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The Biocultural Foundations of Socialism: Human Nature and Politics of the Future

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Abstract

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By Jorge M. Lizarzaburu

This dissertation examines the biocultural foundations of Western and non-Western socialism(s). Specifically, it argues that socialism (i.e., egalitarianism, absence of exploitative private property, ceilings for accumulation and floors for poverty) has been the most natural form of human socio-political organization throughout millennia. “Natural,” in this sense, means that it comes easily to humans by virtue of evolved, hence putatively natural capacities (e.g., cooperativeness, sociality, empathy, inequity aversion) that characterize our species. Tellingly, for at least 95 percent of their evolutionary history, humans have lived in egalitarian groups that successfully adopted practices such as common ownership and management of resources. In other words, long before industrial capitalism gave rise to protests articulated under the banner of socialism in the 19th century, non-Western societies had successfully enacted ideals that both liberal and socialist thinkers could only dream about (e.g., radical democracy, equality). Therefore, I suggest, notions about social and political equality cannot be ascribed only to Euro-American “enlightened” ideas and failed 20th century political experiments but have to be sought also within indigenous and non-Western philosophies and socio-political mechanisms and institutions. Admittedly, socialism’s naturalness does not entail that establishing an egalitarian society is an easy task in the modern world. Yet, the evolutionary success of socialism undercuts narratives that deem a society not characterized by rampant inequality either utopian or straightforwardly impossible.

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Table of Contents

Introduction – Socialism and Human Nature	1
Chapter One – A Biocultural View of Human Nature	13
Nature and Natural	15
Dialectical Thinking and Scientific Methods.....	24
Dialectical Cells and Dialectical Evolutionary Theory.....	33
A Biocultural (Dialectical) Human Nature	40
Chapter Two – Capitalism: Inhuman, Unnatural, Indefinable?.....	53
Defining Capitalism	55
Capitalism Natural?.....	73
Sociality.....	93
Cooperation	103
Fairness/Inequity Aversion	109
Empathy	113
Conclusion.....	118
Chapter Three – Socialism: 200 years of history	122
The Idea of Socialism.....	122
Social Democracy and Chinese Communism	153
The Other Side: “Third-world” Socialism(s)	160
Socialism: From Past to Future (Through the Past)	167

Chapter Four – Socialism: 170,000 years of Practice	171
The Ju/'hoansi (!Kung San)	174
The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)	189
The Inkas	202
The Zapatistas	217
Conclusion.....	237
Chapter Five – WEIRD Minds, weird People, WEIRD Socialism.....	240
The Weirdest People	242
WEIRD (Ideal) Socialism	248
Non-Ideal (WEIRD) Socialism: The Black Panther Party	256
Conclusion – Why Socialism?	277
References	284

Introduction – Socialism and Human Nature

I started thinking about the ideas that I present in the following pages amidst the 2016 U.S. presidential election when the seemingly impossible happened. I am not referring to the fact that a racist, uninformed, B-list celebrity became president; there was nothing surprising about that, except perhaps the fact that the odds heavily favored Hillary Clinton. But as the philosopher Cornel West put it, Trump is as American as apple pie. Truly shocking, I think, was the meteoric rise of a self-described democratic socialist candidate in the Democratic primaries. After 2016, the impossible happened; socialism stopped being a dirty word in U.S. politics even if this new attitude did not usher a large number of political wins. Yet, Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Cori Bush, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and more became the visible (and rather popular) face of a recently articulated protest against the excesses of capitalism.

I worked on this dissertation in the middle of a pandemic that has ravaged the world economy, widened inequality even further, and once again has shed light on the various contradictions of an irrational, inhuman system. Unemployment, food insecurity, eviction crises, lack of access to healthcare and more, became part of daily life for millions of people in the wealthiest country on earth. Along with this tremendous misery, we also witnessed one of the most impressive scientific triumphs of our times, i.e., the development of vaccines in record time. But as it happens in a system that prioritizes profit above everything else, vaccines overwhelmingly benefited wealthy people first. Moreover, patents and vaccine hoarding by rich countries threaten the well-being of poor countries around the world. It is also important to notice that the COVID-19 pandemic, one of many to come, can be largely attributed to urbanization and excessive deforestation, which displaces wild animals from their habitats and

are forced to “move,” along with their germs, into populated centers. It is not far-fetched to suggest that the pandemic is another consequence of capitalism’s environmental footprint. Overall, as it has happened with every crisis of capitalism, the pandemic has affected the poor and people of color disproportionately.

At the same time, it has been working class people (and a large chunk have also been people of color) who have carried society through this emergency. By now, it should be clear who is an essential worker. Nurses, doctors, grocery stores and meat plants employees, drivers, mail carriers, delivery people, cooks, servers, teachers, caregivers, farmers, agricultural “illegal” workers, bakers, and more are the backbone of society, and without them we would not be seeing a light at the end of the tunnel now that vaccination is widespread. Yet, it is CEOs, speculators, hedge and vulture funds, lawmakers with insider information, who once again have capitalized amidst a catastrophe. The salaries and profits of the wealthiest have skyrocketed while society at large has suffered greatly. The consequences of the pandemic are still to be fully seen, but it is clear that the contradictions of capitalism will only increase under its influence.

Beyond social and political failures, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the shortcomings of an ethos based on individualism and selfishness. The deaths of six hundred thousand people (a number that severely undercounts the real number of victims) are the consequence of an incompetent governmental response and a lack of universal healthcare, for sure, but also of people who cannot put the interests of society above their own – no matter how mundane these are. These were people not willing to do something as easy as wearing a mask, not going to a restaurant, bar, movie theatre, or a mall, and all because it trampled their imagined rights. No healthy society can function along the lines of this sort of pathological individualism,

which leads to levels of polarization and conflict that historically have been indicative of societal decline and eventual collapse.

Fully immersed in this moment of crisis, I finished this work whose main aim is questioning a set of dominant and interwoven discourses about capitalism and socialism. Namely, that capitalism is natural, whereas socialism goes against human nature. The 20th century, allegedly, was an experiment that proved both the naturalness and superiority of capitalism, which by decree became the only political game in town. As Fredric Jameson (1994) argues, this narrative has penetrated so deeply that it seems easier to think about the end of the world than the end of capitalism itself.

Against this widely accepted orthodoxy, I set forth to show that socialism is not anathema to human nature. On the contrary, I argue, socialism is natural, i.e., comes easily, by virtue of a set of evolved cognitive abilities (e.g., cooperativeness, sociality, empathy, reciprocity) that characterize our species. A key clarification is warranted here. I understand socialism in at least two senses. In the first sense, socialism is an umbrella term for a number of anti-capitalist movements that were born in response to the Industrial Revolution in Europe. In the second sense, by socialism I mean a set of principles and practices that underlie the most common and successful form of human organization. Indeed, humans and our relatives in the genus *Homo*, have spent most of their history (~ 95 percent) living in small, egalitarian groups (Konner 2002), with no private property, and holding resources in common. These human groups successfully lived according to principles such as fraternity, equality, and liberty, thousands of years before Euro-American thinkers “discovered” these values. Moreover, in most cases they did so organically and without states, repressive forces, codified laws, moralizing big gods, or even writing. The fact that this form of organization emerged independently in every corner of the

globe, with different climates, modes of subsistence, beliefs, institutions, and more, suggests that evolved, cognitive capacities played a fundamental role in its development and maintenance.

That is, this mode of social organization comes natural to us.

Nonetheless, I understand that my thesis flies in the face of contemporary common sense and certainly will provoke many critical reactions from capitalists, socialists, communists, anarchists, libertarians, with and without academic backgrounds. As I mentioned above, for the right, socialism does not work because it goes against human nature as the failed experiments of the 20th century attest. People are too selfish and competitive, and against these natural hurdles quixotic idealists contend in vain. For the left, on the other hand, merely invoking human nature raises skepticism given that historically the concept has been uncritically adopted to justify the status quo with all its aberrations (e.g., colonialism, xenophobia, racism). Indeed, it is quite easy to move from “nature red in tooth and claw” into a world where competition, aggression, individualism, etc. are simply natural outcomes. “Boys will be boys” and “humans will be humans.” A little of mental gymnastics, and it turns out that Enron is in our genes.

Both positions, I think, are partially right, but obviously also partially wrong. Surely, selfishness is part of the human condition, and no amount of social intervention could banish it forever. Yet, this does not mean that life has to be organized around selfishness alone. Inasmuch as selfishness is universal, social sanctions against stinginess are also universal (Brown 1992). Likewise, although the right-wing view of human nature is one-sided and historically a vehicle to justify eugenics, social Darwinism and other aberrations, we cannot reject the concept *a priori* but only by scientific fiat. Of course, science like every other social practice is rent with biases, hence it is important to maintain a critical attitude. Yet, we cannot

do so entirely bypassing scientific theories and evidence if they do not conform to our socio-political inclinations. Rather, all arguments must stand rigorous tests to prove their validity.

Still, my main thesis might provoke hasty initial reactions, which, I suspect, could come from presuppositions about one or more of the concepts in question. After all, socialism, capitalism, and human nature are ideas with convoluted histories, a sizeable ideological baggage, and at the center of still unresolved debates. The first three chapters deal with each of these concepts and clarify definitional issues, thereby constructing the logical foundations of my overall argument. Even if the reader is inclined to disagree with my conclusions, I hope that in the end she will be able to do so without incurring in logical equivocations. That is, we will be on the same page at least in terms of the definitions that I adopt.

In what follows, I present an outline of the contents and a brief overview of each chapter. In chapter one, I detail the history of scientific and philosophical debates surrounding human nature. As I noticed above, suggesting that humans have a nature still provokes heated debates among (social) scientists and philosophers alike. For one camp, differences across cultures are too prevalent to speak of a human nature. For others, even if there is widespread variety, there are also universal structures – traditionally ascribed to evolution– that underlie human behavior. Between these two poles, I suggest a reconceptualization of human nature sifted through a novel evolutionary paradigm, the Extended Evolutionary Synthesis (EES), to propose what I term a biocultural view. In this vein, human nature is a process whereby biological, cultural, and environmental information are entangled in loops of reciprocal causation. This conception, I argue, leads to a flexible, historical, and context-bounded nature that nonetheless also maintains a universal character. Human nature, along these lines, is neither biology vs culture, nor biology + culture, but “*biologyandculture*” fully intertwined.

The upshot of this view is that it challenges the notion that human nature can be reduced to (genetic) selfishness alone. Consequently, the idea that capitalism is a sort of inevitable outcome that organically develops in human societies when other social constraints are removed can be put to rest as well. Capitalist practices, I suggest, are not more natural or unnatural than reading. Both are within a range of behaviors supported by our biocultural constitutions in one way or another, and we can learn to perform them with more or less effort. There is nothing universal, ahistorical, or inevitable about them, however.

In chapter two, I trace the historical development of capitalism and the ideas that surfaced along with it. Specifically, I focus on the multiple philosophical efforts to naturalize capitalism, i.e., to justify it as an upshot of human nature itself, that became mainstream in liberal political theory since its inception. From Mandeville, Locke, and Smith to 19th century Social “Darwinism,” to neoliberal theory (e.g., Hayek, Friedman) in the 20th century, a number of thinkers developed explanations and justifications of capitalism that appealed to human nature. The earliest versions of these theories were reactions to a wealth of material changes produced by capitalism and in many cases sought to understand, and even naturalize, new social realities such as the prevalence of enlightened self-interest, private property, and impersonal markets over older traditions that had structured life in Europe for centuries. In the 20th century, however, these ideas were either uncritically adopted or straightforwardly misappropriated (e.g., Smith by neoliberalism) to justify widespread inequality, an open assault on the social safety net, and the sanctity of private interests above everything else in the name of rational self-interest, and the efficiency of unregulated markets seen as an extension of human freedom itself.

But there was nothing natural or organic about the emergence and eventual spread of capitalism in Europe first, and throughout the world later. On the contrary, to become the

dominant mode of production, capitalism required violence, coercion, widespread misery, slavery, unpaid reproductive labor, and more. Furthermore, not only that capitalism is not natural in the sense that its apologists assume, i.e., organic and inevitable, but also that it negates, or distorts, some of our evolved, cognitive capacities (e.g., empathy, inequity aversion). Indeed, capitalism represented such a radical reorganization of life and put so much stress of the social fabric that immediately it caused reactions and protests in Europe.

In chapter three, I detail the emergence and development of the most famous anti-capitalist challenge, articulated under the banner of the socialist tradition (incl. anarchism, communism, etc.). As I will show, European socialism was born out of the discontent produced by industrialization and rapidly spread throughout the world at a much faster pace than capitalism, and even Christianity and Islam, for instance. In fact, socialism was quickly adopted by people from different nationalities, genders, races, religions, and more. The reason for this success, I will argue, is the fact that socialist ideas evoked old practices and traditions that have structured most human societies. That is, these ideas were easy to think for most humans.

Of course, the historical record seems to directly contradict my argument at this point. If its ideas were natural, then why did the socialist experiments of the 20th century fail miserably? And, why has socialism never worked? To the first question, I can straightforwardly answer that there was nothing natural about rigid, centralized planning, forced collectivization, an overblown bureaucratic apparatus, and other characteristics of the socialist experiments of the 20th century. Tellingly, socialist theorists (*inter alia*: the Utopian Socialists, Lenin, Mao) never imagined that they were developing a natural system, and in fact, assumed that they had to go against the grain of human nature by cultural means, thus all the misguided discussions of “new men,” cultural revolutions, and more.

The second question is based on a common misconception that serves as a segue into chapter four. In actuality, socialism has worked many times throughout human history. As I have noted before, hundreds of societies on the anthropological record reveal a common pattern of organization based on egalitarianism, absence of private property, generalized reciprocity, and holding resources in common. I term this form of organization “socialism in living.” Thus, to be precise what failed in the 20th century was a version of socialism based on values and goals derived from the Enlightenment and Euro-American revolutions (e.g., French, American, Russian).

On the other hand, countless pre-capitalist, non-western societies had successfully enacted *avant la lettre* socialist principles that Europe saw fit to “rediscover” in the 19th century. Chapter four specifically focuses on four societies that exemplify socialism in living, namely the Ju/'hoansi (!Kung San) from Southern Africa, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) from North America, the Inkas from the South American Andes, and the Zapatistas from southern Mexico. These societies effectively practice(d) socialism in living all without adopting capitalism and its environmental hubris. Here, an important caveat is warranted. When I suggest that these groups practiced socialism, I do not mean to reduce their lives to a Western logic. The purpose of chapter four, on the contrary, is to show that Western socio-political philosophy, socialist and otherwise, has a great deal to learn from the practical wisdom of people who successfully lived and flourished according to principles that were never more than utopian ideals in Europe.

Although there are hundreds of societies that exemplify socialism in living, I chose these specific groups because they challenge a somewhat accepted narrative about the evolution of human societies. According to the standard view, humans lived in small, egalitarian bands as hunter-gatherers but with the invention and adoption of agriculture and sedentarism twelve

thousand years ago, inequality became a staple of every society. Although this story is partially true, the full picture is much more nuanced. Agriculture ushered a new age characterized by inequality and powerful elites in charge of states, armies, taxation, religions, etc., yet old socialist practices and principles survived even within these stratified societies.

Along these lines, the Ju/'hoansi are a close approximation to the lives of our ancestors before the adoption of agriculture and exemplify the resourcefulness of a mode of production that ensured the survival of our species for thousands of years. The Haudenosaunee were horticulturalists who unlike the Ju/'hoansi had to deal with surpluses (e.g., food), yet still remained highly egalitarian. The Inkas were a much more stratified and wealthy society with a powerful state apparatus, nonetheless the large majority of the population (98 percent) lived in egalitarian groups organized according to the principles of socialism in living. The Haudenosaunee and the Inkas, therefore, illustrate the challenges that humans faced transitioning from hunting and gathering into settled, stratified societies. They also show that the transition did not necessarily entail the complete abandonment of old socialist principles and practices. Finally, the Zapatistas demonstrate that a socialism based on ancient, indigenous practices can be successful even amidst capitalist maelstrom (e.g., pollution, forced migration, poverty). Indeed, it might be the case that these millenary traditions signal the best path toward a future beyond capitalism.

Noticeably, all these societies are non-Western, preindustrial societies. And even the Zapatistas, a contemporary group, base their practices on ancient traditions as I have noticed. What about the modern, industrialized West, though? Perhaps, socialism worked in these old societies, but capitalism unleashed uncontrollable forces that forever closed the door to socialist practices. In chapter five, I consider a key aspect about Western people that, to a certain extent,

reveals a wrinkle in my overall argument. Western people, it turns out, are psychologically (and neurologically) different from the rest of world. As Joseph Henrich (2020) explains, Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic (WEIRD) minds are weird. Among other things Westerners tend to be more individualistic, overconfident in their talents, inclined to think analytically, and also less inclined to follow tradition and defer to elders. Hence, their minds can “run” capitalism as a cultural package with more ease than most people who live today and have lived thus far.

As it will be evident in chapter five, cultural changes that predate capitalism by hundreds of years altered the nature of Westerners. But we must take this conclusion with several grains of salt and avoid the temptation to essentialize it. Western culture did not dissolve millenary evolved capacities, and socialist practices still come natural to these weird minds. To illustrate my point, I conclude with two examples of what I call WEIRD socialism. The first is the ideal philosophy of John Rawls, who set forth the most significant contribution, and challenge, to Anglo-American political philosophy in the 20th century. Namely, how do we organize a society along the lines of fairness? The second example is a practical intervention and the most successful socialist experiment on U.S. soil, namely the Black Panther Party.

Finally, there is one last definitional morass that I must untangle in this introduction, i.e., the distinction between normative and descriptive statements. After all, to suggest that socialism is natural, at least as natural if not more than capitalism, seems like a normative pronouncement. That is, a claim about how the world ought to be derived from how it is. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume (1964) famously argued that in relationship to systems of morality, we cannot derive an ought-statement (normative) from an is-statement (descriptive). Likewise, this

prohibition can be extended to the sort of evolutionary socio-political argument that I present here.

Hume's is-ought distinction, however, has been wrongly taken as an implicit endorsement of subjectivism and anti-naturalism. It seems that Hume rejects the possibility of deriving moral facts either logically or through a scientific empirical analysis, but this is not necessarily what he meant. As Elliott Sober (2000) explains, Hume merely argues that one cannot deduct an "ought-conclusion" from "is-premises" because doing so would incur in a logical fallacy. But if among the premises, there are descriptive and normative statements, then a normative conclusion could be valid insofar as it follows the rules of standard logic.

For example, Sober (2000, 208) notes that the following argument is deductively invalid: "Torturing people for fun causes great suffering. Therefore, torturing people for fun is wrong." However, if after the first premise we add another one, namely "It is wrong to cause great suffering," then the argument becomes deductively valid. Following Sober's interpretation, the is-ought distinction is not an ultimate prohibition but more likely a proviso about the validity of moral argumentation. Overall, it is not my intention to deduct the moral or practical validity of socialism by violating the rules of deductive argumentation. My purpose in studying socialism in light of the science of human nature is to understand the possibilities and limitations of a system based on egalitarianism, common ownership, etc.

Influenced by Hume's stipulation, philosophers have long remained committed to safeguarding normative and descriptive purity, and at the same time have used this distinction to demarcate the realm of philosophy (normativity) from that of the sciences (description). This distinction is no longer tenable, however. First, and more importantly for my purposes here, I adopt philosophical naturalism as a guiding principle of reflection. By this I simply mean that

philosophers cannot ignore the wealth of empirical, scientific evidence that sheds crucial light on normative questions about the human condition.

Could we argue, for example, that smoking should be banned solely on paternalistic grounds without knowing what cigarettes do to our bodies? And if this is the case with ethics, why not extend the same considerations to politics? To argue about the pros and cons of different forms of socio-political organization, we must have a scientifically informed picture of human beings, including their capacities and limitations. If it turns out that all the evidence indicates that socialism is inimical to human nature, then no amount of normative wrangling can surmount that challenge. But, as I will show throughout these pages, this is not the case.

Second, as Doris, Machery, and Stich (2017) rightly argue, “the descriptive and normative are inextricably intermingled.” At best, we can carefully monitor how they influence each other, and notice whether one wrongly stands as the other and vice versa. No one theorizes from nowhere/everywhere, and I have tried to be as rigorous as I can to keep this in mind at every turn. Yet, I am not pretending that my normative commitments do not influence this work. Doing so would be intellectually dishonest. I do think that socialism is a superior system of social and political organization. But in the end, the main take from this dissertation is not that socialism is the most desirable form of organization or that it is bound to happen. After analyzing scientific and historical evidence, I simply conclude that socialism does not go against human nature. That is, a socialist future is possible. Overall, from an *is*, I deduce a *can* – a mere possibility.

Chapter One – A Biocultural View of Human Nature

A man drives up to his reserved parking spot at work and finds that someone else has parked there. Offended and full of rage, he gets out of his car, picks a rock, proceeds to destroy the trespasser's windshield, and then cuts his tires with a pocketknife. Imagine the same situation, but this time it is a woman who finds her reserved spot taken. She gets mad yet decides to find a different spot; first, she leaves a note on the trespasser's windshield warning them that next time she will call security and have their car towed. In both cases we have typical human behavior that, as Robert Sapolsky (2017) explains, involves different systems (nervous, endocrinological, genetic, cultural) triggered and developed seconds, minutes, years, and thousands of years before there was an action. I chose this particularly gendered example because it conforms to traditional expectations. Men have been encultured to be more violent than women, who are supposed to strike conciliatory, almost maternal, tones in these situations. Culture is undoubtedly a very powerful modulator of human behavior, yet men are responsible for most violence in almost every human society (Konner 2002) on the record. The fact that males are more aggressive than women seems to be a universal of human behavior, i.e., natural. But whereas Soviet female sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko killed more than 300 Nazi soldiers during WWII, millions of men go through life without ever throwing a punch against another human being. Context plays a large role that influences how human behavior unfolds.

In fact, we cannot separate environment and culture from biology, or psychology (Henrich 2020; Sapolsky 2017). These variables are intertwined to an extent that pulling them apart is simply impossible, unnecessary, or straightforwardly misguided. It is in this entanglement of evolutionary processes, cultural information, brains marinating in hormones, electrical impulses reaching muscles, and more that human nature has to be understood. Yet,

there is a reductionist impulse in the sciences as well as among some philosophers to bypass all this complexity and assign naturalness exclusively to ancient evolutionary processes. Thus, human nature is whatever evolved through natural selection, whereas other parts of the puzzle are relegated to the role of proximate mechanisms.

Another influential model takes this view of human nature but supplements it with a more nuanced understanding of the role of human culture. Under this interpretation, human nature emerges from the interaction of biology and culture as two separate systems of information (Paul 2015). In this chapter, I propose an alternative view of human nature, namely a biocultural theory – a concept that I adapt from Marx’s conjectures about human nature. Although the idea that humans are biocultural animals is not novel (Marks 2017), what I suggest goes against the grain of the accepted view in one important sense. Whereas the notion that humans are biocultural animals has been used to reject human nature as a whole, I use the concept to argue that in fact it reveals a nature.

Most proponents of a biocultural view adopt the term to reject hackneyed attempts to reduce nature to biology. Under this interpretation, biology alone is not responsible for any behaviors given the crucial role that culture plays as a modulating force. Hence biology alone cannot explain human nature. Although I wholeheartedly accept that human nature is not synonymous with biology, I also think that we do not have to reject human nature as a concept. The term biocultural implies that biology and culture cannot be disentangled from each other, but it does not follow that as a result human nature simply does not exist. Our nature emerges along the lines of these two interrelated and mutually constitutive systems of information. To be more precise, I argue that human nature is a dialectical process whereby biological, cultural, and environmental information are entangled in loops of reciprocal causation. This conception leads

to a flexible, historical, and context-bounded nature that nonetheless maintains a universal character. As the saying goes, it is our nature not to have a nature. By the end of this chapter, it will be clear that a biocultural theory is better equipped to make sense of this popular yet vague notion of human nature. If we are able to transcend our nature it is precisely because our biocultural constitutions allow us to do so, and this is natural in itself. Likewise, by the end, I hope to show that a biocultural nature is an adequate conceptual tool to understand the naturalness, or lack thereof, of capitalism, socialism, or any human political system. Before I can explain how this is the case, however, a detailed exposition of my argument is warranted.

To do so, this chapter is divided as follows. First, I clarify some definitional issues about human nature and different senses of the word natural. Second, as a segue into a biocultural definition, I explain dialectics as a philosophical concept and trace a brief history of its use and abuse as a “scientific method.” With a demystified version of dialectics in hand, I turn to the EES and explain its dialectical undertones. Specifically, I will show that in light of the EES, evolution acquires a dialectical character (Svensson 2018), therefore human nature itself is better defined as a dialectical process.

Nature and Natural

What does it mean to claim that there is a human nature? Fuentes and Visala (2017) recognize four distinctive senses of the idea. Human nature (or the naturalness of X) can refer to 1) universals of behavior, 2) uniquely human traits or characteristics, 3) innate genetic or psychological adaptations distinct from culture/environment, and 4) normative issues (natural = good; unnatural = bad). A fifth possibility is to consider natural 5) whatever comes easy to us by virtue of our psychologies. These “maturationally natural” skills (McCauley, 2011) are intuitive, automatic, and organized in advance of experience.

From these five possibilities, 2) is not relevant to my argument and perhaps not useful for philosophy or science. All species are unique in one way or another. 3) is simply misleading. There are no innate components that exist independent from experience because as Laland and Brown (2018) rightly argue organisms cannot be separated from themselves, thus are always-already subjected to internal (e.g., hormonal) variables and external stimuli. This point is a good segue into 1), a view of human nature that I accept but with some caveats. Although there are universals of human behavior (e.g., marriage), these are also products of different processes and not of genetic internal cues or instincts that develop in advance of experience. Finally, although 5) smacks of neo-nativism, hence is also susceptible to Laland and Brown's point apropos experience, I think that McCauley (2011) captures a key insight about the term natural. For humans, some things – good, bad, and contradictory – are easy to learn/process (e.g., sociality and tribalism), but others are just hard (e.g., statistical thinking). I adopt this view albeit with the same reservations that 1) warranted and not without making clear that just because something is hard it does not mean that it is necessarily unnatural. Now, I can state my overall argument with more clarity, namely socialism is natural because it is based on 1) universals of human behavior (e.g., cooperativeness) and on ideas that 5) our minds understand and process with ease (e.g., equity). Nevertheless, I still have to develop a more detailed account of human nature.

As I type these sentences, like many people in the modern world I depend on an “unnatural” aid to improve my vision, namely glasses. Due to different evolutionary selective pressures, human vision is feeble compared to hawks, chameleons, or goats. Clothes, shoes, spears, etc. engross the list of “unnatural” devices that people use on a daily basis to supplement and make up for our genetically encoded frailty. I choose these particular examples because they

highlight a common misconception about human nature. Natural is used to denote anything that is encoded in our biology, whereas other factors (e.g., culture, ecology) are external to our nature even if they play a role in its unfolding, canalization, silencing, and more. This view deliberately or not, replicates the nature-nurture debate. As Fuentes (2012) notices, the well-known dichotomy is partly responsible for conflating natural with good (ought-is) and unnatural with bad. The problem that this dichotomy posits to the study of human behavior, however, is that humans are as I have noticed before biocultural animals (Marks, 2017), or *naturenurture* (Fuentes, 2012). Hence, the separation of biology (internal) and culture (external) is necessarily artificial and the study of human nature under this model partially misguided.

Interestingly, the nature-nurture dichotomy is a conceptual legacy that science readily inherited from philosophy. For example, Hobbes' brutish nature, only curtailed by social norms, follows the same logic of Rousseau's noble nature corrupted by society. Yet, their conception of nature is not that different from contemporary thinkers such as Dawkins (2016) who argues that culture acts as a leash on our selfish nature (i.e., genes), or Wilson who suggests that genes keep culture on a leash (cited in Flannagan, 2016). At the end, it is not clear who controls the reins, but nature and nurture are fundamentally at odds in these four versions, i.e., Hobbes, Rousseau, Dawkins, Wilson. Of course, the days when human nature used to be the object of speculation of philosophers and theologians are over. In the modern world, its study is in the hands of scientists, and the occasional scientifically informed philosopher. Yet, there is no consensus on human nature among scientists either. If speculative thinking did not lead to a conclusive view, empirical data has not proven itself capable of ending the debate once and for all. The only thing that both scientists and philosophers accept, however, is the fact that since Darwin, human nature cannot be studied except in light of evolution.

Evolutionary models of human nature come in all colors and flavors. On one camp we have those who define human nature as a cluster of biological/psychological adaptations that are fixed and species-typical. Sociobiology and its successor evolutionary psychology are the paradigmatic camps that render human nature as a set of genetically encoded traits underlying a universal psychology. Researchers such as E. O. Wilson, Pinker, Leeda Cosmides and John Tooby, are among the most noticeable names in this group. For these nativists, the human mind is the product of challenges that our ancestors faced throughout the Pleistocene. Thus, today humans walk around the world with Stone Age minds comprised of innate – hence the nativist label – modules that evolution encoded in our genes. In philosophy, an influential account of human nature that is compatible with evolutionary biology is Machery’s “nomological account.” For Machery (2008, 323), “human nature is the set of properties that humans tend to possess as a result of the evolution of their species.” Importantly, Machery distinguishes between products of evolution (biology) and products of culture and learning, and human nature is confined exclusively to the realm of biology.

On the other hand, there are those who emphasize variation among humans to reject biological essentialism as a vestige of 19th century thinking that modern science has readily dispelled. Human behavior across cultures is so diverse to even consider the existence of universal traits as Levins and Lewontin (1985) stipulate. One of the most famous arguments against essentialism comes from David Hull (1986), who argues that the concept of species defined genealogically, i.e., sharing a common ancestor, as a cluster of individuals who share traits is not tenable. That is, in every group there are members who do not exhibit some of these so-called universal traits. If this is the case, one can never make general assumptions about individuals, and therefore it is impossible to group them in discrete species. The upshot of Hull’s

“anti-essentialist” critique is that human nature does not exist because the putatively universal characteristics of *Homo sapiens* cannot not be defined rigorously or exhaustively.

In the last two paragraphs, we have two poles of the human nature debate. On the one hand, strong nativism exemplified by sociobiology/evolutionary psychology, and on the other hand, weak and strong eliminativism à la Levins and Lewontin, and Hull respectively. In each case, biology and culture, nature and nurture, are given causal primacy to defend or reject the idea of human nature. For example, whereas evolutionary psychologists take a no prisoners approach to defend the side of nature, Jesse Prinz (2012) identifies as a “nurturist” to rebuff human nature. Between these two extremes, there are others who strive to find a sensible middle. Interactionism, for example, conceives human nature emerging out of the interaction of biology and culture (Konner 2002; Paul 2015). A much more nuanced position, interactionism still posits a radical distinction between nature and nurture, however.

Along the lines of interactionism, Paul Griffiths (2011) provokingly suggests that human nature must account for diversity and variation instead of searching for universals. In order to do so, Griffiths adopts Developmental Systems Theory (DST), which emphasizes the importance of considering the relationship organism-environment as a whole developmental system. Under this view, human nature is not the product of internal, i.e., biological, factors alone but also of external causes (e.g., society, culture) that play a fundamental role and in many cases account for variation.

Griffiths’ perspective, which emphasizes flexibility, plasticity, and a quasi-holistic approach, shares some common themes with a widely overlooked version of human nature, Marx’s dialectical view. There at least two important reasons for this neglect. From a scientific perspective, Marx’s theory is not an evolutionary account, hence remains conjectural and lacks

empirical validity. Philosophers, on the other hand, have largely ignored Marx's conception of human nature because according to a certain legend, he was a sort of cultural determinist who rejected human nature. However, if capitalism is inhuman, for Marx, it is precisely because it estranges (*Entfremdung*) us from our essence (*Gattungswesen*). As Norman Geras (2016) notices, Marx regularly uses terms such as essence, human needs, universal characteristics, and human nature – both in his early and mature work. Perhaps the most famous instance and definitive account of human nature for Marx comes from the 6th of the Theses on Feuerbach, which stipulates: “the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations” (Marx 1976a, 4).

Marx's 6th thesis broaches a set of philosophical principles that foreshadows both biocultural (Marks 2017) and *naturenurtural* (Fuentes 2012) scientific models. Namely, biology and culture are so intrinsically entangled that separating them misses something fundamental about human beings and their development. Apropos the sixth thesis, Balibar (2014) observes that Marx's original text has a French word mixed in with the German [*das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse*] (the ensemble of social relations, circumstances, conditions). Ensemble, in this sense, has two connotations. First, it underscores the importance of flexibility for Marx's view. Second, an ensemble cannot be reduced to its parts. An orchestra, for example, cannot be reduced to violinists, flutists, celloists, etc., without severing important relationships among parts. Like most social activities, the “essence” of the ensemble emerges out of the interrelatedness of its different performers as parts of an orchestra. Likewise, the essence of humanity emerges through the interplay of social and transindividual activities that are constitutive of humanity at large (e.g., work, rituals, toolmaking, language) and the role that individual actors play in instantiating these schemes.

Marx's sixth thesis, I suggest, does not claim anything else than what Ernst Mayr (1961) intended when he wrote that behavior is the "pacemaker of evolution." Of course, for Mayr evolution = biology, whereas Marx does not have a clear account of evolution in his theory of human nature. It is also true that Marx and Engels admired Darwin's work, and although highly critical of its ideological undertones, also saw confirmation for their own theories. Specifically, Marx and Engels thought that Darwin had confirmed historical materialism inasmuch as he had demonstrated that nature itself has a history that unfolds through stages. From this, we can conclude that Marx also saw human nature as a multivariable historical activity, i.e., a dialectical process. But Marx would not assign causal primacy to any of these variables. For all the accusations of (economic) reductionism and determinism levied against him, Marx was neither.

On the other hand, traditional Neo-Darwinian theory (including Mayr) endorses a reductionist approach to the study of human behavior and evolution. Yet, human nature cannot be studied in a reductionist sense because the systems of information that constitute it, i.e., biology, culture, environment, are utterly entangled, thus a reductionist approach runs the risk of losing or misconstruing causal relationships. Roughly speaking, scientific reductionism is the notion that the sciences are organized hierarchically and in principle, although unlikely in practice, all sciences could be reduced to physics – the foundational science. Depending on the meaning of "reduce," reductionism can be epistemological or metaphysical (Risjord, 2014). The epistemological reductionist claims that theories at one level can be substituted by theories at a lower level. For example, theories about ethics can be explained, i.e., reduced to psychology. The metaphysical reductionist, on the other hand, assumes that objects, entities, and events explained at higher levels are merely epiphenomenal manifestations of lower levels (Risjord, 2014). Paul and Patricia Churchland, for instance, along with other "New wave" reductionists,

argue that all psychology is reducible, in the metaphysical sense, to neuroscience (McCauley, 2009), i.e., minds are reducible to brains.

The hierarchical arrangement (e.g., Psychology → Neuroscience → Physics) that reductionism proposes entails the existence of fundamental units at each level of explanation. From quarks and atoms, to molecules, to genes, to neurons, to individuals, different parts at different levels explain the mechanisms underlying the phenomena under study. In the social sciences, for example, the dominant form of reductionism is methodological individualism, which argues that social wholes are reducible to its micro-foundations. In other words, social groups can be explained solely by means of individual actors as there are no such things as social properties but only individual agents (Risjord, 2014). As Hubbard (1990, 5) quips, reductionists, like Humpty Dumpty, put things back together the wrong way around. Hubbard's point is not only that reductionism does not get the picture right when it tries to extrapolate the whole from its parts, but that in proceeding directly to parts without regards for the whole it partly misconstrues both.

Along the same lines, Marx famously inveighed against the atomism typical of classical economics. Reductionism, however, does not have to be atomistic. A reductionist does not have to disregard the causal importance of relationships among parts. Marxists, hence, can reject atomism – indeed, anyone interested in learning how things work should – but still endorse reductionism in some cases for a simple reason, namely it works. Reductionism is clearly anti-dialectical but Marxist scientists such as Lewontin (2000), Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992), and Elster (1982) readily accept the fact even when breaking wholes into smaller components is ostensibly the most “unmarxist” methodological procedure, it has been the most successful

scientific method. But I have suggested that a dialectical view and not reductionism is the best lens to study human nature. Can we embrace both?

Reductionism vs. dialectical materialism was one of the facets of the “Sciences Cold War.” Popper and Hayek, for instance, endorsed methodological individualism as an antidote to Marxist pseudoscience, whereas Marxist researchers denounced reductionism for its anti-dialectical bent (Wright, Levine, and Sober 1992). There is a big misconception that lies at the heart of this methodological fight though. Unlike reductionism, dialectical materialism is not, and was never intended to be, a scientific methodology. It simply makes no sense to abandon reductionism and embrace dialectics. It is not methodologically sound. However, just like there is a simple reason to accept reductionism, namely it works, there is an equally transparent justification to uphold a healthy anti-reductionist attitude. Reductionism, as Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992) suggest, is not always the best scientific practice. Some phenomena are either irreducible to its micro-level foundations or it is rather undesirable to reduce because what are suitable answers at one level of explanation might be deeply unsatisfactorily at another level. If I ask, why did a movie make me cry?, the role of photoreceptors, neurotransmitters, electrical signals, and other aspects of the neurobiology of crying might be relevant at one level but insignificant at another. What if I want to know what moved me to tears from an artistic point of view, for instance? At the same time, the neurobiological description is not irrelevant to my inquiry. The point is, explanations are more robust if we accept a pluralism of theories and levels instead of a ham-handed reductionism. Breaking things into smaller parts is not always the best approach. Sometimes it is better to think dialectically, and this is especially true the object of study is a developmental process like human nature.

Dialectical Thinking and Scientific Methods

For Elster (1985) rendered intelligible in analytic discourse, dialectics does not have anything valuable to contribute to the practice of science with the exception of a few interesting comments about social contradictions. Elster is a member of analytic, or “No bullshit,” Marxism, a school for whom obscure terms like dialectics is the main culprit behind the teleological and quasi-religious zealotry that characterized many Marxists in the 20th century. I am sympathetic to the analytic agenda inasmuch as it is committed to elaborate Marx’s ideas clearly, free of jargon, and in light of scientific evidence. Surely, obscurantism and anti-scientific positions are first and foremost characteristics of conservatism. Unlike the analytic Marxists, however, I think that dialectics can be rendered intelligible and still remain a powerful concept to theorize about human nature scientifically, and explicitly to understand Marx’s view of it. Dialectics’ small, but important, contribution to science, and specifically to biology, illustrate its value.

Noah Chomsky noticed that dialectics is a fancy term that expresses a rather simple idea, viz., “think correctly,” but does so cloaked in obscure jargon (Levins & Lewontin, 1985). Although Chomsky is right to a certain extent, to “think correctly” is not an easy task. Under the banner of correct thinking many totalitarian doctrines (e.g., Nazism, Stalinism) accomplished precisely the opposite. As Adorno and Horkheimer (2007) aptly notice in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the main task of totalitarian thinking is to halt all thinking but under the guise of reason. Consequently, when thought stops thinking itself, it becomes precisely its opposite, namely irrationality and barbarism. Totalitarian thinking, however, Adorno and Horkheimer note, is not reserved to politics or religion but can also corrupt science. Indeed, the history of science is full of embarrassing exemplars who adopted barbaric positions and scientific

movements that defended irrational ideas. Trofim Lysenko, Werner Heisenberg, Wernher von Braun, Robert Yerkes, James Watson, and Konrad Lorenz, are just a few examples of scientists, or a charlatan pretending to be one in Lysenko's case, who espoused dreadful socio-political beliefs and/or conducted unethical scientific work.

Against the irrationality of paralyzed thinking, dialectics is a method to engage in a constant critique of one's own unstated assumptions and presuppositions. This method is the legacy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel – a towering giant in the history of philosophy whose influence comes from being read and misread by friends and foes alike. Among other things, Hegel is deservedly famous for his “obscure” writing. The philosopher of science Mario Bunge (2010), exaggeratedly I think, even credits Hegel for popularizing a style of philosophical writing that mistakes obscurity for depth (e.g., psychoanalysis, postmodernism).

Notwithstanding Hegel's position in the history of philosophy, Hegelian dialectics is a key influence for Marx and subsequent versions of Marxisms. Although highly critical of Hegel, Marx remained a committed Hegelian even avowing himself a pupil of “that mighty thinker” as he wrote in the afterword to the second edition of the first volume of *Capital* (Marx, 1990). Indeed, dialectical materialism, Marx famously noted, is the direct result inverting Hegel to save the rational kernel from the mystical shell of his “dialectical idealism,” to use a term loosely.

In the most basic terms, dialectical thinking is a method to overcome seemingly irreconcilable contradictions. Whereas for traditional logic a statement and its contradiction (P & ~ P) cannot be true at the same time, Hegel reconceives the nexus between the two statements through their “andness.” Opposite terms, Hegel argues, often interpenetrate and under closer scrutiny the boundaries between statements that appear to be an either-or disjunction are not as clear-cut as previously thought. Consequently, Hegel aims at developing a method to rethink

and resolve putative dichotomous relationships. Inwood (1992) nicely illustrates how opposites can interpenetrate with the following example. If we conceive a being so powerful that it destroys all resistance, then such being would fall into impotence because it would no longer have any means to test its power. Hence, a being simultaneously omnipotent and impotent can be logically conceived.

The notion that something can both be and not be P, seems to violate the canonical law of the excluded middle. In fact, Levins and Lewontin (1985) assume that Hegelian dialectics reject this logical rule, but this is not the case. Hegel suggests that the statements must be reconsidered in their interrelatedness and as a dynamic process “grasping opposites in their unity” (Hegel 2015, 35). This procedure is what Hegel calls speculative thought or dialectical thinking. That is, when P encounters its contradiction $\sim P$, speculative thinking, according to Hegel, is the process whereby the positive (P) and the negative ($\sim P$) are “reconciled” in a new statement that contains elements of the original contradiction but that nonetheless represents a higher form. This new statement (P¹) is what Hegel calls sublation (*aufheben/Aufhebung*). It can be easy yet misleading to call the higher statement a “solution” or a synthesis, so I am purposefully avoiding that language for now.

Eventually, for Hegel P¹ will encounter its own negation thereby continuing the progression of the dialectical movement. Hegel thinks that contradictions or negations are inherent to every statement, idea, historical moment, etc. and emerge from their inner conditions. For instance, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977) each historical situation encounters its opposite lodged within its own presuppositions, in the *Science of Logic* (2015) being always-already presupposes its opposite, nothingness, or in the *Philosophy of Right* (1991), a wealthy society also produces a destitute “rabble.” Contradiction permeates everything. In this sense,

Hegel is a panlogist who thinks that his dialectical method reveals the intelligible structure of the world (Wood, 2004). Hegel's panlogicism also applies to human history, which unfolds by virtue of the "labor of the negative" (1977,10), i.e., via contradictions.

For Hegel, history is a process whereby the subject actualizes itself as its own object and reunites it with itself understanding this externality as its own expression. This movement is what Hegel famously designates spirit, or mind (*Geist*). For the sake of science, or perhaps anything, *Geist*, whether it is human history understanding itself both as subject and object or simply garbled prose is rather inconsequential. The question is whether dialectics correctly describes the structure of the world, as Hegel thought. The structure of reality, following Hegel's philosophy, emerges as a totality of organically interrelated parts and is characterized by a tendency to change that alternates with periods of (superficial) stasis. Given the role that contradiction plays in the Hegelian system, the whole is irreducible to its parts because there are bidirectional causal and explanatory pathways that cannot be severed without altering their content significantly. Parts acquire their characteristics through the whole and vice versa. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (1977, 11) famously writes that, "The True is the whole." In other words, things reveal their nature only as totalities (Wood, 2004). Reductive explanations, in this vein, are necessarily one-sided according to Hegel's logic. Science, Hegel thinks, must grasp parts and whole in their full interrelatedness to proceed successfully, and dialectics is the correct method to grasp these truths scientifically.

Marx, a scientifically informed thinker, was sympathetic to Hegel's method of thinking but not its scientific pretensions. As Herbert Marcuse (1963, 312) highlights, Marx agrees with Hegel's dialectical conception of reality and its "negative character," as well with the notion that truth is revealed in totalities. Marx, however, breaks with Hegel's metaphysical commitments.

Whereas Hegel conceives the dialectical structure of the world as the result of a self-organizing Spirit, God, or other mystical principles, Marx thinks that this structure is simply a material fact about nature that human thought reflects. In contradistinction to Hegel, Marx (1990, 102) writes, “the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.”

Like Hegel, Marx emphasizes that the structure of the world is dialectical, hence the best way to think about it is, obviously, dialectically. However, for Marx if dialectical thinking is “correct thinking” it is because it mirrors the structure of the world and not because of some *a priori* mystical principle that animates reality. Marx’s quintessential dialectical analysis is found in the three volumes of *Capital*, which reveals the internal contradictions of capitalism following its own presuppositions about the world. Using the theoretical precepts of classical economics, Marx establishes freedom and private ownership as the cornerstone of the capitalist system and following its own internal logic arrives at their opposite, namely enslavement and (legalized) robbery. Marx developed his conclusions through a meticulous analysis of the rather sparse economic evidence available during his time, and not based on faith about the invincibility and necessity of the dialectic.

Unfortunately, given its importance for Marx, in the 20th century Marxist philosophers, political parties, and scientists uncritically adopted dialectics as the path to truth. Instead of a technique to think about the world, the world had to conform to the whims of the dialectic. This form of totalitarianism found its highest expression under the banner of Stalinist dialectical materialism (DiaMat) used to justify *a priori* the decisions of the party as well as scientific theories. Nothing can be more undialectical, both in a Marxist and Hegelian sense, than DiaMat, however. Hegel (1991) does not think that philosophy can predict the future, as the well-known

Owl of Minerva illustrates in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*. Marx, inclined to make predictions as he was, did so based on a rigorous analysis of empirical evidence in the style of social science and not on leaps of faith.

It is under Stalinist totalitarianism that dialectics became a pseudo-scientific method. Lysenkoism is the most infamous example of the misapplication of “dialectics” to the study of science and has come to symbolize everything that is wrong with it. For example, under Lysenko’s reign of terror, the official doctrine of Soviet biology was Lamarckism because it emphasized change, plasticity, and other characteristics that Lysenko found useful to push his quackery. Consequently, Darwinism and Mendelian genetics were expunged from the curriculum for their “bourgeois” and “non-dialectical” bent, which led to the annihilation of the study of evolutionary biology in the Soviet Union – among the most renowned in the world up to that point. Soviet universities trained influential biologists including none other than Theodosius Dobzhansky, who later immigrated to the U.S. and revolutionized the study of population genetics.

The notion that Lysenkoism is the paradigmatic example of dialectical thinking in science has to be taken with several grains of salt, however. First, as I have highlighted DiaMat is neither Hegelian nor Marxist but a spurious mix of both that yields a quasi-religious doctrine. Second, as Nikolai Krementsov (2010) stresses, a large number of Marxist biologists defended Darwin and Mendel against Lysenko’s pseudoscientific and pseudo-philosophical attacks. Darwinian theory, these scientists argued, was also dialectical and not merely “bourgeois” science. In the end, Lysenko’s victory had more to do with unscrupulous opportunism and politics than with either dialectics or science. Nonetheless, Lysenkoism signified the death of the dialectical study of biology in the West and more importantly cemented the reputation of

dialectics as a pseudoscientific framework. Unquestionably, DiaMat should be rejected as mere obscurantism, but it would be unfair to levy the same criticism against dialectical materialism properly understood.

A traditional defense of dialectical materialism against non-sensical misappropriations is György Lukács' (1971) influential essay "What is Orthodox Marxism?" – part of *History and Class Consciousness*. For Lukács, the only thing that makes Marxism unique is its distinctive methodology, which can be applied to critique even its own assumptions. Therefore, even if all of Marx's postulates and predictions were wrong, dialectical materialism as a method would still be salvageable, Lukács argues. In a famous note of "What is Orthodox Marxism?" Lukács suggests that misguided by Hegel's panlogicism/pantheism, Engels wrongly applied the dialectical method to nature, whereas Marx reserved dialectics only to history and society (Lukács 1971, 5). The key to salvage dialectical materialism, for Lukács, is to distinguish Marx's Hegelianism (good dialectics) from Engels' Hegelianism (bad dialectics).

On the other hand, as Wood (2004) evinces, Lukács' attempt to drive a wedge between Marx and Engels via Hegel has no textual basis. In other words, there is nothing in Marx that suggests that dialectical thinking is not suitable to study nature scientifically. Furthermore, to posit a distinction between nature and human affairs, as Lukács implicitly does, is ill conceived. Marx dedicated his efforts to the scientific study of humans as a part of nature, albeit without evolutionary theory as a conceptual framework to do so. But after Darwin, human history and societies are also part of natural categories, therefore their study belongs to philosophy as much as to the sciences. There is no reason why human affairs cannot be studied with scientific rigor. Marx envisioned one science of human nature, i.e., a philosophical anthropology. In a Marxist

vein, it makes no sense to assume that dialectical materialism only applies to the humanities and social sciences but not to the physical or life sciences.

Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992) correctly identify the pressing issue for Marxist researchers in a “post-socialist world,” either we clarify the “dialectical method” making its worth transparent, or we abandon it once and forever. Their choice is the latter. Dialectics, they argue, is not a scientific methodology nor does it contribute anything to the study of nature. I agree with the first part of their claim, the second is more debatable. As Levins and Lewontin (1985, 191) write, “Dialectical materialism is not, and has never been, a programmatic method for solving particular physical problems. Rather, dialectical analysis provides an overview and a set of warning signs against particular forms of dogmatism and narrowness of thought.”

Levins and Lewontin dedicated the *Dialectical Biologist*, a collection of essays on theoretical and empirical issues in science analyzed from a dialectical standpoint, to Engels, “Who got it wrong a lot of the time but who got it right where it counted.” Where did Engels get it right, one has to wonder though? In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels (1964a, 26) purportedly derives the laws of dialectics abstracted “from the history of nature and human society.” These laws are: 1) quantitative change turns into qualitative change and vice versa, 2) opposites interpenetrate, and 3) the law of the negation of negation. Engels credits Hegel for extrapolating these “laws” in an idealistic fashion as they apply to thought but, in line with Marx, projects them into the material world. In doing so, Engels simply agrees with Hegel and assumes that reality is structured as a totality of organically interconnected parts and permeated by change and contradiction.

These so-called laws, of course, do not do much for science written in esoteric terms. So, once again where did Engels get it right? A suitable answer that illustrates the application of the

so-called laws of dialectics to nature comes from the well-known essay “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man” (Engels, 1964b). In this piece, Engels hypothesizes about the relationship between the evolution of the human hand, tool making, and language in a way that reads astonishingly current and somewhat accurate (Stout and Chaminade 2012). For Engels, these biological and cultural traits co-evolved as hominids became more dependent on each other. As our remote ancestors adopted bipedalism, Engels suggests, the hand was free to manipulate objects, gather food, and create better tools, among other activities that increased manual and digital dexterity throughout years of evolution. At the same time, bipedal hominids with better technology developed more complex methods of foraging and hunting that enhanced their survival, thereby becoming more reliant on each other. This new cooperative niche, Engels continues, made communication necessary and created selective pressures to develop language as well as the anatomical changes (e.g., descended larynx) to support its emergence.

Although lots of the details of Engels’ account are either esoteric or manifestly wrong, influenced by a dialectical approach, he correctly identifies the interconnection among different causal variables and selective pressures that underlie human evolution. In other words, in 1876 Engels strikingly proposed a proto theory of gene-culture co-evolution highlighting the intertwined development of hand, language, brain, behavior, and culture. Engels rightly recognized that evolution considered through a dialectical lens avoids the pitfalls of overestimating the explanatory power of reductionism.

It is wrongheaded, therefore, to oppose dialectics to reductionism as scientists and philosophers, Marxists (Lewontin, Hubbard) and non-Marxists (Hayek, Popper) have done. Dialectics can, at most, highlight moments when reductionist science overlooks certain “warning signs” such as the historicity of scientific practice and the interconnection of multiple variables

in complex systems, but not prescribe means by which scientific success is achieved.

Reductionism is a scientific method devised to understand mechanistic causality appealing to lower levels, whereas dialectics is a set of ontological and epistemological commitments that can influence experimental design, and aide in theorizing and interpreting reductionist findings in integrative and dynamic frameworks (e.g., emergence in complex biological systems).

Of course, reductionists could ask why should a highly successful approach need any revision? Specially, when the “enlightenment” comes from a philosophy that became a source of obscurantism in the 20th century. It is unfortunate, for example, that a book like *The Dialectical Biologist*, with modest proposals to strengthen the practice of science was so poorly received. A noticeable exception to the hostile reception was John Maynard Smith, who praised the book for its original approach to the study of biology. Tellingly, Maynard Smith – a lapsed Marxist and member of the British Communist Party in his youth – was well-read in Marxism and somewhat open to its ideas. Narrowmindedness affects scientific progress no matter where it comes from, and science cannot adopt an “end-of history” logic but must always remain open to a relentless critique of its assumptions. Neither dialectics is always wrong, nor reductionism is always right. Three examples from biology nicely illustrate this point.

Dialectical Cells and Dialectical Evolutionary Theory

The first example is the work of Alex Novikoff, a Marxist scientist who explicitly endorsed dialectical materialism to study cell biology, albeit without rejecting reductionism. Along with Christian de Duve, Novikoff contributed to the discovery and visualizations of lysosomes. Lysosomes are organelles – subunits of cells with specialized functions – that contain digestive enzymes. For Douglas Allchin (2008), Novikoff’s original research and productive career was a direct consequence of his Marxist leanings. Novikoff was equally

troubled by the two dominant methodologies in molecular biology, namely reductionism and holism. Contra these two methods, parts and whole, he argued, have to be studied in a dialectical relationship. Alkoff dedicated his career to map organelles and their functions in a reductionist vein but highlighting the importance of their developmental context. Consequently, Allchin (2008, 204) argues, Novikoff “revealed how the ‘same’ units differed depending on various cellular contexts, or wholes.” In this manner, Novikoff reconciled, i.e., sublated, reductionism and holism focused on what he termed “integrative levels in biology” (Allchin 2008).

Sadly, during the McCarthy years Novikoff was prosecuted for his communist sympathies. In 1953 he was dismissed from his position at the University of Vermont and his contributions were widely forgotten. Christian de Duve was awarded the Nobel Prize for the discovery of lysosomes, but Novikoff was shunned. Science is always socially situated, and the abuses of ideological prejudice are not reserved to any political movement in particular.

The second example of dialectical science comes from evolutionary theory and also endorses the study of integrative levels in biology in a dialectical vein. Predictably, I am referring to Richard Lewontin, who is responsible for “popularizing” a dialectical study of evolution. Nonetheless, there are two pioneers that deserve brief mention. The first is Engels himself who developed a dialectical account of evolution *avant la lettre*, as I noticed earlier. The second case is a bit ironic. The preface to *Dialectics of Nature* was written by a towering giant of evolutionary biology, J.B.S Haldane, who praised Engels’ dialectical analysis of evolution.

Haldane – an avowed Marxist – along with Ronald Fisher and Sewall Wright is responsible for developing the mathematical theory underlying modern population genetics thereby playing a crucial role in stablishing the modern Darwinian synthesis (MS). The irony is that Haldane, influenced by Marx and Engels, espoused a dialectical view of evolution, whereas

the MS is decidedly undialectical. I will explain this in more detail later. Haldane, like Novikoff, did not use dialectics as a scientific method but as conceptual tool to enrich what Allchin (2008) aptly calls the “context of discovery.” In other words, his methodological practice remained reductionist, but his analysis and interpretation of scientific evidence was distinctly dialectical. In “A Dialectical Account of Evolution,” for example, Haldane (1937) speculates about the existence of genes that increase the fitness of a species in a manner that foreshadows the main tenets of group selection. Nevertheless, Haldane did not develop any full-fledged theoretical contributions to the study of biology that could be deemed dialectical per se.

Lewontin, on the other hand, has made dialectics the centerpiece of his work in evolutionary biology. For example, the “units of selection” debate stems from Lewontin’s (1970) insistence on the interrelatedness, or dialectical relationship, of genes, organism, and environment. Lewontin’s key contribution was to problematize the gene-centrism that characterizes traditional evolutionary theory in a way that questioned the causal primacy of genes. The classical view of evolution is that the environment posits challenges that organisms “solve” increasing their fitness genetically and through natural selection as the dominant mechanism. In this sense, evolution is unidirectional, and genes are in the driving seat. The issue with this view is that experience, culture, ecological niches, and more, i.e., crucial fitness-enhancing information, cannot be passed down generations by genetic means. On the other hand, inspired by dialectics, Lewontin pioneered the study of reciprocal causation in evolutionary and developmental biology (Sterelny 2005; Svensson 2018) to accommodate these processes and recognize them as evolutionary in their own right.

For Hegel, given that opposites interpenetrate, the relationship between subject and object has to be reconceived in their interrelatedness. In this light, subject has to be thought also

as object and vice versa. Following the same logic, Lewontin argues that organisms are not only objects of evolution but also subjects of it. That is, organisms can affect, alter, or direct their evolutionary pathways instead of merely being passive objects of selection. Evolutionary causality, therefore, is multidirectional and characterized by loops of feedback at work between genes, organisms, and environment. As Sterelny (2005) evinces, following reciprocal causation, organisms and environment are made by each other; organisms are not solely the product of evolution but also causes of it.

This important contribution to the study of evolution is the outcome of Lewontin's dialectical analysis of nature. Whereas reductionist and mechanistic views impose clear-cut distinctions between inside and outside, from a dialectical point of view these boundaries are porous. Therefore, Lewontin reinterprets the relationship between one and the other as a dialectical movement. Organisms can become adapted to their environments through natural selection, and/or, organisms can modify the environment (e.g., building nests, traps) to solve problems. Upcoming generations inherit modified environments that increase, or decrease, the fitness of a population by non-genetic means in some cases, and in others triggers processes of gene-culture co-evolution. For instance, in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Diamond (1999) famously, and controversially, argues that cultural and ecological inheritance have played an inordinate role in the way in which human history has unfolded. If some human groups have been more successful than others, in biological terms, it is not because of "better" or different genes but a consequence of information transmitted through non-genetic channels.

Lewontin's critique of gene-centrism eventually opened the door to multi-level selection theory (MLS), i.e., the notion that evolution can act on genes, individuals, and groups (Sober and Wilson 1998), and inspired many repeated calls to expand the scope of the traditional Darwinian

synthesis (MS). Svensson (2018) highlights that reciprocal causation might be one of the few, if not the only, contributions of dialectical thinking to evolutionary theory. It should be noted that punctuated equilibrium (Gould and Eldredge 1977) is a dialectical form of change that Stephen Jay Gould, a Marxist himself, explicitly compared with Hegel's law of quantitative and qualitative change, namely the idea that small accretions can lead to revolutionary transformations.

Nonetheless, let us pretend that reciprocal causation is the most important dialectical contribution to the study of evolution. Even if this is the case, Lewontin has been foundational to expand the MS because as Svensson rightly notices the EES has a dialectical approach that results from adopting reciprocal causation as one its main tenets. Indeed, one of the radical consequences of this "dialectical" approach to causation is that proponents of the EES (Laland et al. 2011) have challenged Mayr's influential distinction between proximate and ultimate causes in evolutionary biology. To be more precise, Laland et al. (2011) accept that how (proximate) and why (ultimate) questions applied to biological problems have different answers and biologists try to find solutions to both. What they reject, on the other hand, is the dominant (MS) view that assumes that only ultimate, i.e., genetic, causes are evolutionary, whereas proximate processes are ontogenetic (Laland et al. 2011). They propose to extend the MS to make room for processes thus far considered merely proximate (*inter alia*: cultural evolution, niche construction) and grant them ultimate causality as well.

Although Svensson correctly identifies reciprocal causation as the main influence of dialectical biology on the EES, he misses a key point. Constructive development, the second key tenet of the EES, is also dialectical in character. Constructive development is the notion that organisms are not only the product of genetic instructions unfolding, but developmental

trajectories also have an active role in changing inner and outer states that organisms use to match environmental information (Laland et al. 2015). The upshot of constructive development is that the genome does not control phenotypical expression but that organisms “self-assemble” (Laland et al. 2015, 6) through exploration. The novelty of this view is that ontogenetic processes, i.e., happening during the organism’s lifespan, can trigger new cycles of selection, yet do so independently from genes (or at least with little input). In other words, ontogenetic processes are also a source of evolutionary change.

Given the evolutionary import of development, organisms cannot be reduced to genes separated from context without severing and misconstruing causal pathways. Genes, organisms, environment – the triple helix – as Lewontin (2001) calls it, are always interrelated. Human evolution and development are particularly sensitive to this entanglement. For our species, culture is such a powerful system of information that can lead to environmental changes, construct new niches, modify psychologies, and trigger a myriad of epigenetic factors, which subsequently can modulate, silence, or overwhelm gene expression with relative ease. Overall, adopting constructive development and reciprocal causation as its main tenets, the EES makes explicit the dialectical relationship between multiple systems of information and processes vis-à-vis evolution (and evolvability). In this manner, evolution itself is understood dialectically.

For Svensson (2018), however, calls to extend the MS are misguided and unnecessary because they rely heavily on conceptual issues that have been implicitly or unknowingly accommodated by the MS. That is, the MS is already dialectical enough even if it does not use the word explicitly. What is important, Svensson suggests, is to find the correct analytical tools to conduct “dialectical” research instead of focusing on conceptual debates. I have to notice that none of the proponents of the EES adopt the term dialectics nor remain entangled in conceptual

quagmires to score philosophical points. The EES offers to the students of evolution precisely a new paradigm that accommodates cutting-edge analytical tools (e.g., cultural evolutionary modelling) to understand rigorously processes that have hitherto been overlooked or underemphasized.

Lewontin, on the other hand, has made dialectics the centerpiece of his work in evolutionary biology. As I noticed, the “units of selection” debate stems from Lewontin’s (1970) insistence on the interrelatedness, or dialectical relationship, of genes, organism, and environment. Likewise, inspired by dialectics, Lewontin pioneered the study of reciprocal causation in evolutionary and developmental biology (Svensson 2018). Causality, under this view, is multidirectional and characterized by loops of feedback at work between genes, organisms, and environment. Indeed, reciprocal causation and constructive development are the main tenets of the EES (Laland et al., 2015) and as Svensson (2018) rightly notes, the EES itself is dialectical in character.

Along these lines, the EES represents a conceptual break for the study of human nature. By virtue of its dialectical character the EES questions the definition of evolution itself. As Massimo Pigliucci (2007) notes, the classical textbook definition of evolution as change in gene frequencies “simply does not begin to account for what evolution actually *is*.” Although it is true that genetic selectionists tend to pay lip service to other processes besides natural selection, hence the animosity towards extended calls, ultimately genes remain a “privileged class of replicators” (Sterelny and Griffiths 1999, 136). By crowning the gene as the fundamental unit of evolution, the MS exaggerates its explanatory power and presents a distorted view of evolution. Humans, for example, are reduced to a collection of genes thereby becoming mere survival machines or lumbering robots (Dawkins 2016) controlled by their molecular masters. This view

of human nature simply misses the mark *toto caelo*. Certainly, a definition of human nature hinges upon the evolutionary paradigm that we adopt and its accepted view of evolution. If evolution boils down to genes, then human nature has to be explained by way of genes, even if other explanatory elements are also considered *en passant*. On the other hand, if we take evolution to be a multicausal, dialectical process à la EES, human nature acquires a different character.

I opened this chapter arguing that a theory of human nature that does not consider evolutionary theory is critically flawed. Now that I have justified the use of dialectical philosophy and showcased its relevance to evolutionary biology, I conclude developing a more detailed account of a biocultural theory of human nature. To do so, in what follows I read Marx's philosophy of human nature in light of the EES. Human nature, I will argue, is not a universal abstraction but a historically situated process that emerges from the relationship biology-culture, which in a Marxist vein is not only interactive, but non-additive and dialectical. That is, human nature is neither reducible to one of the poles nor an addition of each, but a dialectical synthesis of both. As Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin (1984, 75) rightly argue, "a full understanding of the human condition demands an integration of the biological and the social in which neither is given primacy or ontological priority over the other but in which they are seen as being related in a dialectical manner." The EES gives us the resources to develop an integrative analysis in this vein.

A Biocultural (Dialectical) Human Nature

In what follows I propose a biocultural view of human nature, namely the notion that biology and culture co-constitute natural capacities and abilities but neither side has causal primacy over the other. Along these lines, human nature is a historical, flexible process that

emerges from different biological, cultural, and environmental processes entangled in loops of reciprocal causation and not a set of universal, ahistorical, and fixed characteristics. As my argument unfolds, I will try to carefully weave philosophical principles and empirical evidence to support my position. According to a biocultural view, universality and particularity, i.e., commonality and difference, are complementary parts of human nature. Variation does not disprove the existence of human nature, but it is the upshot of our biocultural constitutions. To explain this seemingly contradictory standpoint, the first definitional issue to clarify is the fact that nature is not synonymous with biology nor universal and fixed. Culture and biology are both natural systems of information, therefore one does not oppose, curb, or leash another through unnatural means. If nature was reserved to biology alone, then it would make sense to speak of transcending it through culture, for example.

But this is not the case; whatever emerges out of the dialectical process between biology and culture (including ecological adaptations) is natural in itself. This explains why even seemingly “impenetrable cognitive processes” (Flanagan 2017) such as vision, are still heavily modulated by culture as the famous Müller-Lyer optical illusion shows. It turns out that environmental information finely tunes our systems of visual input and people who live in “carpentered environments, i.e.,” with more rectangular structures, are more susceptible to the illusion (McCauley and Henrich 2006). To separate nature from nurture, once again, is straightforwardly wrong. The fact that they cannot be fully understood except in their interrelatedness is precisely one of the characteristics of human nature.

The philosophical principles underlying a biocultural view of human nature are already present in Marx’s sixth thesis. For Marx, human nature does not exist abstractly in individuals (or genes) but emerges from historical and social relations instantiated at the group level.

Updating Marx's language in light of the EES, social relations can be understood as evolutionary processes that cannot be developed, mastered, or enacted by an individual alone but depend on collective and cooperative efforts. Culture – our collective brain as Henrich (2016) calls it – is the paradigmatic example of different social relationships (e.g., cooperative breeding, gathering, hunting, toolmaking, writing) with evolutionary import. The key, from a biocultural perspective, is that nothing about human nature can be conceived abstracted from collective activities and relations. Importantly, in a dialectical vein, emphasizing the importance of social relations does not negate the explanatory power, or the existence, of individuals but conceives them as parts of an irreducible whole. Social relations do not dissolve genes in the proverbial bath of acid à la cultural determinism but interact with other systems of information. This is why, for instance, no cultural intervention could completely get rid of selfishness, or altruism, in a society.

A biocultural view, I suggest, is superior to the traditional paradigm, viz., genetic selectionism, because it overcomes its one-sidedness. According to the adaptationist program everything that evolves is “selfish,” i.e., every trait is a consequence of genes trying to make copies of themselves, as Sober and Wilson (1998) rightly stress. Human nature, thus, must in some way or another boil down to selfishness. But as Mary Midgley (1979, 439) remarks, genes are as selfish as atoms are jealous, or biscuits teleological. Selfishness, of course, is merely a metaphor – an elegant one – to refer to biological processes but it has been pushed to such an illogical extreme that its function as a literary device has been almost forgotten. Dawkins, who coined the expression selfish genes claimed that humans are born selfish. “Scratch an altruist and watch a hypocrite bleed,” Michael Ghiselin (1974, 247) famously wrote. Risk your life to save your nephew, it is genes at work. Go out of your way to help a neighbor: genes. Eventually

he will reciprocate. You stop your car in a highly trafficked highway to help a stray dog: genes. You are virtue signaling to attract partners and make copies of, obviously, your genes.

Yet, from a biocultural perspective, genes did not create selfish machines that eventually invented cultural norms. Both genes and culture co-evolved from the get-go and to understand human nature, we have to pay careful attention to the role of cultural activities (e.g., cooperation, hunting) as evolutionary causes themselves. To do so, and following the EES (Laland et al. 2011), a biocultural view of human nature also challenges the distinction between proximate and ultimate causes (Mayr 1961) in evolutionary biology. To be more precise, although Laland et al. (2011) accept that proximate (how?) and ultimate (why?) questions have different answers and biologists try to find solutions to both, they reject the dominant (MS) view that assumes that only ultimate, i.e., genetic, causes are evolutionary, whereas proximate processes are merely ontogenetic. In the same vein, for a biocultural view of human nature, genes do not have causal primacy but are simply another link in a chain of processes underlying the evolutionary history of our species.

This challenge to the classical view of causality leads to a redefined version of Mayr's pacemaker model of evolution, which I suggested earlier is closely related to Marx's theory of human nature. As Konner (2002, 58) explains, Mayr simply noticed that experience can expose organisms to new selective forces thereby driving a change in gene frequencies. Genes, however, are still privileged replicators under this model. A biocultural nature maintains this evolutionary model but without the ultimate/proximate distinction. Under an organism-centered perspective like the EES, humans are not only objects but also subjects of their own evolution. That is, as Marx and Engels theorized, humans also participate in the construction of their nature by way of other processes instantiated through social relations.

In a well-known passage from *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1976b, 31) write:

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. [...] Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production.”

This passage makes two things clear. First, Marx links “what individuals are,” i.e., human nature (*Gattungswesen*), to a particular mode of life. A human mode of life, as Wood (2004) argues, is a life that accords to human essential abilities. Above everything else, these essential capacities, for Marx, are labor and cooperation (or communitarianism).¹ Unlike animals, Marx (1990) thought, humans consciously and purposefully alter their environments to create different niches. Now we know that Marx underestimated the abilities of animals and overestimated ours. Not only that animals can construct their environments intentionally but also humans do so without insight into what they do sometimes. Nevertheless, Marx’s view still holds. It is clear that different forms of labor (e.g., weaving, gathering, toolmaking) have played a crucial role in the evolution of our species. Moreover, throughout history, humans have lived in cooperative arrangements that intensified the power and efficacy of labor to produce different modes of human life. That is, human labor acquires its transformative power only because it is always embedded in larger social relations. As I mentioned before, Engels’ (1964b) “The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man” clearly illustrates how cooperative, working relationships can operate as catalyzers of evolutionary processes thereby transforming humans into toolmaking, social, cultural, and linguistic animals by virtue of their own (social) work.

¹ In fact, *Gattungswesen*, Wood (2004) explains, can also be translated as community.

Undoubtedly, Marx missed the mark widely on the natural capacities that characterize humans. Although cooperation and work are important facets of human nature, there are many more cognitive and cultural structures that must be added to the list (*inter alia*: empathy, inequity aversion, selfishness, aggression, love). Nonetheless, it is undeniable that working with others, humans constructed their own nature, or as Laland and Brown (2018) argue, human nature is socially constructed. Paradoxically, they highlight this fact to reject the existence of human nature (more on this later). Nonetheless, it is obvious that I cannot dedicate my time to become a better hunter, for instance, unless others teach me about it, cooperate to track and kill large game, take care of my children, develop better tools and weapons, sew clothes to protect me from inclement weather, weave baskets to gather larger quantities of food, gather such food, etc.

I purposefully choose hunting as an example because as Hubbard (1991) rightly stresses, as a masculine activity it has been overemphasized by biologists for its role in human evolution. Tellingly, the archetypal graphic representation of the evolution of the genus *Homo* depicts male after male in line, holding their rudimentary hunting tools, and relentlessly moving from *Australopithecus* to *Homo sapiens*. “Man, the hunter” could not exist without the support of extended social relationships, and importantly these relations could not exist without the important role that hunting has played in evolution. With every human adaptation, occupation, innovation, or invention, there is no such thing as individual success. Individuals cannot produce, not even survive, except as part of social groups. “Man, the hunter” was always “Men, the hunters,” and their extended social relations, even if the anthropological record and academic misogyny have overlooked the contributions of women and children. Hunters, gatherers, weavers, mothers, alloparents, children, etc. and the social relations that links them exist in a

dialectical relationship. They are mutually constitutive of each other, and collectively of human nature.

Indeed, as Bowles and Gintis (2011) explain, we have survived and reproduced with unprecedented success by virtue of engaging in cooperative activities. The history of the genus *Homo*, and especially of *Homo sapiens*, would not be the same if not for cooperation. But cooperation has an ancient evolutionary history that precedes our species. Tomasello (2019) explains that very early in the genus *Homo* (around 2 million years ago), individuals became interdependent, and two selective scenarios followed from this. The first occurred around 400,000 years ago when some ancestor of behaviorally modern humans engaged in face-to-face cooperation, which led to selective pressures underlying psychological adaptations such as sociality (incl. sympathy, empathy, and a sense of fairness) and cognitive faculties (e.g., theory of mind). The second scenario, which stems directly from the first, is the appearance of human culture around 100,000 years ago. More complex and sophisticated cultural adaptations led to modern human psychology and biology as we recognize it today. In this second scenario, humans began to live in larger groups, which led to psychological adaptations such as in-group identity, inter-group competition, and a disposition to conform to the rules of the group. It is no exaggeration to claim, as Tomasello (2019) does, that every human achievement – including our psychology, biology, and culture – is the product of cooperative settings and extended communal relationships.

From a biocultural perspective, thus, it makes no sense to talk about human nature except as a dialectic between individuals and communities. Human nature reveals its essence in historically situated (a) social relations (e.g., cultural institutions, familial organization) precisely because it is the result of (b) social relations throughout evolutionary history. In other words,

social relations as a concept has a two-fold meaning interpreted in light of evolutionary theory. What I refer to as (a) are social relations that are the product of evolution, whereas (b) are more ancient activities that drove human evolution thereby creating new selective environments (e.g., niche construction, cooperative breeding). In a dialectical vein, the two main factors in the constitution of human nature are labor and cooperation (or cooperative work) understood in the sense of b). But of course a) can also have evolutionary significance both as cultural adaptations or as catalyzers of long-term processes. To illustrate this point, Engels (1964b) evinces that the hand is both the organ and the product of labor. In the same vein, I suggest that work and cooperation are not only products (a) but also causes (b) of human evolution. From a biocultural perspective, hence, cooperation, not competition and selfishness, is the driving force behind our evolutionary history. This does not vanish competition from our natural repertoires, but simply emphasizes the fact that nothing in human evolution makes sense except in light of cooperation, even if it is to outcompete others sometimes.

Humans, then, “constructed” their nature in hyper-cooperative arrangements where they could labor for their benefit but also necessarily for the benefit of the group. Hence, a natural life, i.e., one lived in accordance with the human essence, must be characterized by social relations of the kind (a) that are fundamentally grounded in cooperation and work with social value. Translated to contemporary Darwinian language, cooperation and work underlie every cultural adaptation that created new selective environments, and consequently drove a myriad of processes of gene-culture co-evolution. Human phylogeny and ontogeny are products of activities sustained in and by hyper-social arrangements.

The final aspect that a biocultural view of human nature reconsiders is the role of groups in our evolutionary history. Given the emphasis that I have put on cooperative working

arrangements, it seems that human nature must be connected in one way or another to group selection. Moreover, MLS theory acquires new significance under the EES (Laland et al. 2015) because it offers a conceptual framework ample enough to accommodate genes, organisms, and groups as units of selection. Although the MS has traditionally rejected groups as targets of evolution, in human history there is no doubt that group selection has played a colossal role as Sober and Wilson (1998) have argued. Genetic group selection (GGS), however, is a murky issue with rather sparse data to validate it as an important mechanism of evolution, although the evolution of virulence is one key example that follows the logic of group selection. Henrich (2016), on the other hand, has rigorously showed that cultural group selection (CGS) has been a crucial evolutionary force in human history – the most important for him. A biocultural human nature, I propose, should heed to the evidence of CGS, which is the gateway to understand how the biology-culture dialectical relationship reveals itself in our cooperative arrangements.

That is, human nature is no abstraction inherent in individuals, but the ensemble of different behavioral traits modulated by and expressed in dominant social relations. Humans are not selfish by nature in the sense that they cannot do otherwise. In every group there will be some individuals who are more prone to behave selfishly, but their behavior will be heavily modulated by material conditions and social norms. Humans are not aggressive. In a group of people, there will be some individuals – mostly males (Konner 2002) who are more prone to behave aggressively, and their behavior will be, once again, modulated by material conditions and social norms. Everybody can be selfish and/or aggressive. No one is condemned to be either one. In fact, as de Waal (2009) notes, violent people are always a minority in human groups. Most people cannot kill easily but do so under the “right” circumstances. Sapolsky

(2017) succinctly explains the crux of the issue, namely genes, hormones, brains, individuals, and groups can never be separated from their context or from each other.

Unequal societies tend to be more violent, for instance not because humans are inherently aggressive but because under conditions of stress, scarcity, food insecurity, injustice, etc., aggression is a more natural impulse. Nonetheless, a lot of people live under these conditions and never engage in lethal violent behavior. Nature is not destiny, nor a set of latent instructions present in every individual but a range of possibilities emerging from the entanglement of genetic and environmental information that is expressed through social relations (a).

With this in mind, there are different behaviors that are part of this range of natural possibilities. For de Waal (2009) we are empathetic creatures inclined to dislike inequity. Paul Bloom (2004) stresses that humans have a sort of “innate” moral compass. For example, children exhibit a preference for good actions, helpful agents, and like to see bad actions punished. Marco Iacoboni (2011) sees in mirror neurons proof that humans are wired to be social. Michael Tomasello (2019) stresses the uniqueness and depth of human cooperation. Graham et al. (2013) argue that there are innate foundations (e.g., care, fairness, loyalty) that underlie human morality across cultures. Konner (2002) highlights love as one of the emotions that are part of our nature. Of course, we can also be aggressive, warmongering, cruel, but most of the time we are not. The point is, human nature is an intricate collection of traits and behaviors, sometimes seemingly nonsensical and contradictory, that are canalized by cultural and environmental cues. To fully understand this complexity, a reductionist reading is one-sided. An interactive approach is a much stronger paradigm but misses causal relationships if it counts biology and culture as distinct systems of information with clear-cut borders. A biocultural view, I suggest, is a much more robust interpretive paradigm because it fully embraces the

porous character and multi-directionality of all the variables involved in the evolution and expression of human nature.

There is one last but important caveat that I should mention about my modest proposal to adopt a biocultural view of human nature. I have developed my account on the grounds of Marx's dialectical materialism and the EES. Even if it remained highly abstract, Marx decidedly espoused a concept of human nature. On the other hand, most proponents of the EES, philosopher/biologist Massimo Pigliucci is a noticeable exception in this sense, reject the idea of human nature (see Laland and Brown 2018; Sterelny 2018). Thus, my proposal seems to fly in the face of the same evolutionary paradigm that I adopt. Closer consideration of Laland and Brown's (2018) reservations vis-à-vis human nature, however, reveals that what I propose here is not entirely at odds with their position. Following the main tenets of the EES, Laland and Brown (2018) are highly suspicious of gene-centric views of human nature. That is, they are critical of models that reduce human nature to allegedly universal biological processes alone. Overall, against the traditional conception of human nature Laland and Brown (2018, 127) write,

Instead, we advocate a more inclusive understanding of the human condition, one that provides a more complete causal-explanatory account of its origins, and that embraces variation as much as commonality. Such an understanding can be specified as the product of internal and external constructive processes operating over both developmental and evolutionary timescales.

But this is precisely how a biocultural view conceives human nature, as I have explained. The difference is that whereas for Laland and Brown (2018) a developmental/processual perspective disproves the idea of human nature, I suggest that this approach captures with precision what is natural about human beings. In fact, as I noted earlier, to critique the "biological" classical view, Laland and Brown (2018) suggest that human nature is socially constructed, in the same sense that I have argued that cooperative group activities played a

significant role in the evolutionary history of our species. Yet, to claim that the gene-centric view is inadequate should not lead to an outright rejection of human nature as a concept. Doing so, concedes that nature and genes are synonymous. Instead, a biocultural view gives us the opportunity to reject gene-centrism, stress the importance of developmental processes, reciprocal causation, and the triple helix (genes, organisms, environment), and still uphold that human nature exists.

Finally, there is one important distinction between Laland and Brown's (2018) position and a biocultural view of human nature. For Laland and Brown (2018), human nature is an outdated term that does little for the sake of science, hence their invitations to dismiss it from the scientific lingo. Although Laland and Brown's (2016) doubts might be interesting for philosophers of science, my aim is different. To develop a systematic analysis of human societies and their political arrangements, a rigorous concept of human nature is needed. Specifically, to critique the quasi-natural status of capitalism and the fixity that it seems to derive from it, a biocultural view of human nature is an advantageous conceptual tool.

Among other things that I will detail in chapter two, the naturalness of capitalism has been justified appealing to self-interest. The self-regarding agent, widely disproved by now (Henrich et al. 2005), still remains the dominant paradigm of human nature in psychology and economics textbooks. Clearly, there are some parallels to be drawn between this view, genes ruthlessly trying to reproduce, and a system that encourages selfishness at every turn. Consequently, a system that accommodates and exploits this alleged propensity, i.e., capitalism, must be natural in the very narrow, biological sense of the word.

A biocultural view of human nature, however, challenges preconceptions about the ubiquity of selfishness and puts them in a richer historical context. There is nothing fixed or

ahistorical that underlies the existence of capitalism, which, as every form of human organization, is transient and contingent. Surely, capitalism is natural in the sense that it is the outcome of culture and biology interacting throughout time, but by no means as a by-product of universal, fixed psychological or biological structures. After all, capitalism has existed for merely a few hundred years and only in a small number of countries (e.g., Western Europe, Japan, China, South Korea). On the other hand, for more than 95 percent of our evolutionary history (more than 180,000 years), humans have lived in small, egalitarian bands with resources held in common. Or in modern terms, throughout history humans have mostly lived according to socialist principles. If anything, it is this form of organization, what from now on I call “socialism in living,” that is natural for humans. Yet, this posits a conundrum. If capitalism is natural because it is an outcome of our biocultural constitutions, but socialism has been natural for longer, does that mean that there are degrees of naturalness?

Instead of getting into another definitional quagmire, I simply submit the following fact to consideration, the anthropological record clearly shows that socialism seems to come more easily to humans. For millennia, people have organized around socialist principles organically both with and in the absence of repressive forces, political and legal institutions, coded laws and moral norms, religions, writing, and more. Capitalism, on the contrary, is a recent development that did not take over and spread as easily as it seems. Why is this the case? To answer this question, in the next two chapters, I will detail the historical development of capitalism(s) and socialism(s) to examine how cultural and material changes interacted with human natural abilities and inclinations.

Chapter Two – Capitalism: Inhuman, Unnatural, Indefinable?

After the collapse of Soviet communism in the 90s, the idea that capitalism is humanity's natural condition became widely accepted (Meiksins Wood 2017). Yet, capitalism (or anything else) is not “encoded in our genes,” determined, inevitable, universal, and more, but just another human cultural package. That is, capitalism as a set of ideas, practices, beliefs, etc. has been transmitted throughout generations just as every other cultural trait, namely vertically (parents), horizontally (peers) and obliquely (e.g., school, media) (Creanza, Kolodny, and Feldman 2017). As it happens with genetic evolution, these packages tend to survive as long as they increase fitness. Yet, when we refer to cultural adaptations it is quite obvious that what matters is the fitness of the group and not of individuals alone (Henrich 2016). After all, culture is a body of knowledge so vast that no individual could master it. Overall, capitalism is a cultural practice originally adopted by a small group of people around the 17th century that subsequently spread throughout the world. This, and not an iota more, is the extent of capitalism's naturalness.

At the same time, that a practice is widespread and normal does not say anything about naturalness in the sense of ease and even less of inevitability. Some people practice celibacy, others eat their dead relatives in funerary rituals, others drink the semen of other men as a rite of passage to signal their own masculinity, others work more than 60 hours a week to provide for their families and as a consequence they do not have time to spend with them. All these customs are normal in at least one society across the world. None are easy to perform but require strong cultural “encouragement” from the environment. What is natural about these behaviors, in the end, is simply that we have minds organized to learn the cultural practices of our environment.

To explain why capitalism is not natural, this chapter details its historical development and explains how it interacts with naturally evolved cognitive capacities. By the end of this

chapter, it will be clear that capitalism is a historical exception that successfully spread only to a limited number of countries. In fact, as I will show in chapter five, it turns out that the people who have been able to adopt capitalism have somewhat different psychologies (Henrich 2020) that make them an oddity compared to the rest of the world. My aim is to show that this is the case because “profit above everything else” goes against much of our most fundamental natural inclinations. But first, as I did in chapter one, I will clarify some definitions to build my argument on solid ground. The first, and the thorniest of these definitions, is capitalism itself.

Merchant, industrial, financial, casino, welfare, crony, are some of the words used to qualify capitalism since its inception. These various adjectives highlight the elusive nature of capitalism as an economic system and as a form of socio-political organization. Although the use of capitalism as a concept of social analysis has seen a resurgence lately, for most of the second half of the 20th century, the term was controversial and evoked accusations of holism, looseness, and sloppiness; consequently, it was avoided by scientists, historians, economists, and philosophers alike (Kocka 2016). The suspicions were reasonable because it is rather difficult to define precisely what is it that the term capitalism supposedly denotes. Throughout history, capitalism has had different characteristics, worked with different social and political institutions, has both coopted and been antagonistic to the state and religion, and has produced strikingly different results. For instance, only in the last 50 years neoliberalism in Chile and Argentina was established by military dictatorships, in the Middle East by theocratic monarchies, and in the U.S. and Europe has cloaked itself under the guise of democracy. Consequently, it seems that either capitalism eludes a definition or that the term simply implies so much that it defines nothing in particular.

Notwithstanding its protean nature, different instantiations of capitalism across time and space actually share some commonalities, hence a definition, complex as it might be, is suitable. In the first section of this chapter, I detail the historical trajectories of capitalism. I use this historical detour as a segue into a philosophical analysis of the ideas that accompanied and justified the material changes capitalism produced. The philosophical portion will specifically focus on how proponents of capitalism have traditionally assumed that its mere existence, but also its alleged superiority over other systems, is a natural and organic development of the kind of beings that humans are. In section two, I dispel this myth that originates with Adam Smith and that neoliberal economic theory transformed into unrecognizable dogma. In the next section, I suggest that capitalism is not natural in the sense that its advocates assume. To be precise, capitalism goes against, negates, or distorts ancient natural evolved cognitive capacities such as sociality, cooperation, inequity aversion, and empathy.

Defining Capitalism

Capitalism is loosely defined by its relation to certain concepts such as markets, property, profit, democracy, free labor, and freedom in a general sense. Of course, capitalism has different characteristics across space and time and not all these concepts apply in every case. For instance, slavery and indentured servitude in the Americas played a large role in the development of merchant and industrial capitalism in Europe and the U.S. I am particularly interested in the intellectual history of how human nature was recruited to explain both the emergence and the superiority of capitalism. Material changes precede ideological justifications. For example, when John Locke (1988) argued in 1689 that private property is a natural right, he was responding to a wealth of material changes that had revolutionized life conditions in parts of Europe and not creating ideas out of thin air. Therefore, I will first highlight the the historical

developments that explain how capitalism came to permeate every aspect of life thereby acquiring, with the aide of various thinkers, its aura of naturalness.

To begin at the most abstract level, Paul Bowles (2006) defines capitalism as a system to organize production based on private property and markets and driven by the pursuit of profit. To this definition, we have to add, as Ellen Meiksins Wood (2016) notes, the never-ending need to push for the expansion of capital. Furthermore, Jürgen Kocka (2016) argues that for a society to be considered fully capitalistic, non-economic life must also be fully colored by processes such as decentralization, commodification, and unlimited accumulation. In other words, as Marx famously suggested, in a capitalist society, economic principles thoroughly exert their influence over non-economic spheres. It is telling that it is only in the 19th century that we have a fully developed critique that notices this condition (e.g., Marx, Weber) but the origins of capitalism can be traced much earlier in history.

The first rudimentary instances of proto capitalistic production emerged in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands around 1500. Nonetheless, capitalism, like any other cultural package, was not invented from scratch in Europe but was influenced by practices of many societies around the world. Specifically, trade and commerce were prominent in Mesopotamia, on the “Silk Road,” and on the East-West route across the Indian Ocean. These long-distance trade routes, however, were largely dominated by independent merchants (Beaud 2002).

More organized forms, yet still proto-capitalistic, emerged as empires in need of money took over trade and organized it under the rules of the civil state. The Chinese Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) and the Roman empire (1 BCE – 5 CE), for example, privileged the development of markets and promulgated measures to standardize currencies, build roads, and manage mines (Beaud 2002). However, Kocka (2016) argues, neither China nor the Greco-

Roman world can be described as fully capitalist, notwithstanding the existence of markets, wealth, luxury goods, and wage laborers. A strong drive to create capital or to expand markets is just not present in these societies that used the market as a means to satisfy “higher” goals such as war or status but not to reproduce capital itself. Indeed, the ethos of seeing capital as means to other things and not just to more capital remained dominant at least throughout the Middle Ages.

Mature capitalism emerged in Britain and the Netherlands in the 17th century. Kocka (2016, 58) lists two important developments that explain why it happened in these countries, and not in China or Arabia, which had the right conditions (e.g., maritime fleets, advanced methods to calculate) before Europe. First, in the early 1600s enterprises became a core institutional component of economic life in Britain and the Netherlands. Capitalistic organization slowly moved away from familial or national ties into more impersonal arrangements where various financiers invested their capital jointly, and consequently were able to expand their commercial reach. Second, the merchants who were part of enterprises had close ties to political power. In fact, as Graeber (2014) notes, to finance their lifestyles, a large part of the noblesse and those in positions of civil authority were indebted to merchants who did not have nobiliary titles but had money.

Hence, the financiers had a lot of sway over the formation of new political and financial institutions that emerged around this time, and were organized around the protection of capital. Also related to the explosion and expansion of capitalism, after the “discovery” of America colonial powers were in desperate need of financing to support the looting of the newly discovered world. European merchant capitalism combined with colonialism gave rise to a more advanced stage, namely finance capitalism, that found fertile soil to develop its roots on the ground that new institutions and practices had prepared in advance for over 200 years. In

chapter five, we will see that a religious policy that forbid cousin marriage is also partly responsible for some of these changes as it led to important psychological changes. But for now, I remain in the realm of history.

At this point, the largest fortunes in the world were made financing wars, colonial enterprises, trade, and industries. Colonial powers such as Spain and Portugal might have done the dirty work, but it was the financial centers (e.g., Genoa, the Netherlands) that mostly reaped the benefits (Beaud 2002). Capital, as Marx (1990) astutely noticed, comes into the world soaked in blood. Naturally, these changes also created substantial tensions and social conflicts. While a few amassed large fortunes, a huge segment of the population was immiserated and forced to migrate, abandon their traditions, and sell their labor to survive.

It is worth noticing that from the get-go, capitalism has shown itself to be prone to cause social and economic crisis. In 1720, the English South Sea Company – a joint stock enterprise – collapsed as a consequence of insider financial speculation thereby affecting a large number of investors and the British economy at large. The macro-economic effects were not as pronounced as what we are accustomed today, but for the first time we can see the fortunes of capital closely tied to the well-being of a big segment of the population (Kocka 2016).

Merely thirty years later, in 1750, one of the most important shifts in the history of capitalism, and humanity at large, was set in motion. A mature financial apparatus coupled with new technologies and sources of energy, produced a massive reorganization of the sphere of production known as the Industrial Revolution. In its first phase, industrialization (1780 - 1880) was mostly confined to Great Britain and, to a lesser extent, France. Other European countries such as Germany, Belgium, and Sweden lagged behind and industrialized later. This early phase was dominated by textile manufacturing and the production of coal, iron, and cotton. It is true

that capitalism had exerted control over spheres of production long before industrialization as is the case with mines in the colonies or plantations. Yet, these proto-industries still operated with a pre-capitalist logic, i.e., not based on profit above all. The second phase of the Industrial Revolution stretched from 1880 to around 1950. In this period, the U.S. and Japan successfully industrialized their economies and even surpassed European superpowers. The productive motors of this second phase were the automobile industry, electricity, oil, and the beginning of a consumerist economy tied to the development and growth of a strong middle class (Bowles 2006).

Industrialization revolutionized every single aspect of economic and non-economic life to a degree never seen before. It is not an exaggeration, Kocka (2016) claims, to suggest that industrialization sparked the most dramatic changes for human life at least since the Neolithic Revolution. The new system of production forced rural populations in the U.K, France, Germany, and the U.S. to immigrate to cities, thereby leading enormous processes of urbanization. For the first time in history, more people were employed as wage-workers than as independent artisans, farmers, manufacturers, etc. Scientific methods were applied to work management (e.g., Taylorism, Fordism), and technological advances were used to increase productivity and surplus value at the expense of workers' well-being. At this point, it becomes obvious, as Ellen Meiksins Wood (2017) argues, that there is a latent conflict between the needs of people and the requirements of profit. In "The Condition of the Working Class in England," for instance, Engels (1975) vividly documented the ruinous state that an overworked and malnourished population had to endure in England in the mid-1800s. It is a sad coincidence that Engels' fortune was partly a consequence of these miserable conditions given that his father owned textile factories in Manchester.

It is also during this period of both intense industrialization and immiseration in the 19th century that the working class appears for the first time as an organized group. As a consequence of coordinated struggle, workers experienced an unprecedented enhancement of working and living conditions (e.g., job security, wages, shorter workday, prohibit child labor), albeit built on the back on its own exploitation and of an emergent third world. These “concessions,” it is always worth remembering, were the product of protests, revolts, and revolutions that swept Europe the mid-19th century (Bowles 2006) and not of capitalist generosity per se.

Overall, the 19th century showcased two key aspects of fully matured capitalism. The first, is its inherent tendency to create social and economic crises through its own doing. Second, and directly related to the first point, capitalism exhibited a seemingly endless capacity to reinvent itself even in the face of challenges. Amidst revolutions and crises, during the first two thirds of the 19th century capitalism cemented itself as the ruling economic system of the world.

The last third was characterized by a great recession that lasted from 1873 to 1895. Unsurprisingly, it is around these years that Marx, Engels, Bakunin, Kropotkin and others, write about the end of capitalism with an optimism that was a direct consequence of widespread social upheaval that made the triumph of an alternative (e.g., communism, anarchism) seem almost inevitable. All confidence quickly faded, however. *Pace* the dreams of communists, socialists, and anarchists, capitalism did not wither but reinvented itself propelled by a new wave of industrial techniques and colonialist enterprises. France invaded Morocco and Madagascar. Britain took over South Africa and Sudan. The U.S annexed Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines, and Japan made incursions into China and Korea. Along with their militaristic endeavors, U.S., French, and German capital spread throughout the world to fund banks, governmental loans, and private industries of various underdeveloped countries. Importantly,

capitalism did not expand markets and sources of raw materials alone, but also led to a more prosperous middle-class that abandoned all dreams of revolution as soon as its quality of life improved significantly (Beaud 2002; Kocka 2016). Against Marx's desires, an international revolution did not come true, and the working class of the West had no problem in participating in the exploitation of the third world.

This period of capitalist expansion coincides with new forms of colonialism that take capitalism, as Lenin (1975a) foreshadowed, to a new stage: imperialism. For the historian Michel Beaud (2002), imperialism is national capitalism functioning at global scale. This is an interesting moment because as Meiksins Wood (2017) aptly notes, the forms of capitalism that emerged victorious in this period heavily influenced, if not determined, all other forms to come. That is, European and U.S. capitalism became so powerful that all national enterprises necessarily became attached to their whims. Yet, the expansion of competing national capitalisms also brings forth more rivalries among financial interests. Global capitalisms vying for control of world markets coupled with the great crises of the end of the 19th century created ripe conditions for chauvinistic nationalisms to take root in Europe. All these components created an explosive cocktail that finally erupted in the form of World War I (WWI).

The contradictions of capitalism are fully embodied by industrialization, a process that created enormous prosperity but also two global wars. Surely, the working class benefited from better living standards, but it was also the working class who covered the battle fields with their blood from 1914 to 1918 and then again from 1939 to 1945. For Beaud (2002), although the working class had organized internationally to gain concessions from the capitalists, confronted with war, nationalism prevailed over anti-capitalist sentiments. Both wars, paradoxically, mobilized society in the belligerent countries and unintentionally created better conditions for

both businesses and the working class, and strengthened capitalism. In chapter three, I will detail how this also happened in the Soviet Union, albeit under a completely different system.

Post WWI, a new period of productivity developed. The roaring twenties saw widespread prosperity for European capitalist countries and the U.S., which replaced the U.K. as the new dominant world superpower. Whereas European countries were riddled with public debt as a consequence of war, the automobile and electricity industries led to a boom of productivity and consumption in the U.S. Productivity, however, was directly proportional to worker's exploitation, albeit "well paid" exploitation. In 1914, Ford famously raised wages to \$5 per day, doubling the average, and then to \$6 in 1919 and \$7 in 1929 (Beaud 2002). Of course, only (mostly white) men earned this much money. The generous pay, however, came with more brutal working conditions as regulations were lax and organized labor was disbanded.

Throughout the decade, there were more than 2 million work accidents, of which 20,000 were fatal, yet productivity rose by a factor of 5 (Beaud 2002). Beyond safety issues, work became unbearably mechanized under Fordist innovations such as the moving assembly line. The average automotive worker, for instance, had to repeat the same move every 10 seconds for 9, later 8, hours every day. In fact, Ford had to raise wages to help with the huge turnover rate that the moving assembly line caused. As usual, better conditions for people are simply a byproduct of increased productivity and never part of the system itself. Here, we see the total and complete normalization of "the market as ethic" taking over any semblance of humanity. Indeed, Ford called the "\$5 day" one of the finest cost-cutting moves ever made (Beaud 2002, 182).

In 1929 a saturated market and a decline in productivity, mixed with rampant stock speculation (once again) caused another crisis. The Great Recession (1929 – 1933) hit the U.S.

especially hard, but the entire world suffered the consequences of the latest and many of yet to come crises. In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted a series of policies to ameliorate the effects of the recession. The New Deal was to a certain extent a compromise between capitalists and workers to reach a new social contract to save the “free market society.” Organized labor was especially powerful during this period and won more concessions such as a 40-hour week (35 for industry), a minimum wage of 40 cents per hour, and the right to organize that it had lost during the prosperity of the 20s (Beaud 2002). Although the “civilizing effects” of capitalism are often touted, it is telling that these compromises are a recent phenomenon. It took more than 300 years to legalize these humane conditions, and even then, racial minorities, women, and others were excluded. Moreover, “entitlement programs” are still under constant attack.

While this new social compromise was being enacted in the U.S., feelings of resentment remnant of WWI had been boiling under the surface in Europe until they exploded in the late 30s. A period of crises, the specter of (soviet) socialism, and a demagogue who saw an opportunity in Germany became again an explosive mix and another global conflict ensued. Merely 21 years after WWI, World War II (WWII) left 50 million people dead – six times more than WWI – and for the first time the world witnessed the terrifying power of atomic weapons. The war was not only the product of nationalisms and racisms of various kinds, but also the interests of capital played a key role. In Germany, capitalists facing a “red scare” saw in Nazism an ally against communism and supported Hitler’s rise to power. Importantly, I am not conflating capitalism and fascism, but the fact that capital must be defended at all costs led to unholy alliances even if they are anathema to capitalist principles. That is, freedom, democracy, and more, all take a secondary role. As Marx rightly stressed, capital, not human values, is the

alpha and omega of capitalism. Thus, financiers had no problem doing business with Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and later with Apartheid South Africa, etc.

As it had happened after WWI, however, the period post WWII was one of exceptional prosperity and less inequality (for white men) that lasted until 1971 when yet another crisis emerged. Kocka (2016) defines this period as a form of organized capitalism or “mixed economies.” Given the popularity and efficacy of the American New Deal and its “Keynesian principles,” the latter were used as a template to regulate market mechanisms through state intervention in Western Europe. This period was the zenith of organized labor in the West, which secured high living standards for the working class. Contrary to Marx’s prediction, the working class was not immiserated, but the average (white) family was able to send their children to college, buy a car, a television and various home appliances, vacation once a year, and indulge in other pleasures of the bourgeois life. There is an understated actor who played a large role vis-à-vis these concessions, however. The end of WWII signified the beginning of a bipolar world divided between American capitalism and Soviet communism. No longer a mere specter as in the 19th century, at least nominally, the 20th century offered an alternative, i.e., “actually existing socialism,” thus the West was quick to make concessions again. But, at risk of sounding repetitive, these “compromises” were won through the struggle of labor, civil rights, and feminist movements among others, and not organically or by virtue of the bosses’ generosity.

An important parenthesis is warranted here to consider the reach of post WWII prosperity. Notwithstanding capitalist pretensions of equality and freedom, the “American dream” was not at everyone’s reach nor was it ever intended to be. Early in the 20th century, W.E.B DuBois (2016, 5) had brilliantly critiqued America for its racist practices that made Black people “poor of dollars and poor of race.” In this manner, DuBois highlighted the intricate

nature of racism and poverty thereby showing how it affected Black people but also poor white people. In *Black Reconstruction*, DuBois (1998) developed a historical analysis that reveals how capitalism had profited, first from free labor, and then from the legal exploitation of black bodies. Racism was not a bug but a feature of the system, DuBois explained, and the U.S. incorporated it with ease. Whiteness became a sort of psychological capital, DuBois (1998) brilliantly argued, used to discourage the economically exploited white working class from building coalitions with people of color. DuBois analysis was incredibly prescient because it foresaw the still palpable economic consequences of a segregated system that marked liberty, justice, and right, “for white people only” (DuBois 2016, 125). But a critic could argue that DuBois’ U.S. was still riling from the consequences of a civil war and subsequently of a failed reconstruction era, therefore healing was rather improbable independent of the economic system. How did 20th century capitalism fare with racial inequalities?

Post WWII, especially in the 60s, it was a widespread assumption among economists that capitalism had found a sweet spot of plenty for all in the U.S. (Piketty 2014). But this was still reserved for white men, mostly. After all, the “most humane” years of capitalism, also saw internment camps for Japanese-Americans, an unwillingness to legally enshrine anti-lynching, vicious segregation, female marginalization, and more. Likewise, the rich North had no qualms conducting business with the South. Racism was not a consequence of southern backwardness alone but baked into the system from the get-go. For one of the most poignant analysis of the limitations of U.S. 20th century” capitalism, we just need to turn to Malcolm X’s famous autobiography. Interestingly without using the word capitalism once, page after page, Malcolm X (1992) describes the wretched conditions that the Black working class, obsessed with chasing capital, endured while the rest of the country became richer. Seemingly at reach, the American

Dream has always been for most people of color nothing more than a tantalizing experience. Of course, there has been undeniable progress. Slavery and lynching are now illegal, although police brutality and a racist carceral system – the “new Jim Crow,” as Michelle Alexander (2020) termed it, replaced both. The point is, one has to be careful to cheer as progress what, as Malcolm X (1992) vividly described, simply amounts to stabbing someone in the back and then removing the knife a few inches. Inasmuch as the wound remains, there is no progress, Malcolm X rightly argued. The success of the “fettered” 20th century capitalism is a narrative that should be taken with several grains of salt.

Like other forms of capitalism, the mixed economy model also ran into its own problems. The optimism of the time, captured by the oft repeated phrase “Growth is a rising tide that lifts all boats” (Piketty 2014, 11), gave way to a new reality. Yet, in the 70’s the period of economic expansion came to a halt and Western capitalist countries suffered economic stagnation. Facing another crisis, the system resurrected ideas that were old, unpopular, and that many thought dead, and restructured itself through a political project known as neoliberalism. In the late 70’s, New York was ground zero to experiment with proto-neoliberal policies such as deregulation and austerity to face a fiscal deficit (Harvey 2007). The 80s saw the rise of a world scale neoliberal revolution: Reagan in the U.S., Thatcher in the U.K., Deng Xiaoping’s “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Pinochet and his Chicago Boys in Chile, and other neoliberal experiments such as Mexico, Peru, and Argentina in the 90s.

Two firsts happen during the neoliberal stage of capitalism. For the first time, there are foci of growth that are outside the West (e.g., China, Singapore, South Korea, India, Brazil). Also for the first time, the economic dominance of the West is contested by an outsider, namely China. What is no longer contested, however, is capitalism itself. Unlike the Cold War years,

post 1989, there is no bipolar world but a clash of mono-logical worldviews with different superficial characteristics.

Hand-in-hand with neoliberal policies, capitalism enters a post-industrial phase. That is, industry is no longer the only nor the most important motor of capitalist economies, at least in the West. Financial services with the aid of new technologies and information play an outsized role thereby inaugurating a “techno-scientific” phase (Beaud 2002) of investment and speculation. Free of regulations, financial institutions acquire levels of wealth and political power that matches and surpasses that of the robber barons of the 19th century. Owing to New Deal regulations, in the 70s, the top decile earned less than 35 percent of the national income in the U.S (Piketty 2014). This figure climbed to almost 50 percent in the 2010’s following the neoliberal revolution. Even more decisive, as Piketty (2014), stresses wealth inequality is now more pronounced, and inheritance assures that the top 20 percent will control a disproportionate share of the pie independent of their skills or productivity. We are dealing, it seems, with people who are too rich to fail.

Given the effects of its policies, Harvey (2007) argues that neoliberalism was a conscious effort to restore the power of economic elites. The ideas behind this “restoration” came from the Mont Pelerin Society, whose founders included celebrities such as Milton Friedman, Friedrich von Hayek, George Stigler, Ludwig von Mises, and Karl Popper (Harvey 2007). Behind the banner of the “open society,” this group of intellectuals, in one way or another, endorsed the (unregulated) market as a source of wealth, democracy, and freedom for all. Neoliberalism, crucially, used human nature as a concept to justify its philosophical principles and practices as outcomes of our natural inclinations. In this manner, neoliberalism recovered an old Western

philosophical idea, namely the state of nature, to devise a new social, or perhaps more accurately asocial, contract.

If the existence of the Soviet Union scared capitalists enough to make some concessions early in the 30s, at the dawn of the century it worked as a boogeyman to mobilize the working classes in the West. According to a traditional interpretation, the 20th century had been a natural experiment, and capitalism proved itself as the most efficient system to organize human societies. The alternative was a colossal failure that led to starvation, misery, and totalitarianism in part because it went against human nature itself. Humans are rational agents who are better served when left to act freely in pursue of their interests. Any attempts to curtail freedom, hence, must impinge on our natural rights. “Freedom,” thus, became the leitmotif of neoliberalism. Free from bureaucratic obstacles, the market can regulate itself and find a “plenty for all” equilibrium that of course starts at the top but eventually trickles to the bottom. This fantasy that has proven wrong multiple times over the last 40 years and all over the world still remains orthodoxy among many economists and politicians as the “The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” of 2017, for example, illustrates.

Neoliberalism campaigns fiercely against the government but, and this is an important caveat, only as long as it interferes with the interests of capital. The success of this campaign is obvious if we notice that public distrust in the government has spiked consistently since the 70s (Putnam 2000). Ideological interventions have convinced generations that the private sector is efficient, whereas the government is corrupt, inefficient, and necessarily against the interests of individuals. Yet, on a daily basis private companies suffer massive data breaches, gamble public funds irresponsibly, let roads and airports deteriorate, overcharge for services, and let public utilities collapse in the name of profit (e.g., Texas, California). Nonetheless, it is a triumph of

the neoliberal revolution that these failures are tolerated as features of the system because it seems that there are no other alternatives.

But for all its anti-governmental discourse in the guise of freedom, neoliberalism, like other forms of capitalism, co-opts the state to defend its interests. This is not a new phenomenon as the Opium Wars in the 19th century, the Cuban embargo, the Indochina Wars, and Operation Condor in Latin America in the 20th century showcase. Overall, the first aim of the neoliberal state is the defense of capital's interests. It can do so through a military dictatorship (Chile, Argentina), a totalitarian state (China, Indonesia), a theocratic state (Saudi Arabia), under the guise of democracy (U.S., U.K.), or through a "perfect dictatorship" as Mario Vargas Llosa famously defined Mexico's political system under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

The neoliberal project can afford such flexibility because it no longer depends on national political institutions alone but also has transnational organizations at its disposition to advance and defend its interests. In other words, with the rise of global financial capital, the boundary between state and corporate power is porous (Harvey 2007), and in fact, in many cases global finance is much more powerful than most states. Organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), ironically conceived by Keynes to act as a regulatory agency inspired by the role of the U.S. government during the New Deal, strongly suggests governments to enact austerity measures, privatize national industries, deregulate markets, encourage a business-friendly environment, i.e., follow neoliberal orthodoxy to assure that governments have access to much needed credit lines but also that hedge/vulture funds receive their money on time. If a government does not want or cannot repay its debt, the IMF acts as the enforcer in charge of "breaking legs" as Graeber (2014) notes.

This brief and obviously insufficient history of capitalism began with the seeds of a system that emerged in rudimentary form in 1500, matured throughout the next two centuries into merchant, manufacturing and an early form of financial capitalism to then move into an early industrial phase by the end of the 18th century. With new technologies, industrialization in the 19th century changed human life in a manner only comparable to the Neolithic Revolution. The 20th century continued the relentless drive toward growth with the help of new industries (e.g., automobile, electricity, oil) and a newly established consumer society. By the end of the 20th century, capitalism reinvented itself once again into neoliberalism, which paired with an even more powerful version of financial capitalism controls worldwide markets. What, if anything, can be generalized from this history as abstract principles that define capitalism throughout time?

First, capitalism is not merely an economic system but also a complex social logic (Beaud 2002). This logic has its own grammar anchored on terms such as market, private property, profit, freedom, and its principles influence every sphere of society. This is precisely what separates rudimentary or proto capitalism from a truly capitalistic society. Namely, the distinction between economic and non-economic spheres is rather porous, and they are correlated to a certain extent, as Marx famously argued.

The second characteristic of capitalism is its inherent instability. This aspect is twofold. First, the frenzy induced by capitalism clearly moves at a speed that human minds simply cannot process. The social upheaval that characterizes every stage of capitalism is partly a product of inequality, but also of the speed of change that it brings forth. No tradition or mode of life is safe, and “all that is solid melts into the air” (Marx and Engels 1975). Second, capitalism’s volatility manifests itself not only as social but also as economic crises. Marx argued that

capitalism's volatility is a consequence of a logic of infinite accumulation, which ceaselessly requires new markets, new customers, new risks. That capitalism is unstable, however, is not a conclusion reserved to Marxists or anti-capitalists. Keynes, who by no means was sympathetic to Marxism, argued something similar but based on "animal spirits" that animate investors, i.e., their irrationality. In any case, Keynes proposed regulatory mechanisms to curb these dark instincts.

But if perennial crises have not signified the demise of capitalism, it is because it has been able to reinvent itself. Joyce Appleby (2011) nicely captures the spirit of capitalism as a "relentless revolution." The transitions between different stages, however, require some release valves. Thus during times of crises, national capitalisms have always been able to tap into xenophobic, racist, or nationalistic feelings to find scapegoats to deflect the blame. The fact that this trick seems to work still today, is not attributable solely to capitalism but also reveals something about our tribal psychologies and how they intensify amidst stressful conditions.

Yet, the effects of capitalism on social life are not reserved to times of crises but define its third characteristic, namely capitalism is an ethic in itself. This point is closely related to the first, i.e., capitalism qua social logic. But this is a broad statement that reflects on the relationship between the economic sphere and socio-political institutions, and the subsequent "social calculus" that conditions life at large. As Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi (2018) highlight, capitalism uses economic mechanisms to decide how people live, which services to fund and cut, what counts as valuable, what to pursue, and how to act. The market has colonized every aspect of life. From this social logic, an ethics of capitalism is derived.

Ethics focuses on human life and the circumstances that promote or hinder its flourishing. Capitalism is unique in the sense that the pursuit of profit becomes the main aim of

human life thereby dehumanizing the world. No other system in the history of humanity has subjugated all (human and non-human) life to the whims of profit. Although this sounds like an exaggeration, it is revealing that in other inhumane systems, at least the elites, the conquerors, people in positions of power, did not pursue wealth for the sake of wealth. But capitalism is a historical oddity in this sense. Aristotle (1999) argued in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that wealth could not be the good because it is always a means to something else. That is, wealth is not complete and self-sufficient. It is one of the great revolutions of capitalism to turn wealth, profit, capital, into the Aristotelian good, namely that which is pursued for its own sake. Graeber (2014) evinces that one of the distinctive features of capitalism is that it creates social arrangements that turn human affairs into cost-benefit relationships. Therefore, in the end the ethics of capitalism is one where humans disappear. Can we speak of ethics, in this vein? Calls to sacrifice lives for the sake of the economy amidst a deadly pandemic are quite revealing of the capitalist spirit. At least other cultures had the decency of sacrificing people to higher gods.

The issue with this logic, is that humans did not evolve to behave as profit-maximizing, calculative machines. Our species would be entirely different – perhaps it would not exist – if ancestral groups had followed a capitalist logic. Let us try to imagine a group of hominids where profits were privatized but losses socialized as we do contemporarily. Let us try to imagine cumulative culture, language, tools, science, and more evolving according to the same principles. The task is impossible.

Of course, the logic of capitalism is rent with contradictions. The wealthiest country in the history of humanity cannot solve homelessness. The private sphere and work suddenly lose their importance when the labor in question is reproductive labor (Fraser and Jaeggi 2019). The grammar of freedom always invoked to justify a system that produces a regime of widespread

powerlessness is swiftly cast aside if authoritarian regimes are willing to do the bidding of capital. Democratic institutions are dominated by people who are unrepresentative (older, richer, whiter) of the general public. Moreover, democracy and freedom, pillars of capitalism, do not exist at the workplace where people are at the mercy of managers and bosses for 8 hours, if we are lucky, every day. Can we even speak of freedom when a person's livelihood (food, healthcare, retirement pensions) depends on the whims of managers, CEOs, speculators, and the market? As Marx stresses (1990), under these conditions the worker is "doubly-free:" free to work or free to starve.

In this world, selfishness and competition, it is no surprise, are natural behaviors. But, once again, there is nothing inevitable about this state of affairs. The history of capitalism shows that the radical changes that it brought were not always welcomed or easily assimilated. On the contrary, adapting for people was not organic, fast, or comfortable. How, then, has capitalism assumed its aura of naturalness?

Capitalism Natural?

I started this chapter detailing the material conditions that precluded and informed the theoretical principles underlying capitalism. Here, I survey one of these new ideas that accompanied radical material changes, namely human nature. However, human nature in light of capitalism cannot be understood separated from other ideas that were radical and foreign, but that eventually became "self-evident truths." Liberty, private property, trade, democracy, among others became key notions in the grammar of liberalism and human nature somewhat came to tie them all together. Bourgeois society was the natural outcome of removing socio-cultural obstacles put in place by religion, politics, and more. Expectedly, the economic and political ideas that explained and justified the new world emerged from Britain, the Netherlands and

France where capitalism was in a more advanced stage. In chapter five, I will consider a key factor behind these intellectual developments, the fact that people in these places were armed with a set of new psychologies. But for now, I bracket this issue and focus on the intellectual history of human nature as a concept and its relationship to capitalism.

The notion that capitalism is a natural form of organization emerged in the 18th century, thanks to Adam Smith who developed the first systematic account of capitalism as a spontaneous form of social organization. Smith assumed that capitalism, or what he termed the commercial society, was an almost inevitable human tendency due to natural capacities such as self-interest, bartering, and sympathy – a trait that tends to be overlooked by apologists of capitalism. Indeed, Smith's ideas were misappropriated and distorted by neoliberal theory in 20th century to portray him as a defender of unregulated capitalism. Unlike neoliberals such as Friedman or Hayek, Smith never supported unfettered capitalism and probably would find 20th and 21st century capitalism monstrous.

Between Smith and the neoliberals, in the 19th century social Darwinism also developed its own attempt to naturalize capitalism. Although I summarize this view below, I devote less time to it for a simple reason. Social Darwinism was a crude pseudoscientific set of theories devised to justify unfettered capitalism, racism, and eugenics that became popular especially in the U.S. and parts of Europe but its influence waned post WWII. The prejudices underlying it have not receded, but social Darwinism has been thoroughly discredited, and merely invoking it raises red flags among scientists and humanists alike. Therefore, I focus on Smith and the neoliberals because theoretically, they are still relevant to the human nature debate.

Alison Jaggar (1988, 35) explains that liberal political theory developed a conceptual apparatus grounded in terms such as freedom, private property, equality, rationality, to express

the needs and principles of a powerful, albeit still emergent, class. Although capitalism had been around for a few hundred years, the bourgeoisie as a class fully developed mid-18th century. Yet, in the 17th century Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau had planted the seeds of liberal social contract theory based on the virtues of freedom, human rights, and above everything else rationality. These authors, and later others such as Hume and Kant, tried to explain newly found liberties, responsibilities, roles, and social institutions as a rational agreement among equal members (i.e., free, white men) acting for their own benefit. In 1689, Locke (1988) went as far as to identify life, health, liberty and private property as God-given natural rights. The manifest contradiction between Locke's theory of natural rights and his role in crafting the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina might be astonishing but reveals a flaw of liberal egalitarianism. As Charles Mills (1977) has argued, liberal equality, embodied by the social contract tradition, remained riddled with prejudices against women and non-European peoples and its theoretical prowess was used to justify atrocities committed against these groups.

Nonetheless, these radical ideas played a crucial role in the formation and reorganization of polities and states across Europe, influenced the independence wars in America (North, Central, and South), and inspired the drafting of political constitutions all over the world. Truly, as Henrich (2020) notices, Western political ideas constitute an example of cultural evolution at work given that they successfully spread all over the world in a few hundred years, albeit they were not successfully enacted everywhere. At the same time, Marx and Engels (1975) had already noticed in the 19th century that capitalism compels all nations to introduce its mode of production, which obviously entails adopting its socio-political institutions. All these ideological changes, of course, were driven by a powerful bourgeoisie with acquisitive and political power that no longer tolerated inequality imposed from above.

Specifically, from the 16th to the 18th century, Britain and the Netherlands (and later France) became incredibly prosperous and free in relation to its European neighbors. When Hobbes wrote dismally about “the state of nature,” Britain had been torn apart by bloody civil wars. Less than a hundred years later, London was the epicenter of European economic and intellectual life. Filled with cafes, clubs, associations, markets, banks, etc. the British suddenly found themselves socializing (e.g., attending sports and entertainment events, gambling) like never before but also engaging in exchange, establishing credit lines and extending their market relationships (Kocka 2016).

Likewise, in continental Europe, from 1566 to 1648 the provinces later known as the Netherlands had been engaged in the Dutch independence wars against Spain. By the 18th century, however, the Netherlands was a wealthy country – the second most important financial center in the world – with a culture of liberty that was well-known for its free press and religious tolerance, which nonetheless did not save Baruch Spinoza from being famously excommunicated. In other words, in merely a century, Britain and the Netherlands went from being war-torn lands to wealthy, peaceful, and organized countries. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that commerce and trade would look like miraculous forces to European thinkers.

Therefore, the first attempts to reconcile the society of commerce and trade with human nature emerged precisely in the countries that had witnessed the miracle of markets at work, namely Britain and the Netherlands. Montesquieu (1991), who was not British but as a member of the French Academy lived in England for two years, praised commerce as a civilizing force that brought prosperity, peace, and order. Likewise, Hume (1953) established a direct link between commerce, the greatness of a state, and the well-being of its citizens. At the same time, and amidst these utopian spirits, some voices were already protesting against rising inequality

and extreme poverty. In 1729, the satirist Jonathan Swift published the famous *A Modest Proposal*, sardonically suggesting that to ameliorate their situation, the poor in Ireland should sell their children as food to the rich. Rousseau (1992), in 1755, famously berated wealth and even blamed “civilization” for crushing the good out of our noble nature.

The first concrete example of the market as a direct outgrowth of human nature, however, comes from a Dutch writer. In 1714, Bernard de Mandeville (1728) published *The Fable of the Bees*. The book caused great controversy because it suggested that vices like greed, pride, and vanity are beneficial to the public good. Mandeville’s bees form a successful society as long as they tolerate and encourage vices, but when a “reformation” wave rids the colony of greed, the society collapses as the bees are no longer competitive and productive. Although this view is almost common sense today, Mandeville’s argument was scandalous in the 18th century given that it was anathema to both Christianity and Renaissance humanism. Moreover, for a physician, Mandeville had rather scant knowledge about people and bees – both eusocial animals.

Yet, Mandeville’s fable incorporated elements of the new social world that capitalism had created. The bees showcase how entrepreneurship, industriousness, wealth, discipline, and self-interest are all crucial for the development of a happy and successful society. Mandeville’s original contribution, then, is suggesting that individuals left to pursue their own interests without regulations could *organically* produce the best social outcome.

Inspired by the sweeping changes that capitalism had brought to Europe, in 1776 Adam Smith (1981) published *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, the first and most systematic attempt to argue that the pursuit of self-interest leads to a society where cooperation, freedom, productivity, and prosperity can flourish. A much more sophisticated thinker, Smith accepted that self-enlightened interest is a structuring principle of successful

societies, but unlike Mandeville, he did not accept self-interest as the only force binding society (Herzog 2013). Influenced by Hume (1964), Smith also paid close attention to social feelings such as sympathy. Yet, Smith also went a step beyond and suggested that something similar to Mandeville's society of bees is not only optimal in terms of productivity but also natural for human beings. In this manner, Smith inaugurates what Meiksins Wood (2017) calls the "commercialization model," namely a tradition that views capitalism, or the "commercial society" in Smith's words, as a system of organization that flows naturally from human natural capacities. Ideologically, this is a key moment because the commercialization model assumes that capitalism is not a radical qualitative break in human history but simply the consequence of the quantitative intensification of eternal human practices. Free from old constraints, capitalism steadily develops into a system that guarantees freedom and prosperity for most. Indeed, starting with Smith, proponents of capitalism regard it as a natural and integral part of human freedom (Bowles 2006). Regulations impinge upon human freedom itself. Society, thus, should do as little as possible to interfere with the natural development of the commercial society and trust the famous "invisible hand" that Smith painstakingly detailed.

Before I move on, let me clarify an important point about Adam Smith. Widely considered the philosopher of capitalism, Smith is far from being the libertarian caricature popularized as a unidimensional advocate of unrestrained self-interest and laissez-faire economics. For Smith, the free market does not solve everything; it is a source of both solutions and problems (Herzog 2013). Indeed, the government, Smith believed, has to put in place institutions to curb problems (e.g., inequality, cronyism) inherent to capitalism. As Amartya Sen (2013) argues, defenders of unbridled capitalism wrongly assume that Smith believed in the self-

regulatory power of the market, that profit is the basis of all rational behavior, and that self-interest is always beneficial for society at large.

Moreover, for Harvey (2007), by Smith's standards present day capitalism fails at securing freedom for most. Smith witnessed manufacturing capitalism, not the fully mechanized/dehumanized world of Max Weber or Marx and Engels, for example. Notwithstanding his optimism about the commercial society, Smith worries about inequality, greed, and the dangers that mindless repetition posits to the mental faculties of workers. In other words, unlike some cheerleaders of unbridled capitalism who claim his intellectual mantle or merely use his name on think-tanks dedicated to spread propaganda, Smith had a complex, sometimes contradictory, view of the "commercial society" of his time.

Yet, Smith is also an impassioned advocate of liberalism. In good "enlightened" 18th century fashion, Smith suggests that liberal European societies are the pinnacle of civilization, whereas America and Africa still remain in a stage of "savagery." England and France, Smith argues, have achieved levels of material wealth and comfort unmatched by civilized and uncivilized countries alike. Due to the commercial society, Smith (1981, 24) highlights, the most modest dwellings of a poor Briton are much more sophisticated than those of kings in Africa. Perhaps Smith forgot about Egypt or did not know about the kingdom of Mali? Nonetheless, Smith's aim is transparent. The commercial society increases the well-being of its citizens, hence it is necessary to find a method to bolster and reproduce it. As Lisa Herzog (2013) suggests, *Wealth of Nations should* be read precisely as a guidebook on how to establish and maintain the commercial society.

With this objective in mind, in *Wealth of the Nations*, Smith systematically describes the mechanisms that characterize new capitalistic societies and attempts to derive social and political

principles that follow from these new arrangements. Three key, interrelated elements are crucial to understand Smith's analysis: division of labor, human nature, and markets. Britain's economy in the 18th century was characterized by an advanced division of labor never seen before in Europe. For Smith, the division of labor improved productivity, enhanced workers' skills, and encouraged new technological invention. The division of labor, thus, explains Europe's wealth and the unrivaled comfort that its inhabitants.

To understand how different Smith's world from was from what was yet to come through ruthless mechanization and industrialization, let's keep in mind that merely 70 years later Engels will denounce the ruinous conditions of the working class in Manchester. Engels' account makes the life of African hunter-gatherers (e.g., nutrition, health, leisure time, social capital) look rosy in comparison to the tribulations of poor, working people in Britain. Of course, even today some aspects of non-industrial societies (e.g., diet, social support) are superior to modern industrial life.

Going back to Smith's argument, his analysis of the division of labor hinges upon the second key principle of the commercial society. Namely human nature expressed as a propensity to "truck, barter, and exchange" (Smith 1981, 25). In underdeveloped societies where the division of labor does not exist, Smith thinks, everyone must perform different tasks to satisfy their needs. No one has time to be a baker, a butcher, a fisher, a hunter, or a gatherer, but must be a bit of everything to procure things for themselves. This, of course, is not true; pre-industrial societies and hunter-gatherers for thousands of years also had a division of labor. Even "rudimentary" tool making, or weaving, requires highly specialized knowledge acquired through countless hours of practice, as well as teachers and helpers. To be fair however, Smith's knowledge of non-European societies comes mostly from traveler's tales, which are not a

reliable source. My aim is to explain Smith's attempt to naturalize capitalism, hence I will bracket his ethnocentrism presently. Trucking and bartering, natural and eternal human capacities for Smith, interact with an advanced division of labor to produce a surplus of high-quality products. This is where the third principle comes into play, namely the market, which modulates the other two.

The size of the market, Smith argues, amplifies or limits the division of labor. Only a society with a large enough market can have an advanced division of labor. People have incentives to specialize in one thing only if it is profitable to do so, which can only happen if one has many customers or exchange partners. The baker, carpenter, blacksmith, brewer – all masculine professions since unsurprisingly Smith does not have much to say about female unpaid labor as a source of wealth – are all examples of what happens when people increase their productivity by virtue of mastering their skills. Then, being natural barterers, humans enter in agreements with each other and exchange their surplus for other things that they need. Thus, the baker can exchange bread for meat with the butcher, who then can barter with the brewer, or the shoemaker. People enter into these exchange relationships because it is beneficial for them, Smith argues. Thus, as one of the most quoted passages from *The Wealth of the Nations* claims, “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages” (Smith 1981, 27).

In this manner, Smith makes self-interest the glue of human societies and by extension a vital part of human nature that also underpins our propensity to truck and barter. Smith's version of self-interest, however, is not as crude as citations out of context of the butcher's lines make it

seem. It is true that self-interest is foundational for Smith's political economy, but it emerges from what he deems a natural human propensity to seek status and be esteemed by their fellows. In other words, to a certain extent self-interest for Smith, hinges upon a strong sociality that is latent in all humans. More precisely, sympathy underlies self-interest. In Smith's (2002) less famous *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he argues that sympathy is a fundamental catalyzer of human action. If people acquire wealth, it is because they seek the admiration of their fellow beings and this relies on our sympathetic feelings. As a side note, in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin (2006) argued something along the same lines but ascribed social feelings such as sympathy to natural selection and not to psychological intentions alone.

Although Marx rightly criticized its atomism, classical liberal economics had a strong societal focus (Rodgers 2011, 45) that modern economic theory later exchanged for complex mathematical models and methodological individualism. As I noted, Smith strives to find the mechanisms and institutions that underlie the commercial society of his time because it is the best way to increase wealth for everyone. That is, Smith's aim is not merely to reproduce wealth but to create a wealthy society where people can enjoy a good life.

Notwithstanding his good intentions, Smith also successfully naturalized capitalism. Previously, Hobbes had extolled self-interest, Locke defended freedom and private property as God given natural rights, Mandeville celebrated industriousness. Smith's genius and originality lies in taking all these core elements of the new world created by capitalism and linking them organically to the division of labor, markets, and human nature. For Smith, (1981, 687) when all these elements are successfully integrated in a society, a "system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord." The market, thus, is the organic development of human beings entering

into natural relationships and the commercial society is based on political institutions that best support these inclinations.

Capitalism, then, is natural for Smith because it reinforces what he considers are positive aspects of human nature such as our inclinations to truck and barter, acquire wealth, engage in commercial activities, and of course, our self-interest. But Smith also warns about negative aspects of human nature that capitalism exploits (e.g., greed, nepotism), which is why we need institutions to curb these abuses. In other words, social and political institutions should encourage but also protect from itself the sort of society that follows organically from human nature.

Industrialization in the 19th century produced a world of brutal mechanization and harsh working conditions that differed completely from Smith's predictions, or perhaps confirmed his warnings against unbridled capitalism. This, tellingly, is the century of the great critics of capitalism – Marx and Weber – utopian socialisms, anarchisms, and communisms. At the same time, a new attempt to naturalize capitalism became increasingly popular among the elites in Europe and especially in the U.S., namely social Darwinism. Although social Darwinism had multiple facets (racism, eugenics), here I focus on its relationship to capitalism noticing, however, that there are obvious intersections at play between these narratives. The main idea animating social Darwinism was the justification of the status quo and to do so it blamed the poor, racial minorities, women, etc. for their misfortunes, which were attributable to feeble minds, racial differences, etc. (Brown and Laland 2011).

As Stephen Jay Gould (2006) rightly notices, social Spencerism would be a more appropriate name for this doctrine that tried to misapply Darwin's views on evolution to human

behavior and societies. Certainly, Herbert Spencer is the real father of social Darwinism², which is rather ironic if we consider that, if anything, Spencer was a Lamarckian more than a Darwinian (Brown and Laland 2011). Nevertheless, in the U.S., the nouveau rich among capitalist powers, Spencer's ideas camouflaged as evolutionary theory became increasingly popular among the robber barons of the Gilded Age who saw in it a justification for their ruthless behavior.³ "Survival of the fittest" became a popular motto among Rockefeller, Carnegie, Hill, and other robber barons to explain their success. According to these social Darwinists, the source of their wealth was not corrupt and conniving behavior but instinct and natural skills. As the journalist Stewart Hollbrook remarked about the popularity of social Darwinism among robber barons, "It was welcome balm to their impaired consciences to be told they enjoyed their riches simply because of the working of natural laws over which neither they nor anyone else had control" (cited in Wyllie 1959, 630). Spencer, therefore, replaced Smith as the defender of *laissez faire* capitalism in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Spencer mistakenly believed that evolution was progressive, i.e., always improving and increasing in complexity. Hence, he sought to apply this distorted view of Darwin's theory to human societies. In the same vein of the towering figures of the Enlightenment, Spencer believed that European, and by extension American, civilizations had left behind previous stages of savagery and barbarism and were therefore the highest stage in human evolution. Moreover, within these societies the elites were innately better than the masses. Wealth and power were a well-deserved consequence of the natural constitutions of certain individuals. It is not a surprise, given these views, that Spencer coined the infamous phrase "survival of the fittest" to

² For a defense of Spencer against social Darwinism, see Weinstein (2019).

³ For a detailed account of social Darwinism in the U.S. during the Gilded Age see Hofstadter (1944).

characterize natural selection. But for Darwin, survival of the fittest merely referred to those organisms that were more successful than others at adapting to their environments. With Spencer, the phrase glorifies competition and the winners, i.e., the strongest. Fitness, however, is not a measure of strength, or talent, but a consequence of genetic and non-genetic processes. Then, whereas Darwin's selection was a purely descriptive mechanism, Spencer ascribed a normative valence to it. It is natural for the fit to rule, survive, and reproduce, as it is for the inferior to perish.

Spencer's views on evolution were patently wrong, yet the rich in the U.S. liked and embraced his ideas. As the social scientist William Graham Sumner, one of the most prominent academic defenders and popularizers of social Darwinism in the U.S put it, capitalism efficiently sifts the fit from the unfit through competition much like natural selection does with other forms of life (Hofstadter 1941). In fact, for Sumner, millionaires are the product of natural selection, which luckily for society puts the most competent in positions of power. Socialism, on the other hand, was unnatural because it protected the weak to the detriment of the strong (Hofstadter 1941). Social Darwinism was not reserved to the business world, though. Medical and scientific research was deeply steeped in ideas directly related to the "survival of the fittest." Researchers across the best universities in the U.S. openly embraced social Darwinism and eugenics. Comments about racial minorities and their naturally feeble minds and lower IQ were common in top medical and scientific journals throughout the first half of the 20th century (Brandt 1978). The famous psychologist Carl Brigham – creator of the SAT – argued that Nordic races were by nature intellectually superior to "Mediterranean," "negro" and other races, and suggested that immigration should be limited to safeguard "American intelligence." In an even more atrocious example, it took forty years for the press to uncover the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study

before doctors and researchers decided to put a stop to the experiments in 1972. Furthermore, From 1946 to 1948, American researchers conducted even more horrendous studies with syphilis patients in Guatemala that led to at least 80 deaths. Along the same lines, Angela Davis (1983) notices that eugenics played a key role in the birth control movement early in the 20th century. What began as a call for “voluntary motherhood” devolved into a tool for population control that targeted and forcefully sterilized women of color to fight against white “race suicide.”

In this crude and unscientific manner evolutionary theory, or more accurately evolutionism, was enlisted to naturalize capitalism. Funded by wealthy businessmen, social Darwinism was successful at pushing policies favorable to the rich and curbing social reforms that could ease the life of the poor. The long-standing American tradition of calling whatever helps the masses (e.g., women’s suffrage, labor regulations, universal healthcare) socialism also dates back to these days. Overall, any limits on unrestrained competition, for social Darwinists, were limits on nature itself, thus doomed to fail.

Social Darwinism was largely discredited post WWII in part due to its controversial association with the eugenics movement so rabidly embraced by the Nazis. Later in the 20th century, however, another ideological movement tried to naturalize capitalism, albeit taking a different route this time. Neoliberalism did not engage in the scientism that characterizes social Darwinism, although one could argue that neoliberal economics is also a pseudoscientific doctrine cloaked in the respectability of complex mathematical models. Nonetheless, neoliberal theory ends up deducing similar conclusions about the naturalness of capitalism. If social Darwinism distorted and misapplied Darwin’s ideas, neoliberalism did the same with Adam Smith’s ideas. Smith did not espouse a crude version of *laissez-faire* economics, as I have already explained. Yet, naturalizing the market, or perhaps inventing it as Herzog (2013)

suggests, made Smith a point of reference for neoliberal economists who developed a more ambitious and idealistic account of capitalism and human nature.

The neoliberal revolution, Daniel Rodgers (2011) argues, signified a rediscovery of the “free market.” Given the failed history of *laissez-faire* economics in the 19th and early 20th century coupled with the efficacy and popularity of Keynesian economics, the idea of unregulated markets organically solving problems seemed dead. Neoliberalism represents a recovery of the concept from the dustbin of history, and to do so, it went back to the original architect of the market as an organic ensemble, namely Smith. But rediscovering the market, in Rodgers’ view, also implied distorting Smith’s work. Neoliberalism brought back the market as a concept of political economy at least in theory through Smith but in practice as a radically new construct with its own methodological and philosophical baggage.

For Craig Smith (2013), as the “father” of economics a lot of people, rightly and wrongly, claim Adam Smith’s legacy as their own, yet his influence on neoliberalism can be reduced to only one, yet important, idea. Namely, as Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek noticed, Adam Smith’s greatest achievement is being the first to systematically explain how individuals pursuing their own self-interest can lead to socially beneficial outcomes. But a positive result hinges upon a social system that allows human nature, exchange, and the market to interact freely and develop organically. For neoliberal theory, the market solves all the problems simply left to its own auto-regulatory mechanisms and with minimal to no governmental intervention. In this manner, neoliberalism builds upon Smith’s naturalization of capitalism to an extreme that no longer resembles its original aim.

Centuries earlier, Smith used the “invisible hand” metaphor to refer to the spontaneous workings of the market. The market functions smoothly when people are left to freely pursue

their selfish motives, which subsequently leads to the improvement of society at large. For Smith, the workings of the invisible hand are not the product of a stroke of luck but the product of a Divine Providence (Smith 2002). Neoliberalism, on the other hand, took Smith's "natural" market and severed it from both sociological and divine principles. Herzog (2013) observes that Smith's invisible hand far from being a celebration of *laissez-faire* signified a coincidence of private and public interest. Spontaneously the market produces wealth but also distributes it among the members of society. In other words, the market, for Smith, is a mechanism of social support. With neoliberalism, the invisible hand loses its social dimension.

In the bestseller *Capitalism and Freedom*, Friedman (2002, 133) famously argued that there is no such thing as social responsibility to be expected from business leaders. Their only "responsibility," if one can use the term, is to make as much money as possible for their shareholders. To justify this view, Friedman characteristically refers to Smith's invisible hand but reduced to unrestrained self-interest and devoid of any semblance of sociality. The impersonal market is the lynchpin to understand why capitalism is natural for neoliberalism, however. If the market is a natural expression of human capacities, any limits imposed on it are limits on our nature itself. Restrictions on the market represent an attack on our humanity.

In other words, the argument unfolds as follows. Self-interest and freedom are essential components of human nature. The market is the arena where these inclinations manifest themselves. A system designed to encourage the market is obviously natural. Capitalism is that system. Therefore, 1) capitalism is natural, 2) alternatives to capitalism are unnatural and doomed to fail (Fukuyama 1992), and 3) attempts to regulate or limit the market deny human freedom and, relatedly, nature. In one way or another, Hayek, Friedman, and Fukuyama, among others endorse these positions.

In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama (1992) famously argued that with the collapse of soviet communism in the 20th century, it was clear that liberal democracy, i.e., neoliberalism, is the only viable political system. In a different work, Fukuyama (2002, 14) explains the superiority of liberal democracy in the following terms:

Political institutions cannot abolish either nature or nurture altogether and succeed. The history of the twentieth century was defined by two opposite horrors, the Nazi regime, which said biology was everything, and communism, which maintained that it counted for next to nothing. Liberal democracy has emerged as the only viable and legitimate political system for modern societies because it avoids either extreme, shaping politics according to historically created norms of justice while not interfering excessively with natural patterns of behavior.

“The tenacity of human nature” reasserted itself against the utopias of the 20th century, Fukuyama adds. Abolition of private property, “weakened families,” and generalized altruism – socialist ideas – were doomed to fail because they go against the grain of our evolutionary tendencies. Of course, Fukuyama conveniently ignores that most humans have lived throughout thousands of years without private property, in societies based on generalized reciprocity and altruism, and with “weak” families – whatever that means. In fact, this form of social organization is the most successful in human history in evolutionary terms.

Overall, no political system is natural because none have been around long enough to exert any influence on our evolved cognitive capacities, except for the egalitarian small bands that I describe above and that characterize most of human history. To be fair, though, no one suggests that capitalism is natural in this sense. For the advocates of capitalism, its “naturalness” is a byproduct of the sort of beings that we are. I take the byproduct idea from work on the evolution of religion (Boyer 2001; McCauley 2011). According to this view, religion is natural because it spreads easily by virtue of the minds that human beings have. Likewise, Smith thinks that the commercial society organically maximizes the good in human societies because it

follows our natural endowments (e.g., truck, barter). For neoliberalism, freedom expressed as market relations guided by self-interest is the cornerstone of human nature. In both cases, unregulated markets come easy to us and capitalism simply greases the machinery that allows the organic development of natural human relations. With the right socio-political institutions, capitalism spreads easily and effortlessly, according to Smith and contemporary thinkers alike. Two different versions of capitalism, with different moral philosophies, both Smith and the neoliberal theorists hold views of human nature that are one-sided and partial.

Contrary to Fukuyama's (2002) conviction, capitalism, in fact, negates "natural patterns of behavior." Yet, whether capitalism is attuned with human nature or not can only be decided in light of evolution. Has capitalism improved the fitness of groups? Yes. After all, it has expanded and reproduced at the expense of other ideas and groups. It is a successful example of cultural group selection at work. However, it is true that capitalism has both created wealth, lifted millions from poverty, extended life expectancy, and more, but also that the price to pay for the comforts of modern life is a straightforward drive toward natural disaster. Of course, what is adaptive and beneficial at a certain point in time can become maladaptive later, and this is especially true of human culture.

Has capitalism spread with ease and organically as the proponents of the "natural" hypothesis assume? On the contrary, it has required violence, colonialism, slavery, unpaid reproductive labor, wars, military dictatorships, theocratic regimes, coups d'état, corrupt local authorities working in tandem with corporations, and repression against labor and civil rights leaders, and if Henrich (2020) is correct new psychologies, i.e., a partial rewriting of human nature. Even then, capitalism has failed to fully take root everywhere except for the U.S., Western Europe (including a few ex-colonies) and Eastern Asia. Surely, capitalism is the

dominant system in the globe but not because people easily adapt to it. The list of dirty mechanisms underlying the expansion of capitalism across space and time is long as I notice above, but truck, bartering, freedom, democracy, etc. seem to play a rather negligible role.

Africa, Latin America, and most of Asia have resisted the relentless drive of capitalism instantiating in its place some form of mixed economy with hints of colonialism, feudalism, native traditions, and varying degrees of industrialization. In fact, even capitalist superpowers are better characterized as mixed economies that include centralized planning, strong governments, and free markets. Of course, for the defenders of capitalism the problem is precisely the fact that governments from across the world have hindered the expansion of capitalism in every country of the world. Had these barriers not existed, even poor countries would enjoy higher living standards by virtue of the “magic” of free markets, they suggest. But what if the issue is not simply allowing the expansion of capitalism through the systematic dismantlement of the government? What if human beings simply are not designed to behave as capitalists?

Capitalism is notoriously anti-nature, i.e., it commodifies and destroys natural resources for the sake of profit. Furthermore, Marx (1975) famously argued that capitalism is also inhuman in the sense that it alienates us from our most basic psychological capacities thereby rendering life flat, disenchanting, dissatisfying, no longer human. In what follows I show that Marx was at least partially right. Given the biocultural view of human nature that I have proposed, I have to clarify in what sense capitalism seems to negate natural capacities, however. After all, one of the consequences of a biocultural view is that human nature is not unchangeable but a flexible process. In this vein, natural is whatever emerges from the interplay of culture and biology.

Yet, we also have to differentiate between evolved capacities that are the product of millions of years of evolution, and others that are more recent cultural adaptations. I am not claiming that there are degrees of naturalness or that older structures are more natural than others. But the universality of certain structures makes them fundamental components of human nature compared to more recent although equally natural developments. As I have shown, capitalism and its practices, in this sense, are a recent historical adaptation and not the byproduct of natural universal behaviors with the exception of selfishness, perhaps. At the most basic level, there is no human society that is not based on sociality, cooperation, inequity aversion, and empathy – all ancient evolutionary structures. These four are obviously interrelated and underlie activities such as teaching, imitation, food production, cooperative breeding, war, and even simple and complex forms of political organization, among others. Naturally, in every society culture modulates the workings of these natural capacities. For example, our culture amplifies or silences empathetic signals, which should be powerful toward “us” but damped for those who are labeled as “them.”

The fact that, notwithstanding environmental and cultural differences, most human societies have lived according to principles that emphasize cooperation, communitarian ties, and egalitarianism indicates that sociality, cooperation, inequity aversion, and empathy play a fundamental structuring role. This is because as Pascal Boyer (2018) suggests, minds make societies. The fact that most human arrangements operate along the lines that I have noted above, i.e., a form of “socialism in living,” indicates that these capacities are part of human nature. Yet, capitalism as a form of life produces conditions that either distort or are detrimental to these natural inclinations thereby creating societies that deviate from the historical record. Surely, (*for some*) these societies have also been wealthier, safer, and healthier than most human

societies from the past. But, a society that goes against the grain of some fundamental natural inclinations produces a world of suffering even amidst abundance. Importantly it is not that capitalism straightforwardly silences or destroys natural capacities but that it distorts them beyond recognition. In what follows I detail how this is the case.

Sociality

Sociality is an intrinsic characteristic of our species that has played a major role through the history of human evolution as it underlies key mechanisms such as cooperation, teaching, imitation, learning, and others that ensure our survival as a species. Given its evolutionary role, it makes sense that sociality is also part of the cognitive machinery that characterizes human minds. Of course, as with everything else related to human nature and behavior, context and social cues are fundamental to understand our inclinations. Our minds are not simply wired to be social but to assess interdependence with others to determine affiliation (Henrich 2020). That is, our minds readily pick cues (e.g., eating with others, sharing a roof, working in groups) to interpret where to extend concern and support.

The idea that humans are social animals has a long philosophical history and is most commonly associated with Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx, among other figures of the Western tradition. Undoubtedly, we are social beings who evolved to live in groups, surrounded and comforted by intersubjective networks of support. Without these networks, our evolutionary trajectories would be different, and their absence hinders normal development throughout both childhood and adulthood.

The psychological and physical effects of social deprivation are sadly illustrated by the infamous Romanian orphanages during the regime of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. These institutions emerged as a necessity after the Communist Party banned abortions and

contraceptives, which led to a demographic explosion that forced several poor families (especially of Roma ethnicity) to put their children under governmental care. The conditions at these orphanages were extremely harsh, and the children had little opportunity for social interaction with peers and adults. Consequently, children reared under these conditions tended to show impaired cognitive development, exhibited little empathy, and had difficulties engaging in and sustaining positive social relationships (Konner 2002). Simply, our minds did not evolve to be deprived from social contact during our foundational developmental years.

But this need is not reserved to childhood alone. Adults with somewhat normal development also suffer tremendously if they face intersubjective deprivation. The most extreme illustration of this is solitary confinement among prisoners. As Shaun Gallagher explains (2014) people who suffer this kind of punishment report chronic depression, anxiety, a loss of motor control, hallucinations, and a loss of the sense of self; the mind unravels and the body breaks. It is, Gallagher rightly claims, a cruel and unusual form of punishment.

Sociality, however, is not a uniquely human trait but has ancient evolutionary roots. Chimpanzees, bonobos, bats, dogs, and many more animals – including wolves much to Hobbes' surprise – also are social creatures. For example, Harlow, Dodsworth, and Harlow's (1965) (in)famous experiments showed that social deprivation has terrible consequences on the psychological and cognitive development of rhesus monkeys. In other words, contra Hobbes (1994), Kant (2008) and much of the modern Western tradition that conceived it as a higher stage of civilization achieved through rationality, sociality is the product of much older evolutionary structures and not cortical/rational processes alone.

But how does capitalism negate sociality? It is undeniable that the world is closer and more interconnected than ever before. Ships, airplanes, news, social media, the internet, and

more have compressed time and space to the extreme that we can reach and stay connected with people across the world with little to no effort. Whereas our ancestors encountered only a few dozen people in their entire lives, we can see twice as many just waiting in line at the bank for an hour. Yet, whether quantity leads to quality in terms of social interactions is dubious.

According to Smith and neoliberalism, even if self-interest is the motor of capitalism, the outcome still is a robust society. Markets expand our networks and keep us connected thereby making us interdependent to an extreme never seen before. Surely, the access the comforts of the modern world are reserved mostly to people in developed countries where socio-economic categories sift what is available and to whom.

Nonetheless, it is unquestionable that capitalism depends on strong social ties as they underlie the never-ending expansion of markets. To a certain extent, the logic at work here is “one does not kill one’s customers.” What this logic reveals, however, is the twisted form that sociality takes under capitalistic arrangements. That is, social relationships acquire a purely instrumental character and become transactional. The issue is that humans did not evolve to engage in transactional relationships most of the time. In fact, the basis of human societies is not that we can enter into calculative, egotistical relationships, but on the contrary, that most of the time we do not do so. To be clear, this does not mean that we are not capable of being purely calculative. Of course, we can. But most human societies are based on principles that discourage us from behaving in this manner. Indeed, as Marx and Engels (1975) noticed, capitalism is dehumanizing inasmuch as it forces us to objectify ourselves and others, or to treat each other merely as means and not ends, to use Kant’s well-known formulation.

But sociality did not evolve merely to engage in trade and exchange or to expand markets but also to fulfill emotional needs. Hence, its distortion has clear negative consequences for our

minds. Robust sociality is a basic human need that capitalism does not fully satisfy because it does not promote conditions to engage in truly human social connections. On the contrary, under the yoke of profit, social relations become purely economic (Jaeggi and Fraser 2018, 48).

Basic needs (e.g., thermoregulation, water, nutrition, respiration) are domains indispensable for human adaptation and survival (Corning 2011). The ability to engage in positive, non-exploitative social relationships is also a human basic need, for Corning (2011). Like water and food, humans need conditions that promote healthy networks of social support. As Weber (2001) recognized in the 19th century, capitalism does not satisfy needs but leads to their satisfaction with buying power. Sociality, however, cannot be satisfied in this manner. One cannot buy familial ties and friendship. In fact, capitalism puts us at a crossroads. Inasmuch as we want to acquire buying power, we have to work. But the more we work, the less time we have to satisfy our needs for social support. To complicate things even more, we spend most of our time at the workplace and the market, but those spaces are designed to remain impersonal. That is, workers are not supposed to socialize but to improve productivity. Of course, if productivity improves by virtue of socialization among workers then it is welcomed.

Harsh and long working hours, nonetheless, are not exclusive of capitalism. What makes capitalism unique is that it has redefined the conditions of life through work like no other system before. We live, as business scholars Carl Cederström and Peter Fleming (2012) argue, in a “workers society.” We are defined through our professions and occupations. We work all the time. We are obsessed with work, yet it makes us feel unhappy, empty, and meaningless (Graeber 2018). We have to remember that our ancestors and modern hunter-gatherers confirm this, were not slaves to work. Around eight thousand years ago, agrarian societies created harsher conditions for a majority who were forced to work to survive with meager diets, and

little to no comfort. Yet, these societies justified their excesses and shortcomings appealing to external authorities (e.g., big gods) or simply using violence and force. If the peasant had to toil away under gruesome conditions while the ruler enjoys the glamour of his dwellings, it is because the providence has decreed it that way. Capitalism, on the other hand, gives us the “freedom” to live this life. It is also true, as defenders of capitalism rightly contend, that modern industrial societies have created better living standards than the previous alternatives. True to a certain extent, this version of the tale tends to overlook the underbelly of progress. For every story about improvements in life-standards, there are examples of industrial accidents, miners and towns buried by landslides, cities without potable water, “leukemia-alleys,” and more.

More importantly, even if we accept the fact that capitalism creates better material conditions, then how come the U.S., the wealthiest country in history, is not the happiest country in the world? In fact, the trend has been negative for several years in a row (Helliwell et al. 2020). How come our spiritual lives feel so flat? How come work feels like a torture for most people? Suicide rates have increased 35 % from 1999 to 2018 (Hedegaard, Curtin, and Warner 2020), there is a rampant opioid epidemic courtesy of Big Pharma’s greed, a gun violence epidemic, and a police brutality epidemic that disproportionately affects bodies of color. The number of people living with depression and anxiety have steadily risen (although we must consider that diagnosis is now more widely available), and the numbers of patients suffering from various forms of dementia, a condition closely linked to lack of social support, have also skyrocketed.

These are not merely numbers on the margins but truly the characteristics of a pathology of “normal life.” In *Dead Man Working*, Cederström and Fleming (2012) argue that the modern worker is an empty figure longing for something meaningful that she cannot even articulate. Not

really alive, neither dead, the modern worker, Cederström and Fleming stress, is captured in a permanent state of helplessness, desperate for life but also worried that death will never come. This flowery language might sound like an exaggeration but underlying these metaphors, there is a common narrative that characterizes modern work. Namely, its inhuman face. The alienated world that Marx and Weber feared and denounced in the 19th century is still a reality today.

One of the best accounts of the alienating nature of work in the U.S. is Studs Terkel's (1974) timeless *Working* – a collection of interviews with workers reflecting on their jobs. As Terkel acknowledges in the introduction, the book is largely about violence done to the spirit and the body. Life and death also emerge as dominant themes from the voices of Terkel's interviewees, who search for meaning as much as compensation in their daily activities but somehow can only get one or the other. Workers are looking for “a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying,” Terkel (1974, xi) writes. Although Terkel's world does not resemble today's fully automatized, impersonal, hyper-managed and controlled workplace, the voices of its participants shed light on the negative consequences of these trends in its early phases. Jennifer Bates, an Amazon warehouse worker who testified before the U.S. Senate Budget Committee, describes her work as a nine-hour intense workout where she is constantly monitored, and disciplined for using the restroom or failing to fulfill quotas.⁴ To illustrate the objectification of the world and the commodity fetishism that Marx so aptly described, elevators at Bates' warehouse are reserved for materials and cannot be used by people. On the other end of the pay-scale, analysts at Goldman Sachs report working more than 95 hours per week under what a junior analyst described as inhumane conditions.⁵ The point: an asocial world feels

⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/17/tech/amazon-senate-jennifer-bates/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/18/investing/goldman-sachs-analyst-workplace/index.html>

inhuman no matter how much money you make, how much longer, and with how much comfort one lives.

But what if work is terrible because, well, it is supposed to be terrible. No system has made work enjoyable. Hard and dehumanizing are not the same thing, however. Now, let us assume that even if capitalism makes us work hard, it also gives us the buying power to enjoy our lives when we are not working. An apocryphal quotation usually attributed to Freud stresses love and work as the pillars of a meaningful human life. Although Freud never wrote those words, the overall notion actually captures something quite truthful about the human condition. If capitalism deprives us of the humanness of work, what about love?

Love, in this sense, refers to the need to establish meaningful social relationships that are intrinsic to human nature. That is, the affective components of our lives that are fulfilled through family bonds, friendships, community engagements, and more. For all its celebration of globalization, the compression of time and space, and new communication technologies, capitalism produces a striking decline in social capital (e.g., healthy networks of support, trust in the government and others, community bonds).

Loneliness, for instance, is a common issue in industrialized countries (e.g., Japan, Australia, Denmark, U.K.). In 2021, Japan even appointed a Minister of Loneliness to deal with skyrocketing suicide rates as a consequence of isolation. Vivek Murthy (2015), 17th Surgeon General of the U.S., warned that a loneliness epidemic was one of the biggest health threats that the nation faced in the 21st century. It is crucial to differentiate between solitude and loneliness. The latter implies the absence of significant social support and relationships, whereas the former is a personal choice.

Healthy social relationships are such a key component of the human experience that loneliness increases the risk of early death by a factor comparable to that of smoking and obesity (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015). Perhaps unsurprisingly, like every other social issue loneliness affects more the poor, unemployed, migrants, and minorities but it is not reserved to these groups. Of course, loneliness cannot be ascribed to a multifaceted cause like capitalism alone. Overwork, new technologies, inequality, faster pace of life, etc. are plausible and more parsimonious. Yet, following the data available on the subject, there is a clear correlation between late stages of capitalism and the exacerbation of the aforementioned causes of loneliness, disconnection, and staggering networks of social support.

In *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert Putnam (2000) traces the significant decline in the number of individuals who engage in different kinds of communal activities in the U.S. To explain the title of the book, Putnam notices that whereas throughout the first three quarters of the 20th century people used to bowl in leagues, in the last decades a bigger number of people still practiced bowling, but most of them did it alone. The trend is not reserved to something as trivial as bowling but as Putnam shows, is replicated in activities such as civic and political engagement, religious ceremonies, workplace relationships, volunteering, etc. Bowling, in Putnam's analysis, is a small sample of the social macrocosm in the U.S.

Putnam (2000, 25) diagnosis is simple: at least since the 70s social capital has steadily declined in the U.S. But the trend is neither irreversible nor progressive. The history of civic engagement in the U.S. has been characterized by ups and downs. During the Great Depression, for instance, social capital was at an all-time low, then it skyrocketed to record highs throughout the New Deal years, and later began to sharply decline in the 70s – a trend that has continued

into the 21st century. Indeed, today's social capital measurements mirror the all-time low 20s. It is noticeable that this rollercoaster ride mirrors the inequality curve in the U.S., which also coincides with the decline of the New Deal and the ascendance and dominance of neoliberal economic policies (Piketty 2014).

Nevertheless, for Putnam neoliberal capitalism is not the culprit of this steady decline. Following the standards of social science he tries to identify measurable and clearly defined variables. To blame capitalism, Putnam suggests, is a legacy of 19th century social theory and obviously of Marx and various Marxisms. "The problem with this general theory of social disconnectedness," Putnam (2000, 282) writes, "is that it explains too much: America has epitomized market capitalism for several centuries, during which our stocks of social capital and civic engagement have been through great swings. A constant can't explain a variable."

Two issues arise from Putnam's argument, however. First, as I noted earlier in this chapter, capitalism is not a constant. Indeed, its variability is part of its intrinsic nature and capitalism as a type has had many tokens in the U.S. throughout these centuries (e.g., plantation, industrial, consumer). Some of these tokens, or instantiations, are more prone to create conditions that support social networks than others. Second, although Putnam rightly notices that appealing to "capitalism" qua variable seems to violate the principle of parsimony, it is also true that reductionism tends to overlook relationships among variables in a system. Capitalism is not behind every social malady, but it seems to underlie many of the issues that Putnam identifies as causes of social disconnectedness. Perhaps grand theories that answer too much are a remnant of the 19th century, but at this current moment of crisis, big questions are as relevant as ever. Does not capitalism play a role in the loneliness epidemic?

For Putnam, the fact that the downward trend started in the 70s is a puzzling question with no clear answer. Yet, all the pieces to solve the mystery are in front of us. The decline in social capital in the U.S. coincides with the rise of neoliberalism and its cult of individualism, which affects tangible structures that are the skeleton of social relationships. Privatization and austerity, for example, translates into a neglect of public services (e.g., libraries, parks, healthcare, sidewalks) that present opportunities for people to develop and engage in supportive social networks. Likewise, an overemphasis on competition and individual achievement leads to a world where others are seen as obstacles or instruments to achieve our goals.

At the same time, Putnam (2000) rightly recognizes the effects of media, technology, money pressures, mobility, and intergenerational change on the decline in social quality in the U.S. Of these suspects, the last has the largest share of responsibility. From the civic-minded Silent Generation to Boomers and their children (Gen X'ers), there has been a dramatic shift in terms of community involvement and values in general. The latter two are more likely to choose "a lot of money" over "a job that contributes to the welfare of society" as an essential element of a good life (Putnam 2000, 273). Aristotle's wisdom, however, has been confirmed many times through empirical studies. It seems right to suggest that wealth is not the good and does not lead to happiness independently from healthy social relationships (Haidt 2006). Yet, as Putnam (2000) highlights, with Boomers and Gen X'ers individualism and materialism became dominant values that have undermined social capital in the U.S.

For all the widespread assumptions about American individualism, it is important to notice that this feature also has a history. In merely two generations, as Putnam (2000) argues, we have witnessed vast attitudinal changes in relationship to materialism and other values. Individualism, however, is not an automatic behavior but like everything else related to human

beings, it is heavily modulated by context. Individualistic behavior has to be reinforced by cultural means to become as widespread as it is in modern U.S. As I have stressed before, neither our biology nor our psychologies compel us to behave as capitalists. In fact, chimpanzees, not humans, are rugged individualists as Sterelny (2012) notes. This is not a swipe against chimpanzees, but a critique of modelers who have insisted on studying *Homo economicus* when in fact *Pan economicus* is a more suitable prospect for such behavior. The unbridled individualism that characterizes late capitalism does not come naturally but requires laws (e.g., unfair tax codes,) institutions (e.g., think tanks, academic departments), myths (e.g., self-made millionaires/billionaires), and all forms of cultural products to naturalize it.

But as a biocultural view of human nature suggests, all societies naturalize their ways of being in the world. At the group level, their existence depends on doing so and individually minds are organized to learn and adopt cultural products because our survival also hinges upon it. Behaving according to the norms and mores of our societies is so natural that in some cases we do it even if those behaviors are maladaptive. The Fore people of Papua New Guinea eat the bodies and brains of dead relatives, which can lead to the consumption of parasites and subsequently to grave diseases. In the West, some of us sit on a desk for more than 10 hours a day in front of a computer, notwithstanding the physical damage that this does to our bodies. Our minds, Boyer (2018) explains, are susceptible to low-quality information and a myriad of systems of thought, from political ideologies to religions, can exploit this vulnerability. Although capitalism negates sociality, it can effectively subsist precisely due to this fact.

Cooperation

Humans are an (ultra)cooperative species (Gintis and Bowles 2011). Cooperation and sociality are closely interconnected and to analyze them separately seems like an artificial move.

After all, sociality is a precondition to the evolution of cooperation and vice-versa. The causal relationship between these traits is reciprocal, and in light of extended perspectives it can be studied in this sense. The analysis of traits as independent units à la reductionism is merely a methodological aid to keep discussions within reasonable limits without falling into the temptation of concluding that “all is in all.” In what follows I discuss cooperation as an independent trait but just for the sake of clarity.

Cooperative predispositions are part of our evolved cognitive capacities (Boyer and Petersen 2012). Therefore, like sociality, cooperation is a staple of every human society and capitalist ones are not the exception. Yet, mirroring what happens to sociality, under capitalism cooperation becomes distorted in a manner that goes against natural inclinations. That is, if following capitalistic principles sociality produces a decline in social capital, misapplied notions of cooperation along the same lines lead to exploitation and inequality. In fact, notwithstanding all his praise for the commercial society, Adam Smith already warned against the exploitative nature of unfettered capitalism. It is not a coincidence that sympathy, through the intervention of a divine providence, and not profit alone animates the workings of the “invisible hand.”

Indeed, evolutionary theory suggests that empathy (and sympathy) evolved because they are necessary for cooperation, teaching, imitation, and other social behaviors. If I can put myself in your shoes, I can be a better teacher or student because I can see and feel things from your perspective. Sadly, traits that evolve for some reason can be “hijacked” to fulfill different functions. Understanding how somebody feels or would feel can be used to cheat and lie by evoking fear, or to inflict pain by anticipating what could hurt more or less, as torture illustrates.

In the same vein, our cooperative nature can be a vehicle to mask exploitative relationships. In *Capital*, Marx (1990) famously argued that capitalism clouds social

relationships underlying cooperative ventures to make them pass as the product of individual or private efforts. It is by virtue of this distortion that a CEO can make 350 times more than a regular worker even when no one ever works 350 times more than another person. But as Boyer (2018) suggests, intuitively humans recognize that nobody works 350 times harder than anyone else. Nevertheless, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the CEO of Kroger received a compensation of 21.1 million, whereas the average worker performing essential duties for the survival of society barely made a little over \$26,000. That is a difference of more than 800 times. For Piketty (2014), it is obvious that CEOs are not hundreds of times more productive than regular workers, but they evaluate their performance and establish their salaries generally unsupervised. In fact, it is common to see CEOs walk away with exorbitant compensation packages after a string of disastrous decisions ruin a company or a country. The people who caused the Great Recession of 2008 (Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, etc.) gave themselves 18 billion in bonuses as a reward for wrecking the economy with their irresponsible gambling.

Notwithstanding these obscene numbers, the first and most obvious issue that my argument faces is the fact that capitalism yields and depends on cooperation – perhaps at a scale never seen before. Although neoliberalism celebrates rugged individualism, it does not shun cooperation inasmuch as it advances the interests of capital. Global corporations are good, for example, but unions tend to be bad. Only in the 19th and 20th century, we have seen mergers between mega corporations, the emergence of enormous factories that employ thousands of workers and service millions of clients, scientific projects that require coordination among hundreds of researchers, wide-ranging air travel that depends on smooth cooperation between thousands of aeronautical professionals, and other enterprises that are simply unrivaled in human history. Surely, monumental projects have existed at least since the Neolithic Revolution (e.g.,

Pyramids in Egypt, Great Wall of China) and surprisingly even before as the archeological site *Göbekli Tepe* suggests. The crux of the issue is what do we mean by cooperation, how it is expressed under capitalistic principles, and whether this instance follows the natural dispositions of our species? After we shed light on these questions, we will be in a better position to decide if capitalism distorts, negates, or, conversely, amplifies our cooperative nature as its defenders assume.

From an evolutionary point of view, cooperation, like altruism, is a puzzle. After all, cooperation benefits others (e.g., neighbors, society, the nation) and decreases individual payoff (Powers, van Schaik and Lehman 2019). From a gene-centered perspective, it is counterintuitive to cooperate with others instead of maximizing our own benefit at every turn. The mystery, then, is why would cooperation be selected if it decreases fitness? But as Tomasello (2019) argues, cooperation is a catalyzer of evolutionary processes that are characteristic of human unique cognitive capacities. In other words, as a biocultural view of human nature suggests, cooperation underlies human activities and niches that led to the development of species-wide characteristics. Indeed, there is no doubt that cooperation is a universal of human (and non-human) behavior present in every society that is part of the anthropological record (Sober and Wilson 1999). It is not only that when cooperation fails societies collapse, but also that no society can develop in its absence.

According to Powers, van Schaik, and Lehman (2019), there are two main mechanisms of cooperation that underpin human arrangements, namely private exchange and collective action. These two are at the extremes of the range of possibilities of “economic games” played in both small and large-scale societies. Interestingly, although the nature of these games is quantitatively different in these two types of societies, qualitatively humans deal with the same

sort of dilemmas in both types of arrangements. Namely, how do we engage in cooperative tasks without being exploited, cheated, or deceived? In the case of small-scale societies, maintaining a reputation as a good collaborator is key to survive, and there are mechanisms such as gossip or punishment (e.g., ridicule, ostracism) that work to enforce cooperative norms. For example, hunters who do not share a prey equitably with others can be subjected to the same fate when their luck turns, or directly be excluded from cooperative activities given their reputation. In grave cases, they can even be excommunicated, which in small-scale societies amounts to a death sentence.

To analyze contemporary capitalism, of course, we have to focus on large-scale societies and their regulatory mechanisms. As Powers, van Schaik and Lehman (2019) explain, unlike small groups where people are related, know each other, and are guaranteed to interact again at some point in life, larger societies are characterized by one-shot interactions. The impersonal nature of large-scale societies opens the door to exploitation and free-riders, which is why these groups adopt social norms but also third-party sanctions (e.g., judges) to deal with this weakness. But since the problem of cooperation is of the same qualitative nature in small and large societies, human minds do not need to rely on norms and sanctions alone. In fact, we cooperate because we have a genuine interest in doing so (Bowles and Gintis 2011). Engaging in cooperative actions, like most group activities, are pleasurable for humans (Tomasello 2019).

At the same time, we are not merely predisposed to cooperate with others, but we do so with an expectation to engage in fair exchanges. Curiously, social norms work to discourage exploitative arrangements but also to justify them. Ideas like “pulling oneself from one’s bootstraps,” practices such as a 400 to 1 pay ratio between management and regular workers, the tacit acceptance of the outsized role that inherited wealth plays in determining future “success,”

and more depend on a number of cultural norms and beliefs that affect both people at the bottom and top of society.

Capitalist elites assume (or pretend) that they work harder, risk more, or are more inventive, and therefore are entitled to bigger shares of cooperative enterprises. “I worked very hard for it,” said democratic presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg to justify his 55 billion dollars fortune during a televised debate in 2020. Once again, no one has ever worked that much more than anybody else but capitalism has cultural norms in place to justify and mask the manner in which it deforms cooperation. Of course, these cultural norms and myths work because people from all walks of life, not just the wealthy, believe them. They have become an integral part of our biocultural constitutions and hence as every part of culture come as a natural feat of life.

Indeed, as Marx noticed, the genius of capitalism lies in naturalizing exploitation by clouding the true character of wealth production. First, to the detriment of sociality, it forces us to treat ourselves as detached individuals who engage in calculative relationships. In this manner, we can justify using others for our benefit and even better pretend that in doing so we advance the welfare of society at large. Second, it overemphasizes individual effort to the detriment of the social relationships underlying every single cooperative venture. Not only that capitalist wealth was built on the backs of workers and slaves, but also of women confined to the household to take care of children and families without any pay in exchange. The myth of the male hunter driving the evolutionary lineage of the genus *Homo* is not less mythical than the entrepreneur who creates wealth by their own means. No one has ever accomplished anything on their own – at the most basic level, merely surviving requires the care of others – yet capitalism makes us pretend that we do. Distorted cooperation and its ideological justification,

thus, explain the grossly unequal payouts among members of a group that characterizes capitalist ventures. These exploitative arrangements lead to inequality, which in turn goes against another human natural inclination, namely inequity aversion.

Fairness/Inequity Aversion

Human sociality (and cooperation) has two important cognitive components, namely a feeling of sympathy for partners and a sense of fairness (Tomasello 2019). Consequently, humans are naturally inclined to dislike unequal arrangements. McAuliffe et al. (2017) detail four characteristics that underlie human fairness. 1) Humans dislike disadvantageous outcomes, i.e., getting less than others. At the same time, 2) humans (sometimes) avoid advantageous outcomes if it means getting more than others. To enforce an equilibrium between these two extremes, humans rely on 3) second and 4) third party punishment. That is, as it happens with cooperation, people punish (e.g., through gossip and isolation) those who are unfair to them (second party) and others (third party). In this vein, inequity aversion can be costly for humans thereby overriding self-interest in some situations. These features of human fairness manifest themselves as early as two years old (Rochat and Robbins 2016) and are modulated by cultural norms throughout development.

Given the naturalness of fairness/inequity aversion, unfair societies necessarily go against the grain of our evolved cognitive capacities. With capitalism, of course, inequality is baked into the system. Moreover, following the neoliberal revolution, in the last three decades inequality has skyrocketed matching levels from the Gilded Age. Laws and tax regulations are written to benefit those who have more, and especially those who have the most, not only in the U.S. but everywhere in the world (Piketty 2014). Moreover, the agencies and mechanisms used to fight tax fraud are underfunded and understaffed to audit and prosecute the largest businesses.

Left to regulate itself, capitalism has shown over and over that it produces enormous income and wealth gaps. When norms, laws, and social institutions are in place to curb exploitation, the outcome tends to be less dire but by no means egalitarian. The Nordic countries, for example, have found a balance between a free-market economy and equality that tends to be praised as an example of tamed, or more humane, capitalism. Of course, we must keep in mind that these countries also participate in a global economy that depends on international networks of exploitation. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the Nordic model has created societies that score high in every category used to measure well-being (e.g., social support, freedom, health) and are constantly among the happiest in the world (Helliwell et al. 2020). These countries, and to a lesser extent the social-democracies of Western Europe however, look like such an extraordinary achievement that it is often assumed that there must be something special about their people (e.g., ethnic cohesion), which allows them to live harmoniously and in semi-egalitarian conditions (Johansson 2012).

But egalitarianism is not a rare phenomenon as I have stressed multiple times. Of course, human societies have never been perfectly egalitarian; human affairs are complicated and messy, which is why utopianism of any kind is not conducive to any serious reflection. But for a species with an ingrained sense of fairness, egalitarianism comes easily. In fact, humans have mostly lived in groups with low levels of inequality, and societies with extreme inequality are a fairly recent phenomenon. The Nordic model is exceptional vis-à-vis capitalism but not in relation to the history of our species.

Importantly, humans are not merely inclined to share equally but to engage in equitable arrangements. In other words, our minds do not expect equal share of resources regardless of circumstances, but an equitable distribution based on effort and need. Thus, the mythical

communist country where everyone receives the same salary regardless of their effort is just as unnatural as the capitalist economy where one person makes hundreds of times more than another. Both distort our sense of equity and fairness. It is along these lines that we should understand Graeber's (2014, 94) suggestion that all human societies have been characterized by following a principle along the lines of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs." Graeber rightly claims that every group or society throughout human history has been structured around this principle. It is not surprising, then, that unequal societies require violence, some sort of ideological apparatus, or a combination of both, to subsist, and even then, they are rather unstable.

The paradox on this issue is that although fairness/inequity aversion are natural, at least during the last 5,000 years most societies have been hierarchically arranged to benefit a small group (Boehm 1999). The question, as the title of one of the chapters from Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* nicely captures, is how did we move from egalitarianism to kleptocracy? Throughout thousands of years, humans thrived, in evolutionary terms, living in small, nomadic, egalitarian groups. Eventually, however, some groups transitioned into a sedentary life linked to agriculture, developed centralized governments, organized religions, large armies, big cities, and more. These are incredibly powerful cultural adaptations because as Diamond (1999, 255) highlights, the descendants of those societies that achieved centralized states ended up dominating the modern world.

Yet, these new forms of organization seem at odds with older evolutionary structures. Indeed, as James Scott (2017) argues, the transition could not have been smooth and required some forms of violence (e.g., slavery) and even barriers that worked to keep the enemies outside just as much as members of the group inside. So-called barbarians who lived in small bands,

Scott (2017) suggests, had a better diet, more freedom, and a better standard of life compared to people living in early organized societies. Yet, chiefdoms, kingdoms, premodern states, and empires took over the world at the expense of nomadic populations, and cemented inequality, with different degrees and ups and downs, as a staple of human life.

Capitalism did not invent inequality. In fact, as Walter Scheidel (2018, 4) highlights, the income ratio between Bill Gates and an average American worker – 1.5 million times – mirrors that of the largest private fortunes and the average worker in the Roman empire two thousand years ago. But just because inequality has a long history, yet incredibly short in evolutionary timescales, capitalism is neither naturalized nor exonerated. In fact, capitalism is supposedly superior to all other systems because it renders us all equals, at least to use our talents in the market independent of caste, birthplace, family, etc. Ancient regimes did not even pretend that people were equal. The chief, the priest, the king, etc. are not equal to the masses. Can we even speak of inequality as an issue among decidedly unequal people? For capitalism and its egalitarian spirit, on the other hand, reproducing ancient levels of inequality is not a feather in its cap.

But Scheidel (2018) also notices that for as long as inequality has been present, periodically there have been spontaneous and organized “levelers.” The “four horsemen of leveling,” as Scheidel (2018, 6) terms them, are war, revolution, state failure/collapse, and finally a timely factor that we have witnessed firsthand recently and whose effects will be present for years to come, namely pandemics. These are all violent mechanisms that leave behind a world of death and misery, but at the same time have the most dramatic field-leveling effects vis-à-vis inequality. For Scheidel (2018), unfortunately these, and only these, are the main equalizers, at a large scale.

Instead of discouraging us, these trends should make us realize the dangers of unchecked inequality. Violence is not assured, but history shows that humans do not tolerate inequality peacefully forever. People want to survive and reproduce. They want to see their children do the same and, if possible, do better than their parents. Add to this very basic aim of most forms of life, the egalitarianism that characterizes our species, and we can start to understand why inequality yields rebellion. This conjecture based on empirical evidence should also throw cold water on the idea that what we need is more capitalism to lift all boats. Inequality will only breed more social discontent, and the good things that capitalism has produced could be lost to new fascisms, nationalisms, religious fanaticisms, etc.

It is clear that inasmuch as inequality has characterized human societies, reactions against it have also been part of the social landscape. It is not easy to replace egalitarianism and convince humans to subject themselves to others. A set of social and political institutions, ideologies, a repressive apparatus, slavery, debt, and more are all needed to sustain hierarchical societies. Although humans are inclined to conform to their social mores because cohesive groups assure reproduction and survival, in highly unequal and hierarchical societies people at the bottom tend to have precarious lives and reproduce less than elites (Scheidel 2018). Social conformism has its limits, however, and the history of inequality is also the history of revolts, protests, debt jubilees, and revolutions. Inequality is not easily accepted or enforced because it goes against a part of what it means to be human.

Empathy

Empathy is the capacity to put oneself in another person's (or animal's) shoes. Capitalism and empathy have a complicated relationship. As I will explain, capitalism does not simply negate empathy but recruits it as means to justify exploitation and inequality. To explain

how this is possible, we have to understand what empathy is and how it works as a part of human nature. To begin, as Dan Zahavi (2015) notes, it is rather difficult for researchers in the sciences and humanities, to agree on a working definition of empathy. Here, I follow de Waal (2008, 281) who defines it as, “the capacity to (a) be affected by and share the emotional state of another, (b) assess the reasons for the other’s state, and (c) identify with the other, adopting his or her perspective.”

This definition is useful for two reasons. First, it is a multilayered view, or Russian doll model (de Waal 2008), that does not limit empathy to cognitively demanding processes thought to be present only in humans and primates, i.e., (b) and (c). Second, this definition nicely illustrates the evolution of empathy in mammals. The layers, from inner to outer, are ancient structures that have increased their complexity and showcase that empathy is a “phylogenetically ancient capacity” (de Waal 2008, 292) that we share with non-human animals. Mice, for instance, show empathic behavior in experiments where given the option between helping a trapped companion and getting a reward (e.g., chocolate), they prefer to assist the mouse under distress. Empathy, thus, is neither a cultural invention to curb our selfish genes nor a product of the Enlightenment but part of our natural evolved capacities.

At the most basic level, i.e., layer (a) in de Waal’s Russian doll model, empathy is an automatic process, i.e., unconscious, fast, stimulus driven (Moors and de Houwer 2006). However, its intensity, like everything else about human behavior is context-dependent. Empathic responses are automatic, but their intensity is modulated by what de Vignemont and Singer (2006) call appraisal processes. Empathy, they suggest, works through two parallel systems: one dedicated to empathic resonance, and one that modulates the intensity of the

response. The latter is finely tuned by experience, contextual information, emotional stimuli, and characteristics of the agent/target that regulates the response.

This explains, for instance, how some white people in the Jim Crow south could gleefully attend macabre lynching spectacles as if they were attending a concert – even purchasing body parts as “souvenirs” and postcards to commemorate the occasion. Dehumanizing Africans and African Americans, a culture of terror and violence modulated and even overwhelmed cognitive capacities to the point of silencing ancient evolutionary structures. To be more precise, empathy was silenced towards a segment of the population but never completely “turned off.” It is puzzling to consider that the same people who could witness a lynching with a straight face, or a grin, are also capable of showing empathy towards their family and neighbors. It is only when we dehumanize others, see them as enemies, invaders, subhuman, that our worst impulses take over.

It is also true that we are not plainly duped into following the “orders” of our cultural norms. Just like there were whites incapable of showing empathy for the victims of lynching in the U.S., there were others who were profoundly affected by the horrors that they witnessed. If there are soldiers who kill without remorse in conflicts, there is a non-negligible number who struggle with PTSD as a consequence of living the horrors of war. “Instinctive” aggression, although latent, is rather impractical for an ultrasocial species. Tribalism and in-group bias can intensify aggression, but it is not genetically programmed nor inevitable.

A strong sense of empathy, on the other hand, is fundamental and crucial to survive. Why is it, then, that capitalism seems to reward those with aggressive and quasi sociopathic tendencies (de Waal 2008), while shunning our social features? The key to understanding this

issue is explaining how capitalism recruits and deploys empathy to determine who is and is not worth of it.

As I have noticed before, a characteristic that is common to all forms of capitalism is profit as the dominant structuring principle of society. This principle requires the reworking of the systems that modulate and amplify empathy. That is, capitalism like any other socio-political system relies on different forms of acculturation, but the objectification of social relationships underpinning capitalism demands a particularly twisted cultural logic vis-à-vis empathy. It is not natural to engage with others as objects; hence empathy's resonance has to be dampened, and the targets pre-established. In this manner, capitalism can systematically justify inequality, exploitative cooperation, and an always-increasing asocial world. Of course, capitalism does not vanish empathy. People still donate to charities, help their neighbors, volunteer, and engage in a number of activities that aim at improving the conditions of others, thus, mobilizing empathetic systems. Culture cannot simply destroy ancient evolutionary structures. What our culture does is direct and deflect empathy in certain directions or reserve to the "apt and fit," the powerful, the rich, the beautiful, sadly the "white," an elite. Moreover, the channels and institutions that amplify empathy are systematically muzzled as Putnam's (2000) analysis of the U.S. documents. In multicultural, modern societies these narratives are also suffused by racial, gender, and class prejudices, which is why some people are considered even less worthy of empathy than others.

It is only by constantly blocking the capacity to put ourselves in someone else's shoes that a society that systematically (re)produces exploitation, and inequality can exist and justify its existence. Once again, capitalism does not have the "luxury" of appealing to external authorities, hence its ideological justifications focus on "freedom," "responsibility," "rewards," and other epics extolling individual effort above everything else. Social issues such as poverty,

homelessness, addiction, teenage pregnancy, gun violence, police brutality, etc. are blamed on individual decisions. Surely, individuals play a role in how their lives unfold, but the capitalist trick is to cloud the structures underlying these problems. It masks social/public failures as individual/private issues. This is precisely the effect of “feel good” stories about children selling candy to buy school materials for other classmates, or Gofundme pools where people contribute to pay for a stranger’s medical care. When all social relationships are merely seen as the sum of different individuals who meet with their private claims, interests, and problems, society itself evaporates. As Thatcher infamously put it, for a good capitalist there is no such thing as a society but only individuals. If society disappears, then others disappear, and there is no need to empathize beyond our inner circles and sometimes not even there. As Robert Lane (2001) argues, in the U.S., the poor, immigrants, racial minorities, etc. are not part of the collective “We” that defines the community at large. Thus, empathy in relation to the circumstances that the members of these groups face is diminished by the artificial distance that exists between “we” and “them.” Indeed, Waldfogel et al. (2021) have conducted a series of psychological studies, which suggest that ideology strongly biases people to be bothered by, or even notice, inequality and structural discrimination.

In this vein, the poor are poor because of their choices. Millennials cannot get ahead because they spend too much money on lattes and avocado toasts. Immigrant children are in cages because their parents broke the law. Two men who repeatedly say, “I can’t breathe” while police officers suffocate them did not follow the “rules.” It is a sad illustration of the intersection of capitalism and racism to consider that Eric Garner and George Floyd are dead both because they were Black and committed “crimes against capital.” One was selling loose cigarettes, the other allegedly used a counterfeit \$20 bill at a store.

When Marx and Engels (1975) wrote that capitalism melts everything in the icy waters of egotistical calculation, they could not know about the mental mechanisms that underpin the objectification of life. Silencing empathy seems to be one of the requirements to reproduce the conditions characteristic of a purely calculative mode of life. Without empathy, there is no sociality, cooperation, or inequity aversion. In other words, without empathy there is no human life.

Conclusion

Although its roots can be traced back to the 1500s, capitalism matured in the 17th century in England and the Netherlands and expanded throughout the world in the following three centuries. The changes that it produced, especially following industrialization, are comparable only to the Neolithic Revolution. Capitalism uprooted traditional modes of subsistence, production, consumption, reproduction, government, and eventually impacted every single aspect of life. All these changes were accompanied by a social logic developed around ideas like freedom, private property, individual rights, etc., but all anchored by one main principle, namely profit.

Originally foreign and anathema to traditional customs, capitalism developed throughout the years an aura of naturalness. In the 18th century, Adam Smith argued that the commercial society, the capitalism of his time, was a byproduct of human nature. Bolstered by the right institutions, capitalism would create a wealthy society to the benefit of the majority. Even better, for Smith, this development would happen organically due to natural propensities that characterize our species. Independent of our aims, the pursuit of self-interest and our inclination to truck and barter would organically establish a system of “natural liberty.” Much cruder than Smith, both in aims and theoretical sophistication, the social Darwinists of the 19th century

assumed that a system based on selfishness and competition assured the “survival of the fittest,” hence were also quick to naturalize capitalism. The rich and powerful were innately better than the poor and inequality was merely an outcome of letting things run their natural course. Interventions to ameliorate the situation of the poor were considered unnatural and hopeless.

In the 20th century a new “naturalized” version of capitalism came to prominence. Inspired by Smith and the collapse of communism, neoliberalism also grounded capitalism in human nature. This time, the unregulated market modulates natural behaviors based on self-interest and freedom. Limitations on the market are infringements upon our humanity. Kant (2010, 21) famously wrote that out of the warped wood that constitutes humanity, no straight thing was ever made. Neoliberalism successfully constructed a socio-political system out of this gloomy dictum. Other systems, conversely, are doomed to fail because they try, in vain, to go against the crooked timber of human nature.

Attempts to naturalize capitalism, however, are rent by a crude version of nature that is either one-sided or plainly wrong. Capitalism does not emerge organically as a product of our evolved dispositions, but in fact contradicts/distorts many of them. Therefore, a system based on such a limited range of behaviors is not natural in the sense that its defenders assume but has a rather limited scope. Capitalism, in evolutionary terms, is as natural as swimming. It is not easy and it is not comfortable, but with the right incentives, we have the “equipment” to do it. No one ever thought about constructing an aquatic society for humans, though. Yet, a society based on selfishness and competition somehow is supposedly natural?

If capitalism works by tapping into a limited range of natural dispositions, it is because we are biocultural beings. Our nature is from the get-go colored by both biological and cultural forces. Thus, even when capitalism negates or distorts sociality, cooperation, inequity aversion,

and fairness, as I have suggested, it can successfully function as a socio-political system by virtue of cultural interventions. As Cecilia Heyes (2018) aptly explains, culture creates “human ways of thinking.” Yet, culture also has the capacity to create “inhuman” ways of thinking. This is the key to understand capitalism and human nature. Evolution in general is economic; like a tinker it works with what already exists instead of starting from scratch. It easily (re)appropriates structures or traits that evolved for a reason and uses them for another. Literacy nicely exemplifies this economy as it utilizes brain regions that originally evolved to support speech. Likewise, capitalism can reclaim behaviors that evolved for one reason (e.g., cooperation) and employ them for another (e.g., exploitation).

Capitalism, then, is natural if it means that it is possible but not in the misconceived sense that Smith and neoliberals assume. If this were the case, the history of capitalism would not be colored by the violence that has been used to cement its dominance across the world. As long as there has been capitalism, there have been reactions against it. In other words, we have not reached the end of history but are merely traversing a point. Another system, another world as the old socialist slogan puts it, are all within the range of what is possible. Human nature does not assure the triumph of capitalism. Assuredly, it is easy to be selfish. But it is also easy to cooperate, be social, fair, and empathetic. Heaven on earth is not possible but that does not mean that hell is the only option left. Capitalism like all socio-political systems is transient, and human nature in its plasticity supports alternatives (better and worse). In the following chapters, I will detail a number of alternatives more attuned to our natural dispositions that share one common principle namely putting human beings, not profit, at the center of social life. The most famous name for this form of socio-political organization is socialism. As it will be evident from

the next two chapters, however, the term has a deep history that goes beyond the ideas and political experiments 19th and 20th century Europe.

Chapter Three – Socialism: 200 years of history

Socialism can be understood, at least, in two senses. First as a political project with European roots, and second, as an ancient structuring principle that characterizes all human societies. In the first sense, socialism is a Western idea with a history of no more than 200 years and that ironically has found success mostly outside of its birthplace. In the second sense, its roots are much more ancient and can be traced back to the dawn of our species, and even others within the genus *Homo* (e.g., Neanderthals, Denisovans). The aim of this chapter is to present a brief history of socialism qua Western idea and political project – including non-Western ramifications. Specifically, I focus on the idea of socialism as it developed in Europe in the 19th century and pay special attention to its practice in the 20th century. As I did in the previous chapter with capitalism, in what follows I trace the intellectual history of socialism hand-in-hand with its material development.

The Idea of Socialism

If capitalism was complicated to define, socialism presents its own problems. Already in 1924, Angelo Rappoport (1924) compiled at least forty definitions of socialism, and the number has grown exponentially since then as new socialist world experiments (e.g., China, Vietnam, Cuba, Africa) emerged. In a very broad sense, we can begin noticing that socialists of all varieties have sought to overcome capitalism and create a more humane and/or rational society (Wolff 2019). But with very few exceptions, the road to something better usually goes through capitalism for socialists within the European tradition. The reason for this is rather transparent. As philosopher Axel Honneth (2017, 6) evinces, socialism is a direct consequence of industrial capitalism, therefore both are inexorably linked to each other.

Industrialization disrupted and destroyed traditional practices and replaced them with brutal working and living conditions, which brought about a series of protests that were articulated under various, heterogeneous movements that eventually coalesced under the banner of socialism. The early proponents of socialism rejected the new capitalist ethos of individualism and greed and sought to recover sociality as a fundamental aspect of human organization. There is nothing new about emphasizing sociality, over greed and selfishness, as a structuring principle, however. In the West, this view can be traced all the way back to Plato and Aristotle. Likewise, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, along the lines of the dominant Christian philosophical tradition, the community played a crucial role and was exalted to the detriment of selfishness and greed, which were derided.

In the previous chapter, I noticed that against these long-held traditional values, Mandeville and Smith developed a new standpoint that justified greed and selfishness as the engines propelling the new market society that was beginning to overtake parts of Europe. Likewise, Bentham, Mill, Kant, Locke, among others, developed new ideas that stressed the importance of autonomy and individual freedom above everything else, although they all did so in different manners and in some cases in direct opposition to each other. At the same time, reactions against the new ethos and the material conditions that the commercial society were causing rapidly emerged. In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, for example, Rousseau (1992), a proto-socialist perhaps, famously chastises the ethos of the new market oriented civil society as the main cause of inequality among people. Later, Fichte's (2012) *The Closed Commercial State* and Hegel's (1991) *Philosophy of Right* are even more poignant critiques of the "new world" that slowly keeps eroding traditional life centered around the community. None of these authors use the term socialism, however.

The word socialism dates back to the 17th century when it was used pejoratively by Catholic theologians to condemn advocates of secularizing natural law. A moral theory first proposed by Thomas Aquinas (1993) and popular in Medieval times, natural law argues that by nature humans are inclined to pursue certain goods (e.g., sociality, procreation, knowledge) and avoid evil. In other words, Aquinas assumes that human beings are social by nature. By natural, Aquinas means that humans can derive the law rationally because they participate in God's reason, which is the cause of everything in nature. That is, Aquinas' natural law is a theological conjecture and not scientific claim about nature. On the other hand, Hugo Grotius (2005), one of the alleged "secularizers" of natural law, argued that the directives that make humans inclined to pursue sociality do not come from God but from human reason alone. Catholic theologians inveighed against this version of natural law not only for what they thought was an excessive secularism but also for overemphasizing the role of human sociality independent from God's plan. Almost a century later, and free of theological or derogatory connotations, the term socialism was recycled and developed into a socio-political idea in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Unsurprisingly, socialism in this sense was born in the countries where capitalism and industrialization were at an advanced stage, namely Britain and France (Beaud 1993).

In France, socialism was born out of frustration with the unrealized potential of the French Revolution. Once it became obvious that equality, fraternity, and liberty were only reserved to some, voices of protest emerged among, or in the name of, the marginalized. For the early socialists, the values that the revolution had enthusiastically trumpeted, existed in a relationship of contradiction under capitalism (Honneth 2017). Specifically, the individualistic notion of liberty that capitalism emphasizes could not be reconciled with social values such as

equality and solidarity. The values of the revolution, thus, colluded against the “will” of the economic sphere.

In this milieu, proto-socialist voices critiqued the limitations and biases of a revolution that from its inception was wedded to bourgeois values. One of these early voices was François-Noël Babeuf who inveighed against the French Revolution for privileging an elite at the expense of the poor, and all under the pretense of establishing a regime of equality. In 1796, Babeuf and his sympathizers, known as “the Equals,” attempted an unsuccessful coup d'état with the aim of establishing a proto-socialist government. The failed enterprise led to his arrest and execution in 1797 but put Babeuf among the first socialist revolutionaries in history (Beaud 1993).

More developed, yet still theoretically crude, versions of socialism emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in the form of Utopian Socialism(s). The label is somewhat unfair considering that it comes from Marx and Engels who used it deridingly and to differentiate it from their mature, “scientific” socialism (Engels 1989). Although Marx and Engels rightly notice the conceptual shortcomings of the utopian socialists, they also give them credit for developing the first attempts to reject the main tenets of capitalism and for embarking in efforts to establish a just society. Étienne Cabet, Charles Fourier, and Henri de Saint-Simon in France, and Robert Owen in Britain have to be counted among the most important names in the tradition of Utopian Socialism.

Owen – a wealthy textile manufacturer – and his followers founded short-lived socialistic communes and championed the development of workers cooperatives and unions. Working side to side without exploitative structures, Owen thought, the lower classes would develop feelings of benevolence and trust for each other. Owen relocated to the U.S. where he established an

experimental community in Indiana. In addition, around a dozen Owenite communities materialized throughout the U.S., but they did not last more than two to four years on average.

In France, Cabet had socialist ideas, and results, that very much mirrored Owen's. Cabet also moved to the U.S. where a few followers created short-lived communities that fizzled quickly. In the same vein, Saint-Simon critiqued the "idle" capitalist class for hoarding wealth and espoused a version of centralized planning to assure fair compensation and higher living standards for the working class. Fourier imagined cooperative associations (*Phalanstères*) as fundamental social units where socialistic principles could be practiced. In "Fourierist" communities people were supposed to live harmoniously, and work on jobs of their preference, although incentives like higher pay were to be offered to those who performed taxing or undesirable tasks. In the end, both Saint-Simonist and Fourierist communities were short-lived and suffered the same destiny as other utopian experiments.

As all these communities showcase, utopian socialists emphasized practice. This emphasis, however, came hand in hand with a poor conceptual apparatus, which lacked the sophistication to understand capitalism and articulate a clear socio-political program in contradistinction to it. Yet, notwithstanding their shortcomings, the utopian socialists have to be credited for planting the seeds of what shortly would become a powerful political movement and a rich intellectual tradition in Europe and that in a matter of years would successfully expand throughout the world.

If utopian socialists lacked theoretical sophistication, the 19th century also witnessed the development of the most systematic and influential critique of capitalism in the works of Karl Marx and his longtime collaborator Friedrich Engels. Capitalism, Marx suggested, inexorably creates a world of rising inequality that divides the world between "haves and have nots."

Following the logic of endless accumulation, the value of inherited wealth and dead labor, and monopolistic tendencies inherent to capitalism, Marx conjectured, the gap between capitalists and proletarians would keep widening both in terms of wealth and numbers. Eventually a very small minority will control the vast majority of wealth thereby condemning the majority to hardship and poverty. Under these circumstances, a revolution of the majority against the minority would be inevitable, Marx concluded.

In 2021, for example, when Marx's intellectual corpse has been buried and exhumed several times, the three richest men in the U.S. have more wealth than the bottom 50 percent, and the world richest 1 percent have as much as 60 percent of the world population. Moreover, the gap between rich and poor is likely to increase in the next years as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Inequality today mirrors that of the Gilded Age and the future looks even bleaker. Full of political fervor, Marx and Engels (1975, 496) wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, "above all the bourgeoisie produces its own grave-diggers." Marx correctly predicted that unfettered capitalism produces extreme inequality but wrongly assumed, at least hitherto, that the impoverished majority would not tolerate this arrangement and revolt against it. Marx's direst predictions did not come true, however. In the late 19th and 20th century, wages and productivity, along with inequality, increased in capitalist countries. Furthermore, communist revolutions materialized in countries with little to no industrialization or proletariat. Yet, Marx was not entirely wrong as some neoclassical economists pretend. Piketty (2014, 10), who is not a Marxist, notices that even if capitalist accumulation turned out to be finite and not infinite as Marx thought, its disproportionate levels and concentration in few hands are still quite disturbing and destabilizing in the 21st century, just as they were in the 19th and 20th centuries. The trajectory of wealth inequality since the 80's in rich Western countries and Japan, Piketty adds,

expressly reflects Marx's analysis. In other words, Marx did not develop a completely inaccurate economic study, but surely put too much faith in a proletariat that never arose to meet the occasion.

Influenced by Hegel (and Lewis Henry Morgan), Marx's conceptual analysis of capitalism theorized a socialist revolution as a necessary progression in human history. The seeds of its destruction, Marx argued, are already present in capitalism, which will eventually be forced to confront its own negation, i.e., socialism. Although this is not the place for a more detailed discussion of Marx's theory of history, his views can be summarized as an interplay between determinism and freedom. For Marx, history exhibits an internal logic whereby forces of production (e.g., human labor, technology) tend to develop to a point where the relations of production (e.g., boss/employee, feudal lord/serf) undergo a revolution and new relations, or classes, are established. As one of many famous lines from the *Communist Manifesto* puts it, the history of society is the history of struggles between classes.

Nonetheless, Marx is not a historical determinist in a teleological sense. Although transitions between societies follow certain patterns, there is nothing in the historical trajectory that is/was inevitable. Things can always be otherwise. History, in this sense, does not move inexorably toward a goal, ignoring the actions of individual actors. The end of capitalism, for instance, is simply not bound to happen. If this was the case, then Marx would not advocate for struggle and activism but would probably endorse a "wait-and-see" attitude. At the same time, it is difficult to reconcile Marx's "austere determinism," as philosopher Terry Eagleton (2011) puts it, with his pronouncements apropos socialism. Marx and Engels do suggest in the *Communist Manifesto* that the fall of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of socialism are both inevitable. But

the manifesto is a political pamphlet and as such it is full of spirited rhetoric and strategically conceived to persuade the working classes and not philosophers, economists, or logicians.

If Marx thinks that socialism is inevitable it is because capitalism promotes a set of conditions (e.g., wealth inequality, strong political institutions, free speech, education) that are fertile soil for a revolution. But Marx's intellectual path begins with him as a philosopher who makes theoretical conjectures and later develops into a social scientist. From a scientific analysis of capitalism, Marx concludes that even if wealth inequality and free speech are necessary conditions for the development of a communist society, they are not sufficient. In other words, just because the conditions are present, it does not mean that socialism will necessarily follow. The future is undetermined. It could be that barbarism, complete annihilation, or any other number of scenarios follow the demise of capitalism. If anything makes socialism inevitable in Marx's view, G.A. Cohen (1986) argues, it is human rationality, which makes people bound to choose a better society whenever it is possible. At the same time, there is no doubt that Marx believed that socialism would represent a higher stage of human history (Wood 2004). In other words, even if Marx was not a determinist, undeniably, a strong progressivism permeates his philosophy.

Notwithstanding its "quirks," Marx's conceptual analysis remains the most powerful and influential critique of capitalism albeit one rent with the limitations of a 19th century worldview such as blindspots on race and gender, and non-European cultures. Indispensable yet insufficient to critique capitalism, as Cornel West (2000) aptly describes it, Marxist theory catalyzed an explosion unparalleled in the history of philosophy. But before Marxism became a political juggernaut and a de facto synonym with socialism (and communism) in the 20th century, it

struggled bitterly with rivals within the socialist movement as two distinct lines emerged in the 19th century.

On the one hand, Marx and Engels, Louis Blanc, and Louis Blanqui defended the necessity of capturing political power to establish socialism – even if they did not agree on the means to do so. On the other hand, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin, precursors of anarchism, argued for the complete dissolution of political power and the creation of a society of “federations,” i.e., free associations of workers (Beaud 1993). Although Bakunin and Proudhon had a devoted base of followers, their conceptual weapons were lackluster and no match for a much more theoretically sophisticated Marx. More importantly, anarchists became increasingly violent and often resorted to political assassinations to carry their cause, which led to a disavowal within the socialist/labor movement and as a consequence their influence eventually waned. Tensions in the socialist movement, however, cannot be solely attributed to anarchism’s conceptual deficiencies or proclivity to engage in violence, but also to Marx’s irascible character, lack of tolerance for dissension, and penchant to critique friends and foes with bitter and cutting rhetoric.

Nonetheless, Marxism became the most influential socialist theoretical school merely a few decades after Marx died in 1883. Socialist and communist parties that claimed his legacy were fully functional in most of Europe and eventually around the world. As I noted earlier, the case of Marxism is truly remarkable for a philosophical school. Never in history have there been Platonist, Aristotelian, Kantian, or Rawlsian governments, neither existentialist, Heideggerian, Derridean, or Foucauldian parties. Yet, by the mid-20th century, there were countries, political parties, social movements, unions, guerrillas, and more that claimed to be Marxist in every single corner of the world. As Wolff (2019) rightly notices, socialism was adopted by people of every

race, gender, class, and nationality in a rather short period of time and at a much faster pace than capitalism, Christianity, or Islam. Indeed, Marxism was quite successful as a cultural package, to use the language of evolutionary theory. Whether these parties and movements were truly Marxist – whatever that means – is a different question that is not within the scope of this chapter but obviously constitutes an important question for Marxist theorists and historians.

Amidst the ideological fights of the 19th century and before socialism coalesced around Marxist theory, many socialist parties (allied with labor movements) of different varieties were formed and spread throughout Europe and the U.S. Just like capitalism did not emerge out of thin air, but only when the bourgeoisie was strong enough as a class, the fate of socialism was closely linked to the consolidation of industrial workers as a class. From 1881 to 1911 the working class grew from 5.7 to 8.8 million in Great Britain, 3 to 5 million in France, 5 to 9 million in Germany, and from 3 to 7 million in the United States (Beaud 1993, 43). Along with these numbers, union membership skyrocketed, and the socialist project became a political force to be reckoned with.

In 1875, the Socialist Workers Party of Germany was created and adopted the (in)famous Gotha Program that Marx (1989) bitterly criticized. In the 1880s in Great Britain a number of socialist institutions and parties were formed: The Social Democratic Federation (1881), the Fabian Society (1884), the Socialist League (1885), the Scottish Labour Party (1888), and the Independent Labour Party (1893). In France, around the same time, the socialist movement was characterized by an often-belligerent dynamic between a Blanquist/Marxist branch on one side, and a powerful tradition of anarcho-syndicalism on the other.

In the United States, a group of German immigrants with Marxist and Lasalleian ideas formed the Workingmen's Party of the United States (1876), later renamed the Socialist Labor

Party (SLP) in 1877. Trade-unionists founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886, which remained the largest union organization up until 1955 when it fused with the Congress of Industrial Organizations to create the AFL-CIO. In 1901, a group dissatisfied with the SLP left and joined members of Eugene Debs' Social Democratic Party to form the Socialist Party of America. In 1909, prominent socialists such as W.E.B. DuBois and Mary White Ovington, along with Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell, among others, were instrumental in the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

From its inception socialism was a vibrant, multicultural, and multiethnic movement, but not without problematic assumptions inherited from Marxism's inherent whiteness.⁶ At the same time, Marxist thinkers such as Harry Haywood in the United States, C.L.R. James in the Caribbean, and José Carlos Mariátegui in Latin America developed attempts to synthesize Marxist theory and racial issues in a manner that educated socialist elites. Likewise, other identitarian claims (e.g., gender, nationality) were incorporated later to enrich the discourse of socialism beyond the needs of the largely white, male industrial proletariat.

Different socialist and socialist-inspired parties and associations were quite effective in winning concessions from the state to improve the conditions of the working class, or to be more precise, of white men among its ranks. It is important to repeat that social progress and the benefits of capitalism come at the expense of those who struggled for a better world as much as from the suffering of those who were excluded from the benefits, but not from the generosity of the elites. In any case, better conditions were always a byproduct of the system and not a conscious, moral choice.

⁶ The most famous, and thoughtful critique of Marxism's limitation vis-à-vis race is Cedric Robinson's (1983) *Black Marxism*.

The most decisive event in the history of socialism as a political movement came to fruition in 1917. Both a triumph and a tragedy for socialism, the Russian Revolution transformed the world in the 20th century. Never truly a socialist or a Marxist country, the words socialism and Marxism, nonetheless, became forever linked to the existence and fate of the Soviet Union and its satellites. In the geopolitical order, the existence of “real socialism” sent shockwaves throughout the world and created schisms of different magnitudes. The first and most notorious gap was between capitalist superpowers and the newly found “workers’ paradise.” This ideological conflict eventually developed into a bipolar world that to a large extent constrained the history of the 20th century. If socialism was a “specter haunting Europe” in 1848 as Marx and Engels (1975) had written, in 1917 it emerged fully developed and made out of flesh and blood. Until October of 1917, socialism was fully inscribed within the capitalist socio-political apparatus and limited to contest it through democratic means, protests, strikes, revolts, etc. With the Russian Revolution, for the first time in history, socialism had the chance to develop its own social and political institutions, laws, practices, etc. The ground where this transpired, however, was not what Marx had predicted, which required creative thinking from the architects of the Russian Revolution. Theoretically, Vladimir Lenin was the most important contributor in this effort.

Before I proceed further, a quick comment on the distinction between the words communism and socialism is warranted at this point. After WWI, Lenin thought that socialist parties from around the world had failed to oppose the war and had let nationalism betray labor’s internationalism. Therefore, in 1918 the Russian Social Democratic Party changed its name to Russian Communist party to distinguish itself from socialist orientations tarnished by the war (Lerner 1994). With this move, the word communism acquired a somewhat different sense that

referred to a more revolutionary form of socialism in distinction to the more moderate social democracies of Western Europe. Even if their goals were rather similar, the means and strategies to achieve them greatly differed. Hitherto, I have used socialism and communism interchangeably but from now on when I discuss historical features or events, I follow conventional labels present in the academic literature (e.g., Soviet communism, Chinese communism).

The Bolshevik Revolution was the first successful Marxist revolution on the planet, yet as I noticed earlier, Russia's situation did not conform to any of Marx's predictions. Socialism, Marx thought, would only work in a wealthy country with fully developed productive forces. Otherwise, the only thing that could be socialized would be poverty (Eagleton 2011). Marx's industrial mentality made him overlook successful socialisms that were neither European nor products of capitalism, but that will be the subject of the following chapter. Until then, let us continue discussing the history of European (inspired) socialism.

At the dawn of the 20th century, Russia was a backwards country with little industrial development and no proletariat. This is a puzzling characteristic of the Soviet social experiment, which for its critics allegedly proved, among other things, the deep-rooted mistakes that render Marxism superfluous. But as Cohen (2001, 389) rightly concludes, if anything, the collapse of the Soviet Union proves Marx's theory correct: a (Marxist) socialist revolution can only happen in a fully developed capitalist country.

It is also true, however, that Marx believed that a socialist revolution could work in a place like Russia but only if it was accompanied by an international revolution (Wood 2004). Without access to the resources of a globalized economy, a poor country like Russia could not successfully transition to socialism. Lenin was fully cognizant of this fact. His political and

philosophical genius lies in adapting Marxist theory to Russia's reality and revolutionary tradition, thereby inaugurating a new theoretical orientation in socialism, namely Marxism-Leninism. Lenin would have to change and adapt his views throughout his life to deal with the material conditions that the revolution faced at each turn. Perhaps paradoxically considering how things unfolded, flexibility and ingenuity were the most interesting characteristics of Marxism-Leninism in its beginnings.

In 1902, exiled by the tsarist regime for his political activities, Lenin (1975b) published the influential book-length pamphlet *What is to be Done?* where he identified two distinct socialist approaches, namely opportunism/gradualism and communism, i.e., Marxism-Leninism. The former, which Lenin associated with social democracy, was characterized by gradual reform, gaining concessions for the workers, and a contemplative attitude in anticipation of a spontaneous revolution. For Lenin (1975b), although this approach makes life tolerable for workers, it does not challenge bourgeois ideology. In fact, Lenin (1975b, 27) argues, opportunism is a form of bourgeois ideology. To a certain extent, time proved Lenin right on this issue. After all, the social democratic parties of the West became bourgeois in the 20th century and even strengthened capitalism by giving it a more humane face. Undoubtedly, the failures of the Soviet Union played a large role in these transformations, though.

On the other hand, communism (Marxism-Leninism) privileged direct intervention to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism. Although seemingly mercurial, Lenin's plan had a detailed strategy grounded in a strong political party and a cadre of professional revolutionaries (the vanguard) whose mission was to "educate" the workers to instill a sense of class consciousness in them. As I noted earlier, the complete rupture between socialism and communism happened post WWI, but it is clear that already in the theoretical seeds of what

would become the Russian Revolution, there is a more active, or belligerent, stance that will distinguish Marxism-Leninism from other orientations. But what may look like a confrontational attitude has to be evaluated in light of early 20th century conditions in Russia.

Unlike Western Europe, Russia simply did not have a democratic tradition nor the political institutions to proceed gradually and spontaneously toward socialism. Lenin, for example, was one of many Russian activists writing in exile after being imprisoned for possessing and distributing socialist literature among workers. Nonetheless, although Lenin challenged socialists around the world in 1902 to rethink their practical and theoretical commitments, the issue became a serious question only after 1919. That is once the Bolshevik revolution was on somewhat firm ground and not merely in the heads of a few revolutionaries, choosing between these two positions became an imperative for socialists in Europe, and eventually around the world. Yet, even if the Russian Revolution was more stable by the end of 1919, the conditions were not only far from perfect but also from decent alone.

Lenin and the entire Soviet leadership would clash against reality and standing on the ashes of a devastating civil war realized that building socialism from the ground is not an easy task. For Beaud (1993), the Bolsheviks encountered a fundamental, yet unsolved problem for the left, namely developing a socialist mode of production. To make things more complicated, Russia had to develop socialism without a capitalist industrial apparatus. Although correct to a certain extent, Beaud overlooks the fact that socialist modes of production have existed multiple times throughout human history. The issue for socialists, at least Marxist oriented, has been developing a socialist industrial apparatus that matches capitalism's power in terms of quality and quantity. In other words, from a Marxist perspective the still unresolved issue is how to replace capitalist industry with an equally productive socialist version. Of course, today we

know that doing so would simply accelerate the demise of our planet, therefore is not a sustainable strategy. Capitalism for every country, whether because it is the best system or as means to push forward toward socialism, is simply unfeasible. In the 21st century, the strategy has to be different, but in 20th century Russia the alternatives were scarce.

In 1921, Lenin adapted the program of the Bolshevik Revolution. To be more precise, Lenin returned to orthodox Marxism and accepted the fact that to build a communist country, Russia first would have to go through an accelerated phase of capitalism. Another point about the distinction between socialism and communism has to be made here. For Lenin the word socialism referred to a flawed western European movement as I mentioned earlier, but following Marx, also to an initial phase of communist society. In this initial phase, also called state capitalism, all production is under the monopolistic control of the state, which exercises its power in the interest of the working class and the peasantry instead of the bourgeoisie as it happens with the traditional liberal state.

In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin (1975c) derives this distinction between phases of a post-capitalist society from Marx's (1989) *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Therein, Marx suggests that before communist society could be organized according to the principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," it has to prepare itself to deal with a transitional period, which he called the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this initial phase inequality still exists because this early version of communism would be "stamped with the birth-marks of the old society" (Marx 1989, 85). In other words, until post-capitalist society can produce its own premises, institutions, practices, and more, the inequality that characterizes capitalism will still be present. On this issue, Marx simply follows a basic dialectical principle: remnants of the old are necessarily part of the new.

The *Critique of the Gotha Program* has to be taken with several grains of salt, however. As Michael Lebowitz (2015) stresses, these pages were a series of marginal notes that Marx made on the political manifesto that the German Workers' Party was about to adopt and were not ready for publication. In fact, Engels published the Critique almost a decade after Marx's death. Lenin, however, took the work quite seriously and developed the so-called "two-stages interpretation" (Lebowitz 2015) of post-capitalist society. For Lenin (1975c), during the first phase, i.e., socialism, the productive forces have to develop and create enough wealth, which then can be used to transition into communism. Lenin (1975c, 381) recognizes a paradox at the core of the first stage. Namely, the state is used to a certain extent to protect "bourgeois right," i.e., inequality, although at the same time it reclaims the means of production as common property. This seemingly paradoxical move, Lenin argues, is necessary to achieve the economic maturity that communism needs.

Therefore, in its path toward communism Leninist Russia embarked in a period of socialism, or state capitalism. This, however, turned out to be the one and only stage in the history of the Soviet Union. As it happened in the West, Soviet state capitalism created a privileged elite and an impoverished proletariat subjected to the haphazard plans of its leaders. Communism, the second stage, never arrived. The Soviet Union never went beyond capitalism and to aggravate things never had the formal liberties of Western capitalist countries (e.g., free press, freedom of association). To understand, at least partially, what went wrong, we must quickly hark back to the roots of the revolution, consider its aftermath, and only then it will become apparent that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had very few paths at their disposition. Soviet communism was rent with obstacles from the get-go, and these early challenges proved decisive throughout the following decades and until its unceremonious collapse.

The events of October of 1917 were a sequel to the February revolution of the same year that overtook the tsarist regime. Both events, however, can be traced to 1905 when spontaneous revolts spread throughout Russia but failed at toppling the government. In February of 1917, the revolutionaries who had cut their teeth in 1905 and people of all trades delivered a coup that ended 500 years of tsarist rule in Russia. Given the lack of democratic institutions, however, the transition period was complicated and fragile. A provisional government was appointed, and different socialist factions of Russia supported it with different aims in mind (Kenez 2006).

Two of these forces, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, argued that Russia was not ready for a socialist revolution. Thus, both parties supported some policies and concessions from the provisional government that although not socialist at least was more progressive than the tsarist regime. For example, both Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries welcomed a call to celebrate open elections issued by the provisional government. The Bolsheviks who were under Lenin's control, had different plans, however. Back from his exile, Lenin rejected any prospects of unity with the Mensheviks and denounced the provisional government and its policies for not going far enough in transforming Russia (Kenez 2006).

In October of 1917, under Bolshevik organization, workers and soldiers easily reassembled into "soviets" – organizational units legacy of the 1905 revolutions – and delivered a coup against the provisional government. For all its historical transcendence, the October Revolution required minimal fighting given that the provisional government did not have the support of the army. Once in power, the Bolsheviks allowed the celebration of free elections to create a national Constituent Assembly as the provisional government had planned. This move was a surprise because it was obvious that the Bolsheviks would lose badly. Indeed, the Social Revolutionaries, identified with the peasantry (80 percent of Russia at the time), won a clear

majority in September of 1917. The new ruling party immediately rejected the Bolshevik regime and proclaimed the newly elected Assembly as the legitimate authority of Russia. Lenin closed the Assembly in January of 1918.

Shortly after, and with the approval and help of Western powers (Lerner 1994, 114) the right-wing White Army attempted a coup against the Bolsheviks. Although unsuccessful, the episode signaled the beginning of a bloody civil war in Russia that lasted two years and left the country in shambles. To make things even worse for the Bolsheviks, in January of 1919, radicals in Germany launched the Spartacist uprising – a poorly planned revolution that failed.

Tragically, the most important German socialists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were captured and executed in January of 1919. By August of the same year, the prospects of a socialist revolution in Germany were gone as the last remnants of revolutionary forces were crushed. Any dreams of a desperately needed socialist, friendly neighbor dissipated for Russia. The question for Bolsheviks was no longer international revolution but simply whether their revolution would survive.

In 1917, Lenin truly believed that the October Revolution would usher a socialist domino effect across Europe that in turn would yield much needed aid and resources to support the Bolshevik regime. By the end of 1920 Bolshevik victory became apparent, but at the same time, the prospects of an international revolution were gone. Now in 1921, Lenin had to shift focus, assure the survival of the revolution in Russia, and change the course to reconstruct a country ravaged by WWI and a bloody civil war. This was the situation when Russia embarked in a journey toward the state managed capitalism that characterized the Soviet Union throughout its history.

Lenin's first step was to promulgate the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921 to liberalize the Russian economy. The NEP, Lenin (1975d) thought, was a compromise between the peasantry and state power (wielded at least nominally by the working class) to develop a capitalist economy with socialist characteristics. For example, the new policy allowed peasants to sell their grain in the market and made small concessions to foreign capitals interested in investing in Russia (Beaud 1993). The NEP contrasted drastically with the policies that had been in effect during the civil war when grain requisitions were common and legal procedure, which incidentally provoked feelings of animosity among the peasantry. More important, these policies successfully increased productivity and led Russia to a modest economic recovery (Kenez 2006). Without an international revolution and devoid of resources, Lenin settled for this version of state managed capitalism as the best option for Russia in the foreseeable future.

In 1922, Lenin suffered the first of several strokes that distanced him from public life and debilitated him considerably. Nevertheless, he remained involved in Russian politics and spent his last years assessing the past, present, and future of the revolution. Lenin bitterly critiqued an enlarged bureaucratic apparatus, the revival of nationalism, and a decline in revolutionary spirit as crucial problems that endangered the future of Russia. At the same time, aware of his own decline, he was increasingly worried about his successor. Lenin correctly foresaw that Trotsky and Stalin were both the most obvious choices but also that their differing styles could lead to a split in the party. Fearing internal conflict, Lenin (1975e) suggested Trotsky for the job, albeit not without some reservations. Stalin, Lenin worried, was ruthless, self-serving, and should not be appointed as his successor. Before this issue was resolved, Lenin died in 1924 and the letter, informally known as Lenin's political testament, only saw the light of day a few years after Stalin's own death.

By the time of Lenin's death, Stalin, who was very astute politically, had outmaneuvered Trotsky and every other important member of the Communist Party (e.g., Zinoviev, Kamenev) and steadily rose to power. Lenin had warned about Stalin's outsized power in the party, but no one was able to comprehend its true dimension until it was too late (Kenez 2006). By 1928, Stalin was in complete control of the Communist Party and every institution of the Soviet Union (Russia officially changed its name in 1923); Trotsky, moreover, was forced into exile. Stalin ruthlessly governed the Soviet Union until he died (29 years later), thereby producing one of the most horrific periods in modern history and another orientation in socialist theory/practice, namely Stalinism. Stalin transformed state capitalism into a brutal form of state collectivism (Beaud 1993), i.e., capitalism driven by statist and collectivist means of production. In this manner, Stalinism was not only a radical departure from the original goals of the revolution but also, as Peter Kenez (2006) suggests, an answer to real problems that the Soviet Union faced. Importantly, it was not the only answer, though. That is, nothing about Stalinism was written in the cards or intrinsic to the Russian Revolution.

Notwithstanding its well-documented abuses, Stalinism was defended as "socialism under construction" and justified as a continuation of Leninism; yet as Marx explained in *Capital*, we should not blindly believe what societies say about themselves. Just like the "bourgeois" societies post French revolution were not always free and equal, the Soviet Union under Stalin was not socialist. At the same time, Stalinism tainted socialism for years to come and is necessarily a point of inflection in the history of the idea. The tragedy, one of many, that Stalinism represents in the history of socialism is the fact that along with its rise, the Soviet Union became a sort of myth across the world for both enemies and advocates.

If socialists around the world had supported the October Revolution when its survival was on shaky ground in the mid-20s, now that socialism had a country, it was even more imperative to champion it. Moreover, in the 30s while the capitalist economies of the West were plagued by crises and stagnation, the Soviet Union was growing at gigantic rates. For a large number of idealists, socialism seemed to be working and had to be defended at all costs.

The Communist International (Comintern), created by Lenin in 1919, was under Stalin's total control and dictated ideological directives to every party in Europe and the U.S. In fact, "true" Marxism became inexorably linked to the whims of Moscow's Politburo, the only true Marxists by their own account. Facing the evidence of Stalin's brutality, activists, volunteers, and intellectuals rationalized the horror as a necessary step toward world revolution, others denounced the regime, and some incapable of reconciling their politics and reality, committed suicide; many more were quiet for decades. Beaud (1993, 99) poignantly captures the situation when he writes, "In the name of socialism, what generosity of spirit and what human richness! But what a tragic waste as well!"

As I wrote earlier, Lenin critiqued what he saw as vices that had taken over the revolution. Stalin, conversely, turned these flaws into the pillars of his tyrannical regime. First, Stalinism built a gigantic bureaucracy characterized by its long-reaching tentacles that touched every aspect of Soviet life. The most important parts of this apparatus were the repressive agencies that Stalin had at his disposition to conduct purges, extra judiciary arrests, run labor camps, and other "tasks" performed by a well-oiled machine of terror. Second, Stalin had decided that the revolution was over and surrounded himself with people who nodded along approvingly; competence was not required to be appointed to a position of leadership. High commands of the Red Army (some who had served during the civil war), members of the

Politburo (including those who had fought with Lenin in 1917), statisticians, scientists, managers (the list can go on), basically anyone who was not on Stalin's side was executed, imprisoned, fired, or exiled. No one was safe. People in charge of purges usually ended up being purged at some point later (Lerner 1994).

Finally, Stalin tapped into a sense of Russian nationalism that was still popular among the peasantry and the working classes (Kenez 2006). Tsars and tsarist generals were rehabilitated. Russian art from the 19th and 20th century was celebrated as the most advanced expression of European culture. Russian science and philosophy were the highest forms of human knowledge. To justify a nationalist attitude within a political system with German roots, Marx and Engels were named honorary Russians (Kenez 2006). This chauvinistic mood and celebration of the past was also accompanied by a systematic dismantling of progressive Leninist policies adopted after 1917. Although Leninism was never formally rejected, under Stalin the Soviet Union became socially and economically regressive.

In 1928, the Soviet Union began the first of two unrealistic five-year plans. The goals set by the Communist Party for the first plan were so far-fetched that they were only achieved in 1960 (Kenez 2006). By 1932, millions of people had died as a consequence of lower agricultural productivity and famines that ensued (Lerner 1994). In an act of feigned ignorance and contrition, in 1930 Stalin halted the first plan amidst tension and widespread revolt among the peasantry. Yet merely a few months later, a second and even harsher quinquennial plan to achieve rapid industrialization began. One of the goals of the Soviet planners was to achieve the collectivization of agriculture. For Kenez (2006) there are two reasons behind this effort. First, the Bolsheviks were always rather suspicious of the peasantry and their political backwardness. Collectivization, they thought, would give them a better chance to control the peasantry either

infiltrating or destroying their traditional social institutions. Second, Soviet leaders associated large-scale with modernity. Big factories and big farms, they assumed, were the mark of a modern, industrialized economy. In 1929, 7.4 percent of peasant households had been collectivized. Merely four years later, almost every household was forcefully collectivized. In 1937, at the end of the second five-year plan, private agriculture had disappeared from the Soviet Union.

Collectivization performed tremendous violence against peasants. Thousands of people died or were imprisoned. Others, facing starvation, migrated to the cities to engross the ranks of industrial workers living in slums with barely any basic services or adequate nutrition. Urban life was not much better under the yoke of industrialization. In this vein, the Soviet Union replicated the tragic consequences of the Industrial Revolution. One of the victims of cultural and demographic changes was the *Mir*, i.e., rural communes that worked as social units with a long history of egalitarianism and cooperation. Blindly following the blueprint of modernity, Soviet leadership missed the natural social units that it had at hand to use as building blocks for a socialist country. Instead, they forced imported ideas upon Russian peasants without paying attention to the context, and with subsequent disastrous results.

Stalin's regime was brutal, murderous, and a striking deviation not only from the original ideas behind the October Revolution, but from 19th century socialism overall. Yet, Stalin remained more than twenty years in power until he died in 1953 and necessarily colored the future of socialism forever. There are two somewhat interrelated causes that explain Stalin's long tenure. The first, ironically, is fascism (Lerner 1994). The German aggression in 1941 came at a perilous moment for Stalin's regime, and the war allowed him to tap into nationalist feelings to support the Soviet cause.

Notwithstanding the enormous human suffering behind his policies and personal vendettas, threatened by Nazi Germany, Stalin was able to mobilize Soviet nationalism, put civil discontent on ice, and recover communist internationalism disillusioned and wounded *inter alia* by purges, labor camps, executions, and expropriations. In 1941, Nazi forces invaded the Soviet Union, easily overpowered the Red Army, and marched to the outskirts of Moscow. Through the heroic sacrifice of civilians and soldiers, eventually the Soviets turned things around, first defending Moscow from what looked like an imminent fall, and then in 1943 inflicting the most decisive German loss in the East front at the Battle of Stalingrad. Afterward, the tide turned, and the Red Army wiped all Nazi gains and eventually reached Berlin in 1945, thereby ending the war in Europe.

The second, and interrelated cause, as historian Barbara Clements (2012) stresses, is the largely overlooked role that women played in the Soviet Union during WWII and its aftermath. Soviet success in war times and the geopolitical power that came with it, rests on the shoulders of women who were preponderant to achieve rapid industrialization, joined the Red Army to serve in every capacity, worked the land to feed the country, and basically took over the daily activities of Soviet society. Ironically, if women were able to play these roles it was due to the profound demographic changes that the October Revolution ushered via the policies that Stalin later repealed.

In tsarist Russia, like everywhere else in the modern world, women had been treated as second class citizens and sometimes no more than serfs for husbands and fathers. Perhaps unsurprisingly given these conditions, working class women actively participated in a series of protests that led to the February revolution of 1917. Likewise, women activists were primordial during the days of the October Revolution and subsequently occupied positions of power in the

Bolshevik government. After 1917, the Bolsheviks enshrined equality of the sexes in the constitution and implemented a series of policies to achieve it. Exhibiting a progressivism unparalleled in any of the Western democracies around the same time, in the Soviet Union divorce was legalized and eased, abortion was also legalized, marital rape criminalized, children born “out of wedlock” had the same rights as “legitimate” children, and marriage became a civil affair. Women were also granted the right to education, property, work, and healthcare.

“For the first time in history,” Clements (2012, 198) writes, “a ruling political party was sponsoring a thorough critique of patriarchy and encouraging women to challenge gender customs.” In this vein, more than ever before, women were politically active and occupied key positions in the government. In 1922, Alexandra Kollontai became the first female diplomat in the world serving throughout different countries until 1945. From 1917 to 1939, Nadezhda Krupskaya was in charge of developing educational policies and occupied high posts in the government. These two, along with Inessa Armand and Alexandra Artyukhina, were part of the Bolshevik central committee and were instrumental for the feminist and emancipatory laws promulgated in 1917.

In 1919, Armand and Kollontai created the Zhenotdel, a wing of the Bolshevik government dedicated exclusively to women’s affairs. The Zhenotdel lobbied for reforms to help women, published magazines and journals that broached issues such as female oppression, morality, sexuality, reproductive health, among others, and assisted communist parties from around the world in establishing local “women affairs” agencies. Likewise, the “feminist” communists secured funding from the party to conduct research and run campaigns to combat sexism in the workplace and schools, violence in the household, among other measures to improve the lives of women.

Thousands of women enrolled in adult education, and although the infrastructure, or lack thereof, that the communists had inherited from the tsarist regime was shoddy, great inroads were made. In 1917, sixty percent of Russia was illiterate. By the end of 30s, seventy-five percent of people under fifty could read and write (Kenez 2006, 118). A strong emphasis on education along with the establishment of daycare facilities, helped women achieve social mobility. Clements (2012) argues that rural women especially benefited from better working conditions, maternity leave at half pay, and an improved educational system no longer barred for them. In 1926, 39 percent of rural women could read and write. By 1939, the number had skyrocketed to 80 percent (Clements 2006, 217).

The situation in Russia was so dire, however, that notwithstanding the intentions of the communist government, they simply could not fund every initiative. Moreover, old patriarchal attitudes (especially among the peasantry) remained in place and conspired against women's emancipation. For instance, women who learned to drive tractors or operate machinery in rural villages usually were received by hostile crowds, that sometimes included local authorities, demanding a man to do the job (Clements 2012). For Clements (2012, 196), first-generation communist leaders were far more committed than younger officials and local directors to women's emancipation. The latter either ignored the emancipatory laws or directly sabotaged them. Tellingly, Stalin closed the Zhenotdel in 1930, and the regime ridiculously declared that the liberation of women, like socialism, was a task that had been completed.

Stalin's move was a mix of personal social conservatism and political strategy. Although they had enthusiastically participated in the expropriation of landowners that the revolution enforced in 1917, peasant women (and men) were not supportive of the emancipatory laws (Kenez 2006). As Lenin, almost bitterly complained several times, Russia's peasantry was

uneducated, extremely backwards, and wedded to conservative values attached to the Orthodox church. Aware of these characteristics, Stalin repealed progressive laws and replaced them with new conservative directives aimed at strengthening the nuclear family, which had come under attack during the Lenin years. Illegitimacy, i.e., non-sanctioned marriage and “free love,” popular during the NEP years, was stigmatized. Furthermore, the new constitution of 1936 went against the grain of early Bolshevik progressivism and promulgated laws against abortion, prostitution, and homosexuality.

But as I noted earlier, the irony behind Stalin’s patriarchal crusade is that, as Clements (2012) stresses, the emancipatory laws and educational programs of 1917 unknowingly saved the Soviet Union from catastrophe during and after WWII. In large part due to massive literacy campaigns, new professional opportunities, and the disruption of traditional gender roles, when women were called to contribute even more during the war years, they did so with relative ease. Women joined or replaced men at factories, industries, offices, and the war front. For instance, by the end of the 30s women comprised 40 percent of the industrial workforce in the Soviet Union (Kenez 2006, 94) – the highest percentage in the world at that time.

Thousands of women joined the army and served in logistical positions but also in combat as soldiers, snipers, and pilots. The most decorated unit in Soviet aviation, for example, was an all-female group that terrorized the Nazis, who unwittingly immortalized them with the nickname the Night Witches. None of this would have been possible without the dramatic changes pushed by the emancipatory laws that the feminist communists fought for at the dawn of the revolution. Thanks to women’s sacrifices, by the end of the war, the Soviet Union was producing more weapons than Germany, which had more sophisticated facilities, an older industrial tradition, and a well-trained workforce. These sacrifices are even more impressive if

we take into account that, although there was some scarce governmental help available, women were still largely responsible for taking care of children and performing other forms of unpaid domestic labor.

Stalin's ineptitude and Nazi brutality caused more than 20 million casualties in the Soviet Union during WWII. Yet, by other standards the war was an onerous test that the Soviet system passed with flying colors. Barely functioning in 1938, largely by virtue of enormous human sacrifice, and to a lesser extent due to Hitler's incompetence (Lerner 1994), in 1945 the Soviet Union gained prestige and emerged as a superpower with tremendous political influence on the global stage. Wary of future invasions and knowing that his alliance with the West was fragile, Stalin "reorganized" Eastern Europe installing regimes that were either friendly to Soviet interests or straightforwardly puppet states. Thus, the world was separated into two polar opposites: the capitalist west versus the communist east, with the U.S. and the USSR at the forefront of each camp respectively. The rest of the world was caught in the middle of this new, long (cold) war.

Stalin died in 1953, but the die had been cast. After his death, the Soviet Union embarked in a process of "de-Stalinization" led by Stalinist officer Nikita Khrushchev – the last Soviet leader who was a convinced Marxist-Leninist. De-Stalinization entailed rehabilitating the victims of Stalin's terror, denouncing his autocratic rule, revising history to reveal Stalin's shortcomings during WWII, and finally prosecuting collaborators. The de-Stalinization campaign ended with a telling symbolic gesture. Stalin's body was removed from the mausoleum where it rested next to Lenin, and was reburied in the Kremlin wall next to other important communist officers in a sort of post-mortem demotion ceremony.

Khrushchev's measures renewed hope among communists all over the world, but optimism was short-lived. Although Khrushchev did not engage in systematic terror like Stalin, the repressive apparatus was left intact. The last straw for many supporters was the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 when the Red Army brutally crushed a local uprising. This tragic event led to widespread condemnation including some intellectuals who up to that point had abstained from doing so. Perhaps the most notable in this group was Jean-Paul Sartre, who nonetheless did not renounce Marxism but strived to reconcile it with existentialism throughout his career.

Not everything was repression under Khrushchev, however. His tenure was characterized by a sincere effort to introduce reforms for the well-being of Soviet citizens. Notwithstanding Khrushchev's intentions, his reforms were usually utopian, hastily planned and inefficiently implemented, and consequently had poor results. At the same time, the failure of Khrushchev's efforts cannot be solely attributed to his character. As Kenez (2006, 190) rightly argues, post-Stalin Soviet society had been constructed on "rotten foundations" and Khrushchev's efforts to reform the system proved too little, too late in some cases, or straightforwardly wrong in others.

After 10 years of Khrushchev in power, Leonid Brezhnev succeeded him in 1964 and remained the leader for 18 years, second only to Stalin. Brezhnev perfectly embodied the Soviet system. He was old - the entire politburo was geriatric - unimpressive, incompetent, and tired. Unlike Khrushchev, he had no vision, or energy, to introduce reforms but simply pushed the Soviet system forward through whatever means it had. Brezhnev's regime referred to the Soviet system as "real, existing socialism," which in a way was a veiled acceptance of the fact that they had abandoned the idealistic tendencies of 19th century thinkers and the early Bolsheviks; their

task was to defend whatever “real socialism” the Soviet Union had achieved hitherto. In practice, this meant continuing the practices of an obsolete system that was inefficient, irrational, and overall, simply unproductive. Incompetence was not reserved to Brezhnev alone but characterized most officers in positions of power, though (Kenez 2006). Statistics were suppressed or fabricated, prices artificially controlled, and basic needs subsidized to maintain a certain semblance of normality among people.

Following Brezhnev’s long tenure, the geriatric nature of the politburo showed its most dramatic signs. The next leader, Yuri Andropov, died in office after merely 15 months in power. His successor Konstantin Chernenko also died in power, but after only 13 months. To avoid the embarrassment of another death in office, in 1985 the younger Mikhail Gorbachev (54 years old at the time) was appointed secretary of the Communist Party. The last leader of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev was a committed socialist who also understood that the system was in desperate need of reform if it was going to survive.

For Kenez (2006), Gorbachev truly wanted to combine socialism, albeit not in its Soviet form, with the efficiency of the market. In the end his reforms (*glasnost* and *perestroika*) were not enough, and the Soviet Union collapsed under its own weight in 1991. Former Soviet republics declared their independence one by one. The satellites in Eastern Europe had already starting “de-sovietizing” in 1989 and rapidly continued doing so after 1991. The greatest socialist experiment, thus far, was over.

Instead of going over hackneyed statistics and arguments to showcase the undeniable disastrous nature of Soviet socialism, in this section I have tried to explain how socialist policies looked in practice and how they affected socialism at large in the international arena. As Beaud (1993) argues, the Soviet Union was not merely oppression but also compromise, and some of its

policies made life better for a lot of people. In a matter of decades, Russia went from being a backwards country with limited international influence to becoming a nuclear superpower heading one of the camps in a bipolar world. Yet, after its fall the Soviet experience also became a warning sign used by the ideologues of capitalism to discourage alternatives to the private market and liberal institutions. If fascism “saved” communism in the first half of the 20th century, Stalin paid the favor forward to the liberal democracies of the West in the second half. Forever associated with his name, socialism lost all prestige and became taboo for decades to come no matter how far Stalinism had deviated from the original ideas of the utopian socialists, Marx, Engels, and even Lenin. Only recently, at least since the 2008 Recession, and in the face of mounting capitalist crises, there has been a renewed, albeit modest, interest in socialist politics in the U.S.

Social Democracy and Chinese Communism

As I mentioned before, socialism as a continuous political movement spread from Europe across the world in a rather short period of time. In Western Europe (e.g., Scandinavia, Germany, France), social democracy, or democratic socialism, gained concessions for workers and a robust social safety net. In most cases these parties were socialist in a vein that was independent or opposed to Marxism. The German Social Democratic Party, for example, abandoned their prior commitments to Marxist politics in 1959. Whether social democracy challenges capitalism or strengthens it is questionable and makes it a complicated part of the socialist tradition. That is, a socialism that constantly saves capitalism from itself is difficult to classify because it no longer aspires to achieve socialism. Notwithstanding this fraught relationship, social democracy has also been historically tied to Marxist, anarchist, and

syndicalist actors who were at the forefront of the strikes, mobilizations, and movements behind its robust concessions.

In Finland, for example socialists were among the organizers of a general strike that won women the right to vote in 1906. Likewise, in Sweden socialists organized massive strikes that set the foundations of the Scandinavian compromise. In 1931, one of these strikes was confronted by soldiers who shot at the workers in an episode known as the Adalen Shootings. Once again, even the Scandinavian compromise, which is constantly touted for its achievements, and rightly so, shows that when people confront capital, the state has no problem recurring to violence to defend it. In Nordic countries, (democratic) socialism also had to wrestle better living conditions out of the hands of capitalism.

Post WWII, in the U.K., the Labour Party became the first socialist party to win a political mandate at the polls. Not Marxist but Fabian in orientation, Labour enacted “socialist” policies such as free healthcare and education, a robust pension system, etc. Tellingly, these initiatives, which are characteristic of other social democracies in Europe and to a lesser extent of the “New Deal” in the U.S. have been under constant attack by neoliberal orthodoxy through austerity measures. Austerity, of course, for the poor. Tax cuts and welfare for the rich.

Overall, as Beaud (1993, 108) explains, Western social democracies achieved national compromises in their respective countries, which signified that socialist parties agreed to renounce overthrowing capitalism in exchange for better conditions for workers. Undoubtedly, social democracies have achieved significant gains in life standards but have also proved fragile and unable to confront nationalisms (Germany), fascisms (Italy), and in some cases have completely assimilated a neoliberal agenda (U.K.). At the same time, all these social democracies still actively participate in global networks of capitalist exploitation. The living

standards of their working classes are partly predicated upon the exploitation of workers in the Global South. Devoid of internationalism, social democracy is a tacit acceptance of capitalism for the sake of national projects.

For better or worse, the shadow of Marxism and more radical traditions loom large in the Western democracies that have achieved national compromises. Nonetheless, their gains are not traditionally ascribed to socialism even if their progressive programs and policies are socialist ideas. For the critics, besides the Soviet Union, the other paradigmatic case of Marxist communism is China. Along Stalin, the proper name Mao Zedong supposedly should end all debates about the desirability of socialism. But for some reason, Pinochet (Chile), Suharto (Indonesia), Franco (Spain), Marcos (Philippines), Wilhelm II of Germany, Leopold II of Belgium, Rios Montt (Guatemala), Batista (Cuba), Videla (Argentina), Churchill, Nixon (and Kissinger) to name just a few capitalist leaders responsible for mass killings, human rights abuses, and other atrocities should not elicit the same reaction vis-à-vis capitalism.

The case of China as a Marxist boogeyman is interesting if we consider that its communist party developed in an antagonistic relationship to the Soviet Union. Mao was a founding member of The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was created in 1921 under heavy influence of the Soviet-led Comintern. Following Soviet advice, the CCP joined forces with the nationalist Guomintang party. This merger proved to be a fatal miscalculation by the Comintern as the Guomintang, led by Chiang Kai-shek slaughtered unionists and communists in big cities thereby forcing Mao and his forces to escape to the countryside and morph into a guerrilla-based movement. This civil conflict, however, was postponed during WWII to fight against the Japanese invasion as a unified front.

Post WWII, the hostilities between Maoists and the Guomindang rekindled, and both claimed to be the rightful rulers of China. With overwhelming peasant support, Mao eventually overthrew Kai-shek's government and forced him to retreat into Taiwan where he ruled as a dictator, under U.S. protection, from 1950 until he died in 1975. In mainland China, Mao founded the Chinese People's Republic in 1949. Mao's triumphal revolution was based on applying the Bolshevik model to China, or what is known as the "Sinification of Marxism." However, the Comintern's clumsy interference in Chinese affairs created a rift between China and the Soviet Union that was never fully bridged. Although for years they were able to maintain a rather tense alliance, Sino-Soviet relations broke definitively in 1960, and both countries engaged in open criticism of each other.

Mao took several not so veiled swipes against Soviet dogmatism and perhaps ironically also against de-Stalinization. The Chinese experience, conversely, illustrated dialectical flexibility, futurity, Mao argued. In this vein, Mao's most important theoretical contribution to Marxism is a new interpretation of dialectical materialism in light of classical Chinese thought and famously developed in the essays "On Contradiction" (2007a) and "On Practice" (2007b). For Mao, dialectical materialism is a theory that sheds light on different paths available to reach truth, but practice is the starting point of all knowledge. In other words, dialectical materialism is not a finalized body of knowledge, for Mao, but a tool that guides practical action, which endlessly discloses truth(s) empirically. Dialectical materialism, as Lukács had written earlier, could be used to criticize itself, in a Maoist vein. More important for historical purposes, Mao's (2007b) standpoint is a direct critique against "doctrinaires" who assume that dialectical materialism is an answer that applies to every question regardless of historical context and local

circumstances. The obvious target of this attack is Soviet Marxism, viz., Stalinism, and its botched intervention in Chinese communist affairs.

Admittedly, what caused the Sino-Soviet split was not only Mao's critical attitude against Stalin, but also the "Destalinization" process initiated by Khrushchev. Mao inveighed against new Soviet policies as revisionism perhaps anticipating the fate of his own legacy. In practice, Maoism devolved into a dogmatism that rivaled and even surpassed Stalinism in some cases. Nonetheless, Maoism as a practical revolutionary guide was profoundly influential beyond China, particularly among third world peasant guerrilla movements (e.g., Vietnam, Cuba) and even in the U.S. (e.g., Black Panthers) as these groups saw in it a more pragmatic approach that fit their local realities.

Maoism, however, was more influenced by Soviet Marxism, viz., Stalinism than by Marx himself. In fact, according to historian Jiang Yihua, Mao did not read Marx in much detail except for a few chapters of *Capital* and none of his works on political economy. Most of Mao's knowledge about Marxism came from reading Stalin's *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course* (Yihua and MacFarquhar 2010). Likewise, based on a careful analysis of the sources that Mao cited, and had access to, Vsevolod Holubnychy (1964) concludes that his knowledge of Marxism was rather lackluster.

But fittingly, Mao's most important contribution to Marxism has a practical character. His appeal to the peasantry as a revolutionary class transformed Marxist practice and influenced movements throughout the world. Whereas the Bolsheviks were always suspicious of the peasantry and their "backwardness," Mao, who came from a prosperous rural background, embraced them as the motor of class struggle. In China, a successful revolution had to go through the peasantry and embrace their practices and traditions, Mao argued. On the other

hand, Mao's positive view of the peasantry did not preclude him from freely critiquing Confucianism, arranged marriages, and patriarchy – all venerable traditions among peasants. At any rate, whereas the Bolsheviks had sought to uproot the traditions of the peasantry through forced modernization, Mao embraced some of their practices as crucial to the success of the revolution but also sought to introduce bourgeois values among them.

Mao's approach was a success strategically and with the overwhelming support of the peasantry and the (Chinese) Red Army, China had a communist revolution. Like the Bolsheviks before, the Chinese Communist Party focused on education, land reform, healthcare (including a successful campaign against opioid addiction), critique of patriarchy, and other laudable goals. But Mao also followed the Soviet blueprint to construct the Chinese socialist model and imported some of the same tragic mistakes. Centralized planning, five-year plans with unrealistic goals, famines, purges, labor camps, repression, authoritarianism, and millions of deaths all became part of the Chinese landscape under Mao. This feature, however, is not a coincidence nor proof that communism always leads to the same results. China purposefully mirrored the Soviet Union, which even sent advisers to oversee the correct implementation of their model.

Maoism was supposed to be the answer to two pressing issues in China, namely peasant oppression and the construction of a socialist society. On the first issue, Maoism has to be considered successful. Mao was able to unify China, stop years of war, and overthrow a tradition of imperialism and colonialism that had mercilessly exploited the peasantry. On the second issue, Mao failed miserably, and he was painfully aware of it (Cheek 2010). Unlike Lenin and (Marxism) Leninism, the great tragedy of Maoism is that Mao lived long enough to make mistake after mistake trying to construct a socialist society. For Yihua and MacFarquhar

(2010) in Mao we should see a flawed man with good intentions, which does not excuse his grave mistakes. Indeed, the flaws got the best of him as he devised plans for a future society. The Great Leap Forward – Twenty years ahead in a day! – and the Cultural Revolution are perhaps the two most famous Maoist tragic missteps. The former caused an unknown number of deaths that ranges between 15 to 40 million (Cheek 2010). The second was an initiative born out of Mao's fear for excessive Soviet revisionism. The Cultural Revolution was a period of terror with dystopian characteristics. Mao's personality cult took new and mindless heights. Thought control and surveillance forced friends and family to denounce each other, universities were closed, and hundreds of thousands of intellectuals deemed as counter revolutionaries were sent to labor camps or killed. As Mao grew older, and his plans proved fatal, his tolerance for criticism decreased and the personality cult around his figure grew even larger.

Overall, the experience of communist China under Mao is deeply mixed. On the one hand, China pre-Mao was a poor, failing empire turned into a loose collection of provinces, torn by war, and suffering the trauma of centuries of European and Japanese imperialism. By the time of Mao's death, China was a unified, organized country with nuclear capacities, and on the road to industrialization. This progress, of course, was not merely the product of Mao's genius but of the sacrifice of millions of people. The cost was an extremely high number of deaths, most of them attributable to avoidable mistakes. Nevertheless, the figure of Mao still casts a long shadow in Chinese politics. Revered and hated, Mao's name is linked to the birth of China as a modern nation-state. Thus, his figure is used to channel and mobilize nationalistic feelings.

Indeed, "Mao Zedong Thought," or more precisely Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, still is the official doctrine of the CCP today, albeit none of modern China policies are Maoist. Although Mao's mistakes have been recognized in modern China, other people (e.g., the

Gang of Four, Red Guards) have been largely blamed for the excesses and consequences. The official position is captured by a popular Chinese slogan that implies that Mao was right 70 percent of the time and wrong 30 percent of it (Cheek 2010, 21). Mao's figure is a source of authority, and as such his image has been protected by the CCP in lieu of more democratic means to legitimize its power. Mao's authority, however, is a double-edged sword, and urban and rural workers also use it to legitimize their claims. Mao's portraits are common occurrence in strikes and protests against inequality, perceived corruption, and other issues that affect modern China. When social rights have been trampled, the appeal to Mao's authority is a powerful reminder of what the communist social contract entailed before neoliberal economic reforms entered the scene.

Following Mao's death, and under the auspice of Deng Xiaoping, China introduced a series of measures to liberalize the economy, which produced the so-called Chinese miracle. Extremely successful from a productive standpoint, China remained socialist only nominally but in practice adopted a capitalist system based on statist and collectivist production that in many ways has proven more efficient, and ruthless, than its Western counterparts. It is worth noticing that against Mao's wishes perhaps, some of his reforms have to be partly credited for building the foundations of China's capitalist miracle. Literacy, healthcare, access to higher education for men and women, are all crucial aspects of Mao's legacy that underlie the economic productivity that characterizes post-Mao China.

The Other Side: "Third-world" Socialism(s)

Russia and China, with more success, nominally pursued socialism but settled for state capitalism, which quickly reproduced the same exploitative structures that Western capitalism developed over hundreds of years but under a different elite. China has been so successful at

building capitalism that for the first time in history a non-Western nation has a legitimate shot at becoming the capitalist center of the world in a not-so-distant future. Social democracy, on the other hand, completely abandoned the socialist project for a “humane” version of capitalism – that is, humane domestically but predatory internationally, of course.

Caught in between the dynamics of Soviet imperialism, Maoism, and European social democratic indifference, “third world” socialism developed in the second half of the 20th century as an alternative at the margins. This tradition of socialism is the most successful in one particular aspect: anti-colonial struggle. Socialist-inspired liberation movements sprouted throughout the Global South to fight against colonial domination, in some cases with the support of the Soviet Union. The fact that these groups aligned with socialism or found in it a philosophy to articulate their demands, simply underscores the link between capitalism and colonial oppression. For Beaud (1993), however, “third world” socialism did not really build socialist societies but had to settle for mixed economies, at best.

One of the main reasons for this “failure” is the fact that these movements were caught in between two imperialisms, Soviet and American, and did not have much room to maneuver. To survive, the countries on the periphery had to commit to one side or the other and that entailed adopting tragic mistakes from either system. Forced to choose between two imperialisms, the socialist countries that depended on Soviet aid to survive against a hostile West, replicated its failed model. Even worst, socialist countries in the Global South freed themselves from colonialist exploitation to enter into another exploitative relationship but this time with the Soviet Union. In a heavily lopsided negotiation, “third world” socialist countries were forced to sell at lower prices and grant preferential access to their resources (e.g., oil, sugar) to the Soviet Union. As another capitalist country, the Soviet Union also depended on networks of

exploitation to fund their industrial levels of production and consumption. Newly founded republics, highly indebted as a consequence of independence wars, and in desperate need of funds, were the perfect source of raw materials to supply Soviet industry.

However, “third world” socialisms are important because, as Beaud (1993, 165) suggests, even if they did not create socialist societies, they challenged and weakened the grip of capitalist imperialism. There is another very important characteristic of these liberation movements that Western political philosophy has largely overlooked, however. Socialism, as this brief story illustrates, has remained largely bounded by a European industrial mentality, or in the case of China, used native practices to fulfill the telos of European Marxist orthodoxy. Conversely, “third world” socialisms have enriched socialism with local beliefs and practices in a manner that does not simply return to, or complete, the European project. This is a key characteristic of these socialisms because, as I have stressed, the entire world cannot afford to industrialize and consume irresponsibly as the richest 20 percent have done. To conclude this chapter, in what follows I present a brief summary of the most significant “third world” socialisms and their anti-colonial struggles.

In Asia, in 1954, adopting a Maoist guerrilla strategy led by Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam gained its independence after almost 100 years of colonial rule defeating French forces backed by the U.S. Following the “Truman doctrine” and fearing a “domino effect”, the U.S., intervened and played a key role in the Geneva Accords, which divided Vietnam into North and South. The former had a communist government whereas the latter was headed first by nationalist, anti-communist Ngo Dinh Diem (1955 - 1963), and then by 12 different governments in merely two years after a rapid succession of military leaders (Beaud 1993). Significantly, Vietnamese independence also led to the Vietnam War, which was a proxy conflict between the

Soviet Union and China backing North Vietnam, and the U.S. supporting the South. After a long and bloody conflict with an exorbitant number of civilian casualties, Vietnam was eventually reunited in 1976 and remains to this day a country with a rather successful “market-oriented socialism.”

In Latin America, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 – led by Fidel Castro, Ernesto “el Che” Guevara, Juan Almeida, and Camilo Cienfuegos, among others – was the most important and only successful Marxist revolution in the region. It should be noted that the Cuban Revolution began as a nationalistic/anti-colonialist movement and only later acquired Marxist, socialist features. Nevertheless, it had profound cultural and political effects that still influence, for better or worse, politics of the region. Unlike Vietnam’s, the Cuban revolution did not overthrow a colonial power but a corrupt, authoritarian military government with deep ties to U.S. interests. The discontent that led to the armed coup against Fulgencio Batista had deep roots in Cuba’s colonial past, however, and was intensified by U.S. imperial attitudes.

In 1898 after the Spanish – American war, Cuba became a protectorate of the U.S. first, and after a period of civil unrest and upheaval, an independent republic. Nevertheless, this was only a formality because the U.S. maintained the right to interfere in Cuban domestic affairs. Hence, in reality Cuba was a neocolonial state. After a series of coups and military interventions, starting in 1934 Batista dominated Cuban politics, personally and through different puppet presidents for the next 25 years, thereby continuing policies that were subservient to U.S. interests. American companies, for instance, had privileged access to resources (esp. sugar) with little to no return for Cuban producers (Beaud 1993).

Batista’s government became increasingly repressive and eventually was overthrown by Castro’s revolution in 1959. Fearing another domino effect, the U.S. response was open

diplomatic hostility, indirect military intervention (e.g., Bay of Pigs Invasion), and economic sabotage. In response, Castro nationalized American companies, which led to the U.S. economic embargo. Forced, more than by conviction, Cuba turned to the Soviet Union for aid, which again entailed implementing its economic model. The open confrontation in Cuba also led to the scariest moment in the Cold War, i.e., the Cuban Missile Crisis when for 13 days in 1962 the world was on the brink of a nuclear war.

The success of the Cuban model is a much more complex topic. During its first years, the Cuban revolution led to enormous improvements in alphabetization, healthcare, and access to higher education that transformed every sphere of Cuban society. In this sense, it became a model of dignity and sovereignty for many countries around the world, and especially in Latin America. Interestingly, it also produced who is, perhaps, the most iconic revolutionary figure of the 20th century: Ernesto “el che” Guevara – a patron saint of protests all over the world. On the other hand, along with great improvements in social demographic indicators (incredibly up to this day child mortality in Cuba is lower than in the U.S.), it also developed the same errors that plagued other “Sovietized” states. Namely, authoritarianism, weak democratic institutions, personality cults, excessive bureaucracy, and especially after the fall of the Soviet Union, food shortages and alarming rates of poverty that do not seem to abide.

The effects of the Cuban revolution on the history of Latin-American socialism are indelible, though. For the first time, socialism spoke Spanish, and other movements in South and Central America had a model to follow. Political parties, social movements, peasant organizations, and guerrillas in one way or another adopted Cuban revolutionary ideology and strategy. This development went hand in hand with a more aggressive American interventionism to contain communism from spreading in its own backyard. In 1970, when Salvador Allende

was elected president in Chile – the first socialist government to win an electoral mandate in Latin America – the U.S. swiftly moved to sabotage and destabilize his government. Merely three years later, Allende was overthrown and killed in a military coup led by Augusto Pinochet with the consent of the CIA.

Moreover, with the support of the U.S., military dictatorships sprouted in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Panama, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Paraguay throughout the 70s and 80s. All these dictatorships were rabidly anti-communist, anti-unionist, and anti-anything with even minimal socialist hints. Furthermore, all these dictatorships were characterized by authoritarianism, corruption, widespread violations of civil rights that included torture, political assassinations, and even genocide as in Guatemala. Finally, neoliberal economic policies were usually part of the governmental agenda. These experiments yielded an alleged economic “miracle” in Chile and tragedy everywhere else (including Chile). In the same vein, these governments weakened political institutions and destroyed the social fabric of many Latin American countries thereby producing massive immigration waves from Central and South American to the U.S.

The response to the neoliberal period and its failures in the 90s came in the form of the Latin-American “pink tide” in the 2000s. Under the label “socialism of the 21st century,” several democratically elected governments that mixed populism with left-wing tendencies came to power in different South American countries. Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, José Mujica in Uruguay, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Nestor and Kristina Kirchner in Argentina, are some of the most important representatives of this new current. Although all of them claim some connection to socialism

and the Cuban legacy, in practice their governments are more accurately described as capitalist with a social focus.

Detached from political power, there is a Latin-American movement that deserves a special mention for its originality: Liberation Theology, a religious, socialist orientation. A group of Catholic priests developed this syncretic version of socialism, based more in the gospel than in Marxism, but that nonetheless had some elements of the latter. Seemingly at odds, Christianity and Marxism both call for social justice and equality, thus their wedding is not as controversial as it seems. In this vein, Liberation Theology simply called for a more just distribution of wealth to improve the lives of the impoverished masses of Latin America (Gutiérrez 2017). Some key figures associated with this movement are Gustavo Gutiérrez (Peru), Leonardo Boff and Frei Betto (Brazil), Juan Segundo (Uruguay), Ernesto Cardenal (Nicaragua), Leonidas Proaño (Ecuador), among others. The leadership of the Catholic Church censured Liberation Theology for its Marxist leanings, but even more tragically scores of priests and nuns who espoused the doctrine, or were suspected of doing so, were imprisoned, tortured, or assassinated by right-wing military governments.

Finally, the last of the “third world” socialisms to consider is “African socialism.” African socialism is an attempt to synthesize Marxism and African/African American thought (e.g., Negritude, DuBois, Pan-Africanism). African socialism stresses the role of capitalism as one of the culprits of Africa’s colonial exploitation and subjugation. First, given that it opposes capitalism, socialism for these African movements was an obvious vehicle to achieve independence from colonial powers. Second, these movements suggest that adopting capitalism post-independence would deteriorate life in Africa. For Kwame Nkrumah (1964), a Ghanaian politician and one of the founding fathers of African Socialism, African life has always been

primordially communal, and capitalism's cult of self-interest would promptly destroy this tradition. Socialism, thus, is a system that would be more aligned with African customs. Nkrumah (1964) termed this blend of Marxist socialism and African communal traditions, "consciencism." Of course, Africa is a diverse continent (genetically the most diverse), hence socialism would have to adapt to local customs and traditions as well (Hallen 2002).

Like those of Asia and Latin America, African socialism was incredibly successful as an anti-colonial/anti-imperialist movement. Throughout the late 50s to the late 70s, a number of states declared their independence from the U.K., France, and Portugal. Algeria (1962), Angola (1976), Ethiopia (1976), Guinea (1958), Tanganyika - later Tanzania (1961), Ghana (1960), Republic of the Congo (1960) Mozambique (1975), and Guinea-Bissau (1973), all achieved their independence led by socialist movements. Furthermore, in South Africa, the fight against the apartheid regime was also driven by socialist forces, including Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC).

Kwame Nkrumah, who I have mentioned above, and Julius Nyerere are perhaps the most influential representatives of African Socialism. Both were leaders of the independence movements in their countries – Ghana and Tanzania respectively – became presidents of the newly formed states, and contributed to political theory and philosophy. But there are a number of important figures associated with African socialism such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Amílcar Cabral, Patrice Lumumba, and Walter Rodney, among others.

Socialism: From Past to Future (Through the Past)

As this brief and incomplete history of socialism illustrates, it is hard to give a verdict on the experiments of the 20th century except perhaps for fanatics on either side of the political spectrum. On the one hand, socialist policies and movements have played a crucial role in

achieving safer and fairer working conditions, ban child labor, develop a social safety net, extend healthcare and education to an enormous amount of people, distribute wealth, led anti-fascist, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist campaigns, and at least nominally promulgated policies against patriarchal structures. On the other hand, repression, authoritarianism, gulags, purges, famines, and poverty taint the positive parts of the record. Even if we want to suggest that Stalinism or Maoism deviated from socialism's original intellectual aims, it is difficult to sift the good from the bad. Abuses and excesses necessarily affect gains and progress. Admittedly, capitalism also has its own share of excesses that in many cases match or surpass socialist misdeeds. But appealing to the *tu quoque* fallacy is not enough to defend socialism.

Overall, the socialist experiments of the 20th century made a series of fatal mistakes that were systematically reproduced throughout the world. First, there was an irrational faith in a messianic proletariat that would supposedly unite against the bourgeoisie when the conditions were right. In fact, the proletariat ended up joining each other to kill proletariats from other countries, or to discriminate against their country fellows based on their race, gender, etc.

Second, the countries where socialist revolutions triumphed had primitive or no capitalism and little to no proletariat, which contradicted socialist theory and its historical analysis. But instead of working with real human beings, socialist leaders decided that it was a better idea to create a proletariat, and to do so they had to push through with a capitalism that proved even more brutal than Western versions. In doing so, socialist leaders also exhibited an outsized and non-deserved confidence in their visions and planning prowess.

This irrational faith, I think, is a direct consequence to a third fatal mistake of 19th and 20th century socialism. Namely, the stubborn belief that only capitalism could produce socialism. Surely, Marx knew about the existence of societies that practiced what he called

“primitive communism” but at the same time assumed that only capitalism could produce the conditions to create a (wealthy) socialist society. Following this blueprint, socialist countries were incredibly successful at developing capitalist societies in a short period of time but failed completely at developing a socialist mode of production or living conditions.

To correct these mistakes, we need to look beyond the limits of European thought and deep into the anthropological record to study human societies that have successfully enacted socialist principles. But no matter where we look, socialism has never worked, critics suggest, and invoke human nature to buttress their defense of capitalism. Hundreds of socialist societies, however, have existed and worked throughout human history, in different continents, with different peoples, and for far longer than capitalism. In light of these examples, yet without trying to reproduce the past, I suggest, we can develop a theory of socialism for the future. Such theory must analyze the failures of recent history undoubtedly but also the successes of the distant past. With this in mind, in the following chapter, I present four non-European societies – the Ju/'hoansi, Haudenosaunee, Inkas, and Zapatistas – that positively illustrate “socialism in living” and *avant la lettre* of Marxist or other Euro-American ideas.

A quick note to conclude this chapter is warranted. If I were to mimic the structure of the second chapter, after the discussion of the ideas and the material circumstances underlying the history of socialism, I should also consider the ways in which these social arrangements were inimical to human nature. But, my point is not to defend 20th century socialisms from accusations of unnaturalness. These social and political structures were natural in the same sense that capitalism is natural. That is, as packages that are part of biocultural processes and nothing else. If capitalism is difficult for our minds to process, it is also undeniable that authoritarian and repressive states, purges, poverty, famines, forced collectivization, etc. are as hard if not more for

us. Yet, the failures of the 20th century do not entail that all socialisms necessarily lead to these evils. This is precisely the key lesson to be derived from non-Western societies of the past.

Chapter Four – Socialism: 170,000 years of Practice

Human nature has been conspicuously absent from my discussion of socialism thus far for a straightforward reason, either socialists did not care much about human nature or wholeheartedly rejected the concept. Wrongly a group of socialist thinkers assumed that Marx did not have a theory of human nature (Geras 2016), while others considered it so malleable that it could be outright dismissed. For the right, on the other hand, the collapse of socialism in the 20th century proved decisively that capitalism is the natural condition of humanity. The natural experiment that Soviets and others ran demonstrated that whereas the system based on competition freedom, private property, and markets thrived, the one based on socialist principles such as common ownership, cooperation, and egalitarianism collided against the “crooked timber” of human nature. And on this point, once again, the critics are correct. Who would think that the absence of private property, rigid hierarchies, and a totalitarian system that curtailed basic freedoms could be natural?

But not even socialists in the 20th century pretended that they were developing a natural system. The Soviet Union, China, and to a lesser extent Cuba, devised initiatives to perfect human nature by cultural means to help with their endeavors (Cheng 2009). Implicitly, then, they conceded that they would have to rework human nature, i.e., that a new psychology was needed, if socialism was going to be successful. For instance, in the Soviet Union the study of genetics, which was among the best in the world early in the 20th century, was barred for its bourgeois bent; genes were not malleable and Soviet leaders, who were bent on creating “new men” did not take kindly to it. Genes, I have explained, do not make sense except in particular contexts (Sapolsky 2017), and the socialists were to a certain extent right in assuming that new circumstances would elicit different behaviors.

On the other hand, the discussion about “new men” was scientifically and ideologically misguided, as well as preposterously misogynist. Socialism does not need “new men;” the old humans should work fine. The shortcomings of socialist experiments in the 20th century cannot be attributed neither to biological constraints nor to human nature itself. What failed in the 20th century was a shortsighted version of socialism sifted exclusively through an industrial European standpoint. But the history of socialism is much older than its theoreticians were willing to acknowledge.

It is true that a socialist society, hitherto, has not been successfully born out of capitalism as Marx theorized. No socialist regime has been able to solve the problem of industrial production and massive consumption without falling prey to an internal subversive capitalist logic that merely reproduces the same structures that it allegedly fights (e.g., elites, exploitation, inequality). In other words, no country has been able to produce wealth like Western capitalist societies without incurring in capitalist practices even if they are formally masked as something else. In this sense, as an autonomous system, Eurocentric socialism as a mode of production has failed in the 20th century although its successes as a protest movement within capitalist societies are not insignificant and deserve praise.

On the other hand, there have been a number of pre-capitalist societies that have successfully lived according to socialist principles throughout human history without incurring in capitalist exploitation or leaving behind its environmental hubris. By this I mean, hundreds of societies on the anthropological record reveal the same pattern of organization: common ownership of land and resources, generalized reciprocity, and egalitarianism (Lee 1988). The fact that hundreds of societies developed the same form of organization indicates the ease with which our minds adopt these structuring principles. With and without strong socio-political

institutions, a repressive apparatus, ideological structures, states, religions, philosophy, and even writing, and through different mechanisms countless groups lived according to socialist ideals. That is, these societies followed organically from natural, evolved dispositions that I have listed before (cooperativeness, empathy, inequity aversion, etc.), and not from modern, “civilizing” ideas. Below I focus on four successful experiments from different historical periods and continents, and with varied forms of social organization and subsistence patterns. These are: the Ju/’hoansi (!Kung San) hunter-gatherers from Southern Africa, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) from North America, the Inkas from South America, and the Zapatistas from Mexico.

Once again, let me stress that in what follows, I use the word socialism to name the set of principles and practices that I listed above, but I do so for the sake of parsimony and without reducing them to a Western logic. On the contrary, the aim of this chapter is to stress that socialism in these places speaks the language of local communities and is modulated by their historical conditions. In fact, in some cases these societies have successfully enacted values (e.g., egalitarianism) and aspirations (15-hour workweek) linked to Euro-American ideals, yet nowhere to be found in Western societies. My goal is to show that long before European socialism emerged in response to industrial capitalism, millions of people had lived according to these principles later articulated by the Enlightenment and the French and American revolutions. Indeed, it seems that Europe had to “rediscover” these principles precisely because capitalism had erased their footprint from industrial society.

The societies that follow are not blueprints of what the future should look like. Although there is a lot to learn from all of them, I am not suggesting a return to a lost paradise. This Rousseauian view of the past is a problematic remnant of tales of “noble savages” and other European inventions that rob people of their histories and voices. The Ju/’hoansi, the

Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), the Inkas, and the Zapatistas are all human societies, and as such they are not perfect but have virtues and vices: violence, envy, sadness, and hunger exist along with joy, equality, peace, friendship, and love. Without capitalist affluence, however, these societies have been able to live spiritually rich and full human lives in accordance with socialist principles. In the following pages, I describe the social mechanisms, institutions, and when possible, philosophies that underlie their success.

The Ju/'hoansi (!Kung San)

Hunter-gatherer societies are the most obvious candidates to exemplify socialist principles at work. After all, these groups were egalitarian and managed all resources in common throughout most of human history. More importantly, these social arrangements are the closest thing to our natural condition (Konner 2010). This is the pattern of organization that contributed to the evolutionary success of *Homo sapiens*. But before I continue, two important clarifications about hunter-gatherers are necessary. The first is a about terminology. In social science, hunter-gatherer is a term used to refer to people who depend on foraging for food and resources (Ember 2020) to distinguish them from food producers whose subsistence depends on domesticated plants and animals. Although the term is widely used, a cross-cultural sample of hunter-gatherer groups revealed that fishing was the most important activity for 38 percent of the societies, gathering for 30 percent, and hunting for 25 percent (Ember 1978).

As anthropologist Carol Ember (2020) nicely explains, “the common term hunter-gatherers overrates the importance of hunting, downplays gathering, and ignores fishing.” This should not come as a surprise. The role of hunting has been overemphasized in our evolutionary history (Hubbard 1990) as much as in food acquisition because it tends to be a male activity in most societies, and researchers, unfortunately, have also been mostly men. Perhaps, “man the

fisher” sounds less heroic than “man the hunter.” Following convention however, I use hunter-gatherer, but I agree with Ember (2020), who suggests that “Fishers-gatherers-hunters” or “foragers” are both more accurate descriptors for these groups.

The second point to be made about hunter-gatherers is the scope of what can be inferred from their lives about the past and human nature. Although the lives of hunter-gatherers mirror in many ways that of our ancestors, they are not immutable relics from the past, but people who are intelligent, innovative, and inclined to learn from neighboring groups. Indeed, a paper by Migliano et al. (2020) recently proposed that regular interactions and cooperative networks among different hunter-gatherer groups might have played a significant role in the emergence and acceleration of cumulative cultural evolution. Hence, it is a mistake to think that life for these groups has remained static over thousands of years, and their present situation offers us a crystalline window into the past. In addition, there is significant variation among hunter-gatherers vis-à-vis levels of violence, gender roles, sexuality attitudes, and even social complexity (Ember 2020).

Hunter-gatherers’ practices, therefore, do not reveal ahistorical universals that apply to all humanity – not even to all hunter-gatherers – but at the same time, as Konner (2010) argues, it is scientifically sound to draw some generalizations about human nature from their experiences. Among other things, it is widely accepted that hunter-gatherer societies are mostly egalitarian in terms of gender and wealth, semi or fully nomadic, live in small groups, and have a clear division of labor by gender; women mostly gather and sometimes fish, and men mostly hunt (or spend a lot of time talking about it). These are not rigid roles, however, and men also spend time gathering. Even more challenging to anthropological orthodoxy, recently archaeologists have discovered graveyards with females and their hunting weapons. Haas et al. (2020), for example,

have analyzed ancient (11,000 – 9,000-year-old) burial sites throughout the Americas and conclude that big game hunting was a non-gendered practice among the early inhabitants of the continent. Finally, hunter-gatherers tend to be more peaceful than food producers because their societies are less prone to suffer famines or shortages (Ember 2020). Although these characteristics can vary depending on ecological conditions, it is fair to assume that they mirror to a certain extent those of the groups where our species, and hominids in general, evolved and lived for thousands of years.

Consequently, we can extrapolate that the social arrangements and practices of present-day hunter-gatherers are adaptations that our ancestors developed to cope with their environments. Against modern notions, it is also important to stress that for thousands of years, hunter-gatherers led rich and fulfilling lives (Suzman, 2017; Konner 2010), and based on ethnographic accounts and anthropological research that flourished in the last fifty-five years, still continue to do so. If we consider this mode of life the state of nature of our species, it is obvious that it differs *toto caelo* from Hobbes' ill-conceived fantasy. Life in these societies was never solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, or short.

Indeed, as the economist John Gowdy (1999) argues, hunter-gatherers challenge dominant assumptions about human nature that are foundational for both Western philosophy (incl. liberalism and Marxism) and neoclassical economics. Against the grain of capitalist orthodoxy, hunter-gatherers demonstrate that 1) Scarcity is not a defining condition of humanity. 2) Humans do not have unlimited wants. 3) Work can be truly cooperative, does not have to be painful, or foundational to our life projects. 4) Humans have successfully lived throughout millennia without private property. 5) Inequality is not intrinsically human.

Based on these observations and copious evidence about different hunter-gatherer societies, we can conclude, as anthropologist Richard B. Lee (1988) rightly does, that “Our ancestors were communists,” or following the terminology that I have adopted here, that they practiced “socialism in living.” The “state of nature,” thus, did not lead to war and misery but to socialist arrangements whereby we survived and reproduced. Indeed, fishing, gathering, and hunting is the most successful mode of production and social organization from an evolutionary perspective. Agriculture, the biggest human blunder (Sapolsky 2017), eventually complicated things, but I will deal with that in the following section. For now, let us turn to the study of socialism among hunter-gatherers through the practices, social institutions, and mechanisms that they use to enforce and maintain their societies throughout time. Although for the cheerleaders of progress – on the right and left – learning from so-called “primitive” societies might seem absurd, their lives are full of lessons for the future of our species.

To learn about hunter-gatherer socialism, I will focus on the most studied of these peoples, i.e., the Ju/'hoansi (their preferred name), or !Kung San, of Southern Africa. The history of how the Ju/'hoansi became the favorite subject of anthropologists from the West and Japan is an interesting story with colonial and capitalist undertones. Feeling adventurous, in 1951 Laurence Marshall, a wealthy American and founder of the Raytheon Company (a military contractor), organized an expedition to Africa with his family. In their travels they met !Kung people in present day Namibia – back then a German colony known as South-West Africa – and found the lifestyles of their hosts so fascinating that they returned multiple times throughout the following decades; they even attempted to hire an anthropologist to add to their expedition, but no one took the job. Luckily, Lorna Marshall, Laurence's wife, decided to take the matter into

her own hands and wrote detailed notes that eventually turned into a couple of important ethnographic accounts of the !Kung San (Suzman 2019).

To keep things in the family, the Marshall “children” also became important ethnographers in their own right. Elizabeth Marshall (1959) wrote the famous *The Harmless People*, a book that popularized a slightly romanticized version of the Ju/'hoansi among non-academic audiences. John Marshall, Elizabeth's brother, filmed and produced documentaries about the Ju/'hoansi and became a lifetime advocate for their rights. Overall, a vacation became an affair that lasted more than 50 years for the Marshall family and that enriched our understanding of humanity forever.

Hunter-gatherer scholarship officially launched in 1966 after a well-known symposium hosted by the University of Chicago. Irven DeVore and Richard B. Lee, both prominent anthropologists, edited a version of the proceedings and presented their own essays. What followed was an explosion of research about hunter-gatherer societies in their “natural” state all over the world. The interest boils down to a rather simple reason: the history of the San peoples, and hunter-gatherers in general, encapsulates the history of *Homo sapiens* (Suzman 2019, 16). Sadly, this excitement never spread among philosophers, psychologists, or students of human behavior in general, who have largely remained caught within Western ideals.

Khoisan peoples consisted of groups of herders (Khoi) and hunter-gatherers known as San (Diamond 1999) who lived in an environment that was not propitious for the development of agriculture – the Kalahari Desert. The Ju/'hoansi are one of the Khoisan peoples and live in the border between Botswana and Namibia. Up to 50 years ago, they still survived gathering and hunting just like their ancestors did for 12,000 years and ours in general for 200,000 years. Today, sadly, they have been reached by modernity and “civilization,” which has condemned

them to urban poverty and to live in reservations, thereby destroying their traditional methods of subsistence and social fabric.

In *Affluence without Abundance*, anthropologist James Suzman (2019) has documented in striking and moving detail the lives of the Ju/'hoansi (!Kung). The title of the book paraphrases anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, who coined the term “the original affluent society” to describe hunter-gatherers' lives. For modern readers, it might seem ridiculous to suggest that people without private property, access to the comforts of modern life, or even medical care are affluent in any way. Yet, they have solved, or in some cases never even faced, some of the problems that plague the modern world.

First, let us consider that the Ju/'hoansi lead a life that is not defined by possessions, wants, or labor. On average, people only work fifteen hours per week to fulfill their needs and spend the rest of their time in the company of friends and family, eating, drinking, telling stories next to the fire, and socializing (e.g., conflict resolution, teaching rituals). In other words, they have solved what John Maynard Keynes (2010) called the economic problem, namely satisfying material needs working less. In 1930, Keynes suggested that his grandchildren would live in a world where technology and automatization shall lead to people working only three hours a day or fifteen hours a week to satisfy their needs. Although we have the technological means to achieve this dream, we work more than ever. Strikingly, given today's levels of productivity the average U.S. worker should be able to enjoy the same standards of living as workers in 50s but only working 11 hours per week (Suzman 2019). The Ju/'hoansi, conversely, figured the “economic problem” a long time ago. Namely, they do not have a problem that Keynes assumed was universal and ahistorical. Of course, the wants and needs of their society are diametrically

opposed to modern societies, but this is not the point. The crux of the issue is that humans can live fulfilling lives without being slaves to work and even in conditions of relative scarcity.

Second, among Ju/'hoansi, there is no gender discrimination even if there are well defined gender-roles. That is, no one is less valued as a member of the community merely because of their gender. No one goes hungry if there is food for others. In fact, the caloric intake of hunter-gatherers is 2,300 calories/day, and their diets are much healthier than those of the industrial world where obesity is rampant (Suzman 2019, 112). Likewise, the Ju/'hoansi have a level of freedom that puts most Western societies to shame. Whereas humans have been enslaved, domesticated, and exploited by chiefdoms, empires and states at least for the last 5,000 years, Khoisan peoples and their ancestors have lived free of hierarchies, taxes, tributes, or any other form of economic exploitation for almost 150,000 years.

But how does so-called primitive communism work among the Ju/'hoansi? The most important aspect to enforce is a pervasive egalitarianism that suffuses every facet of life. As Suzman (2019) stresses, for the Ju/'hoansi material equality is the most crucial precondition from which all other aspects of life follow. It is not a surprise, for example, that gender inequality emerges with agriculture. A labor-intensive mode of production made big families a necessity as more children equaled more labor power. Thus, women had to spend more time at home, pregnant, taking care of children, or both, and progressively became separated from public life. Men, on the other hand, remained visible and gained more power in the public sphere, while women were relegated to the privacy of the household. This is one of the paths that led to men disproportionately controlling politics, social institutions, and obviously wealth in the long run. Among the Ju/'hoansi, on the other hand, no gender holds more power because there are no wealth discrepancies nor political, or religious power to uphold.

To assure material equality, there is a ceiling for accumulation but also a floor below which nobody can sink. This social structure guarantees that no one can exploit others, and at the same time, that no one is alienated from society. Naturally, a ceiling is much easier to enforce in a society where there is no surplus of resources, a feature that will appear with the development of agriculture. Yet, to maintain this fierce egalitarianism, which is the basis of the social fabric, the Ju/'hoansi rely on different social mechanisms (e.g., humor, mockery, gossip) and a widespread system of generalized reciprocity inculcated early in childhood.

A common practice among hunter-gatherers, “insulting the meat” (Suzman 2019) is a ritual that illustrates the use of humor as a leveling mechanism to assure that good hunters remain humble. When a hunter kills a prey, especially a remarkable one, other hunters on the trip, and people eating the meat, engage in rough joking usually initiated by the hunter himself. The hunter apologizes for the measly catch and even suggests that it should be abandoned while there is time to go for something better. The others agree. It is so little meat that perhaps it is not even worth walking it back to the camp.

The “roast of the hunter” continues even after the meat is cut and passed around among every member of the group. Even as they consume it, people keep reminding the hunter what a lousy job he has done, to which he replies with half-hearted apologies and smiles. Although “rough” for modern standards, the ritual is an effective social mechanism to discourage unwarranted or even warranted braggadocio. Implicitly, humor reminds individuals that hunting is most of the time a cooperative task. Even if the person who “hits” the prey first gets “bragging rights” for the kill, hunters leave the camp and track preys in groups. If the prey is large (e.g., elephants), even cleaning, cutting, and sharing can be a group activity that requires a lot of effort.

We can only imagine the level of coordination that our ancestors' hunting trips required when they faced mega-fauna such as giant mammoths and sloths.

Notwithstanding the importance of hunting and the subsequent humbling ritual, women contribute as much if not more to feed the group. Women usually lead gathering trips, which also means that they are not subjected to the whims of male hunters to survive. Manketti nuts, for example, represent 50 percent of the 2,300 calories that Ju/'hoansi consume daily (Suzman 2019), and women gather most of them, although men also participate in these trips. As a side note, unlike hunting, gathering trips do not entail an obligation to share. People can keep what they found, and there is no obligation, nor expectation, of equal distribution. Gathering, it should be noted, requires highly specialized knowledge that most modern, industrialized people lack. The Ju/'hoansi make use of more than 150 species of plants for food and medicine.

Humor and mockery are leveling mechanisms that go beyond "insulting the meat" and apply to different activities and circumstances (gifts, skills, stinginess), however. The aim is always the same, to monitor and prevent egotism from taking over communal interests. Humor is particularly well-suited for hunter-gatherers and their environments because everything is in the open, hence people can constantly monitor others. It is noticeable that even in contemporary societies, where privacy is the norm, and moreover, we are encouraged to boast about our accomplishments, humor is still widely used as a leveling mechanism, albeit not as efficiently as in small-scale societies. Still, we make fun of those who are self-aggrandizing, we love when arrogant people fail, and we use humor as political tool against those who do not share our beliefs.

For Suzman (2019) humor among Ju/'hoansi boils down to envy as an evolutionary mechanism that assures egalitarianism among groups. In other words, we are egalitarian because

we are envious when others have more power, so we restrain inequality from the get-go. This explains, Suzman thinks, why people tend to enjoy when powerful people fall, or cheer for underdogs in sports. Evolution wired in us visceral reactions against disproportionate power wielded by an individual.

Although Suzman's views make evolutionary sense, especially at the gene level, it has its limitations to explain human behavior. Cynthia Willett and Julie Willett (2019), on the other hand, suggest that humor can have political functions that range from empowering those who are systematically disempowered to create a shared sense of belonging to a community. Rough joking in the case of the Ju/'hoansi is an example of what Willet and Willett (2019) call "empathetic humor" as it reinforces community bonds and diffuses selfishness, envy, or aggression redirecting them into practices of generalized reciprocity. We make fun of me as we share because tomorrow, we will make fun of him, and her, and them, as we share. Humor is a mechanism of the utmost importance to balance political power in a society with no formal institutions to do so and reducing it to envy alone does not do justice to its constructive role.

But humor can also have a punitive role. If someone trespasses the limits of what constitutes acceptable behavior, then derision can take a much graver tone. Most of these transgressions are related to sharing and stinginess, which is a cardinal sin among hunter-gatherers, and the Ju/'hoansi are no exception. To avoid these extremes, however, people are socialized into the customs and traditions that sustain a network of reciprocity. Early in their lives Ju/'hoansi babies learn about the importance of sharing. Konner (2010) observes that an infant with a hand full of food moving toward her mouth will certainly be admonished. "Give," an adult will say as they intercept the hand mid-way. This behavior is especially remarkable considering that Ju/'hoansi are permissive with their children, at least by Western standards.

Indeed, for some reason, hunter-gatherers tend to be much more affectionate parents than food producers (Ember 2020).

Engn!au, a Ju/'hoansi man, explains to Suzman (2019, 68), "A person who does not share is not a person." Engn!au's words encapsulate the history of humanity with striking precision. Indeed, sharing resources, food, ideas, artifacts, labor, love, friendship, is the key to understand the phylogeny and ontogeny of our species. Of course, we have to remember that we are talking about human beings and selfishness still exists. Konner (2002), for example, tells an anecdote from his time living among the !Kung when a hunter asked him to hide a piece of meat that he clearly did not want to share. This person knew that people were less likely to check Konner's dwellings. Humans are not machines programmed to be selfish but neither to share unconditionally. There will always be people who do one, the other, or both. This is precisely why there are social mechanisms such as humor and why sharing has to be inculcated early in childhood. Yet importantly, no one is forced to share among the Ju/'hoansi. People are habituated, in a virtue ethics sense, into doing so.

This strong emphasis on sharing, also prepares children to transition into adulthood to readily manage commons with others. When sharing is second nature, i.e., automatic, holding resources in common is an easier task. Private property does not exist among Ju/'hoansi. Here an important point has to be made. Allegedly, one of the most unnatural aspects of (Marxist) socialism is the abolition of private property. Yet, our species has lived without any private property throughout most of history. When Locke made it a natural right, he was naturalizing a rare feature of human societies. In reality, Locke was reacting to and justifying, *a posteriori*, a moment in history when massive swaths of land were being illegitimately appropriated in

England and its colonies (Meiksins Wood 2017). Yet, it seems so unnatural to suggest the abolition of private property that even thinking about it appears to trample on some sacred right.

Suzman (2019) argues that the Ju/'hoansi would agree with Marx on material inequality as the basis of exploitation but would be horrified at the thought of no private property. In this manner, Suzman reproduces a common misconception about Marx's views on private property. Marx never imagined a world where no one can claim a right to any possessions, and everything is communal property. So, there is no reason to fear a world where my neighbor walks into my house, uses my toothbrush, and I reciprocate by taking her car on a long ride the next day whether she agrees or not. Of course, the Ju/'hoansi would be horrified at this prospect. Even in their egalitarian society, people still claim ownership of their cooking utensils, tools, musical instruments, and more. The private property to be abolished is that which has been extracted from exploitation, and which subsequently continues to be used to exploit others. Common ownership, Marx thought, would remedy unequal relationships fostered by exploitative private property. Yet when modern socialists tried to abolish private property, they failed miserably. People simply wanted to keep their own. More important, people wanted to privately accumulate instead of having things in common with others. Our ancestors, on the other hand, solved this seemingly impossible riddle thousands of years ago.

In his foundational work, *Stone Age Economics*, Marshall Sahlins (2017) argues that hunter-gatherers are the original affluent society. Their affluence, Sahlins explains, is twofold. First, they satisfy their basic needs with ease, and second, they can "afford" having free time – an uncommon luxury, even for the rich, in the modern world. In other words, what made hunter-gatherers affluent is not the fact that they can produce wealth as we do in the modern world, but that they have been able to successfully cope with relative scarcity even in the most hostile

environments like the Inuit in the arctic or the Ju/'hoansi in the desert. On the other hand, both bourgeois (Keynes) and socialist ideology (Marx) have made of scarcity a problem to be solved.

The key to survive in the face of relative scarcity is having limited wants. But in capitalist societies this concept seems foreign and unnatural. Capitalism depends, after all, on (almost) infinite production and (over) consumption. Our ancestors, however, evolved and lived in environments of relative scarcity, thus, having limited wants is part of human nature. But overconsumption is also a natural disposition. On the rare occasions when our ancestors encountered abundance of resources in their environments of scarcity, it makes sense to consume as much as possible. This discussion, however, reifies the notion that humans walk around with Stone Age minds in mismatching modern environments. As with everything else related to human nature, context is fundamental. With the right cultural incentives and mechanisms, people in the modern world could also have limited wants, which to be clear do not have to replicate those of our ancestors or present-day hunter-gatherers. That is, no one has to be forced to own just one pair of pants. But not having forty-five different kinds of hair shampoo to pick from on every trip to the supermarket would not be a great loss. Anthropologists around the world have documented the fact that people have rather similar basic wants and needs (e.g., a house, food, a better future of their children). The concrete forms in which these desires are materialized, however, depend on our cultural surroundings.

To clarify, let me propose the following thought experiment. Imagine that rich countries decided to fund, or at least heavily subsidize, housing, healthcare, and education for most of its citizens thereby satisfying their basic wants. These services would be relatively “modest,” of course. By this I mean, we are not going to have millions of mansions and yachts, or hundreds of universities with the resources of the Ivies, but people could have decent housing and

education. By the way, this “utopia” I propose could be realistically enacted with a fair system of progressive taxation, but let us continue to work in the realm of imagination. According to this thought-experiment, we would be recreating a modern version of the world of hunter-gatherers with its ceilings for accumulation and floors for poverty.

But here is the catch: egalitarianism, absence of private property, and common ownership among hunter-gatherers were effective strategies in environments of relative scarcity. This form of organization seems to be the best to survive with little. It is not a coincidence, that these principles and practices of socialism in living were replicated throughout the globe for thousands of years and are still common among the poor and marginalized even in rich countries (e.g., homeless communities). What happens with abundance, though? Perhaps, the utopia that I have proposed above would not create a happy society. Maybe hunter-gatherers were satisfied with little, but once we open the door to wealth and accumulation, humans want more. In the following sections, I will show that this not the case, but let us continue with how hunter-gatherers understand affluence for now.

The Ju/'hoansi are constantly puzzled by the fact that white farmers are not happy. They have so much to eat. What else could they need? At the same time, a white Namibian farmer complains to Suzman (2019, 66), “Bushmen don't understand time like we do.” The Ju/'hoansi prefer to satisfy their basic needs and spend the rest of their time living their lives – fully human lives. They do not understand, as the white farmer says, that time is money. Or perhaps, it is us who do not understand the sheer stupidity of trying to measure time in money. They do not like to work hard as white people, he thinks. He cannot find enough workers for his farm, and when he does, they run away whenever they have a chance. Of course, he conveniently omits that

white farmers exploit and abuse, verbally and physically, Ju/'hoansi workers and even steal their salaries.

At the same time, it is undeniable that there seems to be something that is fundamentally different about the way hunter-gatherers think compared to the descendants of agricultural societies. Here again we must remember that as Heyes (2018) argues culture creates ways of thinking. If our way of thinking seems so alien to hunter-gatherers and vice versa, it is because in merely a few thousand years, the Neolithic Revolution modified our minds. Agriculture, for example, must have removed “hoarding taboos” (Lee 1988), make us more tolerant to inequality, instituted the notion that hard work is a virtue, convinced us about the benefits of delaying gratification, and even changed the way we value and understand time. But these attitudes must have been counterintuitive for our ancestors. Agriculture, thus, had to rely heavily on an ethos of hard work as much as violence and other methods of coercion (Scott 2017).

Why the need for coercion and violence, though? If what I have been arguing hitherto is correct, it is because a life characterized by inequality, social atomization, delayed returns, exploitative labor, etc. go against many naturally evolved dispositions, thus are not easy to adopt. Whereas unequal societies require a strong ideological apparatus as much as repressive forces to modify our natural inclinations, hunter-gatherers organically enacted their “socialism in living” without strong institutions, repressive forces, or even writing across time and space and for thousands of years. One was obviously easier to maintain than the other.

So, let us pretend for a second that I am right on this point. Perhaps, our ancestors were primitive communists and perhaps it is true that human nature was more attuned to this mode of production. But whether we like it or not, agriculture changed everything forever. There is no going back to the lost paradise. The primitive socialism of our ancestors was childlike, and we

are more mature as some figures in the Western tradition chauvinistically maintained (e.g., Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant). The transition to agriculture might have been tough for several generations throughout thousands of years, but nonetheless their sacrifices opened the door to the comforts of the modern world. Once our ancestors crossed the cultural Rubicon, agricultural societies successfully spread throughout the world. The Neolithic Revolution changed our minds forever and heavily modified our ways of thinking in manners that capitalism eventually exploited and intensified. If this is all true, the thought experiment that I have proposed, like all forms, of socialism, would fail. Did agriculture really close the door to socialism forever, though?

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)

Anatomically modern humans lived around 200,000 years ago and behaviorally modern humans emerged 50,000 years ago. Compared to the first 195,000 years or so of human history, life over the last 5,000 years seems so radically different from the past that it is almost hard to believe that we are referring to the same species. In an extremely short period of time, in evolutionary timescales, humans developed complex societies, states, empires, nations, writing, “civilization,” art, trade, science, technology, and more. Based on a poor understanding of Darwin, an “evolutionist” narrative that saw all these stages as inevitable progress became popular in 19th century Europe, which unsurprisingly saw itself as the pinnacle of history. The story, of course, is much more intricate and punctuated instead of a progressive juggernaut. Although there is scattered evidence of sedentarism 12 to 14 thousand years ago, it took several millennia for the first stratified, tax-collecting states to emerge circa 3,100 BCE in the Tigris and Euphrates valley, and in a region known as the Fertile Crescent.

For all their impressive achievements and tomes dedicated to their study, Mesopotamia and Egypt, “cradles of civilization,” were miniscule nodes of power, and as Scott (2017, 14) explains, “not much more than a rounding error in a total global population estimated at roughly twenty-five million in the year 2,000 BCE.” That is, most people in the ancient world happily lived outside of a state as “barbarians.” Not only that early states and empires were small but also that their grandeur was also ephemeral. Although historians tend to focus on consolidated power, monumental architecture, art, science, and more, early states were rent with periods of internal fighting, plagues, and fragmentation (Scott 2017) that lasted longer than epochs of flourishing. In ancient Greece, for example, the classical period credited as (another) “cradle of Western civilization” lasted a little less than two centuries. On the other hand, the Greek “Dark Ages” when civilization collapsed, lasted four-centuries. It is only around the year 1600 CE that states achieve hegemony. To put this in evolutionary perspective, people have lived in states merely the last 0.2 percent of our species’ political life.

In other words, the narrative constructed around agriculture and states as invincible natural and civilizing forces is full of wrinkles and blemishes, perhaps even in tatters. The roles of agriculture and states in human evolution, although crucial, have been overstated. Surely, as Diamond (2017) points out, the descendants of early agrarian states conquered the world, and in the process absorbed, displaced, enslaved, or killed hunter-gatherer populations. But that does not mean that the new societies completely abandoned the social structures and institutions of the “old world.” Indeed, agrarian societies, early and modern states, still relied on sociality, cooperation, and reciprocity to function properly. In other words, the social institutions of hunter-gatherers did not disappear completely but acquired new characteristics under complex societies. In many ways, the socialism in living of our ancestors survived the tribulations of

agrarian states, empires, and modern nations. Perhaps reflecting the fact that researchers tend to come from the elite, chiefs, pharaohs, kings and queens, presidents, and modern politicians have an oversized representation in historical accounts, but in reality, the large majority of humans continued living according to the communitarian principles that characterized hunter-gatherers' lives.

The Haudenosaunee (“People of the Longhouse”) culture is a great illustration of the challenges that different transitions between modes of production and forms of organization presented to humans throughout history, but also of how the principles underlying old social structures survived within the new. The Haudenosaunee are also known as Iroquois, a name that comes from Basque fishermen who had established trade relationships with native groups in North America. Peter Bakker (1990) has persuasively argued that Iroquois comes from the Basque “hilokoa,” which translates to “killing people.” Probably Basque fishermen learned about the Haudenosaunee through the accounts of enemies who described them as murderers; the European explorers who arrived later simply adopted the same word. Although Iroquois, like Indian, is somewhat a testament to European stupidity, it remains the most popular demonym to refer to these groups and is widely used in the academic literature. I follow this convention when I cite other sources, but I use the preferred name Haudenosaunee in my own discussions.

In a matter of a thousand years, the Haudenosaunee went from hunter-gatherers to build provisional settlements, domesticate plants, develop small-scale agriculture, organize a confederacy of nations with complex socio-political institutions, and take over neighboring groups. Nonetheless, the Haudenosaunee were also able to construct an egalitarian society that challenges the narrative constructed around the link between agriculture and inequality. The Haudenosaunee, thus, show that the transition to complex and hierarchical societies did not

necessarily entail the death of old socialist principles nor a forced transition into drastic inequality. Even more interesting, as I will show below, they also undercut the idea the gender inequality was a necessary outcome of sedentarism.

The Haudenosaunee, a rather small population of around 7,000 people, built a powerful society that outcompeted other native groups throughout the 16th century and fought against French and British colonial powers in the 17th century with limited success. Eventually, the Haudenosaunee lost their land and were forcefully relocated to small reservations under Canadian and American rule throughout the 18th century and 19th century, and later adapted to 20th/21st century (post)industrial life. Although like most native peoples they suffer discrimination and are overwhelmingly condemned to urban poverty, more than 120,000 people in the U.S. and Canada still identify as Haudenosaunee today.

Even though the exact date has not been determined with precision, early in the 16th century Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas founded the League of the Haudenosaunee. The Tuscarora joined later in the 18th century to what then became the League of the Six Nations. There were two additional confederacies of Iroquois peoples, the Wendat and the Neutral, but the Haudenosaunee overpowered and incorporated them by 1651. If the Ju/'hoansi are the most studied group of hunter-gatherers, the Haudenosaunee are the most studied of indigenous groups in North America (Snow 1994). There are two main reasons for this popularity among academics. First, Lewis Henry Morgan (1851), the father of anthropology, published in 1851 what is perhaps the first academic ethnography, *The League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois*. With the limitations and biases of a 19th century worldview, Morgan put a sincere effort into understanding and describing in considerable detail the history, daily life, and socio-political institutions of the Haudenosaunee, which for better or worse

popularized them as a subject of anthropological research. Second, the Haudenosaunee are one of few surviving cultures based on a matrilineal system of kinship, which drew considerable attention from researchers – most of them men from patriarchal/patrilocal societies.

What archeologists and anthropologists call Iroquois culture emerged from hunter-gatherer groups that transitioned to more stable settlements and developed into the Owasco culture. By the year 1000 CE, these villages were scattered on both sides of the modern American – Canadian border – between New York and Ontario. After a few hundred years of proximity and contact, as well as conflict, these groups that shared cultural patterns and spoke related languages developed into bigger and more organized settlements by the early 14th century (Snow 1994). Some of the most important features of the Iroquois had existed at least since the Owasco years, but by 1350 CE Iroquoian culture had been standardized in the area. The most prominent cultural features included villages/towns surrounded by palisades that had a symbolic more than a defensive function, a political organization constituted by clans, subclans, and villages, and subsistence based on maize, beans, squash, fishing, gathering, and hunting (Birch 2015). Finally, the most famous Iroquois hallmark were longhouse dwellings where several families lived together. Thus, the name Haudenosaunee, i.e., “people of the longhouse.”

Haudenosaunee societies are matrilineal and residency in longhouses was matrilocal. A matrilineal society is one where kinship is traced through maternal, instead of paternal, lines. In these societies, it is customary for husbands to move in with their wives’ families. Following this system, a collection of families related through matrilineal ties and headed by a senior woman lived in a longhouse. For example, in a house with 120 people, ninety-six of them were related women and their children, and twenty-four were men. A traditional longhouse had rows, or compartments with cubicles for each family. Every compartment had 2 cubicles that shared a

hearth to be used on cold days. There were two storage units at the end of longhouses that could be easily dismantled to add compartments quickly and with ease whenever newlyweds joined. Although the longhouse still survives today, it does as a site for gatherings and public meetings and no longer as a matrilineal unit of residency (Snow 1994).

The longhouse as a social institution is responsible for much of the success of Haudenosaunee society, however. As anthropologist Dean Snow (1994) explains, societies with matrilineal residency are usually more peaceful as they suppress internal conflict. This creates a more cohesive group, which in turn gives them an advantage at external warfare. According to Haudenosaunee history, women were the first to listen and understand the message of Peacemaker – a prophet who at a time of widespread conflict convinced all the nations to create the league (Rodriguez 2017). Women, therefore, have always played an outsized role in maintaining peace and order within and between villages, clans, and nations. Relatedly, and in light of biology, Konner (2015) has suggested that compared to men, women are naturally less inclined to be aggressive and emotional, hence having more women in positions of power would lead to a sharp decline in conflict; the Haudenosaunee seem to be a good case in point.

From matrons in villages, to Clan mothers, women are crucial for the correct functioning of social and political institutions. Clan mothers select and, if needed, replace chiefs to represent villages at the league council, for example. Notwithstanding the role of women, Haudenosaunee society was not matriarchal per se. For Snow (1994), Haudenosaunee women simply lived in a non-hierarchical society that gave them political and economic influence. In other words, the Haudenosaunee did not trade one oppressive structure for another but achieved gender equality and did so hundreds of years before European societies, without literacy, markets, money, or any other so-called “civilizing” forces. In fact, all these innovations and mechanisms ended up

enslaving women in the West. It is unfortunate to notice, however, that given women's role in Haudenosaunee society, its anthropological study has been conducted mostly by men, who unsurprisingly have focused largely on male activities and voices. A noteworthy exception is Jeanette Rodriguez (2017) who has transcribed a first-hand account of Haudenosaunee beliefs and values articulated by Clan mother Iakoiane Wakerahkats:teh.

Haudenosaunee women played a key role in social and political institutions but also were largely in charge of food production. Unlike most agrarian societies, women tended the fields and oversaw farming among the Haudenosaunee. This fact gave women considerable power given that 60 percent of the calories that a traditional Haudenosaunee family consumes, and sometimes even more, came from maize, beans, and squash (Snow 1994). Importantly, although this was a complex society based on small-scale agriculture, food production among Haudenosaunee followed the same socialist principles that characterized hunter-gatherer subsistence, namely common ownership of resources and egalitarian distribution.

According to Haudenosaunee philosopher John Mohawk (2010a), the workers democratically chose a woman – the *entigowane* – who led the others in the communal fields. More than a boss, this person worked as a leader and her position was up to popular election and had to be periodically renewed. Under her supervision, women tended the fields collectively but had individual rights to what they harvested. Individual rights means that they could dispose of the harvest to feed their respective longhouses. In this sense, here we see once again the absence of private property to preclude anyone from accumulating excessive wealth.

Whereas men hunt and fought wars, women were in charge of communal food production. Perhaps, this is why they were able to escape the fate of women in other agrarian societies. Haudenosaunee women did not spend their lives performing unpaid reproductive

labor. Although most agricultural societies privileged big families to satisfy their labor needs, the traditional Haudenosaunee family was rather small. The norm was three children, spread apart, and daughters were preferred because they increased the size of the household (Snow 1994). Due to their farming duties, having two infants or small children running around simply was not an option. Family planning, thus, was carefully implemented, and abortive medicines were easily available for women. At the same time, just as it happens with the Ju/'hoansi, the Haudenosaunee were also a children-centric society and born, or “adopted” children were indulged at least until they reached adolescence.

In the 17th century, European explorers and colonizers were highly surprised by how permissive Haudenosaunee parents were with their children and by the small size of their families. In contrast, to adapt to plagues, European families had as many children as they could to assure that at least some would survive. It is a sad coincidence that these were the ingredients behind the most catastrophic event that hit the Haudenosaunee. The Europeans who “moved” into North America brought their big families, and their children also brought smallpox and other diseases. In the 17th century, the Haudenosaunee were devastated by a smallpox epidemic, which decimated the population by more than fifty percent.

This period put a lot of stress on the social fabric of Haudenosaunee culture and conflict became widespread among them and other Iroquois groups. These wars mostly took the form of raids and were devised to capture prisoners as a means to somewhat mitigate a dwindling population. Some of these prisoners were enslaved; others, especially, women and children were adopted into the life of the clans and became part of the community. Captured men were usually ceremonially tortured and killed; sometimes the hearts of brave prisoners were consumed by warriors to acquire the victim's strength (Snow 1994). Based on this gruesome period of

Haudenosaunee history, Europeans painted a portrait of them as war-minded torturers and cannibals.

But as Snow (1994) highlights, the Haudenosaunee behaved exactly like other people have done under the same stressful circumstances, i.e., deprived of resources and at the brink of societal collapse. This is not a justification naturally, but a reminder of the unfortunate fact that torture, slavery, and even instances of cannibalism were not distinctively Haudenosaunee but were prevalent throughout the world, including Europe, in the 17th century. Yet, cannibalism was especially shocking for European society, and it was efficient as propaganda to justify the colonization and Christianization of the Americas. The hypocrisy is astounding considering that during the Crusades there were reports of Christian soldiers cannibalizing Muslim locals, either as a consequence of famine or to terrorize the population. But even in the 17th century, cannibalism was a widespread practice in European medicine. Bits of mummies imported from Egypt, first, and then blood, fat, bone, skin, and more from locally sourced cadavers (e.g., executed prisoners, stolen corpses) were enthusiastically used as part of prescriptions to fight all kinds of diseases (Sugg 2016).

Haudenosaunee are humans, and as such they create the kind of history that animals like us create. Perpetual warfare and perpetual peace do not exist in any society, and native populations are not different from other societies in that sense. The Haudenosaunee enjoyed relative peace in the 14th and 15th century, and then went through a short period of violence characterized by “blood revenges” at the turn of century that ended early in the 16th century. Amidst these tensions, political actors outside of the traditional order gained more power in the confederacy and socio-political institutions declined. European colonization and the diseases

that came along, led to another period of violence that continued throughout the 17th and 18th century. By 1750, the old social order had disappeared.

The American Revolutionary Wars subjected Haudenosaunee society to one last decisive trauma. Unable to decide which side to support, some people fought with the Americans and others with the British. The tension proved too powerful, and in 1776, the Confederacy ceased to exist. The new governments of Canada and the U.S. did not see natives in general, or Haudenosaunee in particular, as citizens with rights and adopted a series of policies (e.g., the reservation system) tailored specifically to allow white settlers to move into native lands. In 1830, the U.S. forced native peoples to move west of the Mississippi. The Seneca, for instance, ended up in Oklahoma far from the lands or territories where their cultures had developed. Capital, we must remember, also comes soaked in the blood of those who perished on the Trail of Tears throughout twenty years of forceful relocations.

In 1869, Canada mandated patrilineal bonds as the basis to claim band membership and the rights attached to it, which led to issues among the Haudenosaunee where patrilineal bonds were tenuous, if present at all. Then in 1887 through the Dawes Act, the U.S. changed its approach from segregation to “integration.” To integrate, of course, meant to bring native peoples into Euro-American society by forcing them to speak English, become Christians, and abandon their traditional social and political institutions. In the 19th century, most Haudenosaunee were living in small reservations; alienated from their traditional life, violence, alcoholism, and internal conflict was widespread. At a moment when Haudenosaunee culture was at risk of disappearing, Chief Handsome Lake promoted a series of reforms to counter the negative effects of forced relocation. Haudenosaunee society became even more Westernized, and many people adopted Christianity and patriarchy; women lost much of their political power.

The reforms were successful in the sense that they saved the remnants of the Haudenosaunee league but unfortunately in doing so they undermined ancient native customs.

These policies of integration coupled with industrialization in the 20th century have eroded Haudenosaunee culture almost reaching a point of no return. Yet, as Clan Mother Iakoiane Wakerahkats:teh stresses, in the mid-20th century Haudenosaunee people began a process of “reindigenization.” Traditions such as communitarianism, reliance on mutual aid, native spirituality, and egalitarianism have experienced a revival lately (Mohawk 2010a). For all the homogenizing power of modern capitalism, local forms of socialism still remain popular among native and marginalized peoples of the world. As I explained earlier, calling it socialism is simply part of my aim at finding a word to refer to the common practices of different societies throughout history.

Lewis H. Morgan was the first to suggest that the Haudenosaunee were a sort of socialist community. More precisely, in *Ancient Society*, Morgan (1878, 70) argues that Iroquois, along with Aztecs, Roman and German tribes, among others, practiced what he termed “communism in living.” We have to take Morgan’s pronouncement with a grain of salt, however. Although Morgan is sympathetic toward the Haudenosaunee, their communism is also a sign of backwards societies for him. Indeed, communism, for Morgan, is the staple of savage and barbarian groups, not yet fully civilized.

Morgan espoused evolutionist views. Human societies, Morgan (1878) argued, proceed through different evolutionary stages: from Savagery (Lower, Middle, Upper) to Barbarism (Lower, Middle, Upper) to Civilization (Ancient, Medieval, Modern). Predictably, according to this model, Euro-American society was the pinnacle of civilization. This view was not exclusive to Morgan but characterized European “social science” in the 19th century regardless of political

affiliations. Kropotkin (1910), for example, celebrated the role of mutual aid in human societies throughout history as means to critique narrowminded social Darwinism and its overemphasis of competition. Yet, he could not avoid referring to indigenous peoples as savages and barbarians.

Morgan's evolutionist view of human societies was highly influential for Marx and Engels, who saw in it a validation of their materialist conception of history. Marx wrote ninety-six pages of notes on Morgan's *Ancient Society* but died before he could publish his conclusions (Shaw 1984). Later, Engels (1990) combined Marx's ideas with his own interpretation and wrote *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State: in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* where he listed a series of misconceptions about matrilineality and so-called primitive communism. Nonetheless, Engels (and Marx) also rightly notes that the patriarchal bourgeois nuclear family was not a natural social unit but the product of a change in economic relations that agriculture catalyzed. Likewise, the example of the Haudenosaunee led Marx and Engels to conclude that they had rightly historicized capitalism. That is, primitive communism demonstrated that capitalism, like other human societies, was not immutable but the product of historical development, which also opened the door to its own sublation (*aufhebung*).

The implications of Marx and Engel's "Morganism" are important because they reveal a critical flaw of Western 20th century Marxisms in particular, and left-wing politics in general, namely their inability to go beyond European logics. Even when Marx and Engels acknowledged that history moves bounds and leaps, there is a very clear progressivist logic in Marxist theory. Communism, for Marx, is a more humane and higher stage of society that will emerge from capitalism's dialectical implosion – this is what I mean by sublation in the paragraph above. Yet, this commitment to a better future also implicitly suggests that earlier social formations were less sophisticated and, perhaps, humane. But as I have explained, both hunter-gatherers and the

Haudenosaunee constructed human societies that in many senses were superior to their Western counterparts.

Once again, mirroring capitalist ideology, Marxist Eurocentrism overlooks the fact that there are other rational ways of organizing society that do not have to traverse capitalism. Part of the problem is Marx's limited conception of rationality that is inexorably bounded to Europe's Enlightenment. In this vein, Marx, and the Marxists in the 20th century, were convinced that the only rational way to move forward was through a capitalism that eventually would turn into socialism. As Adorno and Horkheimer (2007), Marxists themselves, brilliantly argued, enlightened rationality could easily turn into myth thereby becoming so sure of itself that it forgets its own limitations. Marxism, unfortunately, did not escape this logic but in the 21st century, this mistake must be remedied.

On the other hand, as I mentioned in chapter three, third world socialisms developed a political response aligned with Marxism but grounded in local practices. Nkrumah (1964), for example, stressed the importance of communitarianism among African societies as a building block of future socialisms. Along the same lines, Mohawk (2010a) notices that capitalist practices are not practical for Haudenosaunee groups. First, capitalist practices are anathema to customary native beliefs that emphasize the importance of community, respect for nature, egalitarianism, and more. Second, adopting capitalist practices, Mohawk argues, entails a tacit abandonment of Haudenosaunee culture, and would necessarily lead to its demise. For Mohawk, the future of Haudenosaunee society lies in rediscovering traditional principles and adapting them to current conditions. In other words, Mohawk recommends readopting the principles of what I have called socialism in living, but importantly without reducing them to a Euro-American logic. Although Mohawk (2010b) is sympathetic to Marxism, he rightly notices that

its “industrial logic” also goes against traditional native practices. The wisdom of the past does not have to be sieved through Western frameworks.

The Haudenosaunee solved many of the problems of the modern world without capitalist development/devastation but relying on egalitarianism, generalized reciprocity, and common ownership of resources. Even so, it is also true that although they adopted agriculture, the Haudenosaunee never transitioned into intensive production, hence did not have to deal with abundant surpluses of food and wealth. Surely, these characteristics made their egalitarianism easier to enforce and maintain. Perhaps, the forces that wealth unleashes are simply too much for egalitarian societies to sustain. The next culture that I present is an example of a prosperous socialism, i.e., one where affluence and egalitarianism went hand-in hand.

The Inkas

It might sound like an exaggeration to suggest that the Andean Inkas (Incas Hispanicized) were a wealthy society. Yet it is no hyperbole if we consider that by contemporary standards, as a ransom for Atahualpa, the last Inka ruler, Pizarro and other Spanish mercenaries received 335 million dollars in gold and eleven million dollars in silver (D’Altroy 2014). After pocketing the money, the Spanish executed Atahualpa, nonetheless, and proceeded to enslave and kill millions of natives in America throughout the next four centuries.

The Inka civilization, the largest empire of pre-colonial America, was a multi-ethnic collection of millenarian Andean groups that had organized into complex societies. Its history overlaps with Haudenosaunee society, but their cultures have some prominent differences. The Inkas adopted intensive agriculture, developed into a wealthy empire, created monumental structures, a tax-collecting apparatus, a more rigidly stratified society, and other complex institutions that the Haudenosaunee did not have. Notwithstanding these differences, as I will

show, the Inkas managed to successfully organize by the same “socialist principles” that I underscored vis-à-vis Ju/'hoansi and Haudenosaunee life. The Inkas show that this form of socialism has worked with scarcity and abundance, and with different social and political institutions to modulate and enforce the same goal, namely egalitarianism.

Although there is a rich scholarship on the Inkas, studying their history encounters two hurdles. First, most first-hand accounts of the empire come from 16th century Spanish people (e.g., soldiers, priests) who only witnessed its collapse. Expectedly, most of these sources focus on the “barbaric” and “uncivilized” ways of the Inkas and do not try to construct a rigorous, historical analysis. Second, the Inkas did not have a writing system, or at least not one that the Spanish colonizers could, or wanted to, understand (more on this later). Hence, their version of history did not survive, at least not in their own voice. Two key sources that, to a certain extent, subvert these issues are 16th century writers, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala and Garcilaso de la Vega (a.k.a., El Inka) – a descendant of provincial nobility and a mestizo son of an Inka princess respectively. Guaman Poma and Garcilaso were part of both worlds but had privileged access to indigenous sources, and consequently developed accounts that tried to balance Spanish narratives about the Inkas with descriptions that were more accurate thereby portraying their ancestors in a more positive, if somewhat romantic, light. Overall, both authors are representatives of a syncretic current that sought to reconcile Spanish and indigenous culture as means to navigate the “new world” that colonization created.

Fortunately, new archeological discoveries and technological advances have greatly enriched the study of Inka history in the last 50 years. Overall, what emerges from these records is a picture of a society that although not classless as hunter-gatherers, and more stratified than Haudenosaunee, was still highly egalitarian. A strong sense of reciprocity that was embedded in

Inka cosmology permeated every aspect of Inka life and applied to relationships among equals, non-equals, humans, and non-humans alike (D'Altroy 2014).

According to some educated estimations, the Inkas developed as a group sometime after the year 1000 CE. Famous for its imperial period, the Inka civilization lived for 300 to 400 years, i.e., most of its existence, as a complex, hierarchical society that slowly transitioned into a state (D'Altroy 2014), and only later became an empire. In the 12th century, Cuzco was established as the capital, but it was only in the 15th century that the empire was officially created. Inka expansionism began under the 8th Sapa Inka (ruler), Viracocha Inka, and strengthened under his son Pachacuti Inka who conquered and incorporated vast territories. The Inka empire officially existed for only a century (1438 - 1533). At its height, the empire, in Quechua the *Tawantinsuyu* ("The Four Parts"), expanded from north Colombia to central Chile, and included modern-day Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and the northwest part of Argentina. By the time of the Spanish invasion in 1532, 12 million people lived under Inka rule. Merely 40 years later the population had declined by 50 percent as a consequence of Spanish ruthlessness and viruses (e.g., smallpox, influenza) (D'Altroy 2014).

But even in 1532, the Inkas were still in the process of consolidating control of their territories (Covey and Alconini 2018) and were in the middle of a civil war between Atahualpa and Huascar, the sons of Inka Huayna Capac. This is just another example that shows that most of these all-powerful states/empires in paper, were rather weak in practice. To make this fact even more salient, the conquistadores who allegedly had superior political organization, spent years fighting over looted riches and killing each other before the Spanish Crown could finally bring the Americas under its rule. Pizarro, himself, was assassinated by a group of his compatriots merely nine years after embezzling Atahualpa's ransom.

Independent of their structural prowess, the Inkas were a magnificent civilization with a series of impressive accomplishments. As I will explain, their success was a consequence of their ability to construct a successful economic system based on pre-Inkan Andean institutions and values. Although the Inkas conquered and incorporated other Andean peoples, they maintained or built upon traditional methods of social organization and subsistence that had a millenary history. As I did before, a quick note here is necessary to stress that we are referring to human beings. There is no need to romanticize the Inkas. Their government was characterized by millenary Andean values but also had instances of violence, forced relocations of newly conquered populations to lower the chances of local revolts, and institutions such as slavery and compulsory labor. The latter were especially prominent in the final decades of the empire when the society became more intensely stratified and the rulers tried to consolidate power by giving regional elites more economic advantages. All this internal fighting led to the decline and eventual demise of the Inkas.

Even with these flaws, a few decades later, compared to Spanish cruelty, many indigenous peoples were nostalgic about the “good old days” under Inka rule when no one went hungry or was exploited to death in mines and fields. The empire had impressive temples, an enviable system of irrigation that extended from the Andes to the Pacific coast, a state-of-the-art system of roads that extended for 25 to 37 miles with strategically placed storage households, suspending bridges, and resting points along the way. Even Spanish soldiers were astonished by the architectural proficiency that building roads and bridges in the complex terrain of the Andes requires (D’Altroy 2014). This impressive infrastructure facilitated a system of communication ran by messengers called *chaskis*, who could cover up to 149 miles in a day to deliver messages or small cargo through a system of relays.

The messages were delivered orally, or more often coded in *kipus*, namely recording devices made out of color-coded strings and knots that the Inkas used to register census data, tax obligations, military information, and other demographic information. A *kipu kamayuq* (kipu specialist) was a professional (a sort of accountant) in charge of recording and reading, if necessary, information into and from the *kipus*. Although the *kipu* might have been used to record more than numbers, including stories or instructions for ceremonies, traditionally, it has not been considered writing per se because as a system of notation it could not represent spoken language with precision.

On the other hand, semiotician Walter Mignolo (1994), a leading figure of the Latin-American decolonial turn, has critiqued this Eurocentric definition of writing for what he thinks are ideological components that have excluded visual and pictorial systems such as the *kipu*. For Mignolo, the *kipu* encoded ideas, therefore it should be considered a writing system. Supporting Mignolo's argument, Marcia and Robert Ascher (1981) have analyzed surviving *kipus* and argue that their structure shows logical and syntactical properties that would make them an efficient system to relay ideas that other people could understand. They have also shown, however, that most information coded in the 191 *kipus* that they studied is numerical.

In between Mignolo and the Aschers, Inka expert Gary Urton (2017) agrees that *kipus* should be seen as a sort of hybrid between a writing system and a mnemonic device. In other words, perhaps the *kipu* could not encode concepts with precision, but it could be used to convey general ideas such as the main parts of stories or rituals. We could know more about the *kipu* but only 600 survive. With such a small sample, it is difficult to make definitive conclusions. The Spanish burned most of the records that they found; after all, they looked like

pieces of string and not something valuable for people looking for gold, silver, and not much more.

Whether they had a writing system or not, the Inkas constructed an impressive civilization but also provided a good life for its general population. Yet, as I mentioned before sometimes it is hard to separate fact from myth. One of the most famous accounts of Inka life is Garcilaso de la Vega's (2006) *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (Royal Commentaries of the Incas), published in 1609. Garcilaso was born in Peru from a Spanish conquistador and an Inka noblewoman. He grew up speaking Quechua with his maternal family, later moved in with his father who abandoned his mother, and at the age of 21 moved to Spain where he received an informal education and lived there for the rest of his life. Based on stories from his maternal relatives and childhood teachers but sifted through the Spanish-Catholic worldview of his adulthood, Garcilaso developed a brilliant historical narrative of Inka civilization that is considered a masterpiece of Latin-American colonial literature. In the *Comentarios*, with painstaking detail and erudition, Garcilaso described the Inka empire in general terms as a harmonious territory headed by a benevolent king where most people lead fully human lives. Against colonial narratives that deemed the Inkas primitive, Garcilaso stressed the profound richness and complexity of an empire that developed technology, science, an educational system for the elites, and even had philosophers called *amautas*. Likewise, Garcilaso argued that notwithstanding their privileges, the Inka elites cared about the population at large and worked consciously toward their well-being.

Another crucial account of Inka life is Guaman Poma de Ayala's *El Primer Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno* (The First New Chronicle and Good Government). Written in Quechua and Spanish sometime early in the 16th century, the *Chronicle* was never published and

only discovered early in the 20th century. Yet, this work is a masterpiece in its own right.

Dedicated to King Phillip III, Guaman Poma's book brilliantly combines a rich history of Inka civilization, along with almost 400 pages of detailed illustrations, a "*mappa mundi*" of the Inka empire, and a poignant critique of Spanish rule. This last feature makes the Chronicle unique given that it is the first sustained critique of colonial rule written by a native author.

Interestingly, Guaman Poma was a Catholic and as such held the Spanish king as the legitimate monarch and a representative of God. Thus, although harshly critical of Spanish rule, he does not reject the authority of the king. On the contrary, his purpose is to alert the king of the injustices that natives have been subjected to, surely without his knowledge or consent, so that he can remedy these wrongs. To do so, Guaman Poma (2015) suggested, the king should introduce Spanish technology and uphold Catholic religion but also recover Inka socio-political institutions that were part of ancient Andean life.

Guaman Poma was a descendant of regional Inka nobility. Had his proposals been adopted, probably he could reclaim his familial position, sue for their possessions, and even be appointed to a position of authority. Although this motivation might have been in the back of his mind, Guaman Poma also rightly maintained that for natives, life under Inka rule was far superior than during colonial times (how could it not?). Therefore, he sincerely thought that the Spanish Crown could learn from an Inka empire that had secured a good and happy life for the majority. The king, unfortunately, never received the Chronicle, which was lost for centuries.

In reality, life under Inka rule was more complex than either what Garcilazo or Guaman Poma's account suggest. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Inka elites did have the well-being of their subjects in mind. Even when the state and empire were decidedly hierarchical, daily life was generally permeated by ideas of mutuality and balance. Excesses from the regional elites,

for example, were severely punished. The state was a powerful driving force behind economic production, which was neither based on centralized planning nor on paternalistic programs, though. Subsistence and food production was in the hands of self-sufficient communities called *ayllus* (commune or family in Quechua) that doubled as the main social unit of Inka life.

The most influential account of the Inka mode of production was developed by the anthropologist John Murra (1980) in *The Economic Organization of the Inka State*. For Murra, the Inka mode of production had three main, interrelated, causes underlying its success: 1) Continuity of pre-Inkan Andean institutions and values (esp. reciprocity and common ownership), 2) Intensive agriculture, pastoralism, and textile production, and 3) A state with the aim of increasing productivity and the means, and power, to encourage and force people to do so. The cornerstone of this system was the *ayllu* – a millenary social institution from pre-Inkan times that, as it will be apparent by the end of this section, functioned in accordance with what I have dubbed socialist principles.

The Inkas had well defined social classes topped by the Inka Sapa and the royal family, followed immediately by a number of priests, teachers, architects, managers, and different regional elites remnant of pre-Inkan times. Nonetheless, 95 to 98 percent of the *Tahuantinsuyu* population were peasants who lived in *ayllus* (D'Altroy 2014), thus their structural importance for a well-functioning empire. *Ayllus* were self-subsistent most of the time, except in the event of catastrophes when the state functioned as a security net, which provided food, construction materials, or other resources from its storehouses. Nevertheless, local sufficiency was by far more important than state redistribution for Inka peoples (Murra 1980). An *ayllu* was a kin-related group that worked cooperatively, held pastures and fields in common, and managed water and other resources communally and sometimes in coordination with other local *ayllus*.

Although from an evolutionary point of view, it makes sense that an extended family would be able to cooperate more productively, it is important to notice that in many cases the filial ties were merely imagined and amplified linguistically via terms such as brother, sister, father, etc.

The ethic that characterized the *ayllu*, and still survives among contemporary Andean communities, was one of kinship, generalized reciprocity, mutuality, and gender balance (D'Altroy 2014). Although there were well-defined roles, gender relations were egalitarian and complimentary, not hierarchical, at least within *ayllus*. Nonetheless, as it happens in most agrarian societies political power at large was reserved for men, although the queen was an exceptionally powerful figure in the Inka empire.

Ayllus varied in size and the largest could contain hundreds of households with total population in the thousands. Usually, *ayllus* were divided in two moieties separated by lineages. Marriage happened most of the time within *ayllus* but among people from different moieties. Women typically married when they were 16 and men in their early 20s. Pre-marital sexual relationships, however, were very common and not stigmatized in any way, which of course scandalized the Spanish invaders (Price 1965).

Residency was typically patrilocal, i.e., the woman moved to her husband's *ayllu*, and newlyweds had the right to a new house that the community built. Women never lost affiliation to their birth moieties, however, and when their parents died, they inherited the family's land and property. Also interestingly, "trial marriages" were very common, and partners could decide to break the bond at any point during the trial period with no consequences (Price 1965). Once both had committed, however, marriage was definitive and could not be terminated except in cases of childlessness.

Although *ayllus* had some formal hierarchical lines, in practice they were highly egalitarian arrangements. Decisions were reached through consensus and usually had the well-being of the community in mind. Conflicts were also resolved internally. To illustrate the degree of independence that *ayllus* had within the empire, they held their own local religious ceremonies and rituals to celebrate their ancestors.

Given the climate and terrain, life at high altitude in the Andes is not and was never easy. To deal with these barriers, Andean communities developed what Murra (1980) dubbed an “Archipelago pattern” of production. Basically, each *ayllu* spread over different altitudes to exploit different ecozones thereby being capable of cultivating many products (e.g., potatoes, quinoa, maize, coca). The products, then, could be shared by the community and everyone had access to the different tubers and grains that, along with meat in smaller quantities, were staples of Andean diet.

Part of the Inkas’ administrative genius was adopting successful institutions like the *ayllu* instead of trying to forcefully impose their own as the Spanish did. In fact, D’Altroy (2014) suggests that the Inkas might have adopted Quechua as the official language of the empire not because it was their native tongue – Aymara is the most likely candidate – but because it was already widespread throughout the Andes. Maintaining the *ayllu* as the basis of social life in the empire is economic given that self-sufficient units require minimal state intervention. Through this social institution, and the occasional mediation of regional elites and governors, pre-Inkan and Inkan Andean societies successfully managed pastures, irrigation canals, water reservoirs, and other common resources.

If the Soviet Union and China rapidly developed forms of state capitalism, the Inkas mode of production can be accurately described as an instance of state socialism. The state

collected taxes, mostly in the form of labor, to build temples, roads, irrigation canals, pay for rituals and support a nobility, but also to provide a robust social safety net especially useful in times of need. Moreover, it did so without interfering with the traditional customs and affairs of each community and without forced collectivization or exploitation for the sake of profit.

In the final decades of the empire, conflict over Sapa Inka succession led different factions within the nobility to seek alliances with local elites. To gain their favor, the Inka nobility gave away private parcels to certain individuals who had political power at regional levels. This disrupted traditional social life and led to inequality and widespread social conflict (Murra 1980). The so-called tragedy of the commons never happened as long as *ayllus* were left to their own ancestral social mechanisms, but the tragedy of privatization disrupted communal life as soon as inequality took over communities, and the empire quickly unraveled in the aftermath. Surely, the Spanish conquered the Inka empire because their weapons were superior, but the fact that they faced a divided empire was also a factor of considerable influence that facilitated their task.

Overall, I am not suggesting that Inka life was a model of socialism to implement today. Forced labor and relocation, militarism, human sacrifice, rigid classes, etc. are nothing to celebrate nor anything uniquely Inka though. These flaws, however, were more the effect of the ideology of an imperial elite than the consequence of *ayllu* socialism. It is these units that survived within a stratified state that have to be considered an instantiation of another successful millenary socialist experiment. If anything, coming under an empire disrupted the socialistic practices of Andean cultures forcing them to embrace intensive agriculture and spike productivity. Yet, *ayllu* ethic remains powerful even today among Andean communities that still structure their lives around principles of mutuality and reciprocity.

The first to recognize *ayllus* as socialist units was Peruvian philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui (2019), who, exaggerating a bit, argues that Inka life is the oldest form of “primitive communism” in human history. Steeped in colonial prejudices as much as in Marxist dogma, Latin America left-wing intellectuals either focused solely on industrial workers as a messianic class or assumed that the indigenous population would have to assimilate to Western culture and eventually join the proletarian ranks. On the other hand, Mariátegui, a self-taught Marxist, recognized the widely overlooked revolutionary potential of indigenous practices in the Andes.

Published in 1928, “Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana” [Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality] is one of the most important and original philosophical works from Latin America, and the first to combine indigenous thought with Marxism.

Mariátegui (2011) argues that Andean peasants live according to socialist principles that are deeply rooted in millenarian indigenous traditions based on reciprocity and cooperation.

Specifically, Mariátegui stresses that, as I have detailed before, the mode of production of *ayllus* was characterized by a strong communitarianism, internally and externally as the successful management of common resources (e.g., water reservoirs) among neighboring *ayllus* illustrates.

To a certain extent, Mariátegui celebrated indigenous socialism as a veiled critique of agrarian reforms introduced by the Peruvian government that aimed at dividing large estates held by quasi-feudal landlords into smaller, private parcels to distribute among the peasants. For Mariátegui, this sort of reform was simply an instantiation of capitalism that in the end would end up hurting the peasantry. A truly socialistic program, inspired by the *ayllus*, Mariátegui suggested would be more attuned to the realities of indigenous life in the Andes. In a sense, Mariátegui parallels Guaman Poma de Ayala and attempts to develop a syncretic system out of European modernity, viz., Marxism, and Andean thought.

Well ahead of his time, Mariátegui recognizes the limitations of Marxism's Eurocentric position and the importance of building upon native socialist traditions. Thus, Mariátegui (2019) famously suggested that Latin America needed an "Indo-American socialism" and not a "one size fits all" style of Soviet Marxism. Perhaps even more impressive, Mariátegui's call to "indigenize" socialism antecedes the disastrous policies of the Soviet Union that destroyed communal life among peasants. *Avant la lettre*, then, Mariátegui recognizes the strategical importance of organizing around traditional practices with ancient histories instead of focusing on the forceful transformation of peasants into proletariats. Mariátegui, unfortunately, was ignored by the Marxist intelligentsia. After all he was merely a middle-class mestizo from Peru with almost non-existent academic credentials.

Mariátegui's mestizo status has also brought accusations of cultural and racial insensitivity. He has been criticized for essentializing indigenous identity and even romanticizing Inkaic rule. At no point, however, Mariátegui assumes that there is such thing as an immutable indigenous identity. In fact, his aim is to defend indigenous peoples from both right and left. The former assumes that indigenous culture has no value, thus it recommends "integration" and modernization to solve the problems of the peasantry. Equally condescending, the latter thinks that the peasantry has to become capitalist and subsequently (but only then) aspire to become revolutionaries and socialists.

Mariátegui, along with members of the Communist Party of the U.S such as Harry Haywood and W.E.B. DuBois, have to be credited for educating (Latin) American Marxists and the Comintern in general on issues of race. Unlike his contemporaries who tended to reduce racism to class exploitation, Mariátegui stresses that both are inexorably linked. Undermining accusations of essentialism, he argues that Andean peoples do not have an innate mission to

fulfill (Becker 2006) but simply that indigenous traditions were and still are based on socialist institutions and values. Unlike the European proletariat for orthodox Marxists, the peasantry does not bear a “messianic” sign for Mariátegui. In fact, as Christian da Silva (2014) evinces, Mariátegui’s *indigenismo* is revolutionary because it overcomes reductionist views held by whites, mestizos, liberals, and Marxists alike, who imagined the peasantry as a tabula rasa where Western ideas could be programmed and executed. A socialist revolution could triumph in Peru, and the rest of Latin America, Mariátegui stressed, without importing foreign values but rooted in ancient indigenous traditions. In this vein, Mariátegui is a highly original thinker who challenged Marx’s view of social evolution and its history that moves from the “primitive Indian” to the modern proletariat. Mariátegui highlights the fact that socialism spoke Quechua, and Aymara, long before Europe articulated the idea.

Yet, as much as Mariátegui critiques the notion of primitivism among Andean peoples, he is also careful to avoid an idealization of the indigenous past and does not promote a return to it. Celebrating the seeds of socialism in indigenous culture, Mariátegui invites the reader to consider a future that unfolds centered around values such as mutualism and reciprocity. Such future, however, could only develop through the struggles of a coalition of Indians, whites, mestizos, proletarians, etc. against the semi feudal capitalism of 20th century rural Latin America. Indian self-determination is also a problem of class, Mariátegui explains. In other words, there is no solution to the “Indian problem” without class struggle. Yet, there cannot be true class struggle without addressing race, gender, and other identitarian issues.

Mariátegui might have put too much faith in the ability of the working classes to overcome racism for the sake of his pluralistic version of class struggle, however. But he was not the first to put too much faith in a messianic proletariat rising up to the challenges of its

times. His analysis of the socialist traditions underlying indigenous culture, nonetheless, is still on point. Not only that Andean indigenous cultures continue to rely heavily on mutuality and cooperation, but also that they have been able to do so facing wave after wave of colonialist and capitalist attacks. As I have detailed, the roots of these traditions go all the way back to pre-Incan times but even throughout the imperial years, socialist institutions successfully worked within an agrarian state.

The Inkas developed intensive agriculture, created a tax-collecting state and eventually became a powerful empire with a complex social organization that was home to millions of people. The radical egalitarianism that characterizes hunter-gatherers, and to a lesser extent the Haudenosaunee, might have been lost, but natural, evolved inclinations and the socialist institutions and practices that they underlie, survived even within unequal societies. Furthermore, as is the case with *ayllus*, these institutions were crucial to make life in an agrarian state as humane as possible, at least for 95 percent of the population.

Although the Spanish destroyed most of Inka civilization, Andean cultural practices still pay tribute to their millenary past and color modern life. For example, the *minga*, a common practice whereby people come together to fulfill a task (e.g., clean a neighborhood park, paint a school) is a very popular form of communitarianism that still survives all over South America. *Minga* is a hispanicized version of *minka*, a Quechua word that refers to the practice of pooling resources or labor. As a side note, during Inka times the *minka* was performed with the expectation of receiving a pre-negotiated share of the production in exchange, hence it was more a work contract than anything else. The practice that the word *minga* refers to was originally called *ayni*.

Socialist principles are alive among Andean communities, but the jury is still out on whether these values and practices could in practice lead to a socialist society as Mariátegui argued. The closest thing to a Latin American political revolution based on an indigenous ethos is Evo Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) in Bolivia. The first indigenous president of Bolivia and Latin America, Morales (2008) has embraced indigenous traditional beliefs and practices against capitalist exploitation and as means toward a socialist future. Although Bolivia's geopolitical power is rather limited and its influence in the international arena negligible, Morales' indigenous and multicultural socialism remains a successful experiment that has lifted millions of people from poverty in his country. In reality, Bolivia's room to develop a more radical experiment is severely limited by both domestic and international forces, and its political system is more accurately defined as a capitalism with a strong social focus and governmental regulations. Perhaps, it is a "capitalism in transition" or with indigenous characteristics. There is, however, a modern successful example of indigenous and multicultural socialism, but instead of Inka, it has Mayan roots: the Zapatista Revolution of 1994. This last case takes us to the belly of the beast itself, i.e., socialism within a neoliberal society.

The Zapatistas

Hitherto, I have explained the practices of the Ju/'hoansi, Haudenosaunee, and Inkas. The first exemplify the oldest and by far the most successful human mode of economic production and social organization in evolutionary terms. The other two give us a glimpse into the challenges that our ancestors faced as they transitioned into stratified societies with more resources. The Haudenosaunee and Inkas also shed light on the tribulations that community-oriented societies go through when they are colonized by profit-driven cultures, which to a certain extent illustrate ongoing struggles in the modern world. On top of a clash between

worldviews, the encounter between colonized and colonizers is mediated by a debilitating form of racism. Colonialism, as Fanon (2008) aptly described in *Black Skin, White Masks*, is rather perverse in the sense that it forces the colonized to abandon their practices, but even when they do so, it still does not fully admit the “other” into the new dominant culture. Implicitly, the colonizer assumes that the other is not smart, hard-working, diligent, creative enough to integrate completely. Remember, for example, the excuses that white settlers made to justify the exploitation of the Ju/'hoansi.

The Zapatistas (Chiapas, Mexico) confront all these colonialist logics at work but amplified by a new creature, namely a hostile capitalist state. The Inkas and the Haudenosaunee emerged “alone” in the world, i.e., in their own terms until European colonizers arrived. Their socialisms developed independently and later became loci of resistance within the cultures that engulfed them. But their descendants did not have that luxury. Today, they exist among modern states and as such are supposed to couch their claims in the language of modern liberal political discourse. Yet, the gap between the language of modern liberal states and that of native communities is so wide that it seems unbridgeable. The idea that nature is not an object to exploit, for instance, is so foreign to capital but so obvious to native communities all over the world.

But can native practices lead to successful organization in the modern world along the lines of socialist principles, as Mariátegui hoped? The Zapatista Revolution suggests that socialism based on indigenous practices, albeit not Andean, is a viable political project that can exist even amidst neoliberal maelstrom. As I have done with each group, let me restate a crucial caveat about socialism. As a modern phenomenon, the Zapatista Revolution has been widely publicized in the world and has been used as a canvas to project ideologies and philosophies in it.

Gregory Pappas (2017), for example, sees in the Zapatistas a political project unfolding along the lines of Deweyan pragmatic philosophy. For Thomas Nail (2012), Zapatista organization illustrates Deleuze and Guattari's concept of revolution.

But the Zapatistas are not pragmatists, postmodern/poststructuralists, Marxists, or even socialists in the European sense. Although neither Pappas nor Nail develop a reductionist reading, we have to be careful not to pigeonhole the Zapatista movement into standard categories of Western political discourse neither to justify it nor to see its philosophical value. Zapatismo follows principles derived from ancient Mayan beliefs based on egalitarianism, communal life, and respect for nature. Although indigenous Mayan thought did not have a conceptual apparatus to deal with capitalism, its most basic beliefs are anathema to it, so the Zapatistas easily melded an anti-capitalist discourse with native practices. Hence the Zapatistas are better distinguished as a syncretic movement that articulates its demands in the language of both native thought and (post)industrial socialist protest.

Unlike the Ju/'Hoansi, Inkas, or the Haudenosaunee confederacy, the Zapatistas are a contemporary group built from the fragments of cultures from the past. Although their success cannot be measured by millennia or centuries, their practices and values are ancient and suggest that old socialist principles can still be applied in the modern world. After more than 30 years of existence, Zapatistas are the oldest and most successful organized resistance against neoliberal policies in the contemporary world. Compared to the Zapatistas, expressions of discontent such as Occupy, Indignados, Yellow Vests, or other anti-austerity protests (e.g., Argentina, Greece) seem transient and ineffectual.

Today, more than 360,000 people live in autonomous Zapatista territory in Chiapas. Zapatista territory is divided in 5 regional councils that house thirty-eight municipal councils

(MAREZ), which in turn encompass thousands of communities of around three hundred people each. Regional councils are called *Caracoles* [snails]. The snail is a Zapatista symbol because their revolution moves slowly but steady. *Caracoles* are home to “Juntas del Buen Gobierno” [Councils of the Good Government], named so not because they are necessarily good but to differentiate them from the government, which is definitely bad, the Zapatistas explain. Each *caracol* provides services for the communities within its territory. Signs that read “You are in Zapatista rebel territory. Here the people rule, and the government obeys” welcome tourists and strangers. But before they could reclaim their dignity, they had to traverse a rocky path. However, for people who live in one of the poorest regions of Latin America, walking through roads in deplorable conditions is second nature. In what follows, I detail the history of the Zapatista rebellion and the social and political institutions that constitute their autonomous territories. But first, a quick note about Zapatista sources is warranted.

The Zapatista Revolution offers something that the other societies that I have listed do not, namely its own contemporary voice. Inasmuch as the Zapatista revolution is an ongoing project, it continues to narrate itself mostly in the words of Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (now Galeano as a tribute to a comrade assassinated by paramilitary forces). Marcos entered the scene with a ski mask and a pipe, riding his horse, and immediately became a popular icon adorning t-shirts and souvenirs in shops around the world. A (post)modern che Guevara, Marcos’ figure has been broadcasted excessively by the media as the face of the Zapatista movement. Although Marcos has rejected this personalism, he is also the author of most communiques on behalf of the movement.

Therefore, in what follows I cite Marcos often but when I do so, the reader should take this to mean the Zapatistas as a whole. In some cases, the words are announcements and

manifestos from the command of its armed branch – Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) – in others they are open letters and essays. In any case, the Zapatistas speak as a movement with many voices, faces, and languages all channeled through Marcos, but we should avoid idolizing the masked man as the media has done. The Zapatistas do not have a Lenin or a Mao. Rather, Zapatismo should be understood as a collective that gives a voice to the voiceless. Everyone leads, and everyone obeys. “Behind us, we are you, [Detras de nosotros, estamos ustedes]” writes Marcos (2001a, 103) thereby highlighting that leaders and community are interchangeable.

The Zapatista movement showed its face to the world on the morning of January 1st of 1994, when the EZLN composed by men and women of Tsotsil, Tseltal, Ch’ol, and Tojolaba ethnicities occupied several governmental and municipal buildings in the state of Chiapas. Although Marcos became an iconic representation of Zapatismo as I noted above, it was an indigenous woman, Subcomandanta Ramona, who planned and executed the military operation. On the same day that NAFTA was implemented, the “poor of the poor” armed with old guns, sticks, and even cardboard cutouts of rifles, barefoot, and hungry, emerged from the jungle to shout *¡Ya basta!* (Enough is enough!). The uprising had been brewing under the surface for at least 10 years before the Zapatistas surfaced, but the conditions leading to it are much older. Asked about her age, in 1994 Capitan Insurgente Maribel responds, “five hundred and two,” the number of years since Columbus set foot in America. She is as old as the rebellion, Marcos (2001b, 9) notes.

For more than a hundred years, the rural landscape in Chiapas has been characterized by a semi-feudal mode of organization headed by rich landowners and ranchers who have historically exploited indigenous peasants. A legacy of colonial times, this arrangement was

replicated throughout rural Latin America, especially in the 19th and 20th century, and sadly still survives in many countries of the region. Although slavery was formally illegal, the peasantry was practically enslaved by rich landowners. Indebted for life, peons worked for miserable wages, barely enough food to survive, and a meager roof to sleep at night. In this abject state of dependence, the fortunes of peasants have been inexorably linked to the whims of landowners.

These conditions have been a recipe for a distinctively Latin American form of political clientelism. A person who controls the livelihood of a few thousand people can assure a few thousand votes to a candidate. Landowners and politicians, therefore, developed a relationship of spurious symbiosis whereby one defends the interests of the other and vice versa. Political power ignores and sometimes aids in the abuses committed against peasants, and landowners guarantee that those peasants vote for the party in power.

Against this background, Emiliano Zapata led a peasant revolt in the state of Morelos – part of a series of protests that took part during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Zapata’s movement demanded a significant land reform to ameliorate the situation of an immiserated peasantry. Zapatismo and its revolutionary army conducted expropriations and reorganized haciendas under egalitarian arrangements that redistributed large swathes of land among peasants. For four years the Morelos commune, which would serve as inspiration for modern-day Zapatistas, was as an autonomous territory organized along these lines and the center of Zapatismo.

After a long and bloody struggle, the Mexican army “pacified” Morelos, and Zapata was assassinated by agents of the government in 1919. Yet, the reforms and ideas that his movement introduced were almost irreversible. Zapatismo became tremendously influential in the civil society and eventually reached political spheres in Mexico. In the mid-30s president Lázaro

Cárdenas (this last name will show up again later in connection to present-day Zapatistas) implemented a land reform initiative that, although not as radical as Emiliano Zapata's original plan, redistributed considerable amounts of land among Mexican peasants. Cárdenas' reform created communal farms called *ejidos*, which were owned by the government but held and tended privately. That is, peasants had no ownership but harvest rights over these lands.

In the 40s and 50s, however, Mexican politics suffered a rightward shift and the government made substantial changes to the *ejido* system allowing landowners to rent *ejidos* from peasants. Still submerged in poverty and debt, and sometimes straddled with unproductive land, the peasants fell prey to desperation and soon enough most land was again in the hands of rich landowners, albeit formally the government remained the sole owner. In the end, although the balance between landowners and peasants became more equitable in some states, huge disparity remained the norm. Decades of exploitation followed Zapata's revolution and Cárdenas land reform. By the end of the 20th century, things had reverted to the days of large haciendas and a peasantry largely condemned to indebted peonage. Amidst these conditions, the modern Zapatista movement showed its face to the world.

Some researchers prefer the term neo-Zapatismo to differentiate the EZLN from Emiliano Zapata's original revolt. Rightly, the EZLN thinks that their struggle is merely a continuation after a long pause, and accordingly still call themselves Zapatistas. In this manner, they emphasize that the situation for Mexican peasants has not changed notwithstanding different governments, ideologies, movements, proper names, and more. Truly, the circumstances that led to Zapatismo in 1910 underlain the Zapatista revolt of 1994 but with one key difference, i.e., neoliberalism.

In the 90s, president Carlos Salinas de Gortari enacted a series of reforms that made Mexico the new darling of neoliberalism. Around the same time that neoliberal “shock therapy” was wreaking havoc around the world (e.g., Bolivia, Russia), its orthodoxy kept being pushed as the most efficient way to fight poverty. As usual, privatization was a large part of the agenda and everything under the sun (*inter alia*: railroads, oil, communications) was sold to private conglomerates. In 1992, Salinas de Gortari privatized the communal *ejidos* that had been a foundational aspect of land reform. Immediately, rich landowners “bought” the land. In reality, peasants were so highly indebted that they had already lost their parcels to the usurious practices of landowners. The public force was soon evicting peasants from their territories. Once again, robbery had been legalized through formal mechanisms.

It is especially ironic, or perhaps predictable, that Salinas de Gortari was the one behind this legal assault as his rise to power in 1988 was famously marred by accusations of electoral fraud later confirmed by historians, political analysts, and even by then sitting president Miguel de la Madrid. The legal winner, according to most experts, was left-wing candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas – son of Lázaro Cárdenas the architect of the *ejido* system. There were signs of alterations on a third of the vote tallies (Cantú 2019), and Salinas de Gortari’s government went as far as burning the ballots to avoid a recount. An illegal president legalized the neoliberal assault against Mexican institutions and people.

Salinas de Gortari promulgated these neoliberal reforms to show the international community that Mexico cultivated a “business-friendly” environment, which usually translates into people-hostile policies. In this atmosphere of neoliberal bonanza, the U.S., Canada, and Mexico approved and signed the NAFTA, a commercial treaty that had devastating effects both for the working class in the U.S. and small farmers across Mexico. Subsidized American corn

entered the market, prices dropped, and corn farmers went bankrupt. In this manner, the old and the new – colonialism, racism, and neoliberalism – combined to produce the storm where the Zapatista movement of Chiapas emerged like a thunderbolt to bring a flash of light.

A rebellion with “dark skin and an indigenous language” (Marcos 2001c,79), the Zapatista revolution never tried to overthrow the government or take absolute control like the Russian Revolution, for example. Rather, as Pappas (2017) highlights, the Zapatistas’ objective is to shed light on the effects of power (e.g., corruption, violence). Against zero-sum games that characterize traditional politics, the Zapatistas stress that they fight for a world where many worlds, i.e., many logics, can fit (Marcos 2001c, 80). Unlike the revolutions of the 20th century, the Zapatistas do not have a totalizing theory of history nor pretend that they are fulfilling a universal *telos*. Their demands and goals were much more modest.

Instead of continuing to die in silence, the indigenous people of Chiapas simply wanted to be recognized as human beings with rights to subsistence, education, democracy, and healthcare. Indeed, for Nancy Fraser (2007), what makes the Zapatistas an exemplar of social struggle in the 21st century is the fact that they have not limited themselves to claims of identity recognition alone. Rather, they have successfully incorporated issues of wealth redistribution in a manner that differentiates them from movements inscribed within the grammar of neoliberal progressivism. But going beyond Fraser, it is more accurate to suggest that the Zapatistas have focused not on the redistribution of capitalist profits but on a more profound reorganization of life. Specifically, as the philosopher (and Zapatista) Luis Villoro (2011) suggests, Zapatismo strives to put the common good back at the center of social life.

Zapatista protest moved from armed struggle, to a period of dialogue, to autonomy and self-sufficiency. The organization leading to modern day Zapatismo began in the 70s with the

work of a group of left-wing, mostly Maoist, volunteers, on one side, and a group of Catholic catechists influenced by Liberation Theology, on the other side. Separately, these groups helped hundreds of thousands poor peasants through educational and healthcare programs. In good Maoist fashion, the purpose of the volunteers was to develop a peasant guerrilla and eventually embark in an armed struggle to topple the government. The peasants, however, were not receptive to their ideas and, disillusioned, the Maoists eventually abandoned the area. It is on the ground of this failure to organize a Maoist guerrilla, however, that the EZLN – first as the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CRIC) – upsprung.

Invisible for decades, the Zapatista revolution put Chiapas, Mexico, and their cause on the map. Their struggle, the misery, the lack of basic services and roads, the malnutrition, the thousands of children and adults dying from curable diseases, the hubris left behind by oil and wood companies, everything was left naked out in the wild for everyone to see. Chiapas had to be seen but also served as a mirror where Mexican society had to confront the misery that “progress” had caused. Nonetheless, Zapatista struggle went beyond mourning and actively tried to fashion a new world. In this sense, inasmuch as they experiment and wrestle new possibilities out of what seemed to be foreclosed political options, the Zapatistas exemplify the “creative violence” that Fanon (2007) duly praises in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Indeed, for John Holloway and Eloína Peláez (1998), one of the most radical aspects of the Zapatista uprising is precisely that those who had been painted out of the world had the courage to show us that a new world is still possible.

Women deserve a special mention among Zapatistas. The Zapatista struggle is perhaps the first revolution where women have contributed in every possible role. In fact, a third of the EZLN soldiers are women. Gender egalitarianism is so important within the Zapatista

movement that before 1994 they had, as María Luisa Soriano (2019, 183) nicely puts it, a revolution within the revolution. Women challenged men to recognize the triple exploitation that they were subjected to, namely for being poor, indigenous, and women. In 1993, after a series of discussions, indigenous women demanded to have the same political rights as men, the right to decide over their bodies, partners, and number of children, the right to be free and safe from domestic violence, etc. The movement inscribed these rights as the “Women’s Revolutionary Law,” which still applies to all people living in Zapatista autonomous territories. The internal revolution of 1993, thus, preceded the uprising of 1994.

The audacity of not being willing to die in silence for the sake of progress was answered with brutality by a coalition of private and governmental agencies. The government declared the EZLN a terrorist organization, prosecuted and jailed many of its members, and forced the rest to retreat into the jungle. After a period of negotiations, peace talks between the Zapatistas and the government were established in 1994. In 1995, however, a new president, Ernesto Zedillo, came to power with a different approach to the conflict. The army invaded rebel territories and heightened tensions throughout the state of Chiapas. Zedillo’s strategy was disastrous and a public relations nightmare. Mexican and international civil society condemned the attacks, and the Zapatista protest was publicly legitimized. Forced to change course, the government initiated a new peace process in 1996 that led to the San Andres Accords, which recognized indigenous rights and granted autonomy to Zapatista territories.

Although ratified in 1999, the government has never respected this agreement. Military presence intensified and worked in tandem with paramilitary forces organized by landowners to terrorize any peasants who dared helping the Zapatistas or even worse becoming one of them. This systematic harassment, along with other legal, yet vile, techniques such as providing

subsidies and loans for non-Zapatista populations alone, are common practices even today. One of the saddest examples of violence is the Acteal Massacre of 1997 where a paramilitary group, under the passive look of the Mexican army, killed 45 members (mostly women and children) of the pacifist group “Las Abejas” who were attending a religious ceremony. Their sin was being supporters, not even militants, of the EZLN. Incursions led by right-wing paramilitary forces are still fairly common in Zapatista territories.

Between the semblance of dialogue and the crude reality of bullets, the Zapatista revolution slowly moved into a third stage. After the government betrayed the San Andres Accords and dialogue seemed foreclosed, the Zapatistas decided to construct their own autonomous project (Starr, Martinez-Torres, and Rosset 2010). Zapatista society is based on four pillars, namely radical democracy, healthcare, education, and production.

Although in the beginning the Zapatista army (originally the CCRI), oversaw all affairs, decisions were always made through a participatory process with input from every community. This entails a long process whereby decisions are discussed at the community, municipal, and regional levels. Every member over 12 years old is expected to attend and participate in these meetings. Eventually, each level selects representatives – usually one man and one woman – to attend meetings at the upper level. At the end, every decision has to be approved by consensus and in some major cases it can take up to six months (Starr, Martinez-Torres, and Rosset 2010). ¿Acuerdo ya? (Agreement?), asks someone, and the crowd loudly replies yes to mark that an agreement has been reached.

Zapatista political organization is a radical exercise in participatory democracy. Elected officials follow the principle “*Mandar obedeciendo*” [Rule by obeying]. Leadership positions are temporary, unpaid, and more importantly, everyone in the community is expected to hold one

at some point. The idea, Starr, Martinez-Torres, and Rosset (2010, 105) explain, is that if everyone serves, then people will no longer be mystified by governmental processes. Furthermore, these style of horizontal democracy makes Zapatista society more durable in time. Without permanent leaders, the government, army, and paramilitaries do not have a “head” to kill.

Municipal leaders are selected through open community elections and then become part of a pool from which regional leaders are chosen. Eight to sixteen people serve as regional leaders for one to three years with “leave” periods of seven to ten days to attend other responsibilities (Starr, Martinez-Torres, and Rosset 2010). *Juntas* have commissions, which are the bodies of government that administer individual branches of services. There are commissions for healthcare, education, agricultural production, and more, and each one has *promotores* [promoters] to work in these areas. Teachers, for instance, are education promoters, and nurses are health promoters.

Finally, no one receives money for their services although the community takes care of their parcels and animals, and “pays” them back with communal produce. One thing is sure, no one gets rich serving in the government. It makes one wonder, how many Western-style career politicians would continue having a passion for civil service if they could not inherit their positions from their families, disenfranchise their constituents, gerrymander their way to power, make any money, have a cushy lobbying job waiting on the other side, and on top of that could be removed at any point?

These are the political mechanisms that Zapatistas have developed to administrate economic and civil affairs in their autonomous territories. To appreciate the staggering impact of what the Zapatistas have achieved through this model, let us consider that in Chiapas, the poorest

state in Mexico, seventy-six percent of people live in poverty and thirty percent in extreme poverty; obviously, extreme inequality is rampant. Bad as it is for everyone, poverty affects indigenous people (thirty-six percent of the population) by a factor of two compared to mestizos (Lopez and Nunez 2015). It is against this background that we have to evaluate the Zapatista autonomous model.

In terms of healthcare, Zapatista clinics have basic medical equipment and supplies, ultrasound machines, labs, prosthetics, and even offer specialty services such as dental care, ophthalmology, emergency rooms in some cases, and a system of ambulances that coordinate transfers across different *caracoles*. Women have their own specialized gynecological clinics. The Guadalupeana Autonomous Clinic, located in caracol Oventic (a.k.a., Resistance and Rebellion for Humanity), is the jewel in the crown of the Zapatista healthcare system. On a regular basis it performs minor surgeries, has dental, eye, and gynecological clinics, a laboratory, and an herbal workshop (Cueva 2007). Besides offering curative and palliative care, the system also focuses on preventive care. For example, the Zapatistas have their own vaccination program run independently from governmental agencies.

Preventive healthcare follows a bottom-up approach. It begins at the community level with the work of “*promotores de la salud*,” members of the communities who are not doctors but who have been trained in all sorts of roles (vaccination, first aid, nutrition, reproductive health). Each community has at least one promoter, who is also in charge of preparing others to eventually take over their job. Their main tasks are 1) educate the community on basic measures to prevent infectious diseases, 2) provide basic first-aid services, and 3) determine when patients require specialized care, in which case they are referred to one of the clinics. The promoters are so efficient that in 2008 they detected and alerted the government about an epidemic of

whooping cough spreading in the area, including non-Zapatista territories, long before any governmental agencies knew about it. As with every other Zapatista initiative, the cornerstone of the healthcare system is community involvement and support.

Clinics, nonetheless, are also staffed with professional physicians (volunteers, university students, or staffed personnel) that deal with more complex cases. When the situation requires special care that the clinic cannot manage, patients are then referred to government hospitals. The problem with governmental facilities is that most of the time they are poorly staffed, lack equipment or drugs, or sometimes are nothing but an empty, locked building with a sign that reads *Hospital*; sometimes politicians are in such a hurry to inaugurate new buildings that its contents become secondary. In fact, as journalists Fernández, Giraldo, and Marquez (2015) document, most of the time people seeking attention at governmental hospitals in the area are sent to Zapatista clinics.

One of the most important advances on healthcare among Zapatista communities has been maternal mortality. It should come as no surprise that the poorest state in Mexico also has the worst socio-demographic and health indicators. Indigenous women were especially susceptible to die during childbirth. In most cases, roads to clinics are barely usable, a trip can take 2 hours or more through muddy winding roads, and the cost of a taxi is prohibitive for most families. Therefore, almost 90 percent of indigenous women in rural communities give birth at home with the help of a midwife (Cueva 2007). The Zapatista approach has been double-pronged. First, they provide gynecological services and childbirth in clinics but also, following tradition, they have worked with midwives to capacitate them in things such as basic sterilization processes, dealing with hemorrhages, or when to refer a mother to a clinic. This marriage of Western medicine and native traditions perfectly illustrates what the Zapatistas means by a world

where many worlds can fit. Many logics and practices can coexist. This standpoint, however, does not fall into a sort of “postmodern” relativism. Although Zapatista healthcare has developed a friendly relationship with midwives, not all “traditional” practitioners have been accepted as part of the healthcare network. Western medicine to fight epidemics and seasonal diseases has taken precedence over *curanderos*, *hueseros*, and *hierberos* (Cueva 2007). In this sense, the Zapatistas demonstrate a healthy respect for tradition but without holding dogmatically to the past (or the future).

Given the difficulty that compounding reliable data among remote communities posits and the fact that the government has also promoted campaigns to decrease maternal mortality, it is hard to quantify precisely how much of the success is attributable to Zapatista initiatives. Nonetheless, the rate has declined dramatically (Fernandez, Giraldo, and Marquez 2015), and it is fair to assume that Zapatista healthcare has played a significant role considering that midwives are still the main source of care during childbirth in rural communities.

Likewise, child mortality has also declined dramatically since preventive medicine programs and vaccinations are widely available. Sadly, maternal (76.7 per 100,000 live births) and child mortality (16.9 per 1,000 live births) are still high; Finally, a very important aspect of Zapatista healthcare that is worth mentioning is the humane approach that characterizes their clinics. Indigenous communities report feeling respected and listened at these clinics, unlike at governmental dependencies where discrimination, racism, long-waits, etc. are rampant (Fernandez, Giraldo, and Marquez 2015). Human dignity is hard to quantify, but it is a crucial part of what makes the Zapatista project admirable.

In terms of education, the Zapatista autonomous system, which follows democratic and organizational directives similar to what I have described in relation to healthcare, has also been

rather successful. Every *caracol* offers primary (elementary) education, i.e., first through sixth grade. Oventic also offers secondary education – sixth to twelfth grade. Zapatistas have developed their own decolonial curriculum. Western narratives have been decentered, although not removed completely, and indigenous children also learn to appreciate and respect their own history, which includes an overview of Toltecas, Chichimecas, Mayas, and also Zapatistas. At the same time, math and literacy classes follow the traditional curriculum.

Democracy is also at work here. Each community nominates and elects a teacher, who later comes under the supervision of the municipal education committee. When a teacher has been selected, they negotiate with parents the curriculum, pedagogical approach, and even methods of evaluation. These negotiations are autonomous for each community and are tailored to fit the needs of each locality. Apart from math, literacy, and history, which are obligatory subjects, the classes can focus more on agricultural techniques, ecology, or veterinary skills depending on what the community finds appropriate (Baronnet 2015). Once they agree on these issues, they proceed to negotiate a “salary” to be paid in maize communally produced. The payment should be sufficient to cover their families’ expenses. In relation to educational goals, the statistics are more transparent. The literacy rate in Zapatista territories went from 65.5 percent in 1994 to 86 percent in 2010. In this sense, Fernandez, Giraldo, and Marquez (2015) note, Zapatista results mirror those of the government, albeit without the corresponding resources.

Considering that Zapatistas do not accept any money from the (bad) government, their initiatives are funded through their economic activities and also with donations from national and international NGOs. Zapatista economic production is the fourth pillar of its social life, and like

that of the groups that I have detailed in this chapter, it is structured around communalism and egalitarianism.

This form of “socialism in living,” once again, is based on traditional indigenous practices but is also the consequence of a fiercely anti-capitalist worldview. As I noticed before, NAFTA devastated agriculture in Mexico and especially in Chiapas. Subsidized American corn swamped the market, and Chiapaneco peasants were not competitive. Of course, as it happens with much of so-called competitive markets, the conditions are so unfavorable for some people that evidently there is no competition at all. For Chiapaneco peasants, the lack of roads makes the transport of products difficult if not impossible. Forced migration as a consequence of profound economic crises reduced considerably the labor force, and neoliberal reforms cut back essential public services in the name of efficiency and austerity (Starr, Martinez- Torres, and Rosset 2011).

To confront these adverse conditions, the Zapatistas have adopted socialist arrangements. Work is conducted in cooperatives that produce corn, beans, coffee, handcrafts, clothes – recently even “Zapatourism” has also become a small source of income. In this manner, Zapatista peasants are not forced to sell their produce at prices below market value to large haciendas in charge of distribution. Likewise, the Zapatistas have developed programs to educate the communities in agricultural, or to be more precise “ecoagricultural,” techniques to free themselves from the dependence to harmful pesticides, genetically modified seeds, and other staples of industrial farming that are used to exploit small agricultural producers.

As with every other socialist arrangement considered here, among Zapatistas there is no private property. No one accumulates enough to exploit anybody else. The mechanisms to discourage exploitation also emerge organically and are based on ancient traditions. There are

no written codes forbidding exploitation, but there are committees in charge of administering justice and mediating when conflicts arise.

The Zapatista justice system is also commendable for its non-punitive approach. Zapatista justice focuses on making reparations to the community. “Punishment” usually consists of working on communitarian projects (e.g., planting 1,000 trees) and does not carry a permanent record or consequences, although in grave cases the offender can be expelled from Zapatista territory (Starr, Martinez- Torres, and Rosset 2011). As soon as the community has been compensated, the transgressors are welcomed back with no hesitation. In fact, non-Zapatista communities tend to contact Zapatista justice authorities for mediation instead of approaching traditional governmental institutions. How different U.S. society would be without the punitive laws that disproportionally feeds bodies of color to the carceral system, for example. Yet, we are supposed to believe that ours is the most rational way of organizing society.

The Zapatista revolution, overall, is a magnificent achievement but its limitations and complications are also numerous. Notwithstanding great advancements, Zapatista communities still live in conditions of poverty. Of course, throughout history relative scarcity and poverty has not prevented people from having fulfilling lives. The Zapatistas face different obstacles, however. Like most native populations, they struggle against a modern world that finds their practices, traditions, and livelihoods a hurdle to progress, a remnant of the past. Piling on top of a legacy of colonial injustice and behind a neoliberal agenda, large corporations deplete their resources, poison their territories, and government-backed paramilitary forces kill them. As Marcos (2001d, 74) notes, capitalism covers the ethnocide(s) that it produces with rationality. All is justified in the name of profit. Surviving and reproducing for thirty years in this environment, and in their own terms, is meritorious.

Perhaps, the Zapatistas would be much better if they had joined the “modern world.” After all, their socio-economic indicators are not that different from non-Zapatista territories in Chiapas. Of course, the Zapatista political project partly reveals the false hopes lying behind “integration,” which more accurately means migration, poorly paid jobs, abandonment of traditions, lack of education, autonomy, and a social fabric in shambles. A lot of native communities around the world have very little to show for joining modernity. As such, and notwithstanding their short existence, Zapatista culture has proved effective, hitherto, at establishing an autonomous community within a larger state that is in many senses diametrically opposed, and hostile, to their aims.

More importantly, the Zapatista revolution is an exercise in human dignity. Taking matters into their own hands gives Zapatista territories a sense of meaning that governmental subsidies could not provide. Devoid from culture, land, and means of subsistence, non-Zapatista Chiapaneco peasants mostly depend on the “kindness” of the government or private hands. Tellingly, after the uprising, and to discourage adherence and support, the government inundated the area with subsidies, small loans, and even built a few schools and hospitals. The only condition to receive these favors is not joining the Zapatista movement.

Although both Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas live in conditions of poverty, it is much easier to accept government help to survive. First, it minimizes the chances of being attacked by the army, police, or paramilitary forces. Second, Zapatista discipline is not easy to follow. Alcohol, for example, is forbidden in Zapatista territory as a measure to combat domestic violence. Furthermore, Zapatista affiliation entails a decent amount of communitarian work to perform, meetings to attend, municipal and regional committees to serve in, teaching, imparting justice, etc. Yet, more than 360,000 people elect this model to live and raise their families. The

sense attached to belonging to a community, to live according to their culture and traditions proves to be more important than mere economic incentives. As Marcos (2001e, 269) writes, the Zapatistas demonstrate that “Dignity cannot be studied; you live it, or it dies.”

Conclusion

There are three lessons to derive from the examples presented in this chapter: 1) Socialism has successfully existed throughout human history. For capitalists, the failures of the 20th century indicate that socialism has never worked. Socialists, on the other hand, appeal to escapism and respond that “true” socialism has never been tried. These two positions are myths that should be put to rest. Hundreds of societies across space and time have lived according to socialist principles such as egalitarianism, common ownership of resources, and generalized reciprocity. Industrial, European socialism, on the other hand, has never been effectively implemented, which leads to the second point.

2) The most successful examples of socialism come from non-Western, pre-industrial societies. This fact should raise some doubts vis-à-vis European notions such as the role of capitalism as a civilizing force, the proletariat as messiah, or the inevitability of socialism arising out of capitalism. Equality, fraternity, solidarity, democracy, freedom, etc. have existed in different forms and for thousands of years before European philosophy, ancient and modern, claimed them as their own inventions. The fact that Europe had to remind itself that these were human values points at the contradictions and traditionally hidden shortcomings of an otherwise successful model.

3) Compared to the recent history of capitalism, the permanence of socialist societies indicates that, if anything, this form of organization is much more natural for human beings. Primitive communism, as Lee (1988) suggests, was the original condition of our ancestors.

Instead of adopting the same problematic language, I have suggested calling these arrangements “socialism in living.” More importantly, the fact that so many human societies have been able to organize according to socialist principles without writing, academic discourses, or complex institutions underscores the “naturalness” of this mode of life. People living in different geographical environments, from different races, gender, ages, with different degrees of social complexity, religions, and socio-political institutions developed in one way or another mechanisms and institutions to successfully manage common resources and enforce egalitarianism indicates the presence of universal, evolved dispositions at work. Finally, these evolutionary structures are still part of us.

Yet, capitalism has spread successfully over the last 200 years, and the worlds of our ancestors seem so foreign that suggesting a return would probably elicit somewhat deserved mockery. To make things more complicated, Henrich (2020) argues that WEIRD (Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic) people have different minds. Unknowingly and on purpose, Western culture has developed an individualistic outlook that aligns more closely with capitalism than with old forms of socialism. In other words, Westerners minds can process capitalist ideas (e.g., private property, individualism) with more ease.

Although this is true to a certain extent, there are two important caveats to consider. First, WEIRD people are weird, i.e., an exception, in the world but also in WEIRD societies. It is obvious that traditional college undergraduates filling surveys and signing up for experiments are not universal representatives of humanity at large, but the truth is that these participants are not even representative of their own societies. Second, even in capitalist societies people live, albeit to a lesser degree, according to socialist principles. Indeed, in these societies pockets of “socialist resistance” usually exist among the marginalized. Therefore, the next, and final,

chapter will address the issue at stake, namely, can socialism exist in the modern world or have WEIRD minds closed the door forever to this form of socio-political organization?

Chapter Five – WEIRD Minds, weird People, WEIRD Socialism

By now it should be clear that capitalism is not a tendency towards which humanity gravitates when all “fettters” (e.g., feudal lords, kings) are removed as Meiksins Wood (2017) nicely puts it. On the contrary, capitalism is a historical, contingent, and context-bounded form of social organization with a rather short history that has worked with a limited segment of the world population. Its naturalness qua inevitability or optimality, therefore, is debatable. In this sense, I detailed the long and well-documented history of socialistic practices that have characterized hundreds of human groups for thousands of years.

The fact that so many societies have successfully organized around principles such as common ownership, generalized reciprocity, and egalitarianism should put to rest the notion that socialism goes against human nature. Yet, this does not solve a question that still lingers, why does capitalism work even if it is with a small segment of humanity? And, why does that small segment has been able to spread its institutions, ideas, and practices, even if they are odd for most people in the world?

These questions take us back to the issue of what counts as natural for human beings. I have suggested that human nature emerges from the causal multidirectional entanglement of environmental, cultural, and biological information. To understand capitalism and its relationship to human nature, thus, we have to analyze the ways in which it interacts with our biology and minds to modulate our behavior as any other cultural package does. To a certain degree, capitalism has taken over the world, but at the same time, it has only spread *successfully* among a limited set of populations, i.e., Western Europe and a few Asian countries (e.g., Japan, China, South Korea). By this I mean, Western and capitalist institutions have been copied or imposed throughout the world, but they have only been effectively introduced in these small

number of countries and usually adapted to local practices and beliefs. So, why does capitalism work well with some people but not with others?

In *The Weirdest People of All*, Joseph Henrich (2020) has come up with a partial answer to this question, albeit indirectly. That is, Henrich is not concerned with the origin of capitalism per se, but his purpose is to explain Western prosperity and other quirks that characterize its people. Yet, as I will show, a substantial portion of the puzzle “capitalism/human nature,” has been solved by Henrich’s work. Western people, Henrich argues, are psychologically (and neurologically) different. Unlike most humans that have lived, and live today in most of the world, Western people are highly individualistic, self-obsessed, control-oriented, non-conformist, analytic thinkers, and overconfident in their talents (Henrich 2020, 21).

As an acronym coined by Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) elegantly suggests, Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic (WEIRD) people are weird compared to the rest of the world. These characteristics, Henrich suggests, are the unintended consequences of changes introduced by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages that weakened traditional networks of kinship and partly explain the economic prosperity of the West and its success “exporting” its culture throughout the world. Naturally, there is a dark side to this story, which Henrich (2020) acknowledges yet does not address given the limitations of a book that already undertakes a monumental task. In the second chapter, I highlighted the violence that apologists of capitalism traditionally sweep under the rug of progress, so we can move on here bracketing the issue for now without forgetting that the innovations of the West usually came accompanied by gunpowder and steel.

My purpose is to understand what makes some minds more readily prepared to “run” capitalism and its suite of ideas and behaviors and whether this presents an unsurmountable

obstacle to any future (Western) socialisms. As it will be clear by the end of this chapter, even if Western minds are an anomaly in human history, the prospect of socialism is not doomed. To make my argument clear, this chapter is divided as follows. First, I summarize Henrich's argument on the "uniqueness" of Western minds. Then, I suggest that although Western minds might be different and, in this vein, more prone to capitalistic arrangements, old socialist structures remain firmly in place. If anything, it will be apparent, WEIRD minds expand the possibilities of socialism because they are able to process impersonal relationships with more ease. In other words, whereas older socialist societies worked based on real or imagined ties of kinship (e.g., the *ayllu*), WEIRD people, in theory at least, can behave similarly but in impersonal settings. In this vein, in the following sections I consider two paradigmatic examples that show that socialism is part of the WEIRD philosophical and political repertoire. In section two, I focus on the work of John Rawls. As I will explain, Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, by far the most influential academic work of political philosophy in the Anglo tradition in the 20th century, can be read as a defense of a WEIRD form of socialism. To conclude with a more tangible example, in the third, and final, section I move into the realm of non-ideal theory, in Rawlsian terms. The Black Panther Party (BPP), I argue, illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations of socialism at work in a WEIRD society.

The Weirdest People

In the following pages, I reconstruct Henrich's argument vis-à-vis the rise of the West. Although there are parts where a critical reader will protest against this sort of (Western) epic, I shall reserve any comments for later. First, we have to understand clearly what is original about Henrich's position and how it sheds light on capitalism and human nature. As I noted above, the acronym WEIRD was coined by Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) in a famous paper that

made a splash in the discipline of psychology, and all social sciences at large. Crucially, Henrich et al. found that almost 90 percent of studies published in psychology recruited American (or European) undergraduates as experimental subjects. Nonetheless, Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) warned, psychologists tend to make universal claims about human behavior based on empirical evidence collected from this rather limited pool of subjects. WEIRD people, it turns out, are not representative of most humans that have lived and still live today. As I noticed earlier, Western psychologies are rather odd, and undergraduates, to make things worse, are even bigger outliers. In other words, the version of human nature that psychologists have constructed is in reality unrepresentative of our species not only today but also for more than 99 percent of its history. In this manner, not unlike philosophers, psychologists and economists, among others, have universalized a provincial view of human nature, which nevertheless still adorns psychology and economics textbooks.

Although Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) critique was a key intervention that the social sciences still reckon with, Henrich remained dissatisfied with the fact that the acronym elegantly labeled a problem but did not explain anything in itself. *The Weirdest People of All* (2020) is an impressive effort to solve this issue and account for the origin of WEIRD minds and their relationship to the rise of the West. For Henrich, the key to understand these questions is a number of religious changes that unleashed unforeseen consequences.

The ideas that led to this conclusion were originally developed by a group of researchers that included Henrich (see Schultz et al. 2019), and I summarize it in what follows. Moved by a desire to stop incest, in 597 CE, the Catholic Church, through Pope Gregory I, forbid marriage among first cousins in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Almost two hundred years later, the Church introduced another key policy to label any children born out of cousin marriage or secondary

wives as illegitimate. Eventually the Church adopted the Marriage and Family Program (MFP), which went into effect for every territory under its influence. The MFP extended marriage bans to distant cousins, step relatives, and in-laws. These changes led to smaller, nuclear families thereby weakening extended kinship structures that had characterized European life up to that point.

Suddenly, people were forced to “shop around” for husbands and wives and consequently became less attached to their families and towns, i.e., more mobile. Tellingly, from 1000 – 1250 CE, urbanization sprawled throughout areas influenced by the MFP. New merchant towns sprouted everywhere, and the market penetrated deeply in every sphere of life. By the year 1500, i.e., almost a thousand years after the first seeds of the MFP were planted, all these radical changes had made all Westerners and their descendants psychologically and neurologically different, Henrich (2020) explains.

Moreover, a set of highly individualistic behaviors emerged as part of a package useful to navigate these newly formed WEIRD societies. Equipped with “different minds,” these people developed new ideas, institutions, practices, etc. that became staples of Western civilization. In other words, by virtue of our biocultural constitutions, cultural evolution, accidentally, changed human nature in less than a millennium with genes playing an almost negligible role (Henrich 2020, 483).

WEIRD minds are another instance of how culture creates ways of thinking (Heyes 2018) in a manner that makes it impossible to separate it from our biology. It is in this sense alone that capitalism turns out to be natural. Inasmuch as capitalism is a product of human culture – an unintended one for all that matters – its naturalness cannot be questioned. On the other hand, the notion that capitalism is natural qua genetic destiny, universal, or inevitable is straightforwardly

false. In fact, if Henrich is correct, and the evidence on his side is overwhelming, then two key points about capitalism and human nature follow. First, capitalism is natural only for a very small section of the world. As I mentioned in chapter two, history shows that capitalism did not spread easily, and Henrich might have given us a key to understand why this is the case. Namely, most minds were not equipped to run capitalism as a cultural package, thus its dehumanizing effects (e.g., loss of meaning, loneliness).

Second, as Henrich (2020, 121) notices, there is no direct path from hunter-gatherer societies to premodern states, to WEIRD societies. The former two were based on institutions derived from systems of kinship that simply could not have produced the psychologies that “Western civilization” relies on. In other words, the idea that humanity has always been inexorably moving toward capitalism and that its practices and values are as old as our species is blatantly false. The fact that capitalism emerged and spread in Europe is an accident that can be linked to the unforeseen consequences of changes in religious norms as much as other historical contingencies that I detailed in chapter two.

But with all their differences, WEIRD minds are still human minds. A few hundred years of cultural changes might alter psychologies considerably but still do not dissolve millions of years of evolution. Humans are humans notwithstanding some differences. Westerners might be outliers in a battery of tests to gauge individualism, conformism, analytical skills, impersonal prosociality, respect for elders and tradition, and more. Yet, we are also referring to the same people who supported monarchies and fascist leaders (and continue to do so), colonized and enslaved millions of people around the world, fought two world war, and countless regional conflicts, fell prey to consumerism and a mindless culture industry based on mass consumption, relinquished all semblance of democracy at the workplace, engage in nepotism, believe in

conspiracy theories, etc. Importantly, like all humans Westerners are also irrationally generous, cooperative, empathetic, and more. WEIRD people are not a different species.

Thus, we have to be careful and avoid overstating the differences between WEIRD and non-WEIRD populations as an unbridgeable gap. Indeed, Henrich does not set a dichotomy between these two modes of being in the world. Not only that psychological differences are not essential or unchangeable (Henrich 2020, 31), but also that even within WEIRD societies there is tremendous variation. People in North Dakota and New Hampshire, for example, exhibit high levels of impersonal trust, i.e., trust in strangers, but Alabama and Mississippi score very low on the same measurement (Henrich 2020, 46). Of course, this is not puzzling considering the history of the south and the culture of racial animosity that it has produced. People with a distinct “Us vs. Them” mentality will naturally trust strangers less than those who come from more equal environments. The point is that WEIRD psychologies do not exist independent from context. As everything related to human nature, psychology, biology, and culture are always intertwined and modulate every behavior.

Yet, the evidence still posits another problem for my overall argument. Let us assume that we can put to rest the notion that capitalism is natural in the sense of universal and transhistorical. Then, let us also pretend that we accept the fact that socialism has existed throughout human history, hence we can get rid of the “unnatural” label that has been unfairly attached to it. One problem remains, however; capitalism is still natural for (some) people in the West and moving beyond it would negate their natural inclinations, which would be hard, complicated, and painful. After all, if the West exhibits new psychological dispositions, (re)adopting old socialist structures would be too complicated, perhaps, impossible.

But as I have suggested, assuming that the nature of Westerners has been radically altered essentializes WEIRD psychologies in a manner that is straightforwardly incorrect. After all, institutions and cultural practices reinforce these dispositions by encouraging and rewarding them. That is, if westerners are more individualistic than most people in the world it is partly because of their minds but also due to a socio-political form of organization that encourages this worldview. Consider, for example, the fact that Latin America, like Western Europe and the United States, has low kinship intensity, i.e., people tend to be neighbors with strangers and not family. This characteristic is strongly correlated with high individualism, but unlike the United States and Europe, Latin Americans score low on the individualism scale (Henrich 2020, 203). Once again, human behavior can only be understood in context. WEIRD minds are not wired to be highly individualistic, capitalistic, or anything without the modulating power of other variables.

Rather, for Henrich, a consequence of WEIRD psychologies is that new ideas became “easier,” or more intuitive, to think (e.g., individualism, autonomy). But that does not entail that the old ideas suddenly disappeared or became hard and counterintuitive. In fact, as I suggested in chapter three, socialism was a protest against the changes that industrialization had introduced and that attacked precisely old practices and institutions. That is, 19th century socialism (devised by WEIRD minds) was a way of saying “The new world is difficult.” Moreover, many groups – especially marginalized and oppressed – have traditionally organized around socialist principles even within WEIRD societies (e.g., unions, collective housing, anarchist and religious communities). As I will show next, not only that Western psychologies have not doomed socialism, but also the same cultural evolutionary forces, perhaps, could open a backdoor to a socialist future.

WEIRD (Ideal) Socialism

People from small-scale societies with little market integration are prosocial, cooperative, and generous. Markets, on the other hand, make people self-centered, individualistic, and competitive. Paradoxically, in a series of cross-cultural studies conducted by psychologists around the world, people from societies with high market integration tended to be more generous than their small-scale counterparts (Henrich et al. 2001; Henrich et al. 2005). As a side note, every single society considered in these studies deviated considerably from the rational, self-interested paradigm of classical economics. Even among the “least generous” society, the Machiguenga of Peru, players offered 27.5 percent more than what would maximize their payoff (Gintis, van Schaik, and Boehm 2019). Yet, there was surprising variation among cultures in terms of their generosity measured through a series of economic games (e.g., Ultimatum, Dictator).

The key to understand these differences, Henrich argues, is what sort of prosocial behavior is dominant in each type of society. Small-scale societies are characterized by interpersonal prosociality, whereas market societies are based on impersonal prosociality. The strong kinship networks that underlie small-scale societies – the Inka *ayllu* and its familial structure comes to mind – play a fundamental role evoking and directing generosity, empathy, cooperativeness, and other prosocial behaviors toward kin or familiar faces. In WEIRD societies, conversely, impersonal rules, markets, and prosociality are necessary for the smooth functioning of cities, neighborhoods, organizations, institutions, and more constituted mainly by strangers.

In other words, under the right cultural cues, WEIRD psychologies easily extend trust, cooperation, generosity, etc. beyond circles of kinship. What WEIRD societies accomplished, to

a certain extent, is making a norm out of the fact that even strangers among “Us” can be trusted for the sake of peaceful and ordered coexistence. Of course, many internal “them(s)” differentiated along the lines of race, gender, religion, class sexual orientation, and more are still subjected to all kinds of violence in WEIRD societies.

Nonetheless, high impersonal prosociality suggests that socialism in a WEIRD society would not have to be grounded on systems of kinship that have largely disappeared from the modern world but can be based on impersonal and anonymous rules to guarantee a fair distribution of goods. This is a crucial detail to understand why and how socialism could work today. Minds that can process impersonal transactions with ease are more prone to construct socialist niches that go beyond small communities or that are based on a limited set of ethnic markers (e.g., religion, language).

In fact, the social contract tradition in the West represents in many senses an effort along these lines. In this vein, the political work of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant share a question in common, namely how can a group of strangers live together in harmony? It seems all-too obvious for socio-political philosophy to address this inquiry, but it is important to remember that the notion of strangers with different customs, languages, and accents living together is a fairly recent phenomenon in human history. Furthermore, a large number of strangers living together is a WEIRD problem that evidently preoccupied WEIRD philosophers.

In the 20th century, John Rawls considered the question of peaceful coexistence adding distributive justice as another layer of complexity to the social contract tradition. In other words, how can strangers share social goods in a manner that guarantees a just, stable system? Remarkably, Rawls, the most prominent political philosopher of the Anglo-American tradition (which is as WEIRD as it gets) proposed a society roughly built along the lines of socialism. On

this point I follow William Edmundson (2017) who cogently suggests that Rawls' political philosophy embraced socialist principles albeit reticently.

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls (1971) argues that a just society is one built on principles of justice as fairness. To ensure an egalitarian outcome along the lines of justice as fairness, the members of Rawls' ideal society would agree about its structuring principles in advance and without knowing about their social positions. Behind a "veil of ignorance," as Rawls called it, the actors would not know about their abilities, class, gender, race, etc., and therefore select a society based on rules that would not privilege some groups or oppress others given that nobody knows their initial position.

In a nutshell, through a sophisticated use of analytical philosophy and economics, *A Theory of Justice* formalized what has been a millenary rule to distribute goods fairly, "If you divide, I pick." As Rawls himself noticed, to share a cake fairly the best way to proceed is to have the person who cuts the pieces pick hers last. This guarantees that the person cutting would put some effort in dividing the cake evenly. Likewise, for Rawls, remaining behind the veil of ignorance in relationship to one's position in the system ensures that people would choose the most just basic structure. Rawls, we must notice, follows classical rational choice theory and assumes that the people involved are all rational and self-interested. These ideal actors, Rawls (1971, 60) thinks would derive two principles from the original position:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.

Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.

Simply put, these principles guarantee first, the maximum amount of basic liberties and opportunities for everyone, and second, that inequality will only be tolerated as long as it is also

a means to take care of the most disadvantaged in society. Finally, these principles follow a lexical order (Rawls 1971); that is, the first principle has to be satisfied before the second.

But a closer look at the theory of justice as fairness reveals that Rawls uses the resources of analytic philosophy and economic theory basically to suggest that a just society requires principles that guarantee an egalitarian outcome. Whereas many societies solved this issue in practice, but with the help of strong networks of kinship, in *A Theory of Justice* Rawls tries to answer, how do we enact an egalitarian society among WEIRD people? As a WEIRD philosopher, Rawls is a thinker who develops philosophical ideas within the constraints of “unique” Western psychologies. Yet, he also articulates the hopes and needs of a rather small sector of society with universalizing ambitions. In *The Racial Contract*, for example, Charles Mills (1997) aptly criticized the parochial nature of the social contract tradition in general, and Rawls in particular, for turning a blind eye to gendered, classed, and racialized oppression. Notwithstanding this critique, Mills also recognizes in Rawls an important, if unfulfilled, contribution to political theory, namely a rigorous conceptual analysis of a just society – one that with all its WEIRD quirks and methods leads to socialism, as Edmundson (2017) suggests.

Although Rawls wrote a *Theory of Justice* as an explicit refutation of utilitarianism, he has traditionally been read as a defender of welfare-state capitalism. The equivocation is perhaps understandable as Rawls endorses “property-owning democracy” along with “liberal socialism” as two systems that satisfy the principles of justice as fairness. Furthermore, the final sections of *A Theory of Justice*, dedicated to non-ideal theory, have some strong indications that Rawls understood the United States of his time a “reasonably just society.” Some critics of Rawls have gone as far as to claim that *A Theory of Justice* was a transcendental deduction of the U.S. with all its institutions and practices.

As Frank Lovett (2011) argues, however, capitalist societies are not compatible with justice as fairness because they do not care to improve the lives of the least advantaged. Decades later, Rawls (2001,135) made this point explicit in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* where he stresses that welfare capitalism, and much less laissez faire, could not satisfy the two principles of justice. In the same vein, in his lectures on political philosophy, Rawls (2008) claims that no form of capitalism can produce a just society because it simply allows for inequality to go largely unchecked.

Undoubtedly, Rawls' reputation as an apologist of (fettered) capitalism is partly a consequence of his own unwillingness to inveigh against it, instead opting for some tepid remarks and veiled swipes. Furthermore, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* has been mostly overlooked and did not receive the same attention as *A Theory of Justice*, which turned into an academic behemoth and sparked a huge literature defending, critiquing, and expanding its main argument. It is no exaggeration to suggest that Rawls created a *lingua franca* in political philosophy, and anyone who wished to be taken seriously, at least in Anglo-American circles, had to speak Rawlsian.

Yet, the uncontested dominance of Rawlsian political theory is undoubtedly a testament to Rawls' genius as much as to the parochiality of Western philosophy. According to the standard narrative, political philosophy was moribund until *A Theory of Justice* resuscitated it in 1971. But as Mills (2020) highlights, such history of the origins of political philosophy is covered in a mantle of "white ignorance" that conveniently excludes figures such as W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, Harry Haywood, C.L.R. James, Fanon, among others. In other words, Rawls made political philosophy palatable for a

section of academia that had overlooked the real social and political struggles that numerous groups faced in the U.S. and the authors writing about them.

Yet for all its limitations and gaps, Rawls's conceptualization of the basic structure of a just society is still a powerful tool of analysis precisely because it exposes capitalism as an inherently unjust system. Indeed, for Edmundson (2017), Rawls' utopia can only come true in a socialist society. To arrive to this conclusion, Edmundson conducts an immanent analysis, i.e., following its own terms and presuppositions, of Rawlsian political theory. Specifically, the late Rawls (2001) listed five regimes, namely laissez-faire capitalism, state socialism with a command economy, welfare-state capitalism, liberal democratic socialism, and property-owning democracy, as possible candidates to instantiate justice as fairness. From this list, only the last two, Rawls argued, could satisfy the principles of justice. However, he never specified whether one or the other is preferable, more just, or even desirable. Edmundson's (2017, 186) original contribution is arguing that given the choice between "property-owning democracy" and "liberal socialism," Rawls would, perhaps reticently, choose the latter.

Edmundson grounds his conclusion on the idea of stability, an important component of Rawls' conceptual apparatus. The issue at stake is the following, what would guarantee stability in a society founded according to the principles of justice as fairness? In *A Theory of Justice* social stability comes from 1) human's rational life plan – the most rational thing to do is to follow the laws that we have given ourselves, as Kant argued – and 2) a psychological sense of justice where reciprocity plays a crucial role. Later, however, the most desirable kind of stability comes from an "overlapping consensus" of different worldviews (e.g., religious beliefs, ideologies) that are reasonably accommodated in a society. In any case, for Edmundson (2017), only socialism provides the setting where both justice as fairness can flourish and maintain the

sort of social stability that Rawls espouses because it curbs inequality through the socialization of “major” means of production. By major, Edmundson (2017, 150) refers to means of production that everyone needs to access in order to have a normal and full life (e.g., food, basic utilities).

Property-owning democracy, also a suitable candidate, Edmundson highlights, does not allow for socially owned means of production, even if, as Rawls imagines, the system would have laws in place to curtail excessive accumulation. But the simple prospect of private actors pushing for ownership of an increased share of the market is enough to make this system unstable in a Rawlsian sense, Edmundson evinces. That is, the specter of inequality would always loom large under property-owning democracy, which necessarily makes it more unstable than socialism. In this manner, Edmundson arrives to the main point of his book: Rawls’ utopia is a socialist society.

To this, I add that Rawls has in mind a WEIRD socialist society. Like the socialists of the 18th and 19th century, Rawls devises a solution to the problem of inequality and the strain that it puts on the social fabric. Yet, Rawls’ ideal society is based on rational self-interest, impartial rules, and other staples of WEIRD thinking instead of appealing to old traditions and practices. Cooperativeness, empathy, inequity aversion, in this light, are merely the outcome of enlightened self-interest and serve to safeguard each actor’s well-being.

Had Rawls considered the primordial role of ancient affective mental structures in more detail, he would have concluded that his society is not as utopian as it seems. Rawls’ socialism does not have to depend on enlightened, self-interest but can count on the natural inclinations of our species. Yet, a discussion of the limitations of Rawlsian philosophy is not within the scope of this chapter. What I want to stress is the fact that as Rawls and his legacy demonstrate, even

in the 20th and 21st centuries, WEIRD political philosophy keeps coming back to ancient questions, if not to the solutions, about egalitarianism. Notwithstanding problematic omissions in terms of race, gender, and class, WEIRD minds in academic circles did not stop thinking about the prospects of real equality.

Rawls, of course, never went beyond ideal theory because allegedly it “yields a systematic understanding of how to reform our non-ideal world” (Wenar 2017). In the final chapter of *Rawls, Reticent Socialist*, Edmundson (2017) tries to go a step beyond and considers whether Rawlsian theory can shed light on political alternatives to oppose present-day neoliberalism. A legal scholar, Edmundson especially focuses on the constitutionality of certain actions necessary to transition to socialism. For example, he recovers a key insight from Austrian economist Rudolf Hilferding who noticed that capitalist accumulation facilitates, to a certain extent, the task of socialism given that wealth is so disproportionately concentrated that expropriating only a few corporations (e.g., Amazon, Alphabet, Walmart) would be enough to transition into a system of socially owned means of production without touching middle and small-size businesses.

The question, from Edmundson’s perspective is how to legally enshrine these actions in a way that guarantees stability in a socialist society. Yet, for all his valuable contributions both in terms of ideal and non-ideal theory, Edmundson remains shackled to the consideration of what ifs. After all, there has never been anything remotely close to a Rawlsian social experiment. And although Rawls (2008) was highly sympathetic of Marx, he never pretended to be interested in more than interpreting the world.

Perhaps, the sterile character of Rawlsian theory is also partly responsible for its popularity. Enmeshed in transcendental deductions of a just society, philosophers have avoided

the messiness of the so-called non-ideal world. Socio-political reality, of course, is covered in blood, grime, tears and sweat, and progress has been spearheaded by the work of activists and revolutionaries who have hit the ground to push toward a just society. Therefore, from Rawls we can conclude that socialism, at least in theory, is desirable and popular even among WEIRD philosophical circles but not much more. However, as I have mentioned before, it is still revealing that the most acclaimed political philosopher in the hyper WEIRD analytical tradition turns out to defend a (perhaps closeted) version of socialism.

But beyond this, Rawlsian theory does not allow for any sort of empirical analysis in relationship to socialism in the U.S. At best, *A Theory of Justice* suggests that ideally a group of WEIRD minds behind a veil of ignorance should rationally choose principles that would enforce an egalitarian society. That is, Rawls has given us the WEIRD solution to a problem that, as I showed in the previous chapter, people around the world had solved hundreds of times before. However, ideal socialism is not the only kind that became popular in the U.S. I conclude this chapter with the lessons of the most successful U.S socialist movement in the 20th century, namely the Black Panther Party.

Non-Ideal (WEIRD) Socialism: The Black Panther Party

Rawls identified an important issue at stake in the development of socialism in the U.S. The challenge of American socialism is precisely to incorporate the claims of many groups with diverse and even opposing worldviews and in a non-ideal world without the aid of a veil of ignorance. Of course, Rawls invokes the veil to adequately shield others from abuses because it works to illustrate that all things being equal socialism qua justice as fairness is a superior system. After all, Rawls basically forces us to accept that if we could construct a society from scratch, we would not choose a system that looks like present-day capitalism. On the contrary,

rational people would choose socialism because it leads to fair distribution of wealth and opportunities. The challenges that a multicultural society like the United States presents to political organization are varied and complex, however, and a purely theoretical deduction of socialism is woefully insufficient. However, Rawls' "overlapping consensus" also sheds light on the need to develop a multivocal form of socialism. The failure of centralized planning illustrates the dangers behind reducing multiple worldviews to a monologic form of "progress," for example.

In this vein, the future of socialism should be dedicated to embrace local, national, and global arrangements that dispose people to practice "socialism in living." Naturally, electoral politics should not be abandoned, but a bottom-up approach is a more organic strategy that has largely been overlooked in the U.S. This fact is not the fault of organizers, of course, but a consequence of the inherent difficulties that developing socialist experiments in a society that is rabidly antagonistic to them present. Nonetheless, as Eric Olin Wright (2010) has meticulously detailed, a number of socialist interventions, or as he calls them "real utopias" still happen in the modern world (e.g., worker co-ops, UBI experiments). Let us consider the most famous and successful socialist experiment in the U.S., namely the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP).

Fred Hampton famously said, "First you have free breakfasts, then you have free medical care, then you have free bus rides, and soon you have FREEDOM!" (cited in Bloom and Martin 2016). Although Hampton is listing a number of BPP sponsored initiatives, citing freedom as the outcome underscores the importance of organic forms of protest that happen independent from electoral politics or state intervention. But Hampton, and the BPP, unapologetically assumed that freedom is synonymous with socialism. In this vein, Hampton famously explained

that capitalism is not to be fought with black capitalism, but with socialism. Black Panther socialism was based on grassroots efforts that highlighted the importance of interdependence, reciprocity, and solidarity to construct a community-based intervention against capitalist racism.

But socialist programs are rarely stable if they are universally imposed by a centralized command. Only when people organically become attuned to the ways of their societies, we can speak of a socialism in living that would naturally derive its stability from our biocultural constitutions. This is precisely where the ham-handed approach of the 20th century failed miserably – remember, for instance, the forceful abolition of the Russian *Mir* and its tragic consequences.

The BPP, on the other hand, shows that socialism can develop in alignment with local practices and traditions even in a WEIRD society. The Panthers paid careful attention to local issues and built a multiracial movement from the bottom-up to address these community problems. In doing so, they also demonstrated how programs perceived as radical, even deemed “Anti-American” can become mainstream, popular, and serve as an omnibus for a multiracial, multicultural, and international coalition. Nothing showcases the success of the BPP as well as the brutality that the government showed to suppress it. Fearing the potential of overwhelming support for the party, the FBI, directed by J. Edgar Hoover, infiltrated, destabilized, and killed members of the Black Panthers. FBI memos reveal that the government considered the popularity of the BPP, a direct threat to American interests and feared the potential that it had to attract people – especially black and white moderates – to support its cause (Bloom and Martin 2016). In what follows, I detail the main philosophical tenets of the BPP and explain how it quickly developed a popular movement that unfortunately also fizzled rapidly. Both the heroism

as well as the tragedy that marked the ascendance and demise of the BPP makes it an exemplar for present-day socialist organization in the U.S.

The BPP masterfully combined anti-colonialism (Nkrumah), anti-imperialism (Mao), traditional Marxism (Marx, Lenin), and the black radical tradition (DuBois, Malcolm X) to understand and respond to the material circumstances of American inner cities in the late 60s. Notwithstanding its Marxist leanings, the BPP went against the grain of classical Marxist orthodoxy and organized without an intelligentsia or bourgeois elite but fully grounded on the “underclass” that lives at the margins of capitalism. As Bobby Seale (1991) – co-founder of the BPP with Huey P. Newton – remarks, the lumpenproletariat organizing would probably make Marx and Lenin roll on their graves.

The Marxist tradition in the 20th century overemphasized the role of the messianic proletariat and tended to look down on the members of a class that was no class and who allegedly had no interest in organizing against capitalism. But the BPP, and this is a legacy of Newton’s political genius, was grounded on a conscientization of Black, first, and Latin@, Asian, white people and more later; all people who apparently had no stakes in society. Neither working nor middle-class, the lumpenproletariat of the American black ghetto flocked to the Panthers and its message based on dignity, pride, and self-defense, and importantly, anti-capitalist politics. Formerly incarcerated people, mothers and grandmothers, college students, unemployed and unschooled youth, and people from all walks of life found in the party a vehicle of change and personal realization.

Before I continue this account of the BPP, it is fair to ask whether it should be considered a revolutionary movement. Unlike the Zapatistas, for example, the BPP did not establish autonomous territories. Moreover, the Panthers did not overthrow capitalism and did not end

racism or police brutality. In other words, it is not entirely clear if any conditions were revolutionized. Therefore, the BPP is better theorized as an interstitial revolution. A concept from social science (Wright 2010), interstitial denotes a revolution that happens in the cracks of power. Unlike a transformational revolution that changes the socio-political order completely (e.g., American or Russian revolutions), its interstitial counterpart spreads through small openings, i.e., in the margins and sutures of society.

It is not a surprise, then, that the BPP would recruit precisely among the ranks of those who inhabit these interstitial social spaces and that its revolution would remain mostly confined to these openings. At the same time, the BPP became tremendously influential in the U.S, flexed some political muscle in Oakland, and without a doubt planted the seeds for novel organizations such as Black Lives Matter (BLM). Internationally the Panthers established political relationships with socialist governments, especially in Africa, and became a cherished part of the anti-imperialist movement around the world.

Moreover, as Bloom and Martin (2016) rightly notice, the BPP constitutes the first armed struggle on U.S. soil, at least since the Civil War, to organize against the government. Of course, the Confederacy and the Union attracted substantially larger memberships. Yet, the revolutionary legacy of the Black Panthers is unrivaled in the United States. In only a couple years, thousands of people joined the party, and more that seventy chapters popped throughout the country. The government responded with a widespread effort that vilified the party and harassed and killed its leaders. Fred Hampton, assassinated by the police while he was sleeping, became the most famous victim of governmental violence. The campaign that the government waged against the Panthers, however, went beyond direct violence and included harassment, saboteurs, and agitators that helped attach a label of criminality that the party never fully shook

off. This ideological maneuver imprinted a perverse image of the party in the minds of white, middle-class America. Like Malcolm X before, the BPP evoked, and continues to do so, images of criminals, thugs, communists, and more ideas that have been used in the 20th and 21st century to tap into white, bourgeois anxiety.

Going back to the rise of the BPP, its popularity was directly linked to the circumstances of urban, poor, black America. The Civil Rights Movement in the 60s had accomplished great legal concessions that dramatically changed life in the South. But for young, black people in the North and West, the situation had not changed much even with the introduction of formal desegregation. In black neighborhoods across the region people lived in extreme poverty, compounded by lack of opportunities, and in constant fear of being victims of police brutality and harassment. Sadly, it seems that the previous sentence is still true today. Under these dire conditions, violent protests were common in urban, black neighborhoods throughout the 60s. In 1965, a case of police brutality along with simmering rage created an explosive cocktail that derived in the biggest and most famous of these protests, namely the Watts Rebellion, or riots, depending on the reporting source.

Although the country was shocked, the reasons for the uprising became apparent, and white America was forced to confront, once again, the underbelly of its progress. As a side note, LAPD chief of police William Parker – well known for militarizing the police and other practices that inflamed racial tensions at the time– had justified the excessive and aggressive policing that black neighborhoods were subjected to by appealing to “genes behind criminal behavior” (Bloom and Martin 2016). Appealing to biology, genes, eugenics, etc., has always been a go-to discourse to defend the status quo in the U.S.

In 1966, a year after the Watts rebellion, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, later known only as the Black Panther Party. The BPP developed out of Newton's brilliant philosophical analysis of the political conditions of Black America and burst on the scene to occupy an organizational vacuum left by the urban rebellions. Combining Malcolm's X black nationalism, Fanon's decolonial philosophy, and Mao's guerrilla warfare, Newton identified the need of an organization that could mobilize the rage latent in Black neighborhoods and translate it into effective programs and policies that went beyond "throwing bricks and Molotov cocktails" (Newton 1967a).

What the black community needed, Newton (1976a) theorized, was a vanguard party to teach the people how to correctly organize against a racist system that did not value their lives. The methods of resistance that Newton advocated, however, made the Panthers controversial, if not terrifying, for mainstream America from the get-go. The BPP famously called the black community to arm themselves to resist police brutality, or to be more precise, to resist against occupation in their neighborhoods. In this manner, Newton and Seale used anti-colonial language, which allowed them to link the party to internationalist struggles against capitalist imperialism. This was a strategic move that made socialist and revolutionary movements of the world sympathetic to the cause of the BPP and that eventually led to a crucial network of allies.

Before the party became an international success, it had to become a local and national phenomenon, however. Advocacy for armed struggle and self-defense did the trick. Although the focus of the Panthers eventually moved into community programs, the original self-defense strategy made the party extremely popular with people who had grown weary of the non-violent tactics of the Civil Rights Movement and yearned for a more confrontational form of struggle.

Nonetheless, the Panthers were based on more than weapons and confrontation. The theoretical underpinnings of Newton's call to raise in arms had deep philosophical implications that explain the success of the BPP within the Black community. Inspired by Fanon's (2007) analysis of the psychological effects of colonialism in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Newton (1967b) suggests that African Americans are colonial subjects in their own country. That is, white society does not admit black people as equals, and although it has conceded formal citizenship to them, they are treated as an underclass in reality. Oppressed throughout centuries, the Black community in the U.S. has internalized, Newton argues, colonialist narratives and blames itself for its wretched conditions.

As the title of one of Newton's articles suggests, black people grow up in the U.S. with both Doubt and Fear (Newton, 1967b). First, black Americans have doubts about having "innate" lower capacities that come from societal messages that constantly deem them less intelligent, industrious, and human than others. To intensify these doubts, fear has been instilled in the black population by a brutalizing system that extrajudicially lynched them at one point in history and later by a police force that "legalized" what used to be a practice at the margins of the law, although always abetted by it. The police, Newton argues, works as an occupying force within black communities in the same way that foreign armies operate in colonized countries.

It should be noted that hitherto Newton's analysis is poignant but not unique in many senses. Even before Fanon, DuBois (1994) had famously written on the feeling of being an outsider in one's own country, i.e., having a "double consciousness," that Black Americans experienced on a daily basis. Likewise, the notion that black Americans blamed themselves for their shortcomings and identified with their oppressors is a running subject of Malcolm X's (1992) influential autobiography. It was also Malcolm X who referred to the police as an

invading force in charge of doing the dirty work of white, mainstream America. In fact, at some point Malcolm X remarked that the U.S. needed a Mau Mau – a Kenyan anti-colonial, revolutionary force – to fight for the black community. Nevertheless, if the theoretical analysis had been present for a long time, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale did something that no one had dared before, or since then, in the U.S. They created a Mau Mau in American soil.

Unfortunately, from the get-go there were some evident hints of macho posturing that have been duly critiqued (see Matthews 2001) in the original BPP. Although a critique of patriarchy was at the core of the party's ideology, in practice there were well defined gender roles that conformed to traditionalist customs. Yet, the prospect of self-defense and armed struggle attracted thousands of people (of all genders) and helped launch a movement that later transitioned into more socially oriented programs to serve the community. As Bloom and Martin (2016) aptly suggest, the militia approach has to be credited for attracting droves of people to the ranks of the Black Panthers. "Patrolling the police," the first program implemented by the BPP, was a huge success in black communities. Newton, Seale, and other early members of the party routinely followed cops around black neighborhoods to monitor their actions and defend the community from brutality. These lower-class, black men had the audacity of legally carrying guns during their patrols and had standoffs with the police while they argued on equal ground about their constitutional rights as American citizens. The effect on black America was powerful and immediate.

"As far as I'm concerned it's beautiful that we finally got an organization that don't walk around singing. I'm not for all this talking stuff. When things start happening I'll be ready to die if that's necessary and it's important that we have somebody around to organize us, thus explained a twenty-year old to the New York Times his decision to join the BPP in California "

(cited in Bloom and Martin 2016, 62). In a system where value comes from market relationships, Newton understood the importance of giving those who lived at the margins a cause to reconstitute meaning and pride to their lives. For people with nothing to lose or fear, the party and its revolutionary message were a natural fit. As Bobby Seal (1991, 4) puts it, “Huey P. Newton showed me the n***** on the block was ten motherfuckers when politically educated, and if you got him organized.”

Perhaps the language was too crass for the gatekeepers of political philosophy but the lesson in non-ideal theory was relevant then, and today more than ever. A community is built around local issues and practices with or without capitalist relationships fully developed. The critique of capitalism does not have to be inexorably linked to imagined class antagonisms but must engage real life relationships to develop a communitarian effort. Importantly, this does not mean that class struggle has to be abandoned as some forms neoliberal progressivism often do (Fraser 2000). In fact, Seale (1991) stressed class, not race, as the cornerstone of the BPP grassroots organization. However, the Black Panthers clearly demonstrate that capitalism and its (post) industrial class relationships are not a necessary step to practice socialism, not even in the U.S.

Once the party was well-known and organized, it ran into a huge obstacle. Facing organized, armed Black people, then Governor of California Ronald Reagan, Republican and Democratic legislators, all with strong support from the NRA, swiftly approved a bill that forbid carrying loaded guns in public places. A gun control bill, a 21st century chimera, was rapidly approved when it was poor people of color who decided to exercise their constitutional rights. Perhaps more importantly, the government knew that “policing the police” was a very popular program that increased the visibility of the BPP and helped them attract new recruits; barring

open carriage of weapons was a partial remedy. In response, a group of armed men and women members of the BPP stormed the California capitol as the law was being debated producing one of the most iconic set of photographs in the 20th century, which were widely distributed by newspapers across the U.S. The party suddenly became a national phenomenon. Where white (bourgeois) America saw a threat, black America saw hope.

At this turn, the Black Panthers had to reinvent themselves. The tactic that had made them well-known in the black community was now outlawed. To make things even more complicated, Huey P. Newton was in jail accused of killing a police officer in a confusing incident. In 1968, under these chaotic circumstances, the party strangely found itself at the height of its popularity with more than 68 chapters established throughout the U.S. Without running a large outreach effort, membership ballooned; people walked in, wrote, and called all day long asking to join the Black Panthers.

The fact that the BPP popularity skyrocketed at this particular point, Bloom and Martin (2016) explain, is a consequence of a mix of circumstances that created a desire for a more radical movement in the U.S. First, the assassination of Martin Luther King and “Lil” Bobby Hutton – an eighteen-year-old founding member of the party shot by the police – radicalized a number of people who saw the Civil Rights non-violent approach as a dead-end. Moreover, Dr. King’s legacy was misappropriated and whitewashed by the same establishment that had accused him of being socialist, anti-American, a Russian agent, a philanderer, and more. It is important to remember that in his last years, King turned to a wide-range analysis of poverty in the U.S. and organized the Poor People’s Campaign to combat it. Nonetheless, after his assassination King suddenly became the face of an imagined America that conveniently overlooked both its history of harassment and his anti-capitalist sentiments.

Therefore, whereas King became synonymous with the establishment, Bobby Hutton became a martyr of the revolution against America. A more radical multiracial youth newly imbued in anti-colonial sentiments as a consequence of the unpopular Vietnam war was attracted to the more muscular Black Panthers and their self-defense ethos. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, the party saw its fight as an anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggle, thus the “New Left” also embraced the Panthers as its own revolutionary movement. In this manner, a complex coalition involving different social actors was born out of chaotic circumstances.

For the BPP, this coalition proved useful to raise money, find lawyers, publicists, and other resources that made the party a magnificent threat. Banned from bearing arms, the BPP successfully reinvented itself as a grassroots movement and turned to community programs as means to both help people and further their cause. Under the leadership of Bobby Seale, and later after he was incarcerated, of David Hilliard, the party dedicated its efforts to a number of programs that strengthened its links to the community, improved its public relations, and more importantly helped people in need.

The BPP ran a variety of programs such as health clinics, schools, childcare centers, clothing centers, community housing, prison-busing, legal services, self-defense classes, toiletries for prisoners, sickle cell disease research and treatment, anti-drugs programs, ambulance service, and more – all for free. A famous example worth noticing is the BPP elementary school in Oakland that became a model of educational excellence and won multiple awards for their work. But without a doubt the crown jewel was “Free Breakfast for Children,” which fed thousands of kids (and sometimes their parents) living under the poverty line all over the U.S. The breakfast initiative was so successful that the government, through the USDA, adopted it a few years later, but not without attacking and destroying the BPP’s efforts first.

Seale (1991) explicitly called these community programs socialist. An important caveat is warranted here. Seale explicitly rejected Soviet socialism, thus, also challenged people on the left who uncritically attached the label “socialist” to BPP programs. Indeed, these initiatives were not centralized, Soviet style programs but were based on a grassroots effort that emerged organically from the community. In this vein, the BPP tried to develop a “socialism in living,” more aligned with the non-Western examples from the previous chapter. Community programs grew even stronger under the leadership of David Hilliard. Hilliard, who grew up in the rural south, based the organization on an ethos of cooperation that was common among black people during his childhood (Bloom and Martin 2016). Later, the party strengthened its community-based programs even more under the leadership of Elaine Brown – the only woman to chair the BPP.

Notwithstanding Seale’s apt critique, the BPP community programs were socialist in at least in two senses. First, they shed light on the contradictions and injustices of a system that produced a vast amount of wealth, yet let thousands of black children go hungry, with deficient educations, and living in abject conditions. Then, the same system that failed these children, incarcerated them as adults for breaking laws that gave them lesser standing in society. Conversely, on a daily basis, community programs provided thousands of people with unfulfilled basic needs in the wealthiest country on earth.

Second, the community programs were socialist because they were based on traditional communitarian practices that capitalism shuns. As I noticed above, the programs were not vertically imposed as it is the case with charity or governmental aid but were grounded on the community. People were involved in a number of activities that addressed the issues of their neighborhoods and eagerly collaborated in whatever capacity they could to successfully run

these programs. This involvement, the Panthers hoped, would reconnect people to their communities. To a certain extent, underlying these programs there is also a recovered dignity (the Zapatistas come to mind here) that comes from cultivating a sense of purpose and value within society at large. To be social, not just for the sake of profit and self-interest, is always an anti-capitalist stance. These communitarian efforts relied heavily on reciprocity, volunteer labor, cooperation, and partnerships between the community and private actors. The free breakfast programs, for example, operated with money and food donations from regular people but also from private businesses that did so out of legitimate concern for the community in some cases, and out of fear of BPP-led boycotts in others.

Socialist ideas and practices, thus, were the main driving factor behind the dramatic growth and popularity of the Panthers. As I have noticed, the armed struggle made them visible, but the social programs made them a core part of the community and eventually a threat to the system. Tellingly, the most repressive episodes were reserved for the years when the programs were most successful, namely from 1969 to 1971. Routinely, the police harassed members of the party, destroyed their offices and houses, went door to door telling parents that their children were being indoctrinated in communist and anti-American propaganda, and even raided breakfast meetings walking around with drawn guns terrifying children and adults alike. Everything was done with the clear intention of scaring members of the party and the community as declassified FBI memos reveal. Hoover saw the breakfast program as a particularly dangerous risk (Bloom and Martin 2016).

Yet, it was not only external repression that precipitated the demise of the party. From 1968 to 1970, the BPP mushroomed throughout the U.S., but by the end of 1970, the party quickly unraveled. Governmental violence was a crucial factor, but as Bloom and Martin (2016)

cogently argue, internal conflicts and a new socio-political context were also a determining factor. After the conflict in Vietnam deescalated and the obligatory draft was reduced, moderate, liberal, and left-wing allies lost interest in revolution. In the late 60s, the BPP had filled a void that suddenly disappeared in the 70s. Burdened by repression and new political circumstances, the party splintered, and the coalitions that had been instrumental for their success disappeared.

Here we have to be careful and notice that the interest in, as much as the need for, a revolution disappeared mostly for privileged actors but not for poor people per se. However, policies that increased opportunities for black people to access governmental positions, schools, and universities, among others, made Black Panther's politics less attractive also to black moderates. Finally, anti-imperialist countries that had welcomed the party developed relationships with the U.S. (e.g., China), hence support for the BPP became a sort of diplomatic inconvenience, and it waned. Smaller and wounded, the party dragged along for another ten years until it closed permanently.

In its last years, under Elaine Brown's leadership, the BPP reinvented itself as a socialist democratic coalition and found moderate success as a local political force. In fact, it played a primordial role in electing the first black mayor of Oakland. When Huey Newton was released from jail, however, he became chairman again, and the party reverted to its more muscular tactics, although later it went back to the grassroots approach that had been so popular. Unfortunately, the party was no longer a national phenomenon and lacked the organizational power from its recent past.

Eventually, what was left of the Black Panthers became a front for petty crime. Intra-fighting splintered the group further and led to the formation of two factions, namely a democratic socialist political movement and a series of unorganized guerrilla groups. Neither

succeeded in the end, and the party officially closed in 1982. Huey Newton became increasingly isolated, erratic, depressed, and developed an addiction to cocaine. He was killed by a crack dealer in a fight over drugs in 1989. Years of government-sponsored disinformation campaigns had painted the Panthers as a criminal organization. Newton's behavior in the last years and violent death bolstered that narrative for decades to come. The most important U.S. socialist, revolutionary movement of the 20th century – the Civil Rights Movement was vital and reformatory yet not revolutionary – ended tragically but not without leaving an important, if complicated legacy.

A socialist revolutionary experiment on U.S. soil was so popular, if only for two years, that federal and local governmental agencies mobilized to disrupt it out of fear. It was not only the organization that the government attacked, but also the practices that had made them so popular. Free breakfast, free health care, free busing, free schools, free community housing, all programs that defy the norms of capitalist organization became extremely popular and embarrassed a system that allows extraordinary wealth to exist along with extraordinary misery. What attracted people by the thousands, however, was not free services alone but also the meaning derived from belonging to a community. In doing so, the BPP revived old practices based on egalitarianism and reciprocity that showed the U.S. that things could be otherwise.

The WEIRDEST of all societies embraced the revolutionary spirit of a group that openly proposed socialism. And although the Black Panthers were a staple of the urban, black community, its “rainbow” coalition included people of all races, genders, nationalities, sexual orientations, and classes. They developed relationships with groups such as Siete de la Raza (Latin@), the Red Guard (Asian), the Young Lords (Puerto Rican), the Young Patriots (white, poor), and the white “New Left.” The weird psychological dispositions of people in the U.S. did

not prevent the rise and widespread popularity of a socialist group. Nonetheless, the fact that the Panthers did not become a multigenerational social experiment, like the Zapatistas for example, raises important questions about the feasibility of socialism in a WEIRD society. After a few concessions, key elements of the Panther coalition simply lost interest in a revolution. Surely, this thug of war between concessions from the system and social discontent is a pattern of capitalism since its inception and not a failure exclusive to the BPP's political strategy. Once powerful actors, the state of labor unions in the 21st century, for instance, illustrate the ebb and flow of social movements.

Of course, there is also something valuable to rescue from movements that have had limited success practically but later served as exemplars for the future. The Paris Commune lasted merely a few months but inspired thousands to think that a revolution was possible. Nat Turner led a short-lived slave revolt but his influence among black revolutionary movements is indelible. Latin American independence battles were foreshadowed by many unsuccessful uprisings that the Spanish brutally crushed. Maroons rebelled throughout the Caribbean before having the first successful slave revolution in Haiti. In other words, all these movements planted the seeds for something to come. The right time to reap the harvest, of course, is always inscrutable and one of the many cases in which the Owl of Minerva flies at dusk.

But my aim throughout this chapter has not been to develop a defense of the influence, or lack thereof, that socialist movements have had throughout history in the U.S. What I am trying to show is that even if WEIRD minds seem to be inclined to follow the motions of capitalism, this does not entail that socialism is doomed among this small segment of the world. It is true that the U.S. does not have many examples of fully socialist experiments that went beyond municipal politics (Judd 1989) or small communes (Kelley 2015), thus it is difficult to fully

judge the prospects of socialist politics. What I have done here is review evidence to show that, at a bare minimum, there is nothing in our genes, nor in the minds of Western individuals that would prevent socialism from happening in the future just as it has happened countless times in the past.

If anything, I have argued, the fact that WEIRD minds tend to process impersonal situations with more ease should extend circles of trust and reciprocity thereby allowing socialism to work efficiently among strangers. As I explained in the second section, it is rather telling that the most important 20th century (WEIRD) political philosopher in the Anglo tradition, John Rawls, defended a society that, roughly speaking, would have to operate along the lines of socialist principles. Although Rawls has traditionally been considered a defender of welfare-state capitalism, *A Theory of Justice*, I have suggested can be coherently read as a derivation of WEIRD socialism. In this sense, Rawls asked something along the lines of, how do we fairly divide goods in a society of strangers where kinship does not compel people to behave altruistically? And his answer is, it cannot be with capitalism but perhaps something along the lines of socialism would do.

Yet, Rawls' work never left the realm of ideal theory. Moreover, it was rent with the racial and gendered blind spots that have characterized Western liberalism and Marxisms alike. As Hegelian-Marxists, feminists of every variety, phenomenologists, philosophers of race, and more have noticed throughout centuries, a socio-political doctrine that recoils from the culturally embedded practices that constitute human life remains ensnared in a world of formality without touching the messiness of actuality (Baier 1987). Thus, I have tried to understand how WEIRD socialism could work in the United States beyond the ruminations of the Ivory Tower. Coincidentally, in 1971 at the time of the publication of *A Theory of Justice*, the Black Panther

Party was at the height of its popularity and in a very “non-ideal” manner was laboring to create a just society organizing among the lumpenproletariat.

Before the BPP, communists in Alabama had been moderately successful in attracting black workers to their cause during the Great Depression. The genius of this early effort was combining black southern life, the teachings of the black church, and the writings of Marx and Lenin (Kelley 2015) to speak directly to the concerns of rural workers. Perhaps someone would rightly object to define 1930s southern rural workers as WEIRD minds. Unfortunately, Henrich (2020) does not say much about racial differences, albeit he does concede the fact that there is huge variation among WEIRD populations even in the same country. With this in mind, I think that it is fair to speculate that southern, black rural workers in the 1930s probably deviated from standard WEIRD psychological scales. Therefore, I turned to the Black Panther Party, constituted mainly by urban, younger people who probably would be closer to average WEIRD people notwithstanding some expected variation. Poor people, after all, tend to maintain networks of reciprocity and kinship that are necessary to survive and thrive in environments of stress and relative scarcity.

Overall, the BPP suggests that a socialist project in the U.S. can be popular and spread like wildfire given the right circumstances. The fact that it attracted people of all races, genders, and from all walks of life indicates that our minds are still highly attuned to the same traditions that have characterized human life throughout millennia, namely fairness, egalitarianism, cooperativeness, and others that I have mentioned in previous chapters. It is particularly revealing that college students were attracted to the work of the Panthers and for a long time were one of their most important allies. Student unions, with BPP support and advice, organized boycotts and strikes that paralyzed universities all over the country, effectively protesting against

the mandatory draft, and were responsible for the creation of academic programs such as African American and ethnic studies.

This is significant because college students are the WEIRDEST of all people. In fact, college students are the original WEIRD people in psychology as Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) documented. Obviously, college students, especially in the 60s, develop and inhabit different cultural milieus that could explain their passion for a socialist project. Even today, polls regularly show that college students tend to prefer socialism over capitalism; these opinion polls have to be taken with several grains of salt, of course, as it is not entirely clear what do respondents and questioners understand by either political system.

The point is that the minds of the West are not closed to socialism in any significant or definitive form. The unsung heroes behind the BPP were college students. But also, and more importantly, they were formerly incarcerated people ready every morning at 6 am to pick up children and take them to the breakfast places, “pimps” who opened their houses to serve breakfast and comrades who cooked and served the food, women who taught children about black history, formerly petty thieves who sold the party newspaper, people who put their lives in danger to patrol the police, stop evictions, storm governmental buildings, and protest on the streets. These are the people who demonstrate that socialism is neither doomed in the U.S. nor reserved to the capitalist proletariat, but that it still tends to find the path of least resistance through old practices and institutions based on egalitarianism and reciprocity.

The emergence of modern industrial cities destroyed old communitarian structures that gave people a sense of belonging and meaning. For Henrich (2020), the intensive networks of kinship and reciprocity that used to characterize human societies were like “a hug” that comforted people. As WEIRD countries, institutions, psychologies, and more took over, the hug

disappeared. The issue is that although our minds and bodies adapted to WEIRD societies, as humans we still need that hug. It is an evolutionary necessity, and its absence manifests itself as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and other ailments of the modern world.

The BPP, through its programs, reproduced precisely that part that seems to be missing from modern life: the (social) hug. It might be paradoxical to relate a brawny organization associated with guns and struggle to a hug. Yet, the party's success illustrates the strategic importance of restoring a sense of meaning that comes from belonging to a community. The fundamental step in this direction was to rebuild the affective networks (e.g., camaraderie, reciprocity, neighborliness) that capitalism had destroyed in poor, urban, America. One of the key lessons that the party left us is that to organize affectively is to organize effectively.

Capitalism has melted everything into the egotistical waters of calculation, as Marx and Engels (1975) wrote, but it has not had sufficient time to dissolve ancient structures that make humans inclined to derive a special feeling of warmth from belonging to a community of equals with all that it implies, namely cooperation, empathetic relationships, and more. That is, with the right cultural incentives, socialism can happen in the U.S., or anywhere on earth, as it has happened over and over before. This is not a normative claim, but a fact about humans supported by anthropological, psychological and biological evidence. Human nature, it should be clear by now, is not an obstacle to a socialist society. On the contrary, socialism comes naturally to our species. The road to it might be long, tortuous, and perhaps we will never arrive; however, there is nothing in our biocultural constitutions, that indicates that trying is a lost cause.

Conclusion – Why Socialism?

Throughout these pages I have challenged dominant narratives that recruit confused views about human nature to justify capitalism and deny the prospects of socialism in one fell swoop. For the defenders of capitalism, allegedly human nature boils down to selfishness and competition, hence a system structured around these two traits must be natural qua potentiality always-already waiting to be unleashed. Chapter one dispelled this myth. Human nature, as I have argued, is a biocultural process. Genes have no causal primacy to explain human nature; more importantly they cannot be understood except in context. Selfishness is without a doubt a part of the human condition, but cooperativeness, empathy, sociality, and other evolved capacities are just as important, if not more, to describe human nature. There are no biological forces that ruthlessly compel us to behave in particular ways regardless of cultural and environmental factors. In this vein, capitalism is not a system organized around inevitable human tendencies and is natural only as another cultural package that interacts with biological and environmental factors to influence human behavior. Furthermore, for all its success, capitalism is a fairly recent invention, at least in evolutionary timescales.

Indeed, as I detailed in chapter two, capitalism is the product of historical accidents and contingencies that reorganized human life in ways that radically departed from millenary traditions that have characterized our species. It took almost three hundred years of rudimentary forms capitalism to evolve, and then another hundred years for a mature version to finally emerge in Europe in the 18th century. By the 19th century, it had established itself as the dominant economic system in the world, and by the end of the 20th century as the only option. Undoubtedly, capitalist countries became incredibly wealthy, their population grew exponentially, they conquered other countries and societies, and its institutions and ideas have

been copied (and imposed) throughout the world. Capitalism is a paradigmatic example of cultural evolution at work. That is, it has expanded at the expense of other cultural practices. It is not surprising, then, that from its inception, theorists and philosophers have tried to justify capitalism as an outgrowth of human nature. After all, a system that spreads so quickly must be a natural consequence of our constitutions. The transition was never easy, however. It required, and still does, violence, exploitation, expropriations, forced relocations, slavery, unpaid reproductive labor, and more. Tellingly, only a small number of countries have been able to successfully adopt capitalism. For most people, capitalistic ideas remain foreign, uncanny, and difficult to process – even within capitalist countries.

Along these lines, from the get-go voices of protest challenged the new ethos of profit and selfishness that had overtaken and replaced traditional values in Europe, as I explained in chapter three. Born hand-in-hand with capitalism, these protests were fully articulated under the name of socialism in Europe in the 19th century. Inexorably linked to an industrial logic, European-inspired socialism, or to be more precise Marxism-Leninism, found its apex during the Russian Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Soviet Union and its satellites. Other non-European countries also witnessed successful socialist revolutions that combined traditional local beliefs with Marxist doctrines (e.g., China, Vietnam). Likewise, inspired by socialist practices, many “third world” countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America successfully waged anti-colonialist wars, and won their independence from European superpowers. Thus, for a few decades, socialism, or more accurately state managed capitalism, contested the hegemony of the West. Built on rotten foundations, eventually the Soviet Union crushed under the weight of its mistakes, and the socialist bloc lost its influence. Although China remains a socialist country nominally, it abandoned most of its original commitments and rejected, in practice albeit

not in public, Maoist orthodoxy in the last two decades of the 20th century. If anything, China has developed a form of state managed capitalism that proves to be even more brutal and efficient than its Western counterparts, and by some estimations poised to outdo it in the future. Nonetheless, gulags, famines, purges, repression, and more became forever associated with socialism. The mistakes and excesses of the 20th century became a de facto justification for the superiority of capitalism. Socialism had not worked in the 20th century, capitalist ideologues suggested, because it went against human nature. Human beings are selfish creatures who cannot live in egalitarian arrangements, capitalist orthodoxy trumpeted.

Yet, as I showed in chapter four, hundreds of societies on the record exhibit a pattern of organization based on socialist principles, namely generalized reciprocity, egalitarianism, absence of private property, and successful management of common resources. This form of organization developed without state apparatuses, repression, violence, moral and legal codes, religions, and even without writing in most cases. I termed this mode of organization “socialism in living,” which, as I have stressed multiple times, has characterized our species for almost 95 percent of its evolutionary history. This fact alone should quash the idea that socialism goes against human nature. Nevertheless, the failures of the 20th century indicate the limitations of a capitalist, industrial logic associated with Euro-American socialisms. If we want to learn about the prospects of socialism, I argued, we have to do so from the people who have successfully practiced it and not from modern ideations alone. As I showcased in chapter four, non-Western, pre-industrial societies devised social and political mechanisms to instantiate a mode of life that Western thinkers could only represent abstractly.

On the other hand, one of the most salient issues for future socialisms is the problem of WEIRD minds. But as I have explained, for all its quirks and oddities, Western people are still

humans. WEIRD societies did not dissolve generosity, empathy, cooperativeness, and more. In fact, they have extended circles of reciprocity and collaboration beyond networks of kinship, thereby making WEIRD minds able to process impersonal arrangements with more ease. Under the right cultural cues, there is nothing about WEIRD psychologies that closes the door to socialism in the 21st century or beyond. The institutions, practices, laws, economic mechanisms, and more, that would be necessary to maintain a form of WEIRD socialism, of course, are beyond the scope of this work. In other words, my intention was not to offer an answer to the question, how do we create a socialist society? Simply, I have argued that nothing about human nature forecloses a socialist future nor makes capitalism inevitable. To conclude, however, I want to briefly highlight the normative import of my argument.

In the introduction I mentioned Hume's is-ought distinction and its role as one of the inviolable rules of moral argumentation. I also broached my doubts about the need to draw clear-cut distinctions between the descriptive and the normative. Yet, as much as it is possible to do so in a work of socio-political philosophy, I have tried to remain within the realm of description, albeit acknowledging my own commitments. That is, I strived to present empirical evidence to ground any normative claims that I set forth thus far. Even if I have coherently argued that socialism does not go against human nature and that therefore it could happen, a question still remains, why socialism?

The most obvious answer to this question is because capitalism is destroying the planet. As the Waorani environmental activist Nemonte Nenquimo (2020) succinctly puts it, "Western civilization is killing life on earth." A new mode of production is desperately needed if human life will continue to exist for much longer. By this I mean, a radically different approach that does not merely tame capitalism, thereby extending planetary life by a few hundred years. What

we need is not only a transformation of economic production, but also of our social relationships. We need a new ethos; that is, a new life-structuring logic not grounded in competition, consumerism, profit, and such, but one whereby humans (and non-humans) can reclaim their position at the center of social organization. And here, when I use “we,” I am referring to those of us who live in affluent countries. Those of us who irresponsibly overconsume resources and non-renewable fuels, pollute the environment, waste food, overexploit soils, depend on factory-farming, and still want more, and more. Humans are not destroying the earth. “We” are destroying the earth beyond a point of no return. Our “civilization” is responsible, as Nenuimo (2020) rightly argues, for the environmental catastrophe coming upon us. Why socialism? Because only a system that decenters profit and (re)values people can stop capitalism’s relentless drive to extinction.

But the planet is not the only thing that capitalism destroys. Our humanity also suffers under its gripe. In 1949, with admirable prescience, Albert Einstein (2011) warned about the dangers of what he noticed was a downward tendency in the spiritual and intellectual powers of human beings under the influence of capitalist ideology. Capitalism, Einstein (2011) argues, damages the mental faculties of human beings, and turns them into mindless consumers, incapable of critical thinking, hyper-competitive creatures who are docile in front of authority, obsessed with freedom yet completely unfree, and overall “one-dimensional,” to use Marcuse’s (1964) term. Interestingly, Einstein in many ways foreshadows the arguments of his contemporaries Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. It is perhaps predictable that people who witnessed first-hand the atrocities of Nazism would be wary of mindless behavior and blind obedience. But it is equally noteworthy that the four also experienced life in the U.S., and

conclude that alienation and bondage, both intellectual and material, characterize savage capitalism.

Why socialism? Einstein (2011, 14) decisively writes, “I am convinced there is only one way to eliminate these grave evils, namely through the establishment of a socialist economy, accompanied by an educational system which would be oriented toward social goals.” In other words, Einstein highlights the need to develop a new ethos, in the Greek sense of the word. That is, a new ground where human relationships can flourish as such. Under a system that privileges capital over people, the only thing that can prosper is selfishness and egotism, and only calculative and objectified relationships can develop. In a world of objects, we forego our humanity. Why socialism? Because it is the most human, not only humane, form of organization.

But for all their good intentions, European philosophies and movements have not been able to move beyond capitalism or practice socialism in any transformative way. Moreover, worldwide industrial socialism, with its forced transition through capitalism, would simply accelerate the demise of the planet. Hence, we must seriously consider sources of socialist wisdom that supplement the logic of the West. At some point, we have to stop trusting blindly the philosophy of “the white man that knows too little for the power that he wields, and the damage that he causes” (Nenquimo 2020). In WaoTededo, the language of the Amazonian Waorani, the word that captures this concept is *cowori*, namely a foreigner, stranger. Although this might seem xenophobic, it is only after years of abuse, exploitation, and indiscriminate pollution that *cowori* has acquired a negative connotation. But I think that we should understand *cowori* as more than a foreigner for geographical reasons. In the West, those of us who lead an

alienated existence are *cowori* to each other and to ourselves. And, I am not simply repeating the psychoanalytic mantra that stresses the fact that self is necessarily opaque and partial.

Capitalism makes us *cowori* to our own humanity. It forces us to behave in ways that are not characteristic of our species and deforms us in the process. Humanity, overall, is the key aspect that we need to recover through a socialist ethos. But as Enrique Dussel (2006, 8) aptly argues, the future of politics has to be not only “transcapitalist,” but also “transmodern.” The socialisms – plurality is important in this sense – of the future must transcend the discourses of Modernity (e.g., indiscriminate linear progress, industrialization) to wrestle something new out of what seems like foreclosed political fields. I have modestly suggested that the past is full of light to shine on future paths.

Why socialism, then? Because it is the way to recover humanity, to overcome the flatness of an alienated life, to put the common good back at the center, to reconnect with nature (and to understand ourselves as part of nature again), to recover the soil where humanity can flourish again. Why a socialist future? Because it is the only path that assures a future at all.

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