

Philosophers for Change

Taking notes 52: Philosophy and understanding Paris and the on-going crisis: 10 theses



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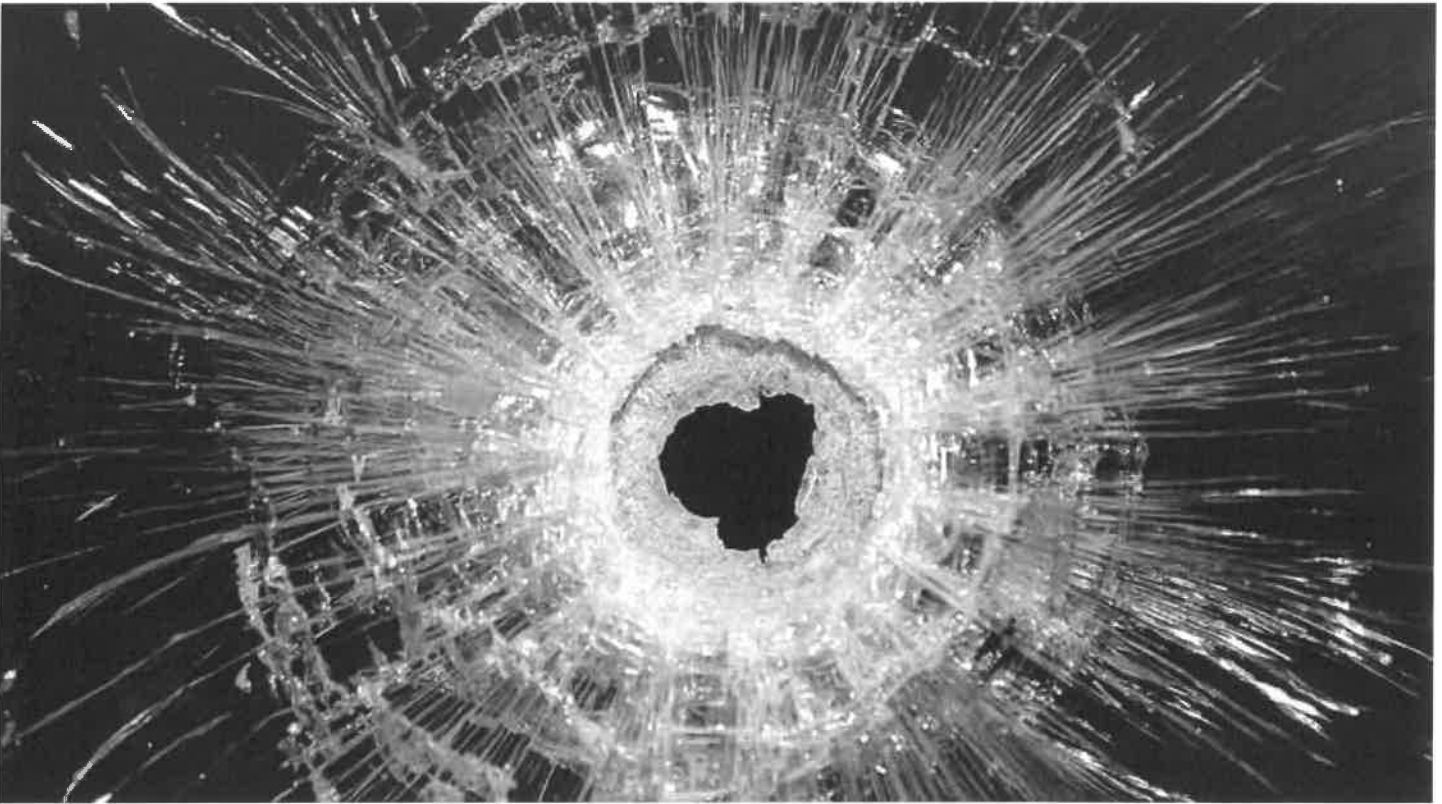
by Jeff Noonan

1. At the basis of all concrete identities: "Muslim," "Sunni," "French citizen," etc., lies a core human being, a capacity for self-making within the objective contexts of natural and social life. Selves are made, identities forged, reproduced, modified, and developed through processes of work and affective-symbolic interaction with other people within and across societies. Work relations and social interactions are contradictory– they are both creative and alienating, mutualistic and antagonistic, peaceful and violent. When politics loses sight of or ignores for partisan advantage the underlying human capacity for self-making and re-making it fixates on the abstractions. A fixation on the abstract

markers of particular identities leads to their reification, and their reification leads in turn to false, quasi-natural explanations of conflict (the problems in the Middle East are the consequence of a 'clash of civilizations,' racism is a result of the 'natural' inferiority of the demonized race, etc).

2. Digging beneath the surface identity to the core human *activity* of *identity formation*, reveals it as the result (always modifiable) of a process of practical and symbolic labour that unfolds in dynamic interaction with other selves and the objective world. Other selves, the natural world, and the social institutions that mediate the relationship between individuals and nature are themselves dynamic and change in response to changed activities. Foregrounding this dynamic process and using it as a wedge against the stereotypes of reified thinking is the constructive political role that philosophical thinking can play. While philosophers will also be motivated by concrete political evaluations of the relative legitimacy of conflicting positions, if they are to be active as *philosophers*, they must ground their political assessments in the deeper understanding of human self-making activity explained above. By demonstrating the ways in which all sides to the conflict are struggling to forge a coherent and satisfying individual and collective identity and the social and environmental conditions in which that identity can be secured, the underlying humanity of all parties to any conflict is made clear. Once this underlying humanity has been made clear, invidious contrasts between positions according to which one side is inhuman and monstrous, the other side human and pure, (positions which, because they are reversible, do nothing but ensure cycles of violence) break down, and the opposing sides can begin to think about the reasons why the other side behaves as they do.

3. History proves that human beings, when they identify themselves as a member of a community under existential threat, can convince themselves that the most abominable acts are justified as matters of group survival. No religion or culture, or ethnicity, or nation-state is prone by its very 'nature' to violence, but all can become violent when they are set in conflict with other religions, sects, nation-states in ways that impair the ability of the group to survive, develop, and flourish. When these conflicts are interpreted as zero sum games, such that the victory of the opponent would mean (or is feared to mean) the elimination of the group to which the self identifies, a logic of exterminism can be unleashed. Victory becomes associated with the complete pacification through the total destruction of the other side. Once this logic is unleashed, it appears impossible to arrest the cycle of violence, because any voice calling for restraint and negotiations will appear not only weak (which is typically politically unacceptable) but also suicidal.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/paris_ap.jpg)

[Credit: AP.]

4. Nevertheless, those voices, the ones that sound most irrational and out of touch with “political realities” are the only ones in touch with the deeper reality, namely, that no matter how abhorrent the tactics adopted, the struggle is comprehensible and defensible in human terms as a struggle for security over the natural and social conditions of life. Killing in response to killing is not the mark of a strong leader, but of a person who is behaving predictably, i.e., the way a machine would, and not like a rational human being. When thought is directed towards the causes of the opponents’ actions, the cyclical nature of violence becomes apparent. A political conflict degenerates towards a violent confrontation, which further degenerates towards a logic of exterminism, which amps up fears on both sides and makes it appear that the cycle can be resolved only by superior violence, i.e., by completely destroying the enemy. However, the struggle to destroy the enemy contributes to the destruction of the community one is trying to protect. The main victims of ISIS are Syrian and Iraqi civilians, hard won democratic freedoms have been undermined by the War on Terror. Further steps down this path of “victory’ via extermination can only further destroy all parties to the conflict.

5. There is a time to assign blame and evaluate the relative merits of the opposing parties’ demands, but assigning blame and evaluating legitimacy, if it occurs outside of this deeper context and frame of the cross cultural human struggle to forge identities and secure the natural and social conditions of their development, will only allow the conflict cycle to repeat. Philosophy seems useless because it thinks at different time-scales than politics. Sometimes, the longer time scales in which philosophy thinks are useless—decisions sometime have to be made right away. But peaceful co-development between cultures formerly at odds with each other takes longer to develop and can only be grounded in mutual recognition of the different ways different groups can express their underlying human capacity for self-determination and self-making and the satisfactions that come with realizing that capacity. The practical value of philosophy is not only to bring to light that underlying capacity, but also to defend the

need for long-term perspectives on conflict resolution which depend upon transformations of self-understanding and re-interpretation of the reasons why former 'enemies behaved as they did.

6. The duty of philosophy in cases of violent conflict is thus not first of all to pick sides but to encourage each side to consider itself in light of the way the other sees it, and in light of the actual success or failure of its tactics. ISIS might think that it is conducting a heroic struggle against Western imperialism, but on its current path it will accomplish nothing but ensuring the ever more complete destruction of the lands and cultures of those areas of Syria and Iraq that it occupies. Western leaders might think they are defending the highest values of Western civilization against barbaric terrorists, but they have eviscerated the highest constitutional principles that past democratic struggles have achieved and killed hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians across the Middle East, stoking the very anger and hatred that fuels the desire for revenge that leads to terrorist attacks. Both sides are destroying themselves as they try to destroy each other—irrationality at a mass scale.



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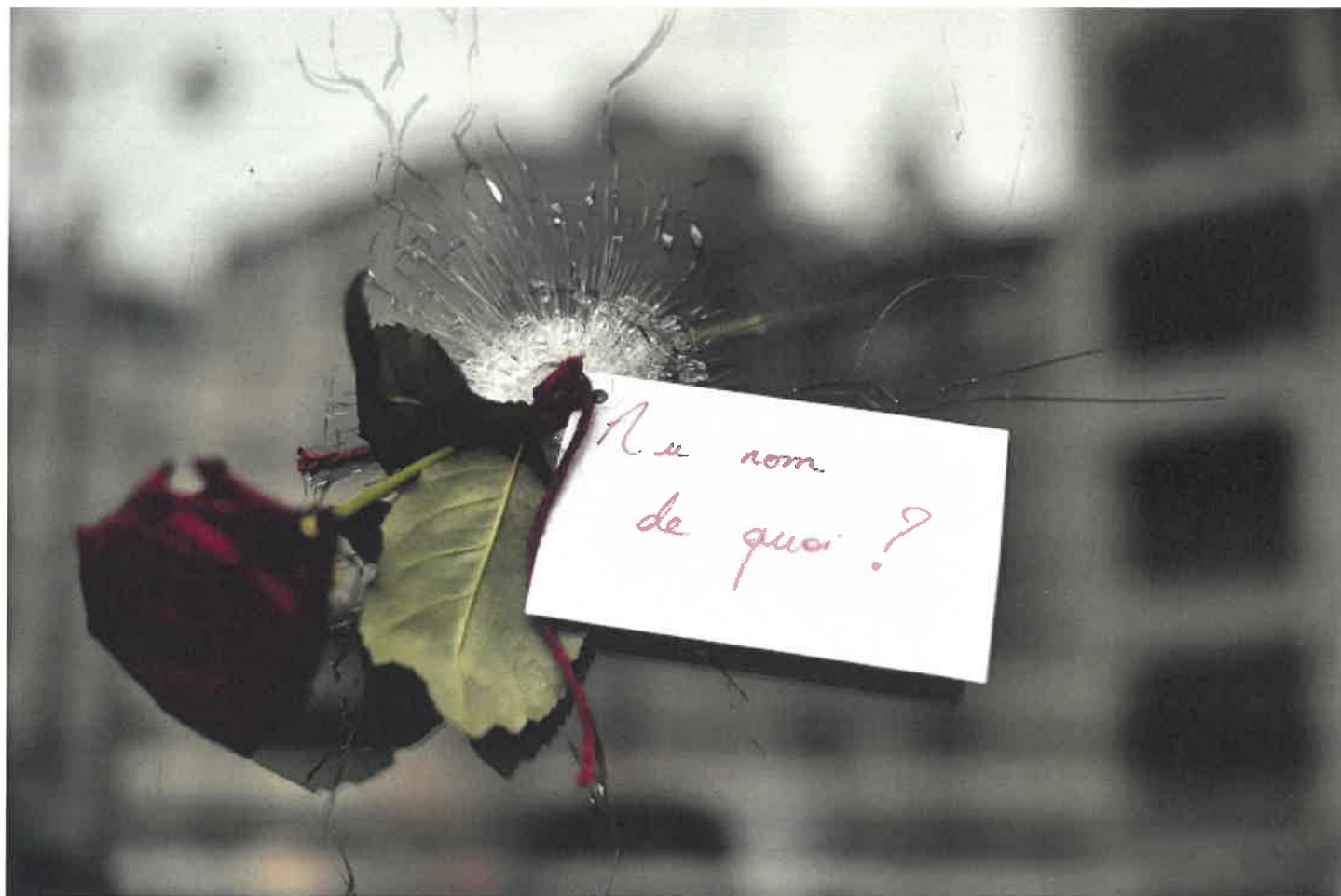
[Credit: Jeff J. Mitchell/Getty Images.]

7. Pointing out this reciprocal irrationality is not a substitute for concrete political struggle, but rather a precondition of turning those struggles in efficacious directions. All efficacious political struggles must be directed at the precise cause or causes of the problem threatening the groups. In the case of the current crisis across the Middle East, the depth causes are: the history of Western imperialism in the region, the destruction of the infrastructure of life-support by the "War on Terror," and cynical exploitation of sectarian and ethnic differences by major Western powers and their regional allies. Simple Western withdrawal from the region, while a precondition of solving the domestic conflicts, will not be enough to ensure lasting peace unless a constructive politics emerges within the region. That constructive politics must stop targeting individuals in the West and justifying such attacks as justified

vengeance. Such tactics undermine support for the legitimate demands of the peoples of the Middle East, embolden racist-militaristic forces in the West, encourage backlashes against Muslim and Middle Eastern citizens of Western countries, as well as refugees and ordinary Muslim travellers.

8. Within the West, the political struggle has to be focused not only on particular governments and their policies, but the structural causes of military intervention in the Middle East and elsewhere. That which must be contested is the principle that the world's resources are valuable to the extent that they are controlled by Western corporations and exploited in the interests of their ability to maximize money profits and the world's people valuable to the extent that they serve these interests (and legitimately destroyed to the extent that they resist this subjugation). Both sides must work towards recognition of the deeper, common life-interest in living in a society that ensures the satisfaction of their fundamental life-requirements, that is governed by institutions that allow individuals to make decisions democratically, and that is open to mutualistic, respectful interaction and growth between distinct cultures.

9. Critics will respond to the last point in thesis 8 with the argument that there are radical differences between an enlightened secular cosmopolitan society and the reactionary, atavistic, irrational fundamentalism that drives groups like ISIS. There can be no reconciliation between western liberal democracy and the reactionary fundamentalism of the caliphate, critics will rejoin, because to do so would betray not only our own ideals, but also the goals of the majority of people in the Middle East struggling to create liberal democracy. In response, while I agree that Western philosophers should not make any excuses for religious fundamentalism of any stripe, at the same time we must not lose sight of the political dimensions of the conflict in the Middle East, i.e., we must not fall into the trap of seeing it as nothing but a problem of irrational sectarian hatreds. A group like ISIS might have irrational elements driving certain of its more horrific propaganda stunts, but a careful analysis cannot but uncover legitimate demands amongst Sunni's in Iraq and Syria for protection against the violence of the Syrian and Iraqi states. ISIS may be destroyed, but another movement will take its place until some political rapprochement is worked out by the parties to the domestic conflict themselves. At the same time, it is appropriate to criticize religious justifications of the tactics that target Western civilians. The legitimate critique of religious illusion should not be confused with Islamophobia (especially since most Islamophobes are Christian fundamentalists, who are equally irrational from the standpoint of enlightenment reason). By the same token, the value of enlightenment ideals of rational analysis and argument should not be exchanged for an uncritical pluralism, or worse, a belief that groups like ISIS should be celebrated for their uncompromising anti-imperialism. The struggle internal to the peoples of the Middle East is precisely to create a broad, democratic, anti-imperialist alliance of secular left and critical Islamist movements (the latter might be understood as an Islamic version of liberation theology). Overall, an effective philosophical analysis and argument needs to identify the rational and the irrational in the opposed camps in order to demonstrate the possibility of future co-development in which cultural, religious, and sectarian identities open towards their outside. Beyond this outside exclusive communal closures give way to dynamic and democratic cultures that cross-fertilize and encourage creative ways of organizing human societies at all scales. One historical example of this process is the triple cross-fertilization between the remnants of Greek antiquity, the Islamic society of the Middle Ages, and Europe. When the Roman Empire closed the Greek schools and after Christian fanatics had burned the library of Alexandria, the works of Greek philosophy contributed to the flourishing of philosophy and medical science in the Islamic world, where they were preserved, built upon, and ultimately re-introduced to Europe through Morocco via Spain.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/paris_loic-venance-afp-getty-images.jpg)

[Credit: LOIC VENANCE/AFP/Getty Images.]

10. Nevertheless, it may also be objected that this argument is naive because it imagines that Western politicians will have to sit down with ISIS, that the caliphate will have to be reckoned with diplomatically and politically, its sins forgiven, and that it is inconceivable that such meetings could ever take place. The actual process of political problem solving cannot be predicted at this point, only that the attempt to bomb ISIS out of existence will fail and provoke more attacks in the West. The current moment does not bode well for a political, non-violent solution. Nevertheless, thirty years ago, it was equally inconceivable that America would sit down with the Iranians who held American diplomats hostage and negotiate in good faith with them. Yet, this past year, American and Iranian negotiators worked out a treaty on the Iranian nuclear program. It is thus true, as Lord Palmerston said, that nations have no permanent friends or enemies but only permanent interests. What he did not understand—and this point is the most important—is that those interests are the permanent life-interest of the human beings who make up the citizenry of all nations, not the *raison d'état* that have typically treated those human beings as expendable cannon fodder and collateral damage.



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[Thank you indeed Jeff for this piece. This article first appeared on Jeff's [blog \(http://www.jeffnoonan.org/?p=2657\)](http://www.jeffnoonan.org/?p=2657). Lead graphic: V. Briskin]

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NOVEMBER 19, 2015 NOVEMBER 20, 2015 SANJAY PERERA # AGE OF VIOLENCE, # ISIS, # JEFF NOONAN, # LIFE FORMS, # LIFE VALUABLE, # LIFE-COHERENT, # LIFE-VALUE, # PARIS, # PHILOSOPHY, # SUPPORTIVE OF LIFE, # VIOLENCE

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Philosophers for Change

Capitalism, socialism, and everyday life in the twenty-first century





(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_alex-gross.jpg)

[Credit: Alex Gross.]

by Jeff

Noonan

Introduction: The Sustaining Ground of Socialist Struggle

The left confronted yet another series of failures in 2015. In Greece, Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) was forced to capitulate to the demands of European money-capital, while in Venezuela, the United Venezuelan Socialist Party lost parliamentary elections, throwing the immediate future of their effort to build socialism for the twenty-first century into question. Socialism has faced political crises before: the split of the movement into revolutionary and “evolutionary” camps; the collapse of the Second International when the German Social Democrats voted in favour of participation in the conflict that would become World War One; the split of Western communist parties following the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the emergence of the New Left in 1968, and the rapid shift of political vitality from the

workers' movement to radical feminism and black power; the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 (a metonym for the end of the revolutionary road), and the disintegration of social democracy into "Third Way" capitalist systems management (a metonym for the end of the evolutionary road). Judged in the most charitable light, the "Bolivarian" revolution in Venezuela and the election of Syriza in Greece promised to succeed where previous efforts to build socialism had failed. In both cases the struggle would be led by an alliance of a formally legitimate parliamentary party and social movements on the ground. The social movements would provide the political energy and the concrete information about peoples' unmet needs, while parliamentary power would gradually institutionalise structural transfers of wealth and resources from the appropriating class to workers and the poor, effecting, over time, a peaceful and democratically legitimate transformation from capitalism to socialism.[1]

These failures, one in the Global South, the other within the European Union, occurred at a moment when the formation of working class identity, especially in the Global North, is facing more challenges than ever before.[2] The manufacturing industries which formed the context in which working class consciousness was forged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continue to move to lower wage countries. Trade unions, important schools for working class consciousness, continue to decline in terms of density and power, sapping any fighting spirit left in the working class. Perhaps even more tellingly, the entire meaning of "social" and "collective power" is changing. As virtual links between people become more ubiquitous, collective power becomes more voluntaristic, affinity-based, and ephemeral. Temporary on-line movements spring up constantly, attracting people from diverse walks of life who happen to feel allegiance to some goal. The movements are easily joined and make no onerous demands: from the comfort of one's living room one can donate money to local rescues for feral cats and in the next minute sign an on-line petition against human rights violations in Syria. Marx speculated that under communism a person could hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and criticise after dinner without ever becoming a hunter, a fisher, or a critic. That goal has not been realized, but in a farcical distortion wired capitalism allows one to be an advocate for feral cats in the morning, a proponent of human rights in Syria in the evening and a gamer all-night, without *becoming* (i.e., permanently determining one's identity by identification with the goal) a cat advocate or a human rights crusader. Identity remains fluid, something to play with and not commit to, unlike Marx's understanding of class consciousness, which would bind individual goals to the collective project. Assuming that there will be no catastrophe that impedes the further development of communication technologies, and that younger generations will be shaped in their sense of self by the changed work and social relationships that on-line environments make possible, nineteenth and twentieth century forms of working class consciousness and struggle seem impossible to revive, at least in the Global North.

Yet, however unsettling to earlier forms of human interaction on-line environments might be, the very fact that the software that enables human interconnection is called "social" media should tell us something important: on-line environments still respond to and serve, as did village squares in the Middle Ages and telephones in the 1960's, the need for human beings to communicate, to interact with one another, to feel that they belong somewhere. Whether they do as good a job as less mediated and more face to face forms of interaction is a question that I leave aside here. The important point is that they are grounded upon and develop out of the social nature of human subjectivity and agency. We cannot be individuals in a vacuum; we need to share our ideas with others, we need their affirmation (and criticism); there are no absolutely self-made individuals but everyone becomes who they are by the appropriation of shared material and symbolic resources, and the creation of the "product" — one's self — is a public performance.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_stelios-faitakis.jpg)

[Credit: Stelios Faitakis.]

If work identities

are being weakened in the Global North, (which is not to say that the need to work is being weakened—if anything, it becomes more important in the age of precarious labour) then what we might call, following Henri Lefebvre, the construction of identities in *everyday life* is becoming more important. Critics might conclude from this turn towards the everyday that since there is little *talk* of socialism in the Global North, and since what explicit struggles there are for it appear to be failing, all the sociological, political, and historical evidence suggests that it is finally time to stop thinking about the alternative to capitalism *as* socialism.[3] Perhaps that is true, if we think of socialism in some doctrinaire

way, as the liberation of the productive forces from the fetters of capitalist relations of production achieved through working class revolution led by a vanguard party. But why should anyone think of socialism as it was defined in the nineteenth century as applicable to the twenty-first?

One answer that I do not share is that socialism was conceived as the antithesis of capitalism. Therefore, if the problems that capitalism causes are still the same, (and they are), then, if socialism means anything definite at all, it must mean what it meant when it was demonstrated (by Marx and Engels) to be the necessary antithesis of capitalism. If socialism *cannot be realised* in that form, then we should simply stop talking about socialism and give another name to the alternative which society struggles against capitalism and seeks to build. I see the sense in this argument, but I will not heed its advice. Nor, however, will I seek to rescue the doctrinaire definitions of socialism from what I regard as the passing of its historical moment of possibility. Instead, I want to defend a conception of socialism (which we can also find in Marx and Engels, although I will not focus on their texts here) as a value system (leaving open the question of institutionalization) which is grounded in certain permanent needs of social individuals, needs which capitalism systematically fails to satisfy (or satisfies only in distorted form). Since capitalism cannot satisfy these needs in any ultimately satisfying way, it will never be fully stable or its future permanently secured. Although the means of struggle may change and the political identities that lead the struggle might shift, the alternative towards which the struggles tend, if they are genuinely progressive struggles, will always best be called 'socialism' because the good they seek to ensure is the good of life-valuable self-realization *enabled by* cohesive, ecologically sustainable, and democratic societies.

The point of maintaining the word 'socialism' is to emphasise that the conditions for meaningful and life-valuable individual freedom are found in our deep (transhistorical, cross cultural) capacity to cooperate, to recognise and respond to harm across cultural differences, to feel equally affirmed by our own and others' successes. This foundation in the depth sociality of human beings is what McMurtry calls the "life-ground" of value in its interpersonal, social, and ecological dimensions: "People feel the common life-ground without knowing it ... Humans need to be near to other forms of life to be fully alive, radiating out to and in from the infinite life-field that makes their living now possible. The more one participates, the better. This is the life-code felt in intuition." [4] When we think of socialism as emerging out of this depth sociality, it becomes clear that its achievement (or not) is never an all or nothing singular event, but an open ended process of institutionalization in a variety of forms, organically across generational time by principled commitment to using natural resources and social wealth to satisfy fundamental natural and socio-cultural life-requirements. Thus, rather than see public health care, for example, as part of a reformist agenda for a better capitalism, my position sees it as an element of socialist society existing within capitalism, albeit in inadequate under-resourced and bureaucratic form. If my view is correct, then the process involves, but is not reducible to, political struggle against specific, structural blockages to further development. Beneath these particular explosions is a deeper process of structural and normative change across time carried forward by rejection of socially enforced beliefs in the superiority of one group of people *vis-a-vis* another, and therefore loss of legitimacy of the institutions of socially enforced exclusion and deprivation. The vehicle by which this goal is carried forward, therefore, is not class-consciousness in the narrow sense, but recognition of the life-ground, that is, attunement to the needs all human beings share. The reality of these needs is daily pressed home for the majority of people because their lives under capitalism are unsatisfying and unhealthy (in the broadest sense of the term). Once we trace those everyday feelings of deprivation to the dynamics of capitalist society as their cause, revitalized movements against capitalism and for socialism, i.e., collective commitment to all-round life-requirement satisfaction but open-mindedness as to institutional forms, become possible.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_jorgemur.jpg)

[Credit: Jorgemur.]

My argument in support of this conclusion will be developed in three moments. First, I want to connect my position to and distinguish it from the history of twentieth century conceptions of socialism by looking at the heterodox arguments of Henri Lefebvre, in his *Critique of Everyday Life*. Lefebvre's argument is relevant because he works beneath the forms of explicit political consciousness to identify everyday goals, joys, and disappointments as the underlying soil from which any worthwhile conception of socialism must grow. His critique of everyday life is also a critique of conceptions of socialism that dismiss everyday life as apolitical and therefore irrelevant. He thus serves as a bridge from the problems of doctrinaire conceptions of socialism to the depth sociality that is the real foundation of the value of socialism.

In the second part I want to concretise Lefebvre's arguments by cashing out his conception of the everyday from the standpoint of the life-value conscious recognition of our depth sociality produces. I will focus on four fundamental dispositions to self and others that illustrate the untutored, spontaneous sociality that defines human life: our capacity for hospitable tending to others in need, our capacity to understand that the goodness of life is the same for all and that there need be no conflict between individuals on this score, the recognition of need-satisfaction as the purpose of social institutions, and our intuitive grasp of peace between peoples as the underlying condition for good and meaningful lives

for all. The real problem with capitalism is that it alienates us from these everyday understandings by disrupting the social and material ties between people, replacing them with socially structured competition for money as the fundamental condition of being alive. Hence, actual life is structured by contradictory forms of consciousness of depth sociality: hospitality as restricted by nationality or other arbitrary particularities, goodness as realization of life-capacities *that pay*, social institutions as servants of money-capital, and peace constricted to the internal relations of an in-group viewing all outsiders as threats. Nevertheless, since these contradictory forms of consciousness are the result of the alienation of our feelings of depth sociality, they do not prove the impossibility of socialism (a society that institutionalizes their non-alienated forms) but rather point toward it as a solution to the problems the alienated forms claim to, but cannot, solve

In the final moment I will argue that the resolution of these contradictions is not dependent upon Marxist theory providing theoretical self-clarification to the working class. Rather, the necessary condition of resolving the contradictions is reflection upon what the real impediments to the universally affirmed goods of hospitality, goodness, meaning, and social peace are. Here, without any explicit direction from any particular political theory, people will converge on an answer: that which prevents the realization of any of these values are forms of social pathology specific to capitalism, namely, competition over goods made artificially scarce and the money needed to access them. This recognition is at the same time, for reasons that I will explain, the recognition that *all that is required for the universal advancing of these values is already present in the life-capital that nature and collective labour have been producing across social and ecological time*. Following McMurtry, life-capital is defined as: “the life wealth that produces more life wealth without loss and with cumulative gain. We defend it by life goods to ensure our life capacities are not reduced but grow through time. Most are unpriced – the sun and air, the learning, the home environment, the delight in nature, the play, the love, the raising of children, the fellow arts, and so on.” [5]

The point of shifting focus, from the day to day of political struggle to the depth sociality of human being and the life-capital that it produces and which sustains it is to sustain hope in the midst of the defeat of particular experiments and movements. There is a politics of the day to day and a politics of the *longue durée* of life-development. Of course, the politics of the *longue durée* does not alleviate the need for the politics of particular struggle. However, the efficacy of the politics of particular struggle, depends upon its serving the values anchored in our depth sociality, and it serves the depth values not by breaking all at once with capitalism, but by claiming back lost life-capital and establishing new institutionalized security against its re-privatization: defending and extending public institutions, pushing the principle of democratic organization into economic life, consciously regulating the demands we make on the natural environment by considerations of ecological sustainability. In these struggles there are ebbs and flows, but the depth sociality remains as the orienting basis and sustaining foundation from which these particular struggles will grow as long as the underlying demands are not met.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_amir-noor.jpg)

[Credit: Amir Noor.]

The Critique of Everyday Life

Given that the third of Lefebvre's three volume work was published in 1981 and the first in 1947, it might be immediately objected that whatever interest the book may once have held, the extraordinary changes to everyday life since the late 1980's caused by globalization and communication technology have rendered his analyses obsolete. Such an objection takes too shallow a view of everyday life. While there no doubt have been changes to the structure of everyday life, the underlying values that steer our ordinary relationships with each other, our expectations, and the social threats to those values remain the same. Lefebvre would be the first to accept that everyday life has a history (that is why he wrote three volumes each separated by roughly twenty years). At the same time as technology has reconfigured social relationships, it has not eliminated the needs that those relationships serve, and one of the essential tasks of the critique of everyday life is to uncover those core social needs and explain how capitalism alienates us from them. The struggle for socialism in every era is, beneath whatever political forms it takes, a struggle against alienation, not only from the creativity of labour, but from the wider set of social needs that define us.

Lefebvre's aim in the first volume was to break the idea of socialism from the stultifying orthodoxy of Stalinism. He was an early proponent of the humanist interpretation of Marxism made possible by the discovery of Marx's early philosophical works. This re-interpretation of socialism as a struggle for a society that institutionalises social values (or reciprocity, mutuality, and creativity) is not a mere historical curiosity. While contemporary socialists do not confront the mechanical conception of socialism as essentially the 'unfettering' of the productive forces from capitalist relations of production, we do still live in a world dominated by the fetishism of productivity and technology. That fetishism

leads people to confuse wealth with money and power with machinery and makes socialism appear as a nineteenth century anachronism. If it is to be a project of the future and not a relic of the past, it needs to be re-thought as Lefebvre tried to rethink it: not simply the negation of capitalism but a re-ordering of society on the basis of values which circulate in everyday life but from which people are alienated by capitalist social forces. "What is socialism, exactly? How does it intervene in everyday life? ... the answer is unclear. The elimination of class antagonisms? The supersession of capitalist property and production? These are only negative definitions. We find the picture of a bourgeois society without a bourgeoisie neither reassuring nor satisfying." [6] If socialism is just a change of social *structure*, and not a change in everyday modes of relating to self, others, and world, it is not the solution to the fundamental problems that capitalism causes, because although those problems have a structural dimension (economic crisis, for example), they are problems of life, and problems of life are problems of meaning, value, and enjoyment, and not just income, jobs, and property accumulation. If socialism does nothing more than increase the purchasing power of workers, it will not solve the crisis of meaninglessness at the heart of capitalist society. [7]

If socialism is to be a *better* society than capitalism, then it must unlock the social values present in but alienated by capitalist institutions and relationships. These social values are not creatures of any particular social form but the basis of the affirmative experience of human togetherness and interaction. The atomistic structure of social life under capitalism makes the existence of these values difficult to discern. Their reality is thus more clearly grasped in earlier and less complex social forms, ones in which the dependence of human life on nature and co-active labour was more evident. His study of the structure of a small French village led him to reflect upon the organizing values of pre-capitalist life. "Rural communities associated nature specifically with human joyfulness ... Thus when the community gathered to carry out this simple action of eating and drinking, the event was attended by a sense of magnificence which intensified the feelings of joy." [8] In all periods, it is joy and fulfillment that people seek, and it is nature and other people that ultimately enable us to be joyful. That is not to say that the struggle against alienation is backward-looking — we learn from history to go forward, not backward. At the same time, the easy joyfulness of earlier forms of social life reveal that we do not need much in the way of material things beyond that which sustains physical and intellectual life. What we need above all are affirmative relationships with nature and other people — feeling secure in life-sustaining necessities, feeling like we belong to a community (or communities), that we have something to contribute, and that we are valued as contributors, friends, lovers. This belonging and feeling valued is what we lack under capitalist conditions of atomisation and alienation.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_getty.jpg)

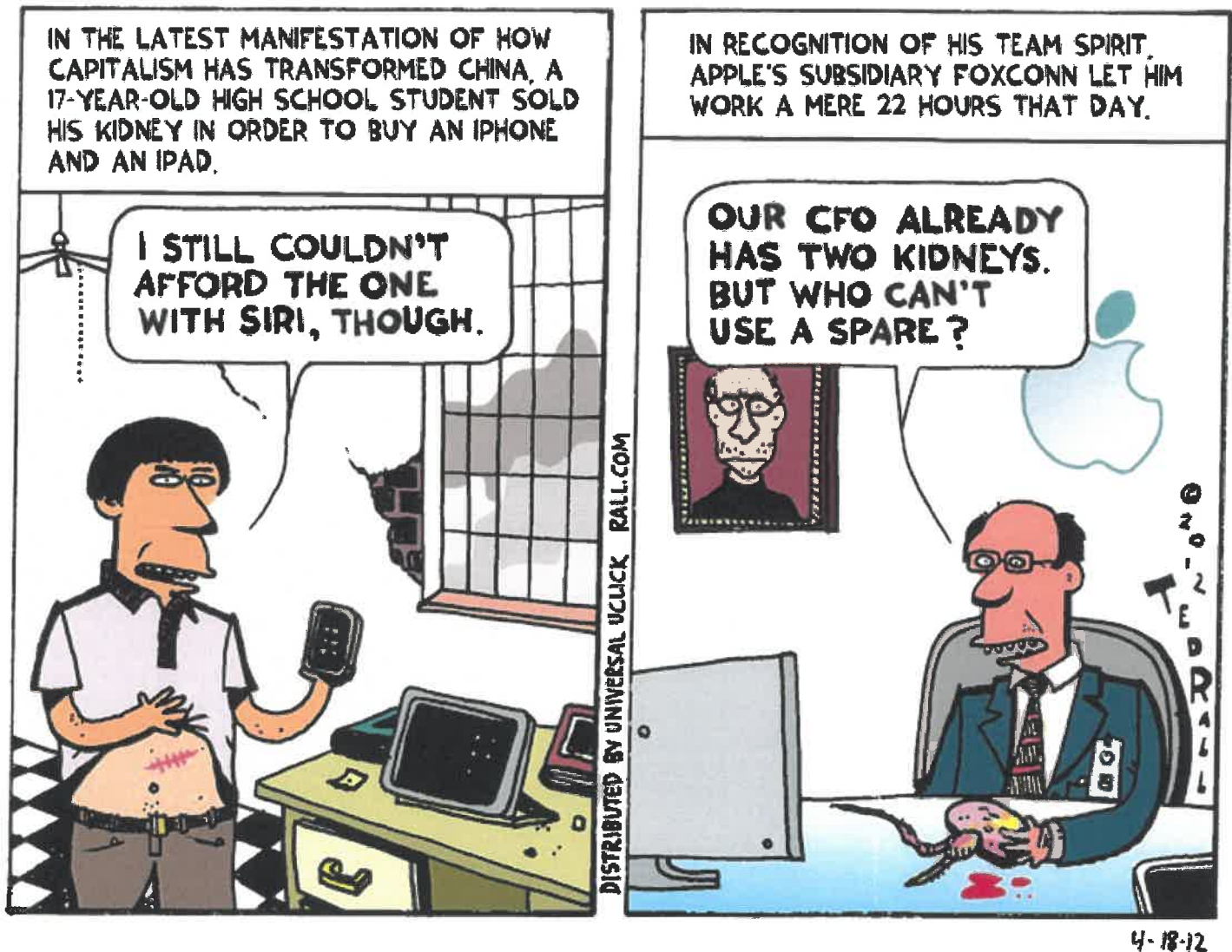
[Credit: Getty.]

Lefebvre argues that for Marx socialism was much more about transforming ourselves than it was about transforming institutions. Or better said: transforming institutions was for the sake of transforming ourselves, putting us in clearer touch with the demands of our depth sociality. “For Marx, to transform the world was also and above all to transform the human world: everyday life. ... When they interpreted the world, philosophers brought plans for its transformation. Were we to fulfill philosophy, were we to change the process of the philosophical becoming of the world into the process of the world becoming philosophy, would that not be to metamorphose everyday life?[9] When Marx spoke of “making the world philosophical,” he meant that it would cease to be an alien objectivity set over against us, the rock against which our dreams are smashed, and instead be recognised as a “world we have created.”[10] But this world we have created is not only the world of industry, it is the everyday world, Lefebvre insists, the world of individual people not as tokens of types (workers, capitalists,) but in the full complexity of their individuality and intensity of their defining goals, passions, and connections. In a future socialist state, Marx argues, our “relationship to the world will be a human one” in which our senses are fulfilled as the windows to the truth and beauty of the world, our expressions of ourselves become manifestations of who we really are, and our relationships to each other based upon our real identity and not the money we command.[11]

But what exactly is “everyday life?” The word is easy enough to use, but to what does it refer? One of the fundamental problems of *The Critique of Everyday Life* is the definition of everyday life. Lefebvre defines it as a “level of social practice within the totality.”[12] Everyday life is located between formal institutions and the functional identities that they assign to us on the one hand, and interior, private life on the other. It is “the region where man appropriates not so much external nature, but his own nature—as a zone of demarcation and friction between the uncontrolled sector and the controlled sector of life—and a region where goods come into confrontation with needs which have become more or less desires.”[13] Needs are organically encoded requirements—necessary, but not always motivating, whereas desires are motivating. In the space between needs and desires alienation can insert itself and

dominate consciousness. We *need* nutritious food, but we might desire unhealthy junk. Everyday life is thus simultaneously a zone of possible fulfilment and frustration, of life-affirmative needs and (possibly) alienated desires.

From the perspective of the *critique* of everyday life, capitalism appears as a dynamic series of strategies to colonise desire. It has proven so resilient to socialist transformation because it has successfully invented and reinvented commodified forms of desire satisfaction. As soon as they are seen through and fail to satisfy, a new product, a new objectified fantasy and corresponding consumer desires are invented.[14] Desire is reduced to consumer demand and consumer demand keeps individuals tied to labour and commodity markets. "Critique," he argues, "mounts an attack on gaps and imbalances (between temporalities, between the "basic" and the "superior," between the historical and the private, the social and the individual). It points out the gaps, the vacuum, the distance yet to be crossed. It criticises the role of society and the roles society imposes ... It attacks alienation in all its forms, in culture, in ideology, beyond the moral sphere. Critique demands the dissolution and revolutionary metamorphosis of the everyday." [15] In sum, critique demands not so much the invention of new desires as the detaching of desire-formation from commodification, the re-establishment at the level of everyday motivations of non-alienated demands for activity, experience, and relationship. No society is revolutionary that does not rest upon non-alienated desires. Simply changing the ruling class without changing the structure of motivation is not revolutionary, because unless desire is disalienated everyday life will continue unchanged, and prove no more free or satisfying than the society it is supposed to replace.



(<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/dia1.jpg>)

In the institutionalised, “controlled” level of society, life-activity is reduced to function: one is a worker, a welder, a bureaucrat, or a boss. Form—i.e., life-activity, follows function—one carries out one’s role. Individuality, depth of personality, uniqueness, is not an element of the controlled sector but everyday life. It is there that we give specific shape to our lives. Although here too, as the critique of alienation makes clear, there is a struggle to impose formulaic structure. Disalienation can therefore be understood as the restoration of spontaneity to life-activity. Moreover,

” In the everyday, when the ‘human being’ confronts within itself the social and the individual through the test of problems and contradictions which have been more or less resolved, it becomes a ‘person.’ What does this mean? In our view, a cloud of possibilities gradually vapourized by choices—by actions—until it is exhausted and comes to an end—until death. It is ... a drama, the drama of participation in society, the drama of ... individualization.[16]

Routinized forms of life turn it into programmed sequences. Spontaneity restores freedom to the drama—who we are becomes a function of the choices that we make, and the choices that we make are not functions of routines but correspond to a self-image freely created according to disalienated desires. In a spontaneous life, no one, not even the agent, can predict where it will go, and it is this unpredictability that makes it satisfying, the person’s own work and reality.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_philly-com-istock.jpg)

[Credit: istock.]

Hence, the key—

and this point is more true now than when he wrote the third volume in 1981—to a non-alienated life is to free it from the technocratic programming to which capitalist consumer society seeks to subordinate it. In a remarkably prescient passage written three decades before the dawn of the era of “Big Data,” Lefebvre saw clearly the opposition between capitalist consumer technology and spontaneous freedom of the human personality:

” *Assimilation, repetition, equivalence (calculable, predictable, and hence open to rational administration)—such are the characteristics daily life tends towards ... Everyday life managed like an enterprise within an enormous, technocratically administered system—such is the first and last word of the technocratic ethic: every moment anticipated, quantified in money terms, and programmed temporally and spatially.*[17]

On the one hand, capitalism is proclaimed as the liberator of the human imagination, on the other hand, we are told that everything about us down to our most intimate desires may be inferred from quantifiable patterns of purchasing activity. In a sense, both are correct: if we mean by freedom “freedom to buy” and our purchases are subject to tracking, patterns can indeed be detected, and predictions (strategic advertising interventions) made. Yet this paradox of consumer freedom only reinforces the truth of the criticism that everyday life in capitalism alienates the human personality, substituting for the spontaneity of experience and activity programmed simulacra which might amuse in the moment, but fail to satisfy over the long term of life.



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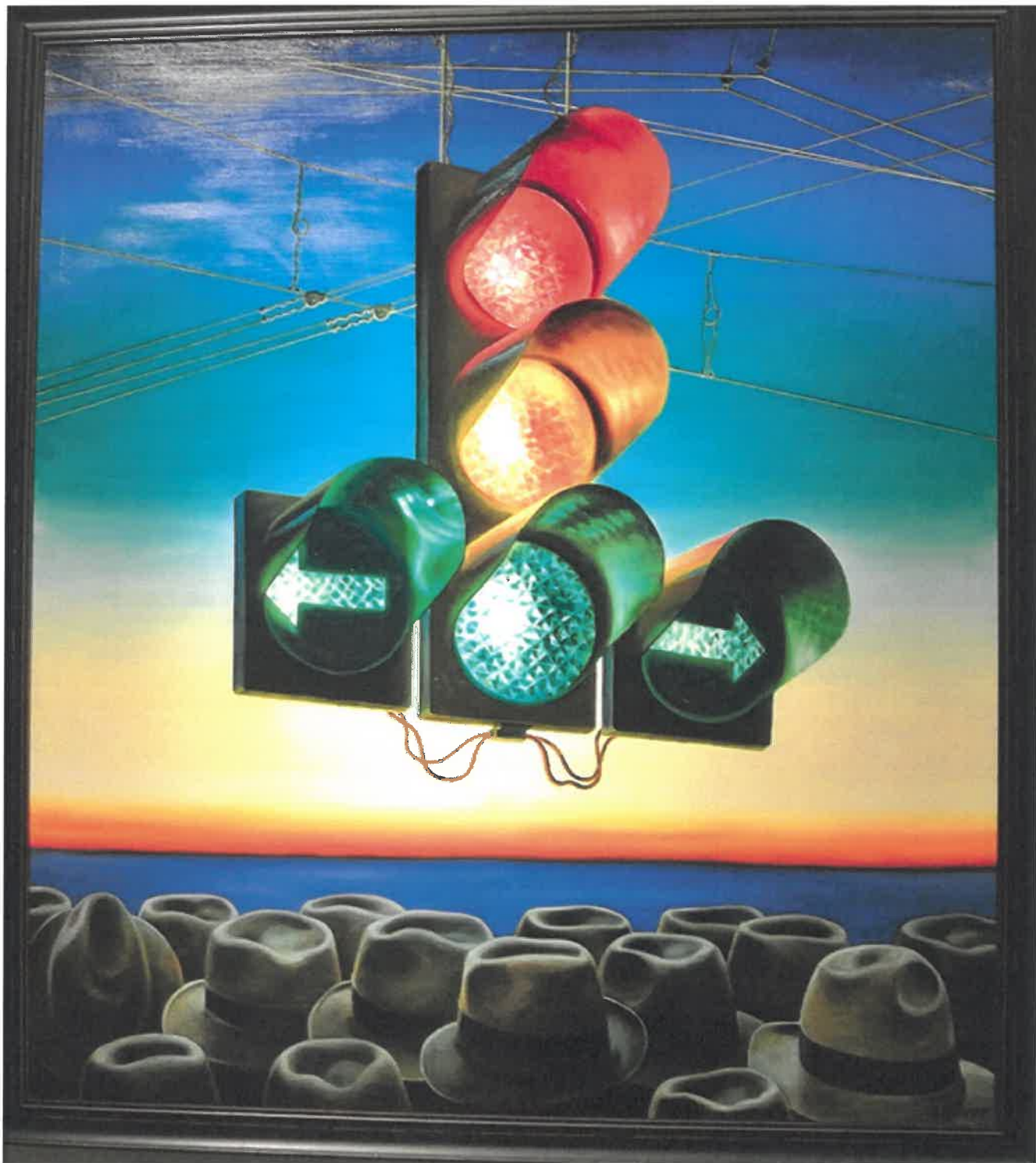
[Credit: leninisstillaround.com.]

The dissatisfactions of everyday

life under capitalism fuel on-going discontent. For many, of course, the discontent is born of real deprivation, i.e., genuine lack of the fundamental life-requirements that all people depend upon. Yet even where there is abundant wealth and basic needs are satisfied, there is a deeper malaise: a universal boredom and directionlessness that only a radical transformation of everyday life could cure. But what does it mean to “radically transform everyday life?” Or, better said, what is the value basis upon which such a radical transformation would build from? Would this radical transformation be the creation of radically new types of people with radically new values, or would it involve the freeing of universal values from their alienated capitalist form and enable their realization and expression in new ways?

The Leninist tradition maintained that the formation of the working class under capitalism so distorted their values that revolution depended upon the expert reconstruction of their goals and politics. Hence, the role of the revolutionary party was not only to organise the struggle, but to recode the desires and

self-understanding of workers. That project has failed: "So the fate of philosophies of pure knowledge as not spared Marxism: Revolution through positive knowledge, brought to the working class *from without*, (Lenin)- that revolution has miscarried." [18] So, if not from without, the revolutionary impulse must come from within. If the revolution comes from within, from an already established basis in sentiment and desire, how can it be revolutionary (as opposed to nostalgic)? The answer is that the sentiments and desires from which a revolution of everyday life could be accomplished are those which form the deep soil of our sociality and which are the targets of capitalist alienation and atomisation. "Physical energy and biological life are already defined solely by possibilities and potentialities. ... human action reacts back upon the *physis* it issues from, ...in order to unfurl it in a second, infinitely rich and complex, nature—products and works ... Social practice unfolds the life of the living being." [19] The satisfaction of these depth needs to creatively unfold our life-capacities would not be an exercise in recovery of lost forms of wholeness but release from alienation in a society that has gained control over the means of all-round life-requirement satisfaction. At the same time, the revolution does not invent new demands *ex nihilo* but rather satisfies the permanent and universal demands of social individuals for more comprehensive and profound forms of experience and relationship. Let us now examine more specifically what these permanent and universal demands are, and the contradictory forms they take under capitalist conditions.



https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_aleksandr-pertov-semaforo.jpg

[Credit: Aleksandr Pertov Semaforo.]

Depth

Sociality

In his study of the origins of capitalism, Karl Polanyi focussed on the ways in which a developing capitalism had to undermine traditional forms of social support for individual life-maintenance. The process began with the enclosure movement, through which the peasantry lost access to the common lands and control over its own subsistence plots, and was completed in the Industrial Revolution. We are told,

” *The Tudors and the early Stuarts saved England from the fate of Spain by regulating the course of change so that it became bearable and its effects could be canalized into less destructive avenues. But nothing could save the common people of England from the impact of the Industrial Revolution. A blind faith in spontaneous progress had taken hold ... and with the blind faith of sectarians the most enlightened pressed forward for boundless and unregulated change in society. The effects on the lives of the people was awful beyond description. Indeed, human society would have been annihilated but for the protective countermoves which blunted the action of this self-destructive mechanism.[20]*

In a mechanical system, all connections between its elements are external and its motions ungoverned by any overarching goal. As Polanyi makes clear, human society is not possible on this basis, because its elements are not fungible parts connected only by impulsive forces, but interdependent living individuals who *feel* the needs they must satisfy as goals, as the desire to maintain their own lives, form their own goals for living, and respond caringly to the unmet needs of others. These internal evaluations of the quality of existence and the capacity to care about other life form the underlying emotional soil of human sociality that a mechanistic system bent only on its own perpetuation must set itself against as a barrier to its consolidation. As such, they are also the most profound reasons for the dissatisfactions of everyday life under capitalism and thus also the real foundation of socialism as a need-satisfying form of life-activity and mode of human relationship.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_shutterstock.jpg)

[Credit: Shutterstock.]

The most universal expression of the inner sociality of human beings is our capacity to recognise unmet needs in other people, *regardless of whether or not they share any more particular identity with us or not*—the life-ground of human sociality referred to above. When French explorers first established their colonial outposts in what is today Quebec, they began to die of scurvy. The indigenous Iroquois, despite not speaking the language of the French, understood that they were suffering from scurvy, an effect of the lack of Vitamin C, and taught them how to cure it by making tea from white cedar trees. Sadly, their

generosity was repaid, eventually, by conquest, but the point to take away from the example is that the capacity to recognise suffering is not dependent upon shared cultural horizons but only on paying attention to the condition of the other regarded as a human being: i.e., one whose life depends upon satisfying the same fundamental needs as oneself. Where no threat is perceived, there are no bounds to generosity and sharing.

This capacity is beautifully expressed in the Gospel of St. Matthew, where loving your neighbour is explained as recognizing and responding to his or her unmet needs: "For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you entertained me, I was unclothed and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you visited me." [21] Physical need satisfaction, dignified appearance before others, and friendly social contact: these are the ordinary, everyday bases of human life and a good life. It requires no expert scientific training to recognise and respond to these unmet needs in others and there is no local boundary to the circle of recognition and response. Time and again in conditions of great calamity some group of human beings opens their doors and shares their resources with other suffering human beings. When they do so, it is because they see in the face of the other human being the suffering to which each of us is liable. Recognition of the face as human, as Emmanuel Levinas argued, is the basis of the universality of hospitality and moral response to catastrophe. As Derrida explains by way of commentary, Levinas thought that the primary duty of human beings "is to welcome the other in his alterity, without waiting, and thus not to pause to recognise his real predicates," a welcoming which is not, he points out without risk. [22] This capacity to recognise unmet needs and to welcome the one who requires their satisfaction also underlies the forms of everyday sociality of traditional societies, in which people cooperate and share the product of their labour, practices which live on even in capitalism in institutionalised (public provision of goods like health care and education) and non-institutionalised (sharing amongst friends) ways.

To argue that this capacity to recognise and respond to harm in others is universal is not to say that it is always expressed without regard to cultural particularities (that the other is always welcomed in his alterity). Its very universality makes it vulnerable to exploitation by divisive political powers in conditions of crisis or scarcity. The on-going refugee crisis in Europe is a case in point. On the one hand, the overwhelming response of Europeans has been hospitable and generous. As Aaron Wendland has argued, drawing on Levinas to explain the moral requirement to welcome the refugees, "Levinas's general account of vulnerability shows us how hospitality in the face of another's need constitutes individual human beings and bespeaks a humanity that precedes and is more fundamental than the establishment of all national boundaries." [23] At the same time as Europeans *were* responding to the face of suffering and fulfilling their duty of welcome and care, a smaller subset of xenophobic voices could be heard, voices that grew louder after the Paris attacks. From the xenophobic perspective humanity is differentially apportioned: we still have duties to respond to the unmet needs of others, but the others to whom we owe that response are restricted by membership in some smaller circle than "humanity." Note that the xenophobe does not necessarily reject the universality of the duty, only that the duty is not indifferent to particularity. From the perspective of fear, Syrians should thus 'help their own' as should the French, the Danes, and the Somalis.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_pieria-co-uk.jpg)

[Credit: pieria.co.uk.]

Hence, in actual social life the universal capacity to recognise and respond to harm in others is contradictory: when it mobilises resources to share with others in dire need, it provokes a xenophobic response. In social life, contradictions cause struggles: day to day politics is the struggle between contradictory expressions of underlying dispositions towards others. Although contradictory, both sides are not of equal value, but the fully universal response is of superior moral force. First of all, it is superior because its realization allows for the satisfaction of the needs of members and non-members of any particular group. Hence, the xenophobic demand to 'care for our own' can be met while also tending to the needs of strangers in crisis (the German economy has hardly collapsed under the strain of refugees, no German is suffering deprivation *because* of the influx of refugees). Second, it is superior because it is implied by the very xenophobia that denies it. Even the xenophobe recognises similarities beneath differences. Considered empirically, Germans are distinct individuals; in order to recognise them as the same, one must attend to what they share (language, etc.). But if we can recognise shared languages, as Norman Geras points out, we can recognise more fundamental bases of human identity too (the need to eat, to be welcomed as a friend, etc.).[24] In sum, the attempt to restrict the capacity to recognise sameness to limited forms of cultural identity is self-contradictory. If we can recognise an identity that unifies co-nationals, we can recognise an identity amongst human beings, since our shared physical life-requirements and general capacities (for speech, etc.), are far less abstract bases of identity than shared nationhood.

Now let us imagine a world that institutionalises this capacity to recognise and respond to unmet needs because they are unmet and not because of the language or religion of the people who are suffering. It would be internationalist, not letting national barriers stand in the way of helping others in need. It would judge the value of goods and services in relation to their life-value as satisfiers of fundamental needs and not as commodities for sale. It would judge as good an economic system that ensured, as far as possible, the elimination of suffering through the satisfaction of need, and would regard as intolerable suffering amidst abundance of resources. Hence such a society would ensure that resources were freed from the control of groups that would exploit them as bases for private power and wealth; an ethic of sharing would overcome an ethic of hoarding, and global society would be judged good when everyone

was furnished with the resources their lives actually require if each is to flourish as a self-determining individual. Arriving at these conclusions requires no expert instruction in Marxism; it does not even require much knowledge of history, but only the everyday ability to feel the pull of fellow feeling in response to suffering others and draw the appropriate inferences about the causes of that suffering. Building such a world seems impossible if it could only come about through from an all or nothing struggle, but if conceived over the long term—as I will suggest all human political-social projects must be—it appears more plausible. If we situate our future goals in reflective understanding of the duties our unalienated relationships with others already embody, we realize that socialism does not need to be created *ex nihilo*, but organically developed from the amplification and extension of already existing practices.

Critics who do not necessarily reject the possibility of recognising needs across cultural distances or the value of hospitality towards strangers might nevertheless rejoin that our capacity to care for others is limited by our own personal goals and ambitions, and that if we are going to base the plausibility of socialism on altruism we will be disappointed, because people cannot completely overcome their self-regarding desires.[25] However, this argument assumes that there must be a contradiction between our desires for our own flourishing and the well-being of others, a contradiction which I will now suggest does not follow from the idea of a self-regarding desire for a good life. What does it mean, to flourish? It means to unfold our life-capacities to the fullest scope our best efforts allow, unconstrained by social impediments like poverty, political oppression, or demonizing, exclusionary ideologies. Yet, this unfolding always occurs in social space—the vaporization of our cloud of possibilities, to use Lefebvre’s metaphor—is not *atomizing*—but depends upon *and contributes to*—other people’s work and possibilities. Just as when we pay attention to the face of the other we see its humanity, so too when we pay attention to our motivations as the motivations of a social individual, we will discover that behind every vocation is the value of *making a contribution* to the good of others’ lives.



<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc2.jpg>

Perhaps this desire to contribute is rooted in a childhood need to please family members, but whatever its psychological origin, it is clear that a component of the idea of a flourishing life is a life that makes a difference, and a life that makes a difference is a life that realizes vital life-capacities in ways that enable others to do more than they would have been able to do. As McMurry argues, "at the highest level of abstraction, *the vocation of each individual is to do what s/he can that is of life-value to others and of life-interest to self. For none to shirk the duty of giving back in to what enables the humanity of each is the obligation in return for these rights—the human ordering of social justice.* These are the true bases of self-respect and freedom." [26] Giving back might *sound like* an imposition on one's individual goals, but it is not felt to be such when it stems from the motivation to be a respectable member of the community, i.e., a member who recognises that his or her flourishing has depended upon the past contributions of others to the life-capital one's own life has appropriated. Where we recognise the obligation as constitutive of our public identity, we are embarrassed *not* to fulfill it.

Take the example of teaching. Every teacher has been previously taught. One's understanding of one's formation as a teacher involves recognition of the goodness of the efforts of one's own teachers. As their knowledge was shared with us the then student, so the student become teacher wants to share in turn what they have learned, contributing, *as an individual* to the virtuous circle of the growth of cognitive capacity, understanding, and documented insights in all disciplines available for universal appropriation by any and all. To share that which one has learned with others is not regarded as a *loss of that which is one's own property*, a burden that must be forced upon the teacher, but the defining practice

of teaching itself: that which one must do *to be* a teacher and then be recognised as a good teacher by one's students. One's personal success as a teacher, individual flourishing in that dimension of one's life, is inescapably bound up with the good of one's students, with the extent to which they grow in understanding through their work with you the teacher.

As with recognition of others' need and hospitality, the organic connection between one's own flourishing through one's vocation can become alienated in conditions of competition for scarce positions. Vocations can be perverted into careers; the good of self-realization distorted into the desire for acclaim, fame, personal renown, or a high income. These alienated forms of motivation do not disprove the sociality of individual goals—fame requires that others' recognise us, and money is only valuable as a claim on social resources which would do no good on a desert island. What these alienated forms of motivation do is cause us to misrecognise others as mere means of our own ego-centric demand for recognition, rather than as the ends of our self-realizing activity. Again, recognising others as ends requires no specialist training: if others have treated us as ends, we have no problem treating them as ends in turn. This organic reciprocity can be alienated, but as with hospitality, the alienated form proves the existence of the underlying social value.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_en-1globaltranslators-compng.png)

[Credit: en.1globaltranslators.com.]

Now let us ask what a world that institutionalizes reciprocity of recognition and free pursuit of life-valuable vocations would look like. It would ensure access not only to the basic means of life-support,

but also the institutions that satisfy our socio-cultural life-requirements: education, arts and culture, the political institutions which regulate the use and distribution of resources. It would be a society in which the rhetoric of equality of opportunity was matched with the reality of investment for the sake of ensuring there were actual positions open to people's talents, and that these positions served demonstrably life-valuable purposes. Finally, it would be a society in which recognition and respect were not rooted in the money-value one commanded. Where money-value rules, the subaltern are taught, subtly and not-so-subtly, that the wealthy deserve deference. Class division cultivates attitudes of subservience. In a society based upon the reciprocity of recognition and free pursuit of life-valuable vocation, respect would only be accorded on the basis of real contribution to others' lives and the common weal—not great contribution, as the vain demand, but any contribution commensurate with talents that improved the lives of others and made one's own life meaningful in consequence.

Our everyday dispositions towards the good of other people with whom we share social space and time are matched by our everyday dispositions towards major social institutions. In an age of political cynicism it might sound counter-intuitive (to put the criticism in its mildest form) to suggest that our untutored expectations about major social institutions focus on their necessity to the good of our own individual lives, but if people did not have this expectation, there would be no explanation of their cynicism. Take the institutions of the highest public importance: the institutions of democratic self-governance. Everywhere across the liberal-democratic world their actual performance is such a disappointment that politicians everywhere are regarded with disdain and the rituals of liberal-democracy (election campaigns, voting) provoke horror at the stupidity (and cupidity) on display. Political apathy is the practical result. These alienated attitudes do not prove that democratic institutions are not essential to a good society; on the contrary, the belief that democratic institutions are essential is what provokes revulsion at the actual practice. Historically, subjugated people have demanded a say in the decisions that determine their lives: from ancient slave revolts through peasant revolts in the Middle Ages to struggles for universal suffrage to Third World Revolutions, the people that do the majority of the work, given: a) overt domination by an identifiable domestic and foreign power, and b) an opportunity to organize, have demanded some sort of formally institutionalized and effective say over the use and distribution of social wealth and a meaningful voice in the governance of public affairs.

Under conditions where this animating power of democratic life has been destroyed, leaving only the shells of democratic institutions, people will retreat to private life and private pleasures and proclaim a pox on all party houses. What Habermas once called "civil privatism" (the refusal of citizen's to participate in democratic life save to demand that services be efficiently rendered) is itself a political act. It is the alienated expression, under conditions of repeated failure of governments to engage and respond to collective initiatives, of the core democratic demand that government institutions organize social life so as to ensure that all subordinated institutions satisfy the life-requirements they have been created to satisfy: hospitals to heal, schools to teach, business to produce needed goods and services through forms of labour that allow us to express our life-capacities in meaningful and socially valuable ways.[27] The evidence that civil privatism is the alienated expression of the everyday belief that political institutions should be substantively democratic is the fact that new movements can shake people from their apathy with shocking rapidity. The Arab Spring was not predicted by any commentator from any political perspective; Occupy emerged in its wake and spread faster than anyone expected; Syriza was elected only a couple of years after it was founded; Chavez's election in Venezuela catalysed the spread of left-wing governments across Latin America, and Bernie Sanders continues to garner mass support (especially amongst the young) even though he continues to utter the most demonized term in the history of American politics: socialism.[28] It is true that each of these mass movements has proven ephemeral, but beneath the surface show there is a deeper continuity of demand for genuine democratic governance.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_steve-cutts.jpg)

[Credit: Steve Cutts.]

At

this point let me return to the beginning of this analysis, to the relationship between people of different cultures and nations, to examine the final everyday disposition relevant to the socialist project, peaceful relations between societies. It might seem absurd to argue that there is an everyday disposition towards peace, given the ubiquity of war across human history. Yet when we inquire into the origins of any war we soon recognise that it is never spontaneous, but must be organized—resources gathered, armies assembled, reasons given. Here I am not concerned with the nature of good and bad reasons for war or whether some wars are just, and what the criteria are. My point, rather, is that there are no major conflicts that arise spontaneously from the result of ordinary commerce and interaction between peoples. Armed conflict arises when one side decides it has something to gain or something to protect that is worth the use of organized violence. What everyday pleasures or joys would motivate anyone to argue in the public forum that society's resources and wealth need to be mobilised to completely destroy an enemy?

Of course, everyday dispositions can be mobilised to support war efforts, even when there is absolutely nothing at stake for the majority of the population (the support of the American population for the First and Second Gulf Wars is a case in point). This example is also proof that what goes wrong in cases where a population is moved to cheer the defeat of an "enemy" even when nothing is at stake for them is the alienation of the everyday disposition towards peace. In both cases, support for the war had to be built by convincing the American populations that Saddam Hussein was a threat, not only to their lives, but the lives of Iraqis (and Kuwaiti's, in the First Gulf War), and that human fellow feeling *required* intervention. In other words, support is built on the basis of an alienated form of the underlying disposition towards peace: supporters believe that war is not with the Iraqi people, to whom a duty to assist is owed, but with their murderous oppressor who is blamed for the conflict.

One might well rejoin: this analysis hardly justifies what has been done to the Iraqi people over the last twenty years, or excuses the unthinking herd-behaviour of Americans (or other people similarly

sleepwalked into war). I agree. Its point, however, is not to justify or to excuse, but to argue that the fact of war does not prove that it is a universal political necessity, the only means of resolving entrenched conflicts, or that it stems from “natural” antipathies between people. On their borders, India and Pakistan remain in a state of armed tensions. In Little India in Toronto, Pakistani and Indian restaurants sit side by side and their owners get along without any problem. In the West End of Toronto, Eritrian and Ethiopian restaurants similarly sit side by side, and no one would know from observing the expats who frequent them that the two nations fought a bloody war. The point is: left to interact on an everyday level, people tend to get along, be respectfully curious of others rather than fearful, and learn to communicate and enjoy one another’s company. To be sure, these fellow feelings can (as in the case of hospitality) be constricted to the in-group and used as emotional energy to fuel the demonization and destruction of an out-group. Yet, the fact that the latter use requires political work, propaganda, and incitement supports my main point: there is a capacity to recognise universal humanity across and beneath differences and that this recognition fosters peaceful relationships between people, no matter how “different” they seem. The internationalism of the workers’ movement, the value of solidarity, and the principle that “an injury to one is an injury to all,” core, indispensable values of socialism, are all rooted in this capacity.



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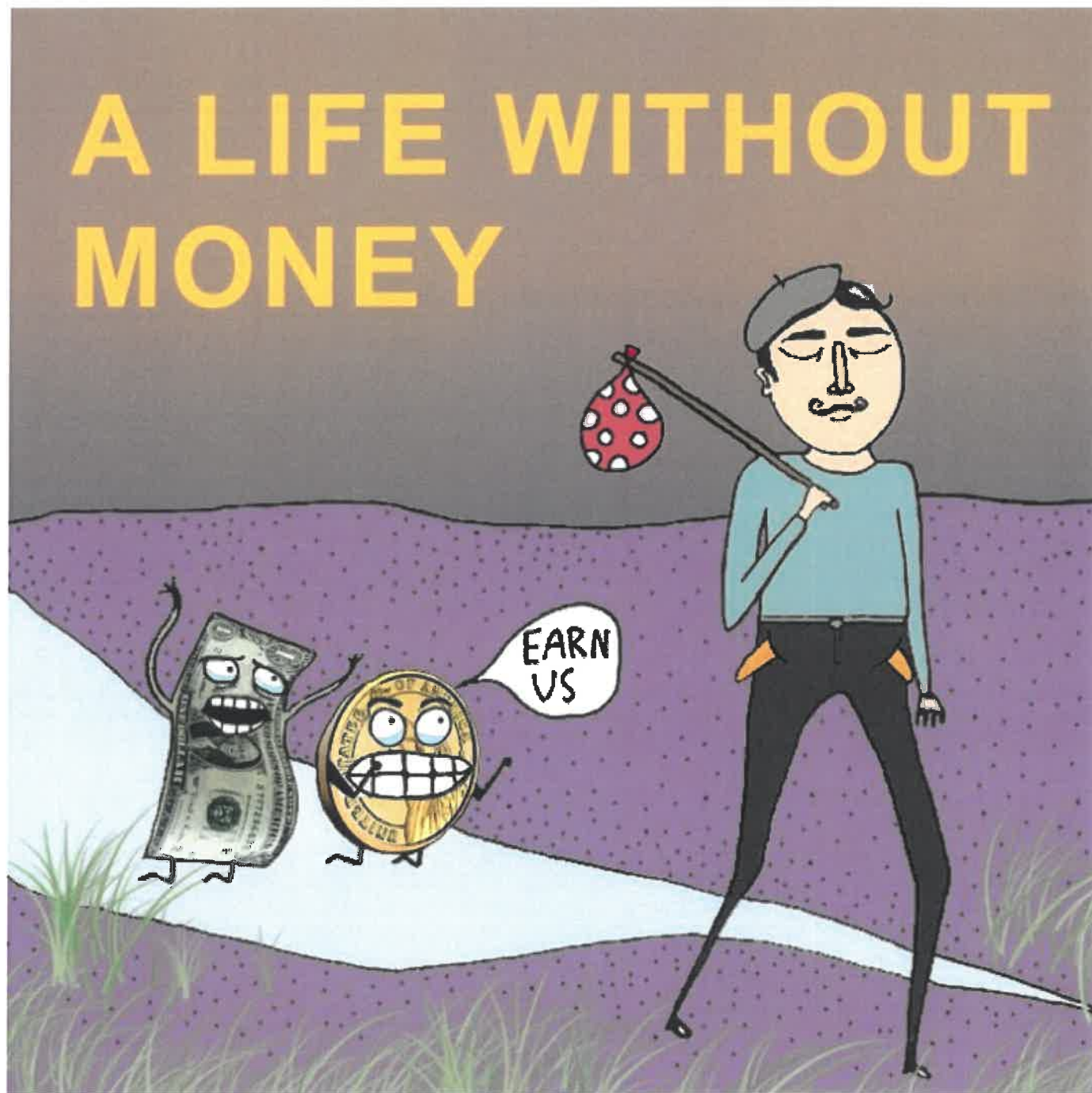
[Credit: Maguire.]

What would a society look

like that coherently institutionalised these everyday social values? It would be democratic, ensuring that all matters of shared concern were decided by those effected by the decision. It would respond to the harm of unmet needs by ensuring that resources were mobilised to ensure the satisfaction of natural and

socio-cultural life-requirements. It would therefore be incompatible with the liberal-capitalist understanding of the economy as a “private” sphere protected by property rights. It would therefore be incompatible with the subordination of the life-value of resources to their money-value, with private control over universally required goods, and the exploitative use of any group as a mere means to the growth of the private wealth of the ruling group. It would furthermore prioritise human flourishing over money-capital accumulation, on the understanding that human happiness requires meaning, and meaning derives from being recognised as a valuable contributing member to the human project. Finally, it would be a global society in which different cultures learned from one another, resolved their differences through negotiation and dialogue, and cooperated in the stewardship of the earth for the sake of the maintenance of the conditions of life (human and non-human) for as long as the physical conditions of the solar system permit. Institutionalizing these everyday dispositions would indeed be revolutionary, and if the resulting society were not socialist, what would it be?

But how to achieve the revolution? This has been the practical problem bedeviling the socialist movement since Babeuf’s Conspiracy of Equals in 1794. But perhaps it is the wrong question to ask. In the final section I want to suggest that the struggle for socialism is better understood as an always on-going building up and securing of life-capital than as the culmination of an acute episode of mass struggle. Mass struggle is important, but its periodic absence or particular failure does not mean that the struggle for socialism in the sense I have been defined it has been arrested, undermined, or defeated.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_sensanostra-com.jpg)

[Credit: sensanostra.com.]

The

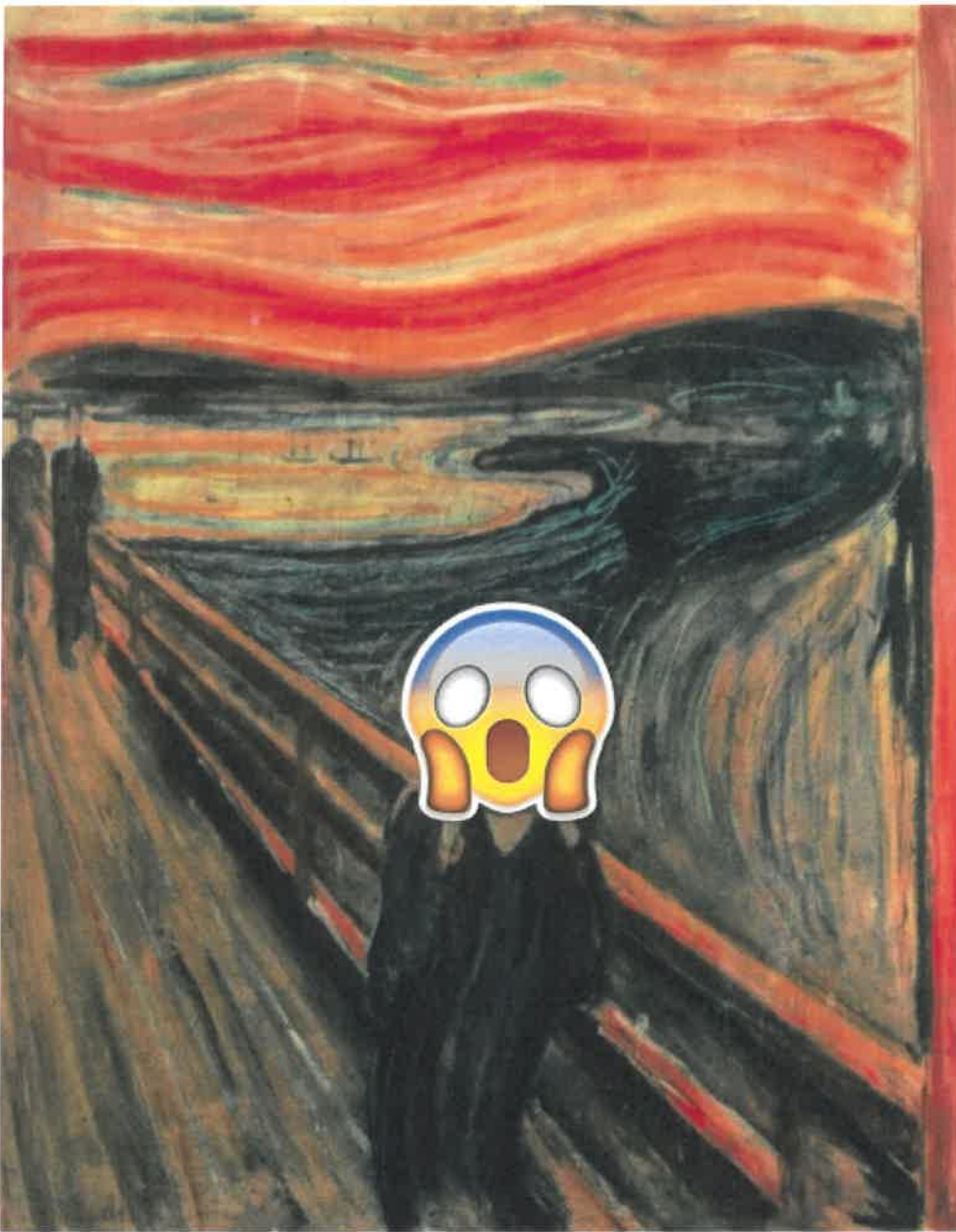
Continuum of Life-Value Development

Defining political success in the struggle for socialism depends on the time frame we choose. It has become axiomatic on the left that the period from 1973 to the present has been a period of successful capitalist retrenchment. "Neo-liberal" policies have broken workers' political and economic organizations, have reduced the tax burden on the wealthy and corporations, a shift that has led to a spectacular rise in inequality exacerbated by the destruction or weakening of social safety nets, murderous attacks on the life-conditions of people of the Global South in the form of "structural adjustment programs," renewed militarism, and a generalized hardening of attitudes towards the needy victims of this reaction. Moreover, the experiments in building systematic alternatives: the Bolivarian

revolution in Venezuela, the Arab Spring, Occupy, and Syriza, have all failed or been neutered. Thus, if we take the period 1973 to the present as our framework of analysis, it seems as though the prospects for the institutionalization of socialist values are dimmer than ever. What happens if we widen the time frame?

If we choose the period from 1789 to 2016 things look remarkably different. In those two hundred years and twenty five years slavery was abolished, women were enfranchised, unions legalised, the recognition of the moral equality of all people recognised, trade unions legalised, socialist movements created, sexual minorities freed themselves from the closet, legislation was passed to make social spaces accessible to the disabled, the environmental movement was born, public education and public health care systems created and funded, average life-spans doubled, discrimination based on sex or race outlawed, environmental health recognized as a material and moral necessity, the moral value of non-human life recognised, the threat capitalism poses to the future of life on the planet acknowledged, and what is most important, all of these gains have been institutionalized somewhere and to some extent, and not a single one of those victories has been overturned in law or completely destroyed. All of these victories represent the growth of life-capital in its political dimension: the principles that determine the regulation of public life. Notwithstanding the reality of neo-liberal damage over the last forty years, it remains the case that on every plane of being alive there is more actual space and time for the development of life-valuable capacities than there was two hundred years ago because oppressive moral hierarchies have been broken down, more life-resources produced, and more robust public institutions at least partially responsive to the needs of workers and subaltern groups exist than in the pre-1789 world.

Well, does that not prove the opposite of what I contend: that liberal-capitalism is essentially an egalitarian and democratic society to which there is no alternative? I do not think that the evidence suggests this conclusion at all. It does show that liberal-democratic capitalism is more plastic than earlier social forms, that is, more receptive to change in response to struggles. But it is the struggles, elaborated over the *longue durée* of centuries, that have partially (and inadequately, to be sure) institutionalized the depth sociality of human beings threatened, as Polanyi made clear, by the destructive utopia of a *self-regulating market mechanism*. Hence, contrary to critics who charge the values that underlie socialism with being utopian, the struggle is not between a capitalism that works and a socialism that is mere theory, but a theory (market self-regulation) which, to the extent that it is institutionalized, destroys the bonds of human sociality, and a practice, which has developed as the human project has developed, of sharing, mutuality, care and concern for others, and life-protection out of which grow what happiness there is in mortal, individual life.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc_mediadesireappropriatons.jpg)

[Credit: mediadesireappropriatons.]

The socialist movement does

itself no favours when it treats the abstract opposition between capitalism and socialism *as ideas* as a temporal difference, i.e., capitalism is now, and socialism is *to be* in the future once class struggle has overthrown the bourgeoisie and installed a new economy based on workers' control. This way of thinking about the practical reality of socialism makes everything dependent upon the mass mobilisation of workers and their allies. However, as the Arab Spring has demonstrated, the emergence of a vigorous mass movement is no guarantee of success. Some might argue that the problem with the Arab Spring was that its secular wing lacked leadership and coherent direction. That criticism might be fair, but the Bolsheviks did not lack for decisive leadership and a clear plan, and yet they too failed to transform capitalism into a life-coherent, democratic socialist society that enriched the everyday lives of people in the Soviet Union. My point is not to dismiss the importance of mass revolutionary movements, but rather to argue that the development of socialism has not been and cannot be dependent completely upon them: even in periods of relative political quiet the effort to recapture life-resources from their

subordination to market forces, to free even tiny fragments of life-activity from alienation, and to extend the democratic principle into new institutions must go on, *by means that critically-minded people invent in the immediate contexts in which they find themselves.*

This moment may not be propitious for an all-or-nothing revolutionary struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie. But there has not been a moment in the last century (with the possible exception of the late nineteen sixties), in which capitalism and capitalists have been so ideologically weak. There is global outrage against the inhuman inequalities between and within countries, there is consensus that this inequality is incompatible with democracy, there is a global consensus that capitalism has caused climate change and cannot continue as usual, and there is universal concern with the future of young people who confront a world that does not prioritise the production of social time and space for them to share their talents. One could say: now is the time to build the revolution. But despite all of these acknowledged failures of capitalism, there is no groundswell of demands for its *revolutionary* overthrow. Socialists can ignore this evidence and try to revive Leninist practice, or they can view the present moment in the *longue durée* and ask: what particular but transformational changes could we achieve now that: a) help reverse the losses of the past forty years, and b) by recapturing wealth from the money-value system and convert it to life-capital of various sorts. Bank regulation? The reinvigoration of progressive taxation? A universal guaranteed income? Public investment in cooperative production as a solution to the refusal of corporations to invest in secure and meaningful employment? Carbon taxes on producers? Public investment in clean energy? Protecting the internet as a means of free dissemination of the intellectual and creative wealth of human being? Every one of these ideas is realizable *within* the existing institutional framework created by past struggles, but which would also, if realized, transform that framework in a socialist direction. There is no need for the all or nothing break which has thus far proven impossible to successfully accomplish if concrete democratising gains are being made.[29]



https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/soc2_aaron-douglas.jpg

[Credit: Aaron Douglas.]

In

this way socialism ceases to appear to people in their everyday lives as utopian theory and instead as those real aspects of their life that they enjoy, because they enable the expression of their life-capacities, mutualistic relationship, democratic self-determination, and as constitutive of a meaningful life.[30] To be sure, these aspects of life will be in tension with the power of the appropriating class and some socialists will maintain that any accommodation with this power is conservative, a shirking of the duty of socialist politics. But what is the duty of socialist politics: to talk about a future event that no one has proven able to organize (The Revolution)? Or to act intelligently in the contexts in which socialists find themselves to recapture money-capital and turn it into life-capital, not through one off minor reforms, but through immediate victories that have historically transformational effects *over the long term*?

My argument is not only against the persistence of illusions on the Left that Leninist models of revolutionary political organization can be salvaged despite all the evidence that tells against them. It is also an overture to all those thousands of activists in particular political campaigns to shed their one-sidedness and particularism and see themselves not as part of some vague movement for an ill-defined socially just capitalism but as organic elements in the struggle for an alternative society: socialism. The defining feature of this socialism captures that which is definitive of struggles for social justice as just: freeing people's life horizons from domination by economic and political power steered only by the mechanical demand to reproduce itself and grow without regard to the damage it does, while at the same time making clear that the ultimate goal of all particular struggles must be to contribute to the long term fundamental transformation of capitalist society.

That transformation, as Lefebvre made clear, cannot just be a structural transformation, but must embrace everyday life. That means it must include as essential elements changed relationships between sexes and genders, between races and ethnicities, between neighbours and citizens; it must involve changed attitudes towards the environment and other living creatures, i.e., the express concerns of the multiple social movements that have dominated the radical agenda since the nineteen sixties. The conditions for the success of any of these movements involves, in addition to whatever particular cultural and psychological barriers they must confront, freeing life-resources that all oppressed people require to live fully, freely, meaningfully, in harmony with the natural world and each other. If socialism is the freeing of life-capital from its destructive money-value form, then socialism will remain relevant as the unifying basis of struggle as long as there is money-capital to be reclaimed.



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[Credit: Wendy Helliwell.]

End

notes:

- [1] The reality, of course, is far more complex, but my focus here is not on micro-criticisms of the contradictions and limitations of these experiments, but the principle that purportedly guided the practice.
- [2] For a more precise analysis of the role technological change is having on the formation of working class identity, see Ursula Huws, "What Will We Do?: The Destruction of Occupational Identities in the 'Knowledge-based Economy,'" *Monthly Review*, Vol. 7, No. 8 (January). 2006.
- [3] Bernie Sanders' campaign is an exception, but anywhere in the world where there is a tradition of social democracy, i.e., the whole Global North outside of the United States, Sanders would not be called a socialist but a social democrat. On the other hand, the fact that Sanders is attracting such large numbers of young people to his message of "democratic socialism" is a telling rebuke of the political, economic, and ideological status quo of the United States.
- [4] John McMurtry, *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism: Second Edition*, (London: Pluto Press), 2013, p. 204.
- [5] John McMurtry, "Breaking out of the Invisible Prison," *The Bullet*, February 25th, 2015, <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1085.php> (<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1085.php>) (accessed, October 20th, 2015).
- [6] Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, (London: Verso), 2014, p. 69.
- [7] As I noted, while the mechanistic conception of socialism has largely been relegated to the past, some contemporary conceptions of socialism that focus on the democratization of economic decision making power separate democracy from the transformation of everyday life. If the democratization of the economy means only that workers gain control over the decisions that guide the firm, but not a fundamental change of values that guide decisions, there is no guarantee that the ecological and existential problems that capitalism causes will be solved. As David Schweickart, for example, argues, there is no contradiction between workers' control over production and their collectively deciding to pursue a high-energy, high-consumption lifestyle, even though such a lifestyle is ecologically ruinous and existentially meaningless. If socialism is to solve all the problems that capitalism generates, it must be grounded in more fundamental values than the re-distribution of wealth and purchasing power. See David Schweickart, *After Capitalism, Second Edition*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), 2011, pp. 102-112.
- [8] Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 223.
- [9] *Ibid.*, p.317.
- [10] Robert C. Tucker assigns the name "To Make the World Philosophical," to a selection from Marx's doctoral dissertation. See Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition*, (New York: W.W. Norton), 1978, pp. 9-12. The phrase "contemplate himself in a world he has created" comes from the 1844 *Manuscripts*. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works, Volume Three*, (New York: International Publishers), 1975, p. 276. For more on the relationship between philosophy and revolution in Marx's thought see Jeff Noonan, "Philosophy at the Service of History: Marx and the Need for a Critical Philosophy of History Today," *Socialist Studies*, 5(2), December, 2009, pp. 17-35, and Jeff Noonan, "Radical Philosophy and Social Criticism," *International Critical Thought*, 4(1), March, 2014, pp. 10-21.

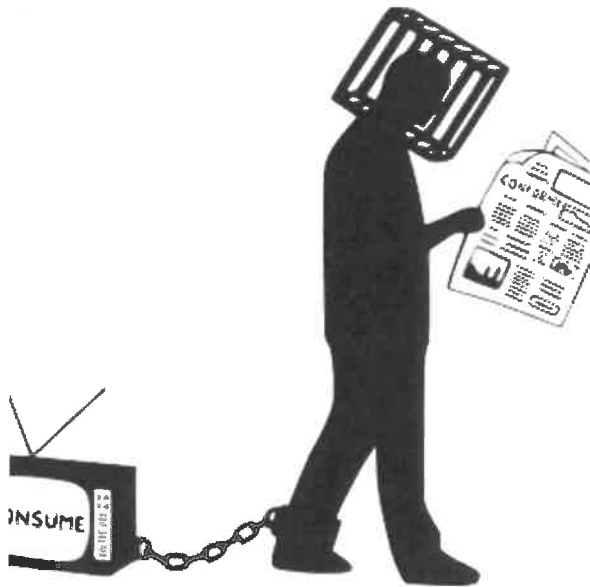
[11] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," p. 326.

[12] Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 325.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 340. The "uncontrolled sector" is the sector of personal feelings while the "controlled sector" is the level of formalized technical-scientific knowledge, p. 631.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 517.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 356-357.



[16] *Ibid.*, p.360.

[17] *Ibid.*, p.731.

[18] *Ibid.*, p.750.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 838.

[20] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1957, p.76.

[21] *The Gospel of Matthew*, 25:35-40.

[22] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 1999. p. 111.

[23] Aaron Wendland, "What Do We Owe Each Other?" *The Stone*, January 18th, 2016, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/18/what-do-we-owe-each-other/#more-158996> (<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/18/what-do-we-owe-each-other/#more-158996>) (accessed, January 19th, 2016).

[24] Norman Geras, *Solidarity in the Conversation of Humankind*, (London: Verso), 1995, pp. 41-43.

[25] Freud famously makes this argument in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, (New York: W.W. Norton), 1961, p. 63-67.

[26], John McMurtry, "Human Rights versus Corporate Rights: Life Value, the Civil Commons and

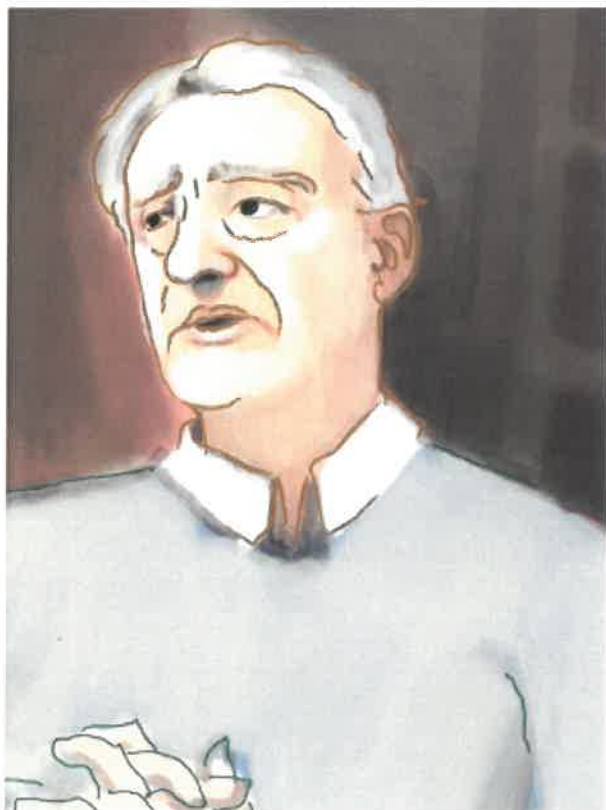
Social Justice,' *Studies in Social Justice*, 5(1), 2011, p. 35.

[27] Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 1996, p. 78.

[28] For a hopeful view of the implications of the Sanders' campaign see Thomas Piketty, "Thomas Piketty on the rise of Bernie Sanders: the US enters a new political era," *The Guardian*, February 16th, 2016. http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2016/feb/16/thomas-piketty-bernie-sanders-us-election-2016?CMP=share_btn_link (http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2016/feb/16/thomas-piketty-bernie-sanders-us-election-2016?CMP=share_btn_link) (accessed, February 16th, 2016).

[29] See also Jeff Noonan, "What Does Revolution Mean Today" <https://philosophersforchange.org/2013/07/23/what-does-revolution-mean-today/> (<https://philosophersforchange.org/2013/07/23/what-does-revolution-mean-today/>) (Accessed, February 17th, 2016).

[30] See also Jeff Noonan, 'Preservative Struggles in the Age of Austerity,' <https://philosophersforchange.org/2014/12/02/preservative-struggles-in-the-age-of-austerity/> (<https://philosophersforchange.org/2014/12/02/preservative-struggles-in-the-age-of-austerity/>) (Accessed, February 17th, 2016).



[Henri Lefebvre. Credit: Pablo Secca.] [Thank you indeed Jeff for this essay.]

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MARCH 8, 2016**MARCH 8, 2016** **SANJAY PERERA****# CAPITALISM, # CAPITALIST LIFE CRISIS,**
CRITIQUE, # EVERY DAY LIFE, # HENRI LEFEBVRE, # JEFF NOONAN, # LIFE CAPITAL, # LIFE
FORMS, # LIFE VALUABLE, # LIFE-COHERENT, # LIFE-VALUE, # MONEY, # NATURAL LIFE-
SUPPORT SYSTEMS, # SOCIALISM, # TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, # TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
MARXISM, # TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SOCIALISM

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Philosophers for Change

Taking notes 58: For the love of thinking: eleven theses



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by

Jeff Noonan

(1) Teaching at the university level is not a practice of communicating or transferring information but awakening in students a desire to think by revealing to them the questionability of things. The desire to think is awakened in students if the teacher is able to reveal the importance of the discipline to exposing to question established “solutions” to fundamental problems of human experience, thought, activity, relationship, and organization. Teaching does not instruct or transmit information, it embodies and exemplifies the commitment to thinking.

(2) True teaching is thus a practice, a performance of cognitive freedom which awakens in students a sense of their own cognitive freedom. Both are rooted in the most remarkable power of the brain: not to simulate, not to sense, not to tabulate, not to infer, but to co-constitute the objective world of which it is an active part. In thinking we do not just passively register the world, we transform it in the act of knowing. To think is thus to cancel the alien objectivity of the world and to become a subject, an active force helping to shape the order of things.

(3) The awakening of the power to think in students is best accomplished in face-to-face contexts. When students and teachers are materially co-present to one another, the challenge-structure of learning is most intense. Sharing the same learning space means that each can hold the others’ immediately accountable for their claims and in turn be held accountable for theirs. The discomfort essential to learning is best produced in a materially shared learning space. Information can be transmitted over the web, but education depends upon “the unease at feeling an earlier world-view challenged and exposed as partial, contradictory, or rooted in false normative assumptions ...to become educated is to internalise this dissatisfaction with the given state of your understanding, to practice on yourself the critical questioning through which cognitive growth occurs, and then to engage others in the same spirit of respectful conflict, in formal or informal settings.” (Noonan and Coral, “Education, Social Interaction, and Material Co-presence: Against Virtual Pedagogical Reality,” *Interchange*, 43, No. 4, pp. 31-43, 2013).



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[Credit: joebower.]

(4) All

successful teaching therefore results in students who *love to think and never stop thinking for the rest of their lives*. This result is very different from mastering a certain body of knowledge or learning to apply certain rules to well-defined situations. To love to think is identical to the need to question the given: the given structure of knowledge in the discipline, its application to the problem domain of human life that the discipline ranges over, the overarching structures of human social life within which the discipline or subject matter has its place, the overall problems of life as such which given forms of social life try to answer. To love to think means to remain alive to the questionability of things. While often associated with education in the humanities, all disciplines are capable of cultivating the love of thinking to the extent that they foreground the questionability of past claims in the discipline and the world over the mechanical mastery of techniques, rules, and methods. Of course, techniques, rules and methods are essential to disciplinary knowledge, but as means to the development of understanding the human problems the discipline explores.

(5) Thus, the person who loves to think is *critically minded*. The critically minded person is not an undisciplined skeptic, but one who can detect contradictions between principle and practice, and between principles and the values to which they purportedly lead as means. Critical thinking is not the ability to solve problems within the established parameters of social, economic, political, aesthetic, and intellectual-scientific life. Change is impossible if all that people can do is apply the given rules. If the problem lies with the established rules (and fundamental problems in any field always concern the established rules), then confining critical thinking to “problem solving” always serves the status quo (i.e., repeats the cause of the problem as the solution).

(6) Every class in which the love of thinking is cultivated must be a class in which problems are posed

and the life of the interaction between teacher and students is collective effort to solve the problem, all the while understanding that fundamental problems must always be taken up anew. Claim, counter-claim, response, and development of the argument to a wider conceptual coherence constitutes the life of learning. Students who love to learn are willing to assume the obligation to always think in public regardless of what the authorities (political or disciplinary) say and thus push the inquiry or argument beyond where those authorities would like it to remain.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/thes_nick-sousanis.jpg)

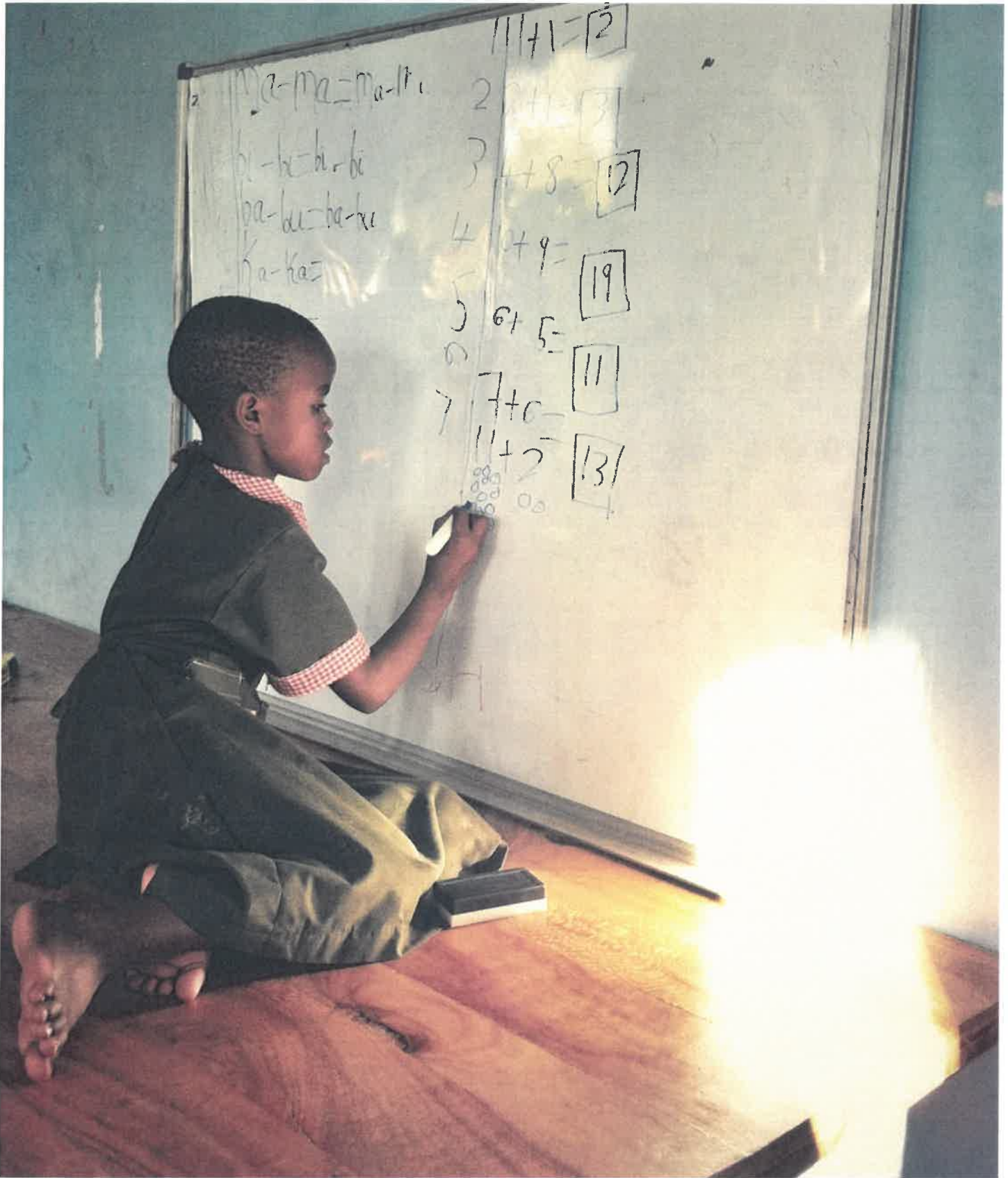
[Credit: Nick Sousanis.]

(7) Of course, learning to love to think is always developed in relation to a specific subject-matter and definite methodologies. Every class or course of study obviously has a subject-matter and outcomes in the generic sense of content and skills that the student must grasp as elements of learning the subject-matter and the techniques of the discipline. Learning to think is not opposed to acquiring specific skills and competencies (or being evaluated on how well one has mastered them), but thinking is not reducible to these skills or competencies either. These are always means to the real end: awakening and cultivating the love of thinking.

(8) The problematic form of learning outcomes are administratively-imposed, government-mandated, quantifiable (assessable) competencies. As the instructions for writing learning outcomes at my university explains, "*The learning outcomes approach to education* means basing program and curriculum design, content, delivery, and assessment on an explicit identification of the integrated knowledge, skills and values needed by both students and society ... It differs from more traditional academic approaches that emphasize coverage by its emphasis on basing curriculum on what students need to know and be able to do as determined by student and societal needs not disciplinary tradition." They are problematic because: a) disciplinary traditions are the heart of *university* education, b) "student and social need reduces to *labour-market demand*, and therefore, c) they are explicitly directed against disciplinary autonomy and academic freedom in favour of a commodified conception of education as *purchase of essential skills*. Learning outcomes are justified as proof of a new concern within the university with the quality of teaching and student learning. In reality, they are part of a conservative drift in higher education towards skill-programming and away from cultivation of cognitive freedom and love of

thinking. Ironically, the passive, consumeristic attitude learning outcomes encourage in students works against both the motivations for learning and the acquisitions of the skills and assimilation of the information that the learning outcomes prioritise.

(9) While they are often sold to faculty as means to improve teaching and better serve the interests of students, what they in fact achieve is a narrowing of the scope and aims of classroom interaction to skilling and information transfer. (See further, Furedi, Frank, 2012, "**The Unhappiness Principle** (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/the-unhappiness-principle/421958.article>)," *Times Literary Supplement*, November 29th; Stefan Collini, "**Who Are the Spongers Now?** (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n02/stefan-collini/who-are-the-spongers-now>)" *London Review of Books*, Vol. 38, No.2, January 21, 2016). While teaching can always be improved, the motor of improvement must always be the desire on the part of the teacher to better cultivate the dispositions of critical thinking in the student, and never to simply comply with economic and administrative demands to adapt to passing fashions presented as *the only way to really serve students' interests*.



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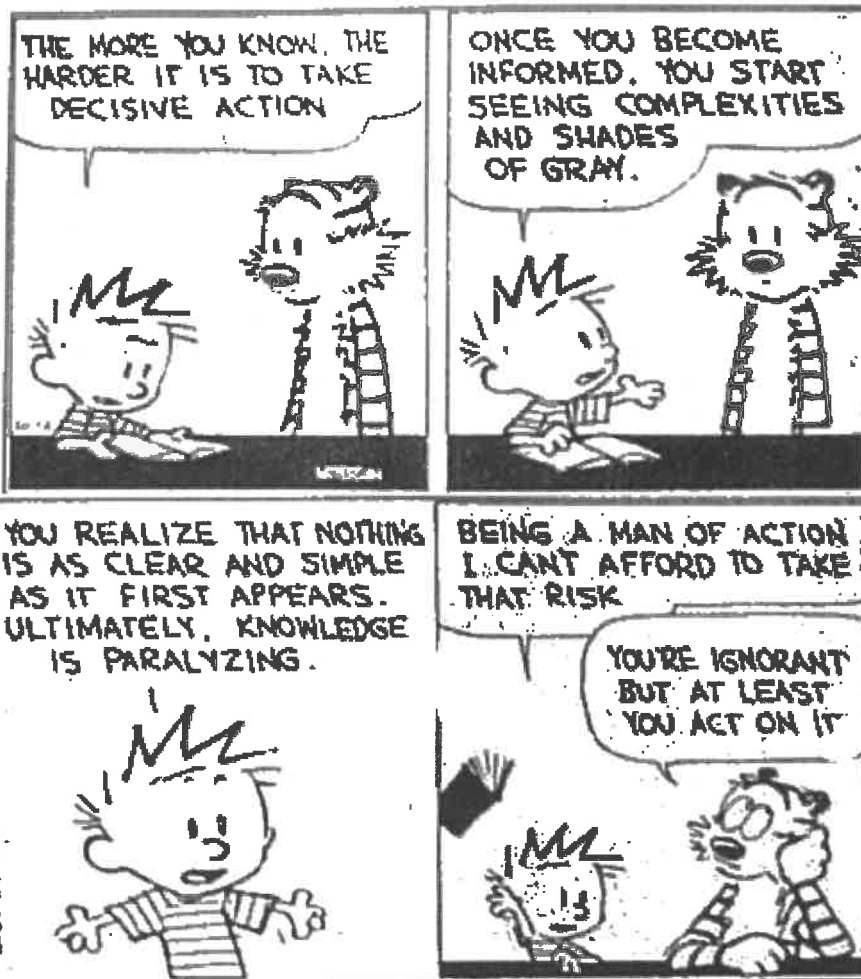
[Credit: watotonatembo.]

(10) Learning outcomes are also instantiations of the emergent obsessions with quantitative measure as the only means of understanding the value of achievements or practices. As metrics, they are either

redundant (doing nothing but state the obvious, i.e., that a class on Greek philosophy will cover Greek philosophy, and a class that involves essay writing will enable students to learn how to write essays), or useless (if what they aim to measure is something like love of thinking, which is an inner disposition not subject to quantitative measure but only qualitative interpretation over time frames much longer than a class or course of study). In their belief that only that which is measurable is real, defenders of learning outcomes show themselves to be another example of a society-wide cognitive derangement that confuses the value of practices and relationships and activities with their measurable aspects (the “externalist fallacy,” John McMurtry, “What Is Good, What is Bad, The Value of All Values Across Time, Places, and Theories,” *Philosophy and World Problems*, Volume 1, EOLSS Publishers, 2011, p. 269). Even if they are not explicitly justified in terms of “customer satisfaction,” it is clear that when thought within the context of society-wide changes to public institutions and attacks on public sector workers (which include professors in Canada), learning outcomes presuppose and reinforce a consumeristic attitude towards education. They present the purpose of pursuing a course of study as the purchase of a defined set of skills and circumscribed body of information which can then be used as a marketing pitch to future employers. Learning outcomes submerge the love of thinking in bureaucratic objectification of the learner as a customer, a passive recipient of closed and pre-packaged material.

(11) Hence, there is no clear pedagogical value to learning outcomes. If there is no pedagogical value how are we to understand the current fad? It is part of the attack on the professional autonomy of professors because it is no barrier to the imposition of market discipline on universities. See, for example: Jonker, Linda, and Hicks, Martin, 2014, *Teaching Loads and Research Outputs of Ontario University Faculty Members: Implications for Productivity and Differentiation* (<http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/FINAL%20Teaching%20Loads%20and%20Research%20Outputs%20ENG.pdf>), Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario; Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s Public Services (2012); “Post-secondary Education (<http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/reformcommission/chapters/ch7.html>),” Deem, Rosemary, Hilyard, Sam, Reed, Mike, 2007, *Knowledge, Higher Education, and the New Managerialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Bruneau, William, 2000, “Shall We Perform or Shall We Be Free?” *The Corporate Campus: Commercialization and the Dangers To Canada’s Colleges and Universities*, James L. Turk, ed., Toronto: Lorimer; Massy, William F, and Zemsky, Robert, 1995, “Using Information Technology to Enhance Academic Productivity (<http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/html/nli0004.html>).” If professors are allowed to define their own terms of work (legitimated by appeal to academic freedom and professional autonomy) they escape the discipline of market forces to which other workers are subjected. This allows them to extract rents in the form of higher wages, and it also constitutes a barrier to “higher productivity” (more graduates produced per unit input of academic labour). Learning outcomes are only one aspect of this broader political-economic assault on academic labour, but the motivation behind them – whatever their institutional supporters might say – cannot be understood outside of this context.

CALVIN AND HOBBS



(<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/stormacad1.gif>)

[Credit: Bill Watterson.]

[Thank you Jeff for this contribution. This

piece is a slightly revised and expanded version of "[Ten theses in support of teaching and against learning outcomes.](http://www.jeffnoonan.org/?p=2793) (<http://www.jeffnoonan.org/?p=2793>)"]

The writer is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Windsor, in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. His most recent book is *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, (McGill-Queen's University Press), 2012. More of his work can be found at his website: <http://www.jeffnoonan.org> (<http://www.jeffnoonan.org>)

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APRIL 5, 2016 APRIL 5, 2016 SANJAY PERERA # ACADEMIA, # CORPORATE UNIVERSITIES, # CORPORATIZED EDUCATION, # CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, # CRITICAL THINKING, # EDUCATION SYSTEM, # HIGHER EDUCATION, # HIGHER LEARNING, # INDEPENDENT

THINKING, # JEFF NOONAN, # LEARNING, # TEACHING, # TESTING

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