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The Business of Life and Death, Vol. 2: Politics, Law, and Society

Collected Philosophical Essays
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Introduction

As far as my generation is concerned, the single greatest geopolitical shake-up witnessed until now has been, without any doubt, the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991. This collapse marked the conclusion of a century-defining confrontation between East and West started with the Western Powers' military involvement in the Russian Civil War, peaked with the invasion of Soviet Union by Nazi Germany and its allies, and continued by way of a prolonged arms race between the United States of America (US) and their former anti-Nazi Soviet ally. Triumphantly, liberals, whether progressive or conservative, celebrated the "end of history" so confidently announced by Francis Fukuyama (b. 1952), according to whom the entire world was now going to become essentially liberal in all chief legal and business aspects,[1] whilst economic gurus such as Milton Friedman (1912–2006) advised the leaders of the world's nations, and especially those that had experienced communism, "to imitate Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan; free markets in short... The fall of the Berlin Wall did more for the progress of freedom than all of the books written by myself or Friedrich Hayek or others."[2]

Today, we stand in a world displaying all the achievements—and all the disruption—that a liberal conception of the human being and of human affairs is capable of in concrete reality. On the one hand, international economic integration has never been so widespread and so deep. Not even the self-proclaimed socialist and isolationist Republic of North Korea is insulated from for-profit transnational financial and commercial transactions, especially with regard to its gigantic, and growing, Chinese neighbour.[3] Similarly, traditionally liberal civil and political rights have extended to the citizens of most countries on our planet. Emblematically, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights are today the new frontier for the recognition of all individuals' rights to self-determination, choice of lifestyle and free pursuit of happiness, analogously to what women campaigned and fought for one hundred years ago, or Europe's and the Americas' common men long before them.

However, what is the meaning of two men or two women marrying today, if they can have no economic security, if they have no trade union that is capable of protecting them, if the provision of healthcare when ill is costlier and poorer in quality than it was twenty years ago, if their old-age pensions are at the mercy of financial vagaries upon which these men and women have no control whatsoever, if their meaningful employment is at risk or non-existent, if the price-tag for the care and education of their children is beyond their ability to pay, or if the environment that they all need to survive is in grave peril while carcinogenic pollutants and stressors abound all around them?

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[1] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press, 1992. As also done in my previous volumes for Northwest Passage Books, I use "liberal" and "liberalism" *à la* European, i.e. not in the progressive American sense, which would better translate in Europe as "democratic socialism" and "social democrat".

[2] Milton Friedman, "Free Markets and the End of History", *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 23(1), 2006, http://www.digitalnpq.org/archive/2006_winter/friedman.html.

[3] Cf. Hanhee Lee, "Foreign Direct Investment in North Korea and the Effect of Special Economic Zones: Learning from Transition Economies", *Journal of Economic Development*, 40(2), 2015, 35–56.

Though saluted by its sycophants as the source of limitless bounty, today's liberalism and the profit-centred criteria that it assumes *qua* only rational path of human behaviour are also, as experienced by our forefathers in the 19th and 20th century, the source of deflationary spirals—the gold standard back then, the Eurozone today—, disastrous market collapses—the panics and crashes of old, today's meltdowns and credit crunches—, prolonged slumps—the Great Depression of the 1930s, today's Great Recession—, enormous inequalities—the Gilded Age or Belle Époque dissected by Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929), the 21st-century patrimonial capitalism dissected by Thomas Piketty (b. 1971)—and severe ecological calamities—the thousands killed by the Great Smog of London, the abandoned ancestral homes of the Alaskan Inuit swallowed by melting permafrost.

All civilisations have their ills. Ours, which is liberal, has got liberal ills. As amply discussed in my third volume for Northwest Passage Books, Canadian value theorist John McMurtry (b. 1939) has diagnosed these ills as tantamount to a cancer—indeed, to "the cancer stage of capitalism", as reads the title of his most famous book. In light of these ills, it can only be sensible to investigate other, alternative conceptions, so as to retrieve different approaches; identify aspects hidden, twisted or neglected by the application of liberal concepts; remember aims, methods and values that are either alien or secondary to liberalism; and seek correctives, constrictions and compromises that liberalism, by its own devices, would not easily generate or quite simply be oblivious to.

Historically, both socialism and conservatism have, in many ways, contributed to integrate, impede and innovate liberal institutions in life-enabling modes. Among them, human rights jurisprudence is a major example. Often confused with the fundamental freedoms of the individual defended by liberals since at least the days of John Locke (1632–1704), the notoriety of human rights—the rights of "man", "woman" and "infants"—originates in the 18th century with so-called "radicals" such as Thomas Spence (1750–1814), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), Robert Burns (1759–1796) and, above all, the Jacobins leading the most extreme wave of political and socio-economic reforms of the French Revolution. As to the concept itself of human rights, earlier scholastic thinkers such as Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546) and Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) should be credited as its likeliest fathers, as also reflected in our century by the staunch defence of jusnaturalism by the Catholic Church, traditionally a champion of conservatism, and by Thomist thinkers like Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) and Arthur Fridolin Utz (1908–2001), whose vast oeuvre informs, enriches and symbolises the Social Doctrine of the Church and its focus upon human rights.

Socialists, on their part, played historically a crucial role in making economic, social and cultural rights recognised, enshrined formally in constitutions, justiciable in actual legal practice, and funded by means of progressive taxation of both income and wealth. It is also, if not primarily, because of the pressure exercised, and the actions taken, by socialists of various streaks and sorts that, say, tax-funded public hygiene programmes and infrastructures, public schools, public works and public hospitals, all of which were among the dreams concocted by the French Jacobins back in the 1790s, became a widespread reality in the 20th century. In the last quarter of the 20th century, however, many countries started witnessing a gradual retrenchment from the secured provision of these rights, as inaudibly but poignantly flagged out by the recent drop in life expectancy rates, for the first time in decades, in post-industrial countries such as the

US and the United Kingdom (UK).

The old right-wing powers of landed aristocrats and clergymen are long gone, and with them whatever paternalistic attention to the plight of the most vulnerable members of society that these patricians may have paid. The Roman Popes continue to issue articulate, reasoned and well-meaning warnings about the deplorable condition of the poor and the dramatic state of the Earth's environment, but it is unclear whether such warnings can change the conduct of the world's ruling elite and, along with it, humanity's fate. The 20th-century pressure of left-wing socialism and trade-unionism is perhaps not entirely spent. Nonetheless, it has been certainly weakened dramatically by the collapse of the USSR and, with it, the rhetorical, political and ideological bargaining power that, at least in the liberal countries, the sheer existence of the Warsaw Pact granted to workers, trade unions and socialists, including those who opposed Soviet communism, abhorred armed revolution, or refused to seek the abolition of capitalism as a desirable goal.

In essence, contemporary liberalism rules, by and large, unrestrained. Even the current alleged threat to it that goes under the name of "Islamic fundamentalism" does very little in terms of stopping actual for-profit trade between the seemingly threatened nations (e.g. France and the UK) and the nations whence most fundamentalists are born, trained, and their organisations funded (e.g. Saudi Arabia). Moreover, as a result of liberalism's unrestrained rule and its attendant accruing of both wealth and power into the hands of a small interest group, wealth is no longer successfully taxed to the extent required in order to secure the widespread provision of the social, economic and cultural rights enshrined in most countries' constitutions, as denounced *inter alia* by leading thinkers of the Frankfurt School, i.e. Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) and Axel Honneth (b. 1949). Even in Europe, where some of the most extensive achievements have been reached in terms of both *de iure* and *de facto* entrenchment of human rights, liberalism's money-based partiality and elitist drive has recently been shown by, and showered upon, the Republic of Greece, where wealthy creditors' interests took priority over poorer and poorer swaths of the population, with dire consequences in terms of nutrition, health, and survival. (I provided an articulate ethical assessment of the effects of austerity in post-2008 Greece in my first volume for Northwest Passage Books.)

As the great 20th-century Greek polymath Cornelius Castoriadis (1922–1997) had feared and denounced in the 1980s, the loss of both nationalist and socialist restrains upon liberal politics and policies has meant that high finance enjoys once more that freedom of movement, predation and devastation that only the stringent legal constraints of the 1930s and post-bellic Bretton Woods had been able to choke. Castoriadis called it a "vast financial casino".[4] Unsurprisingly for people capable of historical memory, i.e. those who remember why those constraints had been put in place, the 20th century ended with a series of financial collapses that were greater and greater in both frequency and gravity, turning quickly many a celebrated "tiger" into a sacrificial lamb, no matter whether the big cat in question was Asian, Baltic, Celtic or Viking. Evidently, this sort of historical memory is in short supply, if it is not short as such. As John Kenneth

[4] Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Crisis of the Identification Process", *The Rising Tide of Insignificancy (The Big Sleep*, 2003, 219, <http://www.notbored.org/RTI.html> (the English translations of Castoriadis' works available on this website are anonymous and provided as a public service. Their quality and, above all, their accessibility, are higher than the alternatives available; hence my choice of them as cited references in this book).

Galbraith (1908–2006) declared in 1987: "History may not repeat itself, but some of its lessons are inescapable. One is that in the world of high and confident finance little is ever really new. The controlling fact is not the tendency to brilliant invention; the controlling fact is the shortness of the public memory, especially when it contends with a euphoric desire to forget."[5]

The continued result of such an amnesia *vis-à-vis* the rationale for potent financial regulation is that the 21st century has witnessed too several additional instances of self-inflicted financial mayhem, which is largely accepted as the new normal and somewhat akin to the erratic inescapability of bad weather, rather than as an avoidable and unpleasant state of affairs brought about by human agency. Reflecting on conservative and socialist alternatives, perhaps, can help us understand that it is neither new nor normal and that, above all, it does not have to be accepted, for other paths are open to human societies.

Specifically, in the first part of this book, I explore the socialist perspectives of Albert Einstein (1879–1955; chapter 1), Cornelius Castoriadis (chapter 2), Martha Nussbaum (b. 1947) and John McMurtry (both in chapter 3). Then I tackle the intellectual vistas provided by conservative thinkers Giulio Tremonti (b. 1947; chapter 4), Arthur Fridolin Utz (chapter 5) and Hans Jonas (1903–1993; chapter 6). In the second part of the book, I integrate the theoretical apparatus offered in the first part by means of concrete examples of opposition and redirection of liberal economic principles and practices, i.e. human rights law (chapters 7 & 8) and Iceland's boom-bust cycle and recovery in the early 21st century (chapter 9), to which the concluding musings of mine also relate, at least in good part (chapter 10).

The sources that, in this book, were revised, partially redrafted and updated, do differ considerably in both length and character, some being extensive articles or book chapters, others being reasoned book synopses, conference proceedings or review essays. Once again, as in my previous collections for Northwest Passage Books, the term "essay" has been understood and used in a broad sense. Therefore, the chapters of this book are markedly uneven too. Nevertheless, they all share my concern with and for the fate of the life-support systems upon which we all stand to survive and, if possible, live well. Life-value onto-axiology, which I tackle explicitly in chapters 3 and 7, informs implicitly the whole book.

[5] John Kenneth Galbraith, "The 1929 Parallel", *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1, 1987, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1987/01/the-1929-parallel/304903/

Chapter 1: Einstein's Socialism

Introduction

Prompted by worried letters of self-perceiving patriotic informants, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had intelligence gathered about Albert Einstein since at least 1932, when he sought admission into the US and, a few years later, naturalisation. His dubious associations with "anarchist" and "communist" individuals in Continental Europe, his questionable participation in the initially left-leaning German Democratic Party, his outspoken interest in the socio-economic and cultural developments of Bolshevik Russia, and his even louder objections to post-war McCarthyism made him a highly suspicious character during his life, capable of "un-American activities", in spite of his mathematical genius.[6] Sternly and unmercifully, the Official Memorandum prepared by the agency on the 27th of July 1955, soon after Einstein's death, concluded that he had indeed "sponsored entry into U.S. of numerous individuals with pro-Communist backgrounds" and "affiliated… with literally hundreds of pro-Communist groups".[7] However, "[n]o evidence of CP membership developed" and so neither prosecution nor expulsion could ever be justified.[8]

Quite the opposite, Einstein received considerable public recognition in the US, not solely for his contribution to the sciences, but also for his role in furthering the development of the atomic bomb, by which the war with Japan was brought to a close and military supremacy was gained over all nations, including the US' former allies, Joseph Stalin's (1878–1953) USSR *in primis*. Throughout the years that he spent working in the US, Einstein gave repeated proof of the highest academic ability and instructed a generation of American minds, who went on to make the US the leading power in modern physics and, either directly or indirectly, its military applications. Special awards and honorary doctorates were showered on him by prestigious US universities, including Princeton and Harvard.[9] Like Galileo (1564–1642), Newton (1642–1726) and Darwin (1809–1882) before him, Einstein became an icon of intellectual achievement, transcending the borders of academia and reaching far and deep into popular consciousness.

What were Einstein's political views, though? Was he actually an "anarchist" or "communist", as the FBI's informants feared, even if he never joined such political organisations or parties? How could he be a trustworthy sponsor of Roosevelt's (1882–1945) Manhattan Project, given the subversive leanings the FBI attributed to him?

Pacifism and Zionism

Most non-scientific articles, speeches and letters written by Albert Einstein, primarily in German, are kept and catalogued at the *Albert Einstein Archives* of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, Israel. Together with other original sources, they have been

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[6] Cf. FBI, *FBI Records: The Vault*, Bufile numbers 61-7099, n.d.a, <http://vault.fbi.gov/Albert%20Einstein>.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid. "CP" stands for "Communist Party".
[9] Cf. Hans-Joseph Küpper, *Albert Einstein in the World Wide Web*, 2000–2015, <http://www.einstein-website.de/indexhtml.html>.

studied and assessed by scores of biographers, among whom should be cited the comprehensive 21st-century works by Thomas Levenson[10] and Hubert Gönner.[11] After a 9-year-long process of digitalisation, the materials contained in the archives were released online in 2012.[12] Upon this basis, yet further integrated, translated into English, and aimed at both printed publication and digitalisation, the *Collected Papers of Albert Einstein* have been made available as well by Princeton University Press and, following a two-year delay on each printed volume, by the California Institute of Technology, which sees to the management of the *Digital Einstein* project.[13] So far, fourteen of the planned twenty-five volumes have been issued, covering Einstein's writings and correspondence from his youth to 1925.

A review of the vast critical literature on Einstein's political views shows no palpable disagreement as concerns the notion that he had two chief open ideological aims throughout his life *qua* engaged intellectual: pacifism and Zionism. On the one hand, given the far-from-uncommon shock at the sight of World War I's brutality and devastations, Einstein devoted much of his non-scientific literature, pleas and activism to the goal of international peace. The historical context and specific issues did vary, ranging from Wilson's (1856–1924) plans for European reconciliation[14] to Cold-War appeasement.[15] Nonetheless, the overall aim of peace, i.e. the avoidance of physical violence and murderous agency within and among nations, is as unambiguous as it is recurrent. Even the controversial atomic bomb, the development of which he undoubtedly promoted to President F.D. Roosevelt, was justified as *extrema ratio* against the modern barbarity of German National Socialism. Hitler's (1889–1945) regime seemed interested in developing novel weaponry of this kind and, most ominously, willing to use it for the sake of military conquest.[16]

As to Zionism, Einstein started campaigning for a Jewish Palestine in 1921, after witnessing the vast post-war migrations of Eastern European Jews, the abrupt resurgence of unashamed anti-Semitism in Central European politics and societies, and the growing imperative of developing a Jewish consciousness among European Jews that, until then, had regarded themselves as fully integrated and legal equals of the non-Jewish populations. The worsening plight of such ill-treated European citizens in the 1920s and 1930s, not to mention the horrible fate suffered by millions of them during World War II, strengthened Einstein's support for the establishment of a Jewish Palestine in which Jews and Arabs could co-exist peacefully. He went so far along this line of thought and personal commitment as to blame the growing tensions between the local population and the Zionist settlers onto the "treachery" of "the English" administering that

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[10] Cf. Thomas Levenson, *Einstein in Berlin*, New York: Bantam Books, 2003.

[11] Cf. Hubert Gönner, *Einstein in Berlin. 1914–1933,* München: C.H. Beck, 2005.

[12] Cf. Ze'ev Rosenkranz *et al.* (eds.), *Einstein Archives Online*, 2002–2013, <http://www.alberteinstein.info/>
(Archival call numbers are made up of two parts: the microfilms' reel number and the sequential number within that reel; for the sake of brevity, after a first extended bibliographic entry, I refer to them by their call numbers).

[13] Cf. Diana K. Buchwald *et al.* (eds.), *Einstein Papers Project*, 2005–2015, <http://www.einstein.caltech.edu/>.

[14] Cf. Albert Einstein, "On Internationalism", *New York Evening Post*, 26th March 1921, in *Einstein on Politics: His Private Thoughts and Public Stands on Nationalism, Zionism, War, Peace, and the Bomb*, edited by D.E. Rowe and R. Schulmann, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 88–90 (published originally under the title "How Einstein, Thinking in Terms of the Universe, Lives from Day to Day"; when possible, I make use of the English translations of Einstein's German-language documents comprised in Rowe's and Schulmann's book).

[15] Cf. Albert Einstein, "Undelivered message to the World", April 1955; EA 28-1098.

[16] Cf. Albert Einstein, "Letter to Franklin Delano Roosevelt", 2nd August 1939; EA 33-088.

region after the end of the second global conflict.[17]

Whereas there are many public statements of support and several self-descriptions proffered by Einstein *vis-à-vis* both pacifism and Zionism, none can be found on either anarchism or communism as such. Many references are made by Einstein to "communism" and "communist" in connection with Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe, much interest is shown by him with respect to the novel experiments taking place in those societies, but no genuine self-commitment to that specific ideology or its incarnation in the Soviet political system can be found in an unequivocal manner. It is actually much easier to come across critical remarks, especially during the 1930s, once the idealistic internationalist hopes of Lenin (1870–1924) and Trotsky (1879–1940) had been definitively supplanted by Stalin's pragmatic State-building cruelty.[18] Though not interested *per se* in scholarly assessment, the FBI itself, after decades of close scrutiny on the mathematically gifted yet potentially subversive Albert Einstein, discovered no damning evidence to have him either prosecuted or expelled. On this point, even the following incriminating piece of evidence briefed in the Internal Security Report of the 30th of January 1950 was regarded as inadequate:

> [T]he 'Monthly Review,' 66 Barrow Street, New York City, self proclaimed [sic] 'an independent Socialist magazine' made its initial appearance in May of 1949. The first issue contained articles by [Albert Einstein] and others. This report stated further that a study of the articles contained in a background check of the editors and contributors revealed that this magazine was Communist inspired, and followed the approved Communist Party line.

What kind of article by Einstein was ever published in it? As stated above, and as subsequent events manifestly revealed, it was not enough to cause Einstein to face charges or have serious problems with the US authorities. Nevertheless, it may well be the clearest statement of Einstein's political views available to us.

Why Socialism?

"Why Socialism?" was issued in May 1949 by the *Monthly Review*, republished in 1998 to celebrate the review's fiftieth year of life, and again in May 2009 for the article's own sixtieth anniversary.[19] In it, a mature Albert Einstein explains why, all things considered, *socialism*—not anarchism, communism or, for that matter, liberalism—is the best option on the table.

The article opens with some epistemological considerations. Writing first of all as a practicing scientist, Einstein argues that, unlike physics, economics cannot easily proceed to the "discovery of general laws" because of two main reasons.[20]

On the one hand, the phenomena that economics studies "are often affected by many factors

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[17] Cf. Albert Einstein, "Letter to Michele Besso", 21st April 1946; EA 7-381.
[18] Cf. David E. Rowe and Robert Schulmann, *Einstein on Politics*.
[19] Issue 61(1), 55–61, to which I refer here.
[20] Albert Einstein, "Why socialism?", 55.

which are very hard to evaluate separately".[21] Unlike specialists in the hard sciences, economists cannot credibly abstract, isolate and assess individual parameters within concrete economic phenomena. On the other hand, these phenomena have been "largely influenced and limited by causes which are by no means exclusively economic in nature", such as "conquest", the violent self-establishment of "the privileged class", their consequent enjoyment of "a monopoly of the land" and of "education", thus making "the class division of society" a firmly rooted feature of human relations over generational time and creating "a system of values" guiding "social behavior" consistently with such class division and related privileges.[22]

In this connection, Einstein cites the one and only economist, indeed the one and only expert, whom he finds worth quoting in the whole article, namely Thorstein Veblen. Known to most contemporary economists for a handful of insightful notions (i.e. conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure, ceremonial and instrumental institutions, the conflict between business and industry, and the fundamental instincts of emulation, predation, workmanship, parental bent and idle curiosity), Veblen has been commonly saluted as the father of evolutionary economics, for he rejected the physics-inspired conception of neoclassical economics *qua* abstract system of *equilibria* among depersonalised atomic agents, and replaced it with the biology-inspired conception of economic life *qua* historical network of adaptive behaviours ingeniously developed by members of our species and socially institutionalised over time.[23]

As modern economies are concerned, Einstein refers to Veblen's claim that it still reflects the second stage in the history of our species, i.e. "'the predatory phase' of human development".[24] In this phase, strong individuals prey upon the weak as a matter of course and upon each other as a matter of honour. Business conglomerates, like industrialists, entrepreneurs, merchants, conquerors and tribal chieftains before them, operate according to this barbaric logic, which is "the real purpose of socialism" to "overcome and advance beyond".[25] Accordingly, as Einstein concludes, "economic science in its present state" is limited in its potential knowledge to the "predatory phase" of human associations and whatever tentative economic laws we can derive therefrom; *a fortiori*, today's economists "can throw little light on the socialist society of the future."[26]

What is more, "socialism is directed towards a social-ethical end", which lies beyond the purview of science.[27] Science, at best, "can supply the means by which to attain certain ends", but the ends themselves are the product of political innovators, prophets, preachers, poets, philosophers and popular writers: these are "personalities with lofty ethical ideals" that can inspire "many human beings" and, indirectly, "determine the slow evolution of society."[28] As a

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Cf. David Reisman, *The Social Economics of Thorstein Veblen*, Cheltenham: E. Elgar, 2012.

[24] Albert Einstein, "Why socialism?", 55. Veblen's earlier stage or phase of human development is the "savage" one, when nature's overpowering force made life so precarious that human beings could only cooperate within small communities in order to survive, and nobody would attempt predatory behaviour upon her fellows for fear of injury or death.

[25] Ibid., 56.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

result, economists cannot claim any special expertise on socialism nor, for that matter, can any other breed of scientists: "we should be on our guard not to overestimate science and the scientific methods when it is a question of human problems; and we should not assume that experts are the only ones who have a right to express themselves" on socio-political matters.[29]

Confronted with the horrors of the 20th century, as well as with the disillusionment and the nihilistic despair of many, Einstein proceeds to delineate a basic philosophical anthropology. According to him, the human being is both "a solitary being and a social being."[30] As the former, the human being seeks self-preservation and self-gratification. As the latter, the human being seeks approbation and acceptance by her peers, with whom she is willing to coexist cooperatively and empathise. If there is any "equilibrium" that matters in economic and socio-political affairs, then it is the one between these two aspects of human nature.[31]

Moreover, for the individual to come into existence and grow, she must rely entirely upon a functioning society's past, present and future being. We are inextricably social animals, "just as in the case of ants and bees."[32] Unlike these animal species, however, the human one is not determined solely by its biological make-up, but also by its cultural make-up, which can be even modified, albeit to a small extent, by the individual's "conscious thinking".[33] That is the ground for human freedom, which, unfortunately, has been used for all kinds of horrible ends.

As concerns the fundamental root of all characteristically modern horrors, it is to be found in the excessive emphasis placed upon the "solitary" aspect of human nature by the predominant liberal traditions and institutions. The classical economists' self-serving atom contains highly destructive potential. Specifically, because of the excessive emphasis on the "solitary" aspect of human nature, human beings no longer think of themselves primarily as members of a human community and no longer focus their personal efforts upon social improvement *qua* social beings, but rather upon self-centred, self-maximising aims dictated by "egotism".[34] This is reflected chiefly in the "economic *anarchy* of capitalist society", which allows by law, culture and economic practice the selfish expropriation of other people's labour and fruits thereof for the sake of self-aggrandisement.[35]

Einstein singles out and attacks the capitalist institutions of "private property" and the only nominally "free" labour contract between powerful employers and powerless individual employees.[36] Upon such bases, the governing individualistic logic of predatory "competition" and self-aggrandising deprivation favours the few that "share in the ownership of the means of production" and can therefore keep at ransom the other allegedly "free" members of society, who depend on the former élite for work, wages, housing, bread—in essence, for survival.[37] This basically barbaric élite is nothing but an "oligarchy of private capital the enormous power of which cannot be effectively checked even by a democratically organized political society", no

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 57.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 58.
[34] Ibid., 59.
[35] Ibid.; emphasis added.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

matter whatever parliamentary, multi-party system may be in place, since institutions of this ilk are all too easily "selected… financed… [and] influenced" by "private capitalists", who also "control… the main sources of information" and therefore shape the collective consciousness in accordance with the élite's desiderata.[38] It is mostly if not uniquely trade unions, which were established after prolonged and arduous struggles, that offer "the workers" opportunity for independent thought, a modicum of bargaining power, protection from the capitalists' worst excesses, and some degree of self-direction.[39]

Pivotal in its negative character is, within such a sorry state of affairs, capitalism's mental "crippling of individuals", who learn already at school that they must be "competitive" and "worship acquisitive success".[40] Therefore, Einstein argues that in a proper socialist society, in addition to a "planned economy" that is duly run for the benefit of the people rather than of an "all-powerful and overweening… bureaucracy", there should be an "educational system" that is "oriented towards social goals".[41] The social side of the human being needs nurturing, so that it may be the prime source of meaning in people's lives: no other truly constructive and comprehensive existential meaning can be given, according to Einstein.

Which Socialism?

The FBI's informants had reason to worry about Albert Einstein. In "Why Socialism?", capitalism is criticised adamantly and forcefully in its historical origins, institutional articulations and socio-cultural effects. Especially, the liberal constitutions' sacred right to own property privately is condemned as an institution that validates and maintains ancient conquests, extortions and brutalities.[42] The attendant competitive business and labour relations are similarly criticised, insofar as they further the inequality and oppression established by such ancient conquests, extortions and brutalities. The educational and, more broadly, the value system of capitalist societies are equally blamed for legitimising, entrenching and advancing them, as well as an individualistic, dog-eat-dog mentality that ruins most people's chances of finding any fulfilment in life, since the meaningful inter-personal social aims that can offer true fulfilment to most people are severely neglected, if not completely removed from view. Only the privileged, property-owning few can benefit from the individualistic ethos replacing such positive social aims.

According to Einstein, a planned economy and, *above all*, a renewed emphasis on social goals and the social self-understanding of the human person are the alternative to be pursued. This alternative is the only one that makes sense to Einstein, lest we wish to remain within the predatory phase of human development. Still, this alternative is not tantamount to "anarchism", which, in all of its manifestations, would do away with planning institutions and, in many of its

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[38] Ibid., 60.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 60–1.
[41] Ibid., 61.
[42] Both World Wars were initiated by countries that had economies patently based upon private property and political systems formally based upon liberal constitutions. It is unlikely that such considerations should have escaped Einstein's mind, as preoccupied as he was by the twin issues of war and peace, also in Palestine.

manifestations, would stress the solitary side of the human being over the social one.[43] The word "anarchy" does appear in Einstein's text, but in connection with the socially and existentially destructive individualistic emphasis of capitalism. Could it be "communism" then? Yes, it could; possibly, that is, but not plausibly. Einstein's qualifications on the pivotal role of a truly socialist education and the potentially self-serving excesses of the bureaucracy presiding over a planned economy are a not-so-implicit attack against the Soviet model, Stalin's cult of personality, and the communist camp in general, in which predatory behaviour was still rife. Any reader of the *Monthly Review* would have easily grasped it back in 1949.

Above all else, Einstein speaks of "socialism" *tout court*. He does so both in the article's title and in its main text. Open-ended, perhaps vague, positively capable of many non- and anti-communist declinations in its long life as a political ideology (e.g. Saint-Simonianism, Fourierism, Proudhonism) as well as in Einstein's lifetime (e.g. German revisionist Marxism, British Fabianism, Scandinavian social-democracy), "socialism" is the term that Einstein chose. *Pace* the FBI's informants, he opted neither for "anarchism" nor for "communism". It would be uncharitable not take Einstein's word for it. Not even the FBI's top echelons did it, despite being suspicious of him for longer than two decades. What kind of socialism is it, though?

A few of Einstein's key concepts are patently of Marxian origin (e.g. "class", the "ownership of the means of production", the dismal account of the early stages of capitalism i.e. primitive accumulation). Even so, Marx himself is never cited. On the contrary, the Norwegian-American economist Thorstein Veblen is the only explicitly quoted authority, and one that does not figure among the most famous champions of socialism, which Veblen actually conceived of *in primis* as "an animus of dissent" symptomising capitalism's inherent malaise[44] and, *in secundis*, as the inevitable future form of rational economic engineering brought about by the eventual collapse of intrinsically unstable capitalist institutions.[45] Was Einstein then a socialist *à la* Veblen—a Veblenite?

Einstein's archives contain loads of references to, and exchanges with, a "Professor Veblen", but it is Oswald Veblen (1880–1960), the noted mathematician, Thorstein's nephew. Apart from the citation in "Why Socialism?", Thorstein Veblen openly resurfaces only in Einstein's "Remarks on Bertrand Russell's Theory of Knowledge", where he is commended as follows: "I owe innumerable happy hours to the reading of Russell's works, something which I cannot say of any other contemporary scientific writer, with the exception of Thorstein Veblen."[46] However, the text is about Lord Russell (1872–1970), the British Nobel-laureate philosopher and Labour activist with whom Einstein shared many campaigns for international peace and nuclear disarmament, and nothing can be derived from it as regards Einstein's assessment of Veblen's

[43] Cf. Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, Oakland: PM Press, 2010.
[44] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904, 338.
[45] Cf. John Wood, *The Life of Thorstein Veblen and Perspectives on his Thought*, New York: Routledge, 1993.
[46] Albert Einstein, "Remarks on Bertrand Russell's Theory of Knowledge", in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by P.A. Schilpp, La Salle: Open Court, 1944, 279.

political views but generic appreciation.[47]

Upon a review of Einstein's writings on socialism, as pursued for example by Rowe and Schulmann in 2007, and of his essay "Why Socialism?" in particular, I believe it impossible to determine along specific party- or theory-lines what sort of socialist Einstein could have been. Verily was he a "socialist", but in as open-ended and as broad a way as this term allows for and along the specifications available to us in "Why Socialism?", which I have summarised and highlighted in the previous section. A master of theoretical physics, Einstein was not prone to lengthy, hair-splitting theoretical speculation on human, social and political matters, even if he wrote often about these issues and regarded them as paramount. His die-hard liberal colleague at the Keiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, the great Hungarian chemist Michael Polanyi (1891–1976), was certainly much more so inclined than Einstein ever was.[48]

Furthermore, Einstein had not always been a socialist, or at least not as clearly as he declared himself to be in 1949. As a young man, Einstein had grown up in a classically liberal Swiss milieu and the political writings of his youth show him to be a compassionate liberal, who felt deeply for the less fortunate, but also took for granted many liberal institutions, e.g. wage relations, and feared novel, unorthodox socialist plans. For example, reasoning along liberal lines, he condemned the Austrian proto-Zionist Josef Popper-Lynkeus' (1838–1921) projects for a compulsory national labour service, which, in his view, would affect negatively individuals' crucial incentives, such as "the effort of striving for an improved existence as a wage earner" and the shame of being among "those who are not gainfully employed".[49]

Similarly, whilst Einstein did salute Lenin as an honourable "man, who in total sacrifice of his own person has committed his entire energy to realizing social justice", he did "not find his methods advisable".[50] Even though he followed with keen interest the developments in Bolshevik Russia, Einstein adamantly rejected their being founded upon "bloody terror".[51] To Bolsheviks and revolutionaries, Einstein—the pacifist indeed—much preferred "the most courageous fighters against militarism… the Quakers."[52]

Albeit never abandoning peace or Zionism as cherished socio-political and moral goals, Einstein was willing to change his economic and political views in the face of new evidence.

The Great Depression proved to be the watershed for Einstein, much more so than the horrors of the First World War or the tumultuous yet intriguingly novel Russian experiment that ensued thereof. Given the self-inflicted collapse of capitalism and the seemingly endless turmoil that followed it, Einstein believed the remedies to have to be found in non-capitalist forms of socio-political and economic agency. Writing in 1932, Einstein argued that "the unrestrained lust for

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[47] William T. Ganley analyses the connection between Einstein and Thorstein Veblen, but finds clear analogies and plausible reverberations *vis-à-vis* their understanding of natural science, rather than economics, politics or social and moral issues (cf. "Institutional Economics and Neoclassicism in the Early Twentieth Century: The Role of Physics", *Journal of Economic Issues*, 29(2), 1995, 397–406; and "Note on the Intellectual Connection between Albert Einstein and Thorstein Veblen", *Journal of Economic Issues*, 31(1), 1997, 245–51).

[48] For an introduction to Polanyi's work, cf. Mark T. Mitchell, *Michael Polanyi. The Art of Knowing*, Chicago: ISI Books, 2006.

[49] Albert Einstein, "To the Society 'A Guaranteed Subsistence for All", 12th December 1918; EA 32-754.

[50] Albert Einstein, "On the Fifth Anniversary of Lenin's Death", 6th January 1929; EA 47-471.

[51] Albert Einstein, "On a Document Collection from Russian Prisons", 1925; EA 28-029.

[52] Albert Einstein, "Letter to Henri Barbusse", 17th June 1932; EA 34-546.

profit" that had brought down the liberal economic architecture could not plausibly rescue it from itself.[53] Besides, liberal institutions had had a considerable time to prove themselves worthy: they had fared poorly and failed miserably.[54]

Echoing the plight of Veblen's revolutionary engineers, who get frustrated by the repeated sabotage of productive efficiency caused by businesspersons for the sake of pecuniary gain (e.g. snuffing new technologies threatening established monopolies, restricting production in quantity and/or quality to control supply and/or demand, wasting time and resources on advertising unnecessary goods and services), Einstein suggested that an international "Council of the Wise" comprising a number of top-notch experts should be created in order to deal effectively with the "social and economic" woes of the planet.[55]

Veblen aside, such a technocratic suggestion recalls Saint-Simon's (1760–1825) influential pre-Marxian socialism[56] and the positivist tektology (or "tectology") of Russian revolutionary and science-fiction author Alexander Bogdanov (1873–1928).[57] In any case, as reminiscent of other forms of socialism as it may be, Einstein's advice at that point was no longer "liberal", i.e. a notion that, as he lamented in 1948, "has become so watered down as to cover the most diverse views and attitudes".[58] Most importantly, in the same year and document, Einstein also asserts: "socialism, as I understand it, does not exist anywhere today."[59]

Einstein's socialism was of his own stripe: the one that he presents in "Why Socialism?". That is, in short, the answer to this section's opening interrogative.

Concluding Remarks

It is not possible to align Einstein's stripe of socialism with any other in a clear-cut manner. There is simply no sufficient theoretical articulation in his writings to perform such an intellectual operation. What is more, any careful study of the various schools of thought comprised within the socialist camp is absent therein. This may be disappointing for the political partisan, the keen scholar, and the pedant. However, it is not disappointing for those who find Einstein's stance enlightening, inspiring, or insightful.[60]

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[53] Albert Einstein, "Statement for the Amsterdam Peace Congress", in David E. Rowe and Robert Schulmann, *Einstein on Politics*, 426.

[54] The same conclusion had been reached in those years by Michael Polanyi's brother Karl, cf. his classic 1944 study in economic history, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrar & Reinhart).

[55] Albert Einstein, "Thoughts on Forming a Council of the Wise", 14th March 1939; EA 28-473.

[56] E.g. Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon, "Industry" (1817), in *Henri de Saint Simon, 1760–1825: Selected writings on science, industry and social organization*, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1975, 158–61.

[57] Cf. Alexander Bogdanov, *Essays in Tektology: The General Science of Organization*, Seaside, CA: Intersystems Publications, 1980.

[58] Albert Einstein, "Letter to John Dudzic", 8th March 1948; EA 58-108. This statement casts doubt on the conclusion reached by Schulmann, according to whom Einstein's socialism is so un-Marxist as to be nothing but liberalism, in line with his Swiss youth's ideals (cf. "Einstein and Socialism", *Physics Today*, 62(10), 2009, 12). Like many contemporary Anglophone commentators, Schulmann is perplexed that Einstein may have chosen such a 'radical' and socially unapproved term as "socialism" to describe his own political views.

[59] EA 58-108.

[60] For one, the *CCPA Monitor* published in September 2007 various excerpts from Einstein's "Why Socialism?" ("Take it from *Time*'s 'Person of the Century': Socialism offers the only hope for true, humane democracy", 14(4), 27).

For one, I believe that it is beneficial to recall the crucial circumstances that led him to gradually abandon the liberal beliefs of his youth and embrace a socialist conception in its place. It was after the 1929 crash of Wall Street and the ensuing years of economic decline—not to mention the resulting worldwide armed conflagration—that it became clear to Einstein, as it became to many intellectuals of his generation, that capitalism was hopelessly flawed and in need of replacement. As Karl Polanyi (1886–1964) and John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) had also loudly acknowledged in Einstein's day, dreadful socio-political nightmares are the outcome of deep economic slumbers, especially financial ones.

Staring at rapacious and life-disabling historical manifestations of liberalism such as the Great Depression, Einstein eventually saw the error of the liberal doctrines of his youth and, rather than being wilfully blind to the facts or committing himself to *ad hoc* exculpations of the doctrines themselves, he moved on; that is, he gave an answer to the question "Why Socialism?"—rather than liberalism.[61] The answer was not going to be changed later; socialism was his conclusion. It was the outcome of a lifetime's wisdom of experience and reflection upon the circumstances that history had presented him with.

[61] As I have argued in my third volume for Northwest Passage Books, the *a priori* unfalsifiable assumption of the free market's beneficial character, which allows economic failures to be blamed upon external shocks and forms of agency that cannot but be present in real-world economic life (e.g. State 'interference', individual cases of excessive greed, faulty national character leading to cronyism), leaves ample room for such self-exculpatory intellectual manoeuvres. Whether because of his training as an empirical scientist or of his own sense of personal and intellectual integrity, Einstein did not pursue this self-exonerating line of thinking.