1970s Foucault made a fundamental break with his critique of liberalism in *Discipline and Punish* and came to embrace neoliberalism and thus liberalism. Collier wants me to endorse this positive description. It is quite problematic to assume that Foucault somehow today, three decades after his death, would advocate neoliberal