大阪公立大学 Osaka Metropolitan University 学術情報リポジトリ

Your Money or Your Life : John McMurtry and Martha Nussbaum on the For-profit Assault upon Life-capabilities

メタデータ	言語: English
	出版者:
	公開日: 2011-03-24
	キーワード (Ja):
	キーワード (En):
	作成者: Baruchello, Giorgio
	メールアドレス:
	所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.24729/00007009

Journal of Philosophy of Life Vol.1, No.1 (March 2011):13-48
[Discussion Paper]

Your Money or Your Life
John McMurtry and Martha Nussbaum on the For-profit Assault upon Life-capabilities

Giorgio Baruchello*

Abstract

Philosophical reflections by John McMurtry and Martha Nussbaum are presented in this article *qua* projections of the capabilities approach to life that has been developing in the humanities and social sciences over the past twenty-five years. In particular, it is shown how both McMurtry and Nussbaum reveal that human life is under attack not solely because of the eco-biological collapse denounced by the world's scientific community at its highest levels, but also in many of those socially evolved civil commons that contribute to the flourishing of life's capabilities and, in essence, make life worth living. What is more, a common causal root is found behind this ongoing two-pronged assault upon life capabilities, that is to say, the defining search for ever-increasing profits of the global free-market economy.

1. Hans Jonas, an Opening Statement

> [T]he "human condition" has been transforming... In the old days religion told us that we were all sinners because of the original sin. Today it is our planet's ecology that accuses all of us of being sinners because of the overexploitation of human ingenuity. Back in the old days, religion terrified us with the Last Judgment at the end of times. Today our tortured planet predicts the coming of that day without any divine intervention. The final revelation... is the silent scream emerging from things themselves, those things that we must endeavour to resolve to rein in our powers over the world, or we shall die on this desolate Earth which used to be the Creation (Jonas, 1993, pp. 48-49).

Such a grim picture of the human condition in a world altered by humanity's creative powers may appear extreme. Most ingenuous science-technology would seem to have contributed enormously to the enhancement of

* Professor of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Akureyri, Iceland

life-expectancy rates, agricultural productivity and other important dimensions of organised human existence. Besides, in many parts of the planet, most people have no problem whatsoever breathing fresh air, eating nourishing food, and walking fearlessly under the sun. Why accuse "human ingenuity" in this way?

One reason may be that, in spite or maybe because of humanity's science-technology, many human beings now do encounter difficulty in accessing unpolluted air (Aziz and Baiwa, 2008), uncontaminated or genuine food (Loeppke, 2008; World Health Organisation, 2009), and face an increased risk of developing melanoma because of excessive solar irradiation (Agar et al., 2004). Analogously, "human ingenuity" does pose a threat to human survival in at least two major and well-known potential forms, to which testifies an extensive body of agreements aimed at binding the world's nations: nuclear annihilation and overexploitation of natural resources. Finally, heed should be paid to the fact that the man who depicted the human condition in these unpleasant terms was no suspect "radical", but a conservative German-born British and Israeli war hero, a pupil of Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann, a long-time Alvin Johnson Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City, a devout Jew, and one of the esteemed fathers of modern bioethics: Hans Jonas. In truth, his worried statement about the transformed human condition and "the silent scream emerging from things themselves" could be regarded as his spiritual testament, for it was uttered in 1993, the year of his death.[1]

2. The United Nations

Since the 1990s, the scientific community has been at least as adamant as Hans Jonas. The Union of Concerned Scientists—to name one representative group of eminent researchers—asserted back in 1997: "Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms" (para. 3).

[1] Jonas' preoccupation *vis-à-vis* the ecological devastation of the Earth was the concluding point of an unusual intellectual itinerary, which: (a) started with the in-depth study of otherworldly Gnosticism; (b) matured into the recovery and defence of the corporeal dimension as inherently sacred, in contrast to the scientific and technological instrumentalist approach; and (c) peaked in the exposition of an ecologically constructive ethics based upon the principle of responsibility (Baruchello, 2008b).

Once again, words like these may sound hyperbolic. Yet, to date, there has been literally *no* fundamental aspect of our planet's environment that has been left unspoiled by those very ingenuous means of financing, extraction, production, transportation, consumption and disposal of the items traded for profit in the global free market (UN, 2002-10). If we look at the economic roots and fruits of late-modern scientific and technological enterprises, many of the very goods that should lead to growth and wellbeing have been rife with bad outcomes.[2] These have varied enormously, from recurrent oil spills and pollution-induced cancers (Boffetta, 2006) to global-insecurity-creating securisation packages (Stiglitz, 2010).[3] Invariably and without exception, the planet's ozone layer, its boreal and tropical forests, oceanic planktons and corals, biosphere-wide hydrologic cycles, fresh water aquifers, humus-rich land, and the diversity of both vegetal and animal populations have *all* been affected negatively, whether by one of the for-profit processes mentioned above, or by several of them jointly (UN, 2002-10).

As a result of the current economic crisis, doubts have begun to emerge in high-level political bodies about the belief that growth should be pursued in the way in which it has been pursued over the past few decades. Hence, whilst massive life-depletion has been recognised by official emanations of the United Nations (UN) on a number of occasions (Pachauri and Reisinger, 2007), the failure in the received conception of economic growth has been denounced by Ban Ki-moon (2009) himself, UN Secretary-General: "the economic and financial turmoil sweeping the globe is a true wake-up call, sounding an alarm about the need to improve upon old patterns of growth and make a transition to a new era of greener, cleaner development."

Statements like the one above reveal that something crucial is amiss, albeit

---

[2] The environmental record of Soviet Union and its European satellites was far from positive (Deutsch, Feschbach and Friendly Jr., 1968; Ziegler, 1990). After their demise, liberal capitalism was adopted in all of these countries, yet without improvements *vis-à-vis* crucial vital parameters. On the contrary, the Russian Federation experienced an unprecedented peacetime depopulation (Zagaitov and Yanovskii, 2007) and tuberculosis became a widespread threat due to the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), whose chief aim was to restructure the banking sector and the new states' public budgets along profitable lines, thus suffocating prevention programmes (Stuckler, King and Basu, 2008) that had been commonplace in the days of real socialism or "bureaucratic" capitalism (Castoriadis, 1988).

[3] In accordance with the superstitious (Oslington, 2008), non-falsifiable hypothesis of self-regulating free markets, these packages were designed by highly paid mathematical wizards, whose unfettered selfish pursuits should have generated the nations' wealth, eventually and providentially, or at least accrued the stockholders' invested wealth (Wargo, Baglini, and Nelson, 2009). "Shock[ingly]", neither end was attained (Greenspan, 2009).

in rather general terms. Precisely, what lies behind such expressions of concern is the etiological connection between the pursuit of profit-driven growth defining today's global free-market economy and multi-level bio-ecological loss. Cautiously avoided by political leaders and mainstream economists, this etiological connection has been debated in the works of "green" thinkers such as John McMurtry (1998), David Korten (2001), Jennifer Sumner (2005) and Tim Jackson (2009), but above all it is unmasked in ordinary public life each time the business community or its political representation resist environmental and/or health-and-safety regulation, and/or their effective enforcement. Typical reasons for this resistance are money-measured "costs", "fiscal unfriendliness", increased "rigidity", or "competition" (Gaggi, 2008). Whichever reason is preferred, this kind of resistance displays *de facto* blindness and/or eventual indifference to non-money-measured losses and considerations, such as physical and mental health, work and worklessness-related suicides, long-term environmental viability, and children's present and future welfare. Competitiveness for profits is of ultimate value; vital parameters are not.[4]

Unless restraints are forced upon the very ingenuous means of financing, extraction, production, transportation, consumption and disposal of the items traded worldwide, there is nothing intrinsic within such a profit-oriented mechanism that can overcome the merely instrumental attribution of value to life, so as to acknowledge either the unique requirements of the living (Baruchello, 2007a) or life's intrinsic worth (Backer, 2010). This is shown manifestly whenever members of the business community bypass existing regulation by illicit behaviour and/or outsourcing of productive activities to nations that have comparably less stringent life-protective measures (Glyn, 2006; International Labour Organisation, 2006). Once more, competitiveness for profits is signalled to be of ultimate value, not vital parameters.[5]

---

[4] Though addressed in the fifth section of this article, I have provided elsewhere a more thorough examination of the technical roots of this life-blindness (Baruchello, 2007a, 2008a).

[5] An iconic albeit tragic indication of the constitutive life-blindness of for-profit competition can be traced in the recent wave of suicides recorded across small-scale entrepreneurs in Northern Italy. There, many entrepreneurs who wanted to stay in business resorted to firing workers during a major recession, thus condemning these workers and their families to unsettling uncertainty and likely poverty. (a) Devoid of the ability for self-exculpating rationalisation (e.g. Malthusian determinism, Ricardian equation of natural laws and economic laws, Thatcherite "TINA"), (b) indebted to profit-seeking banks, (c) denied welfare alternatives and public subsidies by a government committed to free market policies and budgetary austerity, and (d) endowed with elements of Christian morality, the entrepreneurs who killed themselves could not bear the guilt stemming from their decision, which was however the only one available to them *qua* rational agents in the "tough" capitalist system ("Di crisi

Equally significant is the fact that, over the past two years, nearly all the countries suffering from the current economic crisis have been busy rescuing with public money the profit-driven financial institutions that were responsible or co-responsible for the crisis in the first place (Stiglitz, 2010). Often created by central-bank *fiat*, these public resources had been long denied to, and are now not being utilised to fund, life-protecting and life-enhancing institutions, such as ambulance services, public hospitals, old-age pensions, university research, international aid, or primary schools (Halimi, 2008). Quite the opposite, public investments are being reduced across the board in order to secure the money-measured value of existing assets, keep treasury bonds attractive to institutional investors, and prevent inflation from mounting upwards ("Threat of inflation", 2009). Protecting existing money-measured wealth is proved thereby to concern governments, their economic advisers and leading business elites much more than preventing further environmental degradation, not to mention securing the progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural rights, to which most governments are legally bound (Baruchello and Johnstone, 2011). Again, competitiveness for profits is of ultimate value; vital parameters are not, even if they are enshrined in international covenants and charters.[6]

To counter well-established life-destructive trends and assist governments in the fulfilment of their international obligations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been operating since 2002 the world's largest repository of information on sustainable development, *The Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* (EOLSS). These "systems" are defined as follows:

> A life support system is any natural or human-engineered (constructed or made) system that furthers the life of the biosphere in a sustainable fashion. The fundamental attribute of life support systems is that together they provide all of the sustainable needs required for continuance of life. These needs go far beyond biological requirements. Thus life support systems encompass natural environmental systems as well as ancillary social systems required to foster societal harmony, safety, nutrition,

---

si muore", 2009; "Imprenditory suicidi", 2010).

[6] Zizek (2001) claims these tokens of international law to be as binding as the governments' interests allow them to be, for they are not backed by any non- and super-human source of authority, such as the Biblical God of old.

> medical care, economic standards, and the development of new technology. The one common thread in all of these systems is that they operate in partnership with the conservation of global natural resources." ("Definitions", para. 2)

By defining "life support systems" in this manner, UNESCO acknowledges that human life on Earth depends not solely on natural systems, but also on socially created and maintained ones. Actually, if Jonas' opening assessment is correct, then the natural systems themselves might depend on us too, for humanity has the power to keep at their destruction, or to cease it. In the following pages, the works of John McMurtry and Martha Nussbaum are presented in order to clarify how, in recent decades, the power of "human ingenuity" has relentlessly achieved the former end and how, instead, it could attain the latter.

3. John McMurtry

Consistently with Jonas' assessment, UNESCO's Honorary Theme Editor John McMurtry (2009-10) connotes *all* planetary life support systems as "civil commons" i.e. "social constructs which enable universal access to life goods" (para. 5.34.10).[7] The adjective "civil" is meant to highlight the social character and the social aims of these commons/life support systems. In other words, McMurtry revokes the distinction between natural and socially created-and-maintained life support systems. If the Earth's natural life support systems are recognised and conceived of *qua* life support systems, then humankind must somehow organise itself in order to protect and/or restore them. Therefore, natural life support systems are turned into socially created—insofar as we create conceptions—and maintained—insofar as we get organised for their protection or rescue—life support systems, i.e. civil commons.

The revocation of the distinction between natural and socially

[7] "Civil commons" is an original philosophical conception of McMurtry's that has entered the mainstream of contemporary Anglophone social and human sciences (cf. Ato, 2006; Baruchello and Johnstone, 2011; Brownhill and Turner, 2001; Dickinson, Becerra, and Lewis, 2009; Finlay, 2000; Florby, Shackleton, and Suhonen, 2009; Hodgson, 2001; Johnston, 2003; Johnston, Gismondi, and Goodman, 2006; Jordan, 2004; Kaara, 2005; Mook and Sumner, 2008; Noonan, 2006; Scarfe, 2006; Shurville, Brown, and Whitaker, 2009; Streeck, 2009; Sumner, 2005, 2008; Turner and Brownhill, 2004; Westhues, 2003).

created-and-maintained life support systems by the use of the adjective "civil" implies as well that McMurtry is not thinking of the commons *qua* resources available to all the members of a community without any form of regulation or conscious guardianship. Rather, he thinks of the commons *qua* resources that the community administers in order to support and possibly enhance the life of its members across time.[8]

McMurtry (2009-10) identifies and explores three known modes of life's being: "thought", "experience" (also "feeling" or "felt being"), and "action" (also "biological movement" or "motility"). No ontological dualism or sharp separation is implied: "Although we can distinguish the cognitive and feeling capacities of any person, this does not mean dividing them into separate worlds as has occurred in the traditional divisions between mind and body, reason and the emotions. Life-value onto-axiology begins from their unity as the nature of the human organism." (para. 6.3; emphasis removed) As a consequence of this synthetic approach to the phenomenon of life, genuine civil commons are therefore those institutions that protect and enhance life in these three modes of being, that is to say, as action (e.g. publicly subsidised provision of nourishing food and guaranteed access to potable water), felt being (e.g. freedom from fear *via* collective bargaining of employment contracts and/or legally enforced standards for job security) and thought (e.g. increased access to higher education by tuition waivers, extensive scholarship programmes, or direct public provision of educational services).

With his comprehensive approach to life, McMurtry (2009-10) operates in line with UNESCO's definition of "life support systems" and the much older UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966). Yet, there is much more to civil commons/life support systems than their institutionalisation and instantiation by the UN. Historically, whether conceived of as civil commons or not, humankind has set up a vast number of life-protective and life-enabling social institutions, which step beyond the sole field of 20th-century international legislation. McMurtry (1999) contains an exemplary two-page inventory of just such life-protective and life-enabling social institutions:

> [U]niversal health plans, the world wide web, common sewers,

[8] McMurtry's civil commons should not be confused with Garrett Hardin's (1968) unregulated commons, the tragic doom of which justifies their appropriation for private ends.

> international outrage over Vietnam or Ogoniland, sidewalks and footpaths, the Chinese concept of jen, the Jubilee of Leviticus… water fountains, Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest… effective pollution controls… music… old age pensions, universal education, Sweden's common forests… the second commandment of Yeshua… the rule of law, child and women shelters, parks, public broadcasting, clean water… the UN Declaration of Human Rights, occupational health and safety standards, village and city squares, the Brazilian rainforests, inoculation programmes, indigenous story-telling, the Ozone Protocol, the Tao, the peace movement, death rituals, animal rights agencies, community fish-habitats, food and drug legislation, garbage collection, the ancient village commons before enclosures. (pp. 206-7)

As a keener look at the etymology of common parlance can reveal, several of the institutions listed above underpin "*civil* coexistence", "*civil*isation" and "*civil*ity", i.e. that which makes human life possible in societies and social life possibly humane. Together, these civil commons determine the scope of "the life ground", which McMurtry (2009-10) describes as follows: "Concretely, all that is required to take the next breath; axiologically, all the life support systems required for human life to reproduce or develop." (Glossary)[9]

The technical context within which the notion of life ground is cast is value theory (or axiology), for McMurtry attempts to demonstrate that all values rely ultimately upon the life ground and derive their value from it: "Life support systems - any natural or human-made system without which human beings cannot live or live well - may or may not have value in themselves, but have *ultimate* value so far as they are that without which human or other life cannot exist or flourish." (para. 6.2.1)[10] Nevertheless, McMurtry's conception has ample implications and applications outside axiology, such as the revision of forestry governance (Humphreys, 2003), the historical interpretation of democratic institutions as civil commons (Noonan, 2006), or the life-grounded

[9] Western philosophers have written little about the "life ground" as such, for they have largely taken it for granted or focused on isolated aspects of the same (Allen and Baruchello, 2007; Baruchello, 2007b). As a consequence, I must refer recurrently to my own publications and those of other McMurtry scholars.

[10] Denying the ultimate value of the life ground leads to performative contradiction (Baruchello, 2009): even philosophical pessimists and spiritual religions have testified to its primacy (Baruchello, 2005, 2007b).

understanding of human rights and their implementation (Baruchello and Johnstone, 2011).

In the perspective of an unusual "applied axiology", McMurtry (2002) has been developing a "Well-Being Index" (WBI) comprising all fundamental "means of life" or "vital need[s]… for none can be deprived without reduction of vital life capability." (p. 156; emphasis removed) In its most recent formulation (McMurtry, 2009-10, para. 10.10.4), the WBI lists seven vital goods that refer to as many vital needs:

> (1) the atmospheric goods of breathable air, open space and light;
> (2) the bodily goods of clean water, nourishing goods and waste disposal;
> (3) the home and habitat goods of shelter from the elements;
> (4) the environmental good of natural and constructed elements all contributing to the whole;
> (5) the good of care through time by love, safety and health infrastructures;
> (6) the good of human culture in music, language, art, play and sport; and
> (7) the good of human vocation and social justice - that which enables and obliges all people to contribute to the provision of these life goods consistent with each's enjoyment of them.

If these goods are not provided, then vital needs are not met; and if these needs are not met, then human capabilities dissipate, to the eventual point of individual and/or social non-existence. If instead these needs are met, then human capabilities do not only continue to be: they can "flourish" into the good life, individual as well as social (McMurtry, 2002, p. 156).[11]

Grounding the WBI in "need" as a fundamental criterion, McMurtry has always had to be clear and strict about what may count as genuine need and what, upon closer examination, appears to be nothing but sheer desire. Thus, he builds the WBI upon a vast collection of empirical data from all the sciences (McMurtry, 1998, 1999, 2002) and a precise definition: "*'n' is a need if and only if, and to the extent that, deprivation of n always leads to a reduction of organic capacity*." (McMurtry, 1998, p. 164; emphasis added) Only that without which

[11] In his works, McMurtry writes more about "life capacities" than "life capabilities". He thereby chooses to focus upon the ontological ground out of which emerge the life-capabilities responsible for life's flourishing.

life capacity is harmed counts as need; the rest does not. We can live, and possibly live well, without motorcycles and videogames, but we cannot live, and certainly not live well, if nourishing food, shelter, rest, meaningful self-expression and social interaction are denied to us.[12]

In the course of the last decade, McMurtry has offered slightly different versions of the WBI. Jordan (2004) has argued that the WBI is bound to be undecided, because biological needs are invariant, whilst the emotional and intellectual ones are not. Probably, as countered by Rubino (2010), Jordan confuses invariant emotional and intellectual needs with the varying awareness of them that we possess, as well as with the varying means available for their satisfaction. In addition, Jordan (2004) fails to appreciate the openness of the WBI to empirical rectification and theoretical clarification (Rubino, 2010). What is most important, though, is that the WBI does undoubtedly identify actual vital needs, the missed satisfaction of which would eventually disintegrate any individual and/or collective life by compounding physical and mental deficiencies. Who would reasonably and in good conscience ever assert that the prolonged absence of breathable air, clean water, adequate shelter, non-alienating surroundings, human affection, spontaneous interaction, or secure and humane employment does not generate devastating life-disruption, whether in the form of irreparable psychosis, physical illness, or even of the most expedite death?[13]

McMurtry's WBI is his most ostensible contribution to the development of standards for the measurement of human wellbeing, so that growth and decline may be interpreted in ways that mainstream economic criteria neglect or fail to ascertain (Sen and Nussbaum, 1993; Shackman, 2006-9). The importance of

---

[12] Noonan (2006) adds to this understanding of human needs the notion that they balance mutually. For example, the need for water is balanced out by the need to urinate; whilst the need to be educated can only turn into pathological solipsism if it is not balanced out by the needs to rest and socialise. Needs are satiable, unlike standard economics' desires or preferences, which can be distinguished sharply from true needs. First of all, "deprivation of needs always leads to harm whereas deprivation of wants is only harmful in light of revisable self-interpretation." (p. xiv). Secondly, "needs are satiable whereas wants are not" (p. 57).

[13] Philosophers have often focussed upon abstract issues, whether mental or linguistic in nature, and failed to address the life ground making their speculations possible (Allen and Baruchello, 2007; Baruchello, 2007b). They and other scholars may still toy with the conceptual analysis of "life capability", thus avoiding more substantive issues; or reduce "need" to linguistic statements, i.e. without any deeper objective ground to discriminate amongst different usages of words (Doyal and Goug, 1991). Yet, all these philosophers and scholars can do so because their needs have been met and their life capabilities expressed in reality (Baruchello, 2009). She who denies the import of the life ground can do so because she stands upon it (Baruchello, 2005, 2007b).

determining novel standards and indicators is considerable. First of all, it has already been highlighted how the type of growth conceptualised and pursued in today's global market reality has had systemic negative implications upon life at many levels, such as human health, social cohesion, and the environmental conditions of planetary survival (McMurtry, 2009-10; Stiglitz, 2010; UN, 2002-10; Worldwatch Institute, 2009). Secondly, in the wake of the current economic crisis, the same global reality has also been proved unable to attain growth even on its own terms ("Major Global Downturn", 2008; Putin, 2009; Sarkozy, 2010).[14]

Regarding the systemic negative implications of this global reality, McMurtry (1999) is famous for analysing the causal connection between late-modern for-profit economic activity and life-depletion, both natural and social, as *cancerous*:

> 1. In their defining, endless quest for ever-growing gains, life-disconnected pursuits of profit replicate themselves across Earth's societies through sequences of investment and returns that should proceed theoretically *ad infinitum*. *Homo oeconomicus*' desires are non-satiable *ex definitio*: according to standard economic theory, each sentient economic agent is a self-maximising pleasure-machine (non-sentient ones self-maximise too, but for the sake of their shareholders' pleasure). In their pattern of action, life-disconnected pursuits of profit mimic the life-disconnected self-replication of cancerous cells within a host body.[15]
>
> 2. The effects of this theoretically endless, non-satiable self-replication are analogous in practice too. As any oncological record can illustrate, the sprawling of cancerous cells leads eventually to loss of organic capacity, down to the very point of killing the host, whose demise implies also the demise of the cancerous cells within it. Similarly, the profit-pursuing sequences of investment and returns in the global economy have been producing life-losses on a massive scale by stripping the Earth's life support systems and societies' civil commons, such as: agribusiness' contamination of underground aquifers ("Troppi pesticidi", 2008); cuts to

[14] *Pace* the dogma of better-knowing markets' self-correction, this reality has been requiring waves of combined State "interference" in order to continue to operate, whether desirable or not (Stiglitz, 2010).
[15] McMurtry scholar John Barry (2009) speaks in this respect of "growthmania" (p. 93).

cultural ("Budget cuts", 2008), educational ("Allarme mense", 2008) and healthcare provision (Stuckler, King, and Basu, 2008); less-inclusive privatised policing (Sheptycki, 2002) and pension schemes (Elliott and Atkinson, 2008); and longer working hours (Bunting, 2004).

3. Finally, many of societies' long-established protective civil commons (e.g. democratic governments, universities, central banks *qua* socially responsible monitoring bodies) have been blind and unresponsive to the ongoing assault upon life-capabilities. Regularly, they have not even recognised it for what it is, that is to say, an assault on life-capabilities. On the contrary, they have pro-actively cooperated with its diffusion, e.g. by treating public investments in healthcare as costs, abolishing or marginalising ethics in the curricula of business schools, dismantling currency trade regulations, and fostering the privatisation of public banks and other public assets that guaranteed a steady flow of revenues to public bodies (Florio, 2004; Glyn, 2006; Stiglitz, 2003, 2010). By this sort of recurrent behaviour, many of societies' long-established protective civil commons have acted analogously to the immune defences of a living organism that failed to individuate its cancerous cells as harbingers of death and kept facilitating their replication.[16]

As far as this cancerous pathology is concerned, David Humphreys (2003) argues that David Korten and John McMurtry are the only scholars who have taken the carcinogenic paradigm beyond the level of mere metaphor or analogy. Using it as a powerful hermeneutical perspective, McMurtry (1999) is said to have applied it thoroughly and coherently to contemporary economic reality, in order to ascertain its multi-level life-destructiveness and the lack of recognition and defensive response by public institutions, including academic ones. As other commentators have also acknowledged (Barry, 2009; Noonan, 2006), McMurtry's work exemplifies philosophy *qua* civil commons of Socratic

[16] Henrich (2003) argues the free market's quest for ever-higher profits to constitute a "war against nature" and criticises McMurtry's oncological paradigm for failing to stress the element of wilful violence of this quest. However, McMurtry's oncological paradigm applies to social bodies rather than biological bodies, hence to choices that are made by human beings regarding how to organise and regulate communities; de- or re-regulate economies; respond to or cooperate with for-profit pursuits, including by means of police brutality and other forms of State violence aimed at quashing protestors and silencing opposition.

questioning of received views, empirically backed critical reflection, and creative envisioning of alternative understandings, especially as economic theory and the economy are concerned.

4. Martha Nussbaum

Humphreys' correct observation notwithstanding, it is interesting to read the opening lines of Martha Nussbaum's (2010) latest book—significantly entitled *Not for Profit*—and discover that she too refers to the ongoing "world-wide crisis in education" as "a cancer" (pp. 1-2). Possibly unaware of McMurtry's work, Nussbaum shows that the social body is capable of pathology recognition *via* its immune system of historically evolved civil commons. Such are in fact the public educational system and the humanities, out of which Nussbaum's own work originates, and which she wishes to defend and revive in their life-serving social functions.

According to Nussbaum (2010): "the humanistic aspects of science and social science—the imaginative, creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought—are… losing ground as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit… and skills suited to profit-making." (p. 2) The emphasis on money-returns for private investors is so strong in today's educational and academic environment that, in Nussbaum's view, what is at stake is the very survival of humanistic education in all of its complex forms, given their regular, growing, and prolonged underfunding, marginalisation and outright "fear" in the world's schools and universities (p. 23).

Perplexingly, as Nussbaum notes, many parents are worried and sometimes even ashamed if their children decide to pursue soul-enriching humanistic studies; whilst much more rare is to encounter parents who are worried about, or ashamed of, children that have opted for a wallet-enriching career in the notorious world of high finance. Thus, "at a time when nations must cut away all useless things in order to stay *competitive* in the global market, they [the humanities] are rapidly losing place in curricula, and also in the minds and hearts of parents and children." (p. 2; emphasis added)

Nussbaum's chief preoccupation is not about the perception of humanistic studies, though. Rather, she thinks that human life is going to suffer immensely if this long-lived educational tradition perishes. As she remarks over and over in

her latest book, humanistic education is not an ivory-tower endeavour, but an eminently civil one, for humanistic education has sustained for centuries "citizenship… employment and… *meaningful lives*" (p. 9; emphasis added). Also, humanistic education has played an essential role in "cultivating humanity"—the title of her 1997 book—within sufficiently cohesive national communities delivering "health, education, a decrease in social and economic inequality… political liberty… democracy." (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 15)

In particular, the humanities and the humanistic component of education at large nurture "skills that we all badly need to keep democracies vital, respectful, and accountable" (p. 77) and "provide a useful foundation for the public debates that we must have if we are to cooperate in solving major human problems" (p. 94). According to Nussbaum's analysis of Western intellectual and socio-political history, humanistic education has contributed in a fundamental way to those emotional and intellectual elements expressed by institutions looking after the community-wide, long-term protection and enhancement of life capabilities. In her view, "[a]chievements in health and education, for example, are very poorly correlated with economic growth." (p. 15) Life-beneficial progresses of this kind depend primarily upon the culture and dispositions that emerge from the cultivation of proper "moral emotions" across the community's youth (p. 27).

In contrast, today's pervasive profit-driven ethos offers merely "thin norms of market exchange in which human lives are seen primarily as instruments for gain." (p. 80) If the youth's mental horizon and heart are deprived of those sympathetic sentiments that Adam Smith himself (1759) depicted as the healthy counterforce to capitalism's inherent callousness, then it is inevitable that human communities become—and according to both McMurtry (1991, 2002) and Nussbaum have already become[17]—more unequal, more brutal, and filled with "greedy desire, aggression… narcissistic anxiety… enslavement and subordination… fear and hate" (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 29, 38 and 43).[18]

In Smith's century, it was thought that a society based upon for-profit trade

[17] Echoing McMurtry (1999) on the failed response of civil commons institutions to pathological conditions and Nussbaum's (2010) concern *vis-à-vis* the unstopped depletion of basic moral propensities and social skills, neuroeconomists Wargo, Baglini and Nelson (2009) have concluded that the financial collapse kick-starting today's ongoing economic crisis was due to "greed, moral meltdown, and public policy disasters." (p. 1)

[18] Sukys (2009) describes this process of "dehumanization" as "an inescapable enslavement to market values and quantified judgments." (p. 3)

would foster politeness, civility and human solidarity. The martial ethos and policies of early-modern Europe would wane, replaced by the much "softer" ethos and policies of persons preferring the merchant's quieter competition for material gains to the conqueror's bloody warfare. Instead of pitting man against man, "commerce" would actually "get man closer to man" (Verri, 1771, p. 149). In the 21st century, Nussbaum (2010) testifies to a subtle, unforeseen recrudescence of cruelty that had not been envisioned in the age of Enlightenment.

Politeness, civility and human solidarity may have been fostered centuries ago by for-profit trade, but only as instruments of for-profit trade. If more profit can be made today by impoliteness, incivility and pitilessness, then humanity itself can be discarded, especially if no counterforce (e.g. religious self-restraint, trade unions, popular protest) intervenes to halt trade and its accessory political and military means of affirmation. Even the conqueror's bloody warfare has been increasingly privatised in recent years so as to generate conspicuous profits (Avant, 2005). This is no life-serving commerce, it should be noted, but rather life serving commerce—and life's obliteration in particular. Under these emblematic circumstances, for-profit trade's possible function *qua* civil commons is forgotten and betrayed, for it is lost in the most dramatic instantiation of for-profit life-blindness: intentional killing of human beings benefiting maximally money investors and/or managers.[19]

Roessler (2010) criticises Nussbaum's (2010) dramatic assessment as the "jeremiad" of an anachronistic elitist. On his part, Jollimore (2010) connotes it as the true picture of the sad state of the university system of the United States of America (USA), in which the vast majority of students are being offered worse and worse higher education. However, Nussbaum (2010) sounds much more like the outraged forewarning of an honest believer in human liberty, which all communities ought to cherish.

What Nussbaum (2010) calls "the collapse of the Socratic ideal" (p. 77), i.e. the humanistic cultivation of open-minded inquiry and inclusively constructive dialogue, is in fact observable worldwide, not just in the USA. From Canada to Singapore, over the last three decades, governments and corporate sponsors have been pursuing incessantly the transformation of public universities and research centres into means for the eventual generation of profit for private money

[19] Certainly less dramatic, but equally exemplary is the regular association on stock exchange markets of substantial layoffs in for-profit companies and the increased value of the stock of these companies.

investors and/or managers. In an egregious case of self-contradiction, even the world's leading Finnish educational system (PISA, 1997-2010) has been criticised of late by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for not being adequately efficient, i.e. conducive to higher profits, as though that were the essential aim of education (OECD, 2010).

Given the premises, today's OECD should be pleased with the record of many other countries, despite their much lower PISA-based achievements. The policies implemented worldwide within academic settings over the past three decades display unvaryingly a prolonged tendency to make these settings profitable, as recorded by both McMurtry (1991, 1998, 1999, 2002) and Nussbaum (2010). The former is particularly clear on the relentless corporate takeover of educational institutions, insofar as private-public "partnership" in research and teaching has been promoted as a way to: facilitate exchanges between universities and the business world; get students closer to potential employers and vice versa; and externalise the research costs of private enterprises onto public institutions and, ultimately, tax-payers. Sometimes, governments have proceeded to the outright privatisation of educational institutions, whether *in toto* or selectively (e.g. management, teaching, research positions, catering). Less blatant but even more pervasive has been the market-oriented selection of research programmes and curricula; as well as the inculcation and implementation of top-down corporate command structures, both mental and administrative (e.g. no bottom-up consultation in faculty restructuring, increased pay for top management and decreased free access to education, faculty's ability to attract private sponsorships as promotion criterion).[20]

As for Nussbaum (2010), she reports that in the United Kingdom, despite its long-established academic and parliamentary traditions, educational institutions have been required to "justify themselves to the government… by showing how their research and teaching contribute to economic profitability." (p. 127) According to her, any profit-driven assessment of the sort introduced in Great Britain and Northern Ireland fails completely to see how democracy and,

[20] Within such mental and administrative command structures, scholars, schools, campuses and their inhabitants are seen as business opportunities and/or costs. They are no longer perceived *qua* civilising forces, centres of human excellence, or foundational rocks of democratic liberty (Nussbaum, 2010)—all of which are things that scholars, schools, campuses and their inhabitants have been able to instantiate in their long history, from Bruno's defiance of religious dogmatism to young students' protests against the Vietnam War, the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), or the Iranian autocracy.

probably, the economy's own profits have been made possible by an underlying layer of emotional and intellectual learning evolved by, and enshrined within, humanistic education. This is no novel insight, nor a politically "radical" one. Edmund Burke himself (1791) had already observed long ago: "Even commerce, and trade, and manufacture, the gods of our economical politicians, are… themselves but effects, which as first causes, we choose to worship. They certainly grew under the same shade in which learning flourished. They too may decay with their natural protecting principles." (para. 134)[21]

Nussbaum's worried remarks upon the fate of humanistic learning and its function in promoting life-capabilities are part of her broader study of authentic human life and substantive freedom, i.e. the public provision of resources and opportunities for the actual enjoyment of the formal freedoms applying to each citizen of a liberal democracy. In this, Nussbaum follows a traditional liberal conception, which found a powerful expression in the words of Isaiah Berlin (1969): "It is true that to offer political rights, or safeguards against intervention by the state, to men who are half-naked, illiterate, underfed, and diseased is to mock their condition… What is freedom to those who cannot make use of it? Without adequate conditions for the use of freedom, what is the value of freedom? […] First things come first… individual freedom is not everyone's primary need." (p. 124)

Although Berlin was never as exact as Nussbaum on the liberticidal implications of for-profit activities, he was familiar with enough economic history as to add: "[T]he minority who possess it [liberty] have gained it by exploiting, or, at least, averting their gaze from, the vast majority who do not… [Hence] [i]f my brothers are to remain in poverty, squalor, and chains—then I do not want it [liberty] for myself… To avoid glaring inequality or widespread misery I am ready to sacrifice some, or all, of my freedom… I should be guilt-stricken, and rightly so, if I were not." (p. 125)

Analogous positions have been articulated in recent decades by Nobel-prize-winner Amartya Sen (1992, 1999), with whom Nussbaum co-edited a book in 1993 that established firmly in both human and social sciences what is "now widely known as the '*capabilities approach*'... [Whereby] we should focus

[21] It should be added that for Burke, religion was also very important as part of the substratum of learning and proper moral dispositions that made society and *a fortiori* commerce possible. Nussbaum (2010) is more sceptical on this point, particularly as she draws from R. Tagore's assessment of religious conflict in India.

on… What are the people of the group or country in question actually able to do and be?" rather than "opulence (say, GNP per capita)" (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 34; emphasis added). Nussbaum (1999) appreciates this approach because it considers people individually and it reflects an ancient Aristotelian spirit, since it wonders about the "activities characteristically performed by human beings [that] are… definitive of a life that is truly human" (p. 39). Nussbaum's privileged approach wishes to ascertain not solely those "changes or transitions… compatible with the continued existence of a being as a member of the human kind", but also the "functions… [that] must be there if we are going to acknowledge that a given life is human" (pp. 39-40). In connection with this twofold focus, she lists a set of life-capabilities to be protected and/or promoted (Nussbaum, 1999, pp. 41-42):

> 1. *Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length…
> 2. *Bodily health and integrity*. Being able to have good health… being adequately nourished; being able to have adequate shelter
> 3. *Bodily integrity*. Being able to move freely from place to place; being able to be secure against violent assault… having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction
> 4. *Senses, imagination, thought*. Being able to use the senses; being able to imagine, to think, and to reason… in a 'truly human way', a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education… in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression… being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain
> 5. *Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves; being able to love those who love and care for us; being able to grieve at their absence… to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger; not having one's emotional developing blighted by fear or anxiety…
> 6. *Practical reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life…
> 7. *Affiliation*… Being able to live for and in relation to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; being able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; having the capability for both justice and friendship… being able to be treated as a dignified being

whose worth is equal to that of others…

8. *Other species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature

9. *Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities

10. *Control over one's environment*… *Political*… *Material*… having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others…

Nussbaum (1999) further classifies these life-capabilities into three categories:

1. "*Basic capabilities*" constitute "the necessary basis for developing the more advanced capability." (p. 44) Although glimmers of life-capability may be observable since people's earliest childhood, it is only through much parental care, social interaction, and prolonged schooling that children develop any of them into significant features of their life.

2. "*Internal capabilities*" are those "states of the person" that establish "sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions." (p. 44)

3. Finally, "*combined capabilities*" are the internal capabilities endowed with the institutions that allow for the expression of the internal capabilities of each as a genuine option in life. (p. 44)

Since it is assumed that "all, just by being human, are of equal dignity and worth" (p. 57), Nussbaum believes governments and public bodies to be morally bound—not just legally or politically—to the universal fostering of combined capabilities. Accordingly, governments and public bodies ought to pursue steadfastly the promotion of life-capabilities by establishing, maintaining and expanding societies' life support systems or, as McMurtry (1999) defines them, civil commons.

Nussbaum's (1999) list of life-capabilities is insightful and thought-provoking. To some extent, it points toward McMurtry's later WBI and the underlying three ontological modes of life that he identifies throughout his philosophical production (McMurtry, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2009-10). Still, Nussbaum's list appears somewhat rhapsodic compared to McMurtry's WBI, which is organised precisely and consistently around the fundamental criterion

of human life need(s) and the corresponding good(s), without provision of which life capacity is always reduced. To be exact, McMurtry's WBI is *grounded* in a universal onto-axiology of life-value that applies to all individuals and cultures. Contrastingly, Nussbaum's own list might possibly be shown *via* transcendental deduction to presuppose such a life ground, which is nowhere recognised in her work as an ontological or ethical ground. As a result, her selection is at risk of being subject to the endless relativisation of opinion on what is good for people with no underlying objective and self-evident foundation. Contrary to the life-grounded principle of universal vital needs and goods, Nussbaum's list is more likely to be reduced to the subjective notions of "desire", "preference", or "want" that constitute the psychological given of standard economic and psychological anthropology. At the same time, her focus on what the individual can do—indeed the capabilities approach itself—loses sight of what is required for the individual's doing to be possible in the first place. As a consequence, although the capabilities approach does aim at promoting life-enhancing institutions as humanity's moral duty, it too can ironically contribute to today's widespread blindness to social and natural life support systems beneath the "separate individual" that she regards as the fundamental fact of ethics (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 62).

Also, Nussbaum's position points toward the already-cited ICESCR (1966), which pursues "the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear or want" and requires States "to take steps, individually and through international assistance and co-operation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights" (article 2(1)).[22] Life-considerations are at the heart of this covenant as much as they are at the heart of Nussbaum's work, for no "freedom, justice and peace" are said to be attainable if States fail in this task (Preamble). These rights are so important that individuals themselves are said to be morally bound by them:

> The State Parties to the present Covenant… realiz[e] that the individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized in the present Covenant. (Preamble)

[22] *Via* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the ICESCR draws on the 1941 "four freedoms" speech by F.D. Roosevelt (Whelan and Donnelly, 2007).

Then, Nussbaum's capabilities approach, her concern for people's substantive freedom, and her denunciation of the ongoing for-profit assault upon learning and humanity are no idle speculation by an elitist armchair philosopher. Quite the opposite, they reverberate, articulate and further substantiate (a) the genuine aim of international law in its highest form;[23] (b) as well as the observable failure in adequately securing this aim forty-four years after the ICESCR was opened for signature by the convened representatives of the world's nations.[24]

5. Your Money or Your Life

Often, within the de-humanised academic environment denounced by Nussbaum (2010), the authors who have addressed the fundamental contradiction between life-requisites and for-profit activity have been neglected, marginalised, if not even derided as "nostalgic communists", "radicals", "leftists", or other "-ists", depending on which disqualifying predicate was in fashion at a given time in each given rhetorical setting. Clearly indifferent to the importance of dissent and "the Socratic ideal" commended by Nussbaum (2010), entire disciplinary sectors would appear to have been cleansed of alternative conceptions, the lack of which has even been blamed by official State bodies *vis-à-vis* the current economic crisis (Alþingi, 2010). Representative of this un-Socratic indifference, *Foreign Affairs* contributor Jagdish Bhagwati wrote sneeringly back in 2002: "The disappearance of alternative models of development provoked anguished reactions from the old anticapitalists of the postwar era… from socialists to revolutionaries… captive to a nostalgia for their vanished dreams… *in fields other than economics*. English, comparative literature, and sociology are all fertile breeding grounds for such dissent" (pp. 2-3; emphasis added).

From a life-grounded perspective, this rhetorical use of disparaging terms makes hardly any sense. For one, the particular economic model in place is not

[23] The ICESCR, together with the UDHR and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), form what legal scholars call "the International Bill of Rights".

[24] Given its life-protective and life-enhancing aims, the ICESCR is also another example of civil commons, the proper functioning of which is hampered by unrestrained for-profit activity (Baruchello and Johnstone, 2011).

of crucial importance. What matters, instead, is that human needs be met and that life-capabilities be protected and promoted. If forcibly regulated in a life-grounded perspective, for-profit trade itself might actually be able to secure at least some of those results that Swedish defender of global capitalism Johan Norberg (2003) connotes as “the important things in life—love, family, friendship, one’s own way of life” (p. 17). Profit, it should be noted, is not cited amongst them, for profit ought to be a means, not an end. In this sense, the plausible civil-commons function of intelligently steered for-profit trade had already been acknowledged long ago by Sang Hongyang, who claimed that “crafts and commerce” have to be encouraged so that “people” be no longer “poorly fed” (as cited in He et al., 1991, p. 186).

Still, from this life-grounded reconsideration of economic activity, it follows too that if public endowments are routinely privatised (Florio, 2004) and the existing civil commons turned into money-making devices—e.g. Nussbaum (2010) *vis-à-vis* public universities—then it is of the essence that such devices serve human needs *and* spur life-capability regularly and widely, in both space and time. If vital needs are not met and if life-capability is spurred in no such way, then alternatives must be sought and implemented, embracing economic pluralism, re-regulating life-detrimental de-regulated economies (Sarkozy, 2010), and rejecting un-Socratic intolerant orthodoxy, including so-called “market fundamentalism” (Soros, 1998).[25]

Under the perspective of the life ground, life alone can be paramount; nothing else should carry as much weight, or more. Consistently with this axiological axiom, a life-grounded reconsideration of economic activity is bound to discard stances that make life secondary. Stances of this kind are far from rare in theory or uninfluential in practice. As the former is concerned, neo-liberal guru Robert Nozick (1974) wrote famously:

> [A] right to life is not a right to whatever one needs to live; other people may have rights over these other things. At most, a right to life would be a right to have or strive for whatever one needs to live, provided that having it does not violate anyone else's rights. (p. 179)

[25] On this matter, John Kenneth Galbraith (1967, 1977) advocated long ago the nationalisation of “too-big-to-fail” private companies that constitute *de facto* market-distorting oligopolies, for they generate private profits irrespective of actual competition and socialise their losses at will.

As the latter is concerned, in its review of the report about Hong Kong in 2001, the UN's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee (ESCR, 2002) stated that the region's "philosophy of 'positive non-interventionism'" was hampering the implementation of the ICESCR, to which they are party (para. 176). This business-centred philosophy "had a negative impact on the realization and enjoyment of the economic, social and cultural rights of Hong Kong's inhabitants, which has been exacerbated by globalization." (para. 176)
From a life-grounded perspective, the ends are the obligation; the means can vary. If life-capabilities-enabling substantive freedom is to occur, then it can reasonably happen that some degree of positive interventionism must be accepted, whether in the form of progressive taxation, public investment, or else. Political and economic doctrines can and should be reviewed, revised, and rejected, if they cause non-beneficial life-depletion. Fundamentally, from a life-grounded perspective, any "economy succeeds or fails to the extent to which it provides or does not provide its members with th[e] means of life severally and as a whole" (McMurtry, 2002, p. 156).

In accordance with this statement, not any for-profit commodity counts towards the generation of genuine, life-consistent wealth: "Claimed 'economic goods' which disable or do not enable life abilities are not means of life; they are economic 'bads'" (McMurtry, 2005). Kalashnikovs, addictive cigarettes, actual toxic pesticides and virtual "toxic assets" are not good. They may engross a firm's or an individual's profits but, like slaves or DDT in the past, they are bad, for they harm life-capabilities. Puzzlingly, the jargon of standard economic theory and the practice of ongoing economic activity refer indiscriminately to all traded items as "goods". In fact, they all count towards wealth "creation", despite their destructive impact upon God's creation, the survival of which so deeply concerned Hans Jonas (1993).

This surprising yet ordinary inability to perceive the successful/failed civil-commons function of for-profit trade is due to the technical jargon's almost complete lack of effectively life-grounded criteria for the adequate conceptualisation of the living, and henceforth of what is actually good (Baruchello, 2007a, 2008a). Given the jargon of standard economic theory and the observable practice of ongoing economic activity, life support systems, life-capabilities, and living beings themselves are sheer economic "externalities"

until, say, labour costs, carbon trade parameters, pharmaceutical research, and the purchase of land by climate-change-doomed archipelagos make them economically "visible", either *qua* business opportunities or *qua* possible costs ("Le Maldive", 2008).

The social science of economics, which so much sway has enjoyed in late-modern policy-making, is quite simply unequipped to conceive of and tackle life *per se*. If economic activity is blind to life *de facto*, mainstream economic theory is so *de iure*. The life ground is presupposed throughout its conceptualisations and operations, but it cannot be grasped by its standard categories of thought (Baruchello, 2007a, 2008a). To such categories of thought, a biodiversity-rich virgin patch of boreal forest is uneconomic, whilst its transformation into a "coniferous monoculture" makes utmost sense (Felton et al., 2010).

Unsurprisingly, the policies guided by these categories of thought have been often most harmful to life-capabilities. In South America, one of Argentina's leading experts in medical science recently remarked:

> According to neoliberal dogma, the market is the perfect allocator of resources and the ideal arbiter of priorities and policies. Beginning in the unfortunate decade of the 80's, the market, in both general society and in health, weakened labor, increased unemployment, dismantled universal social coverage, lowered salaries, reduced public health expenditures, privatized services, mandated user fees, and decreased supervision of private health care providers and of the pharmaceutical industry. All these initiatives deteriorated the collective physical health. As to mental health, the replacement of more or less predictable individual lives with the uncertainties and unpredictability of unchecked market forces quite clearly deteriorated it (Escudero, 2009, p. 183).

In North America, Lawrence Summers, former economic advisor to US President Barack Obama and Chief Economist of the World Bank, crystallised the life-blindness of both mainstream economic theory and dominant economic praxes in a succinct and poignant statement: "*the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable, and we should face up to that*" (as cited in Smith, 2007; emphasis added).

6. Concluding Observations

The conceptual vacuum acknowledged by Lawrence Summers is yet to be filled in any serious way within dissent-cleansed economic theory and economic activity. Certainly, environmental economics, empirical studies in human happiness, and alternative views of development and growth have been emerging visibly over the past years. This growth notwithstanding, they remain marginal both within and, above all, outside academia (Baruchello and Lintner, 2009). Indeed, the dominant conceptual apparatus available to major advisers and major advisees is still so limited *vis-à-vis* vital issues that a bizarre though emblematic argument is commonly heard today amongst central bankers. According to it, the countries affected less dramatically by the "credit crunch" of 2008 were somehow shielded by "backward" tightly regulated banking systems and legal impediments to innovative financial activities (Draghi, 2008). Instead of recognising such regulation and impediments as appropriate, these appear to the economic expert like some sort of defiant archaeological specimen from an arcane past.[26]

In a parallel fashion, despite the ongoing crisis and its blatant origin in de-regulated for-profit finance, life-enabling economic, social and cultural rights have been surrendered to its recovery, insofar as States have secured private pecuniary returns by reducing public investments, from decreased parental leave in crisis-hit Iceland (Law no. 173/2008, article 7; Law no. 70/2009, article 18) to cheaper, lower-quality meals in Italy's State-run primary schools ("Allarme mense", 2008). To a conceptual apparatus that cannot discriminate between universally needed sources of nourishing carbohydrates and the unnecessary means of financial speculation upon the same that make these sources less available and yet capable at the same time of "wealth creation", the prioritisation of private pecuniary returns over life-enabling economic, social and cultural rights is truly an impeccable logical option ("RFA tracks increased speculation", 2010).

[26] Mario Draghi is not only the governor of Italy's central bank, but also the chairman of the Financial Stability Board established in 2009 by the G-20 to re-regulate international banking and prevent another global financial crisis like the one started in 2008, the shockwaves of which are still being felt worldwide.

Given such a logic, Jonas' (1993) opening statement does not appear at all hyperbolic, but rather like the reasonable fear arising from a prolonged process of global life-destruction that has been perpetuated by a widely accepted life-blind conceptual apparatus that is incapable of comprehending anything that is not "growth-directed", whether 19th-century industrial workers' demand for free time (Noonan, 2006) or the "liberal arts model" of the American educational system (Nussbaum, 2010, p.17). If the life-capabilities praised by McMurtry and Nussbaum are ever to become the true goal for collective action, then the experts and the policies of those who seek their counsel must change dramatically.

Unfortunately, in the wake of the current crisis and of most nations' responses to it, that which Finnish jurist Aulis Aarnio stated in 1991 stands true today: "Environmental values and economic values often clash, as in the protection of the forests and waterways. Almost without exception, the values that have prevailed have been economic." (p. 131)[27] Apart from showing further the paradoxical understanding of the economy in today's received forms of consciousness—such that for-profit processes destroying their own ontological preconditions are claimed to be "economic"—this quote refuels Jonas' concern that an overly ingenious humankind may actually "die on this desolate Earth which used to be the Creation" (p. 49).[28]

References

Aarnio, A. (1991). Statutory interpretation in Finland. In D.N. MacCormick and R.S. Summers (Eds.), *Interpreting statutes. A comparative study* (pp. 123-170). Aldershot: Dartmouth.

Agar, N.S., Halliday, G.M., Barnetson, R.S., Ananthaswamy, H.N., Wheeler, M., Jones, A.M. (2004). The basal layer in human squamous tumors harbors more UVA than UVB fingerprint mutations: a role for UVA in human skin carcinogenesis. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the U.S.A*, *101*(14), 4954–4959.

[27] Revealingly, in a recent interview, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that a crucial aim of any successful Labour government should be to sustain "financial innovation" and "let the City be the financial heart of the world" (as cited in Cavalera, 2010).

[28] McMurtry (1999) invoked a "paradigm shift" prioritising life capital over money capital (p. 132). Eleven years later, no such shift has occurred yet.

Allarme mense, qualità a rischio (2008, November 12). *La Repubblica.* Retrieved from http://www.repubblica.it/2008/11/sezioni/cronaca/mense-rischi/mense-rischi/mense-rischi.html

Allen, R. and Baruchello, G. (2007). Life responsibility versus mechanical reductionism: Western world-views of nature from pantheism to positivism. In *Encyclopedia of life support systems*. Retrieved from http://www.eolss.net

Alþingi. (2010). Report of the Parliamentary commission on the banking collapse, 2008. Vol. 8. Retrieved from http://rna.althingi.is/pdf/RNABindi8.pdf

Ato, S. (2006). Deferring to difference, cultivating the civil commons, honouring humanity: What's the left-universalist to do? *Humanitas*, *IV*, 1-12.

Avant, D.D. (2005). *The market for force: The consequences of privatizing security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aziz, A., and Bajwa, I.. (2008). Erroneous mass transit system and its tended relationship with motor vehicular air pollution (An integrated approach for reduction of urban air pollution in Lahore). *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment*, *137*(1-3), 25-33. Retrieved from ABI/INFORM Global. (Document ID: 1898761531).

Backer, L.C. (2010). Values economics, theology and legitimacy: Catholic social thought and its implications for legal regulatory systems. *Economics, Management, and Financial Markets*, *5*(2), 17-56.

Ban, K. (2009, May 22). UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for the World Environment Day. [SG/SM/12265 ENV/DEV/1055 OBV/788]. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sgsm12265.doc.htm

Barry, J. (2009). 'Choose life' not economic growth: Critical social theory for people, planet and flourishing in the 'age of nature'. *Current perspectives in social theory*, *26*, 93-113.

Baruchello, G. (2005). Notes on pessimism. *Appraisal*, *5*(3), 148-150 and 159-160.

Baruchello, G. (2007a). Mechanism, Galileo's *animale*, and Heidegger's *Gestell*: Reflections on the lifelessness of modern science. In C. Tandy (Ed.), *Death and anti-death, volume 4* (pp. 29-66). Palo Alto: Ria University

Press.
Baruchello, G. (2007b). Western philosophy and the life-ground. In *Encyclopedia of life support systems*. Retrieved from http://www.eolss.net
Baruchello, G. (2008a). Deadly economics: Reflections on the neoclassical paradigm. In C. Tandy (Ed.), *Death and anti-death, volume 5* (pp. 65-132). Palo Alto: Ria University Press.
Baruchello, G. (2008b). Gnosticism, sustainable development and racism: Re-appraising Hans Jonas as a political thinker. *Appraisal*, 7(2), 13-20.
Baruchello, G. (2009). Good and bad capitalism: Re-thinking value, human needs, and the aims of economic activity. *Economics, Management, and Financial Markets, 4*(3), 125-169.
Baruchello, G. and Johnstone, R.L. (2011). Rights and value. Construing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as civil commons. Special issue of *Studies in Social Justice*, "Life-value, the commons, and social justice" [forthcoming 2011].
Baruchello, G. and Lintner, V. (2009). Life and death economics: A dialogue. In C. Tandy (Ed.), *Death and anti-death, volume 6* (pp. 33-52). Palo Alto: Ria University Press.
Berlin, I. (1969). *Four essays on liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Bhagwati, J. (2002). Coping with antiglobalization. *Foreign Affairs, 81*(1), 2-7.
Boffetta, P. (2006). Human cancer from environmental pollutants: The epidemiological evidence. *Mutation Research/Genetic Toxicology and Environmental Mutagenesis, 608*(2), 157-162.
Brownhill, L.S. and Turner, T.E. (2001). *Gender, feminism and the civil commons*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa and Canadian association for the study of international development.
Budget cuts threaten opera house future (2008, December 26). *ThinkSpain*. Retrieved from http://www.thinkspain.com/news-spain/15876/budget-cuts-threaten-opera-house-future
Bunting, M. (2004). *Willing slaves. How the overwork culture is ruling our lives*. London: HarperCollins.
Burke, E. (1791/2001). *Reflections on the French revolution*. Retrieved from http://bartelby.org/24/3/
Castoriadis, C. (1988). *Political and social writings, Vol. I, 1946-1955*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cavalera, F. (2010, September 10). Blair: la mia guerra. *Big Ben blog—Corriere della sera*. Retrieved from: http://bigben.corriere.it/2010/09/blair_la_mia_guerra.html

Deutsch, M., Feschbach, M. and Friendly Jr., A. (1968). *Ecocide in the USSR: The looming disaster in soviet health and environment*. New York: Basic Books.

Di crisi si muore: tre imprenditori suicidi, osessionati dall'idea di licenziare. (2009, May 23). *Panorama*. Retrieved from http://blog.panorama.it/economia/2009/05/23/di-crisi-si-muore-tre-imprenditori-suicidi-ossessionati-dallidea-di-licenziare/

Dickinson, T., Becerra, T.A. and Lewis, S. (Eds.). (2009). *Democracy works: Joining theory and action to foster global change*. Herndon: Paradigm Publishers.

Doyal, O. L., and Gough, I. (1991). *A theory of human need*. London: MacMillan.

Draghi, M. (2008). Giornata mondiale del risparmio del 2008. [Presentation by the Governor of the Bank of Italy at the national meeting of ACRI on the annual world day for savings, October 31, 2008]. Retrieved from http://www.repubblica.it

Elliott, L. and Atkinson, D. (2008). *The gods that failed. How blind faith in markets has cost us our future*. London: The Bodley Head.

ESCR. (2002). *Committee on economic, social and cultural rights: Report on the twenty-fifth, twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh sessions* [U.N. ESCOR, Comm. On Econ., Soc. and Cultural Rts., 58th Sess., Supp. No. 2, U.N. Doc. E/2002/22]. Retrieved from http://tb.ohchr.org/default.aspx

Escudero, J.C. (2009). What is said, what is silenced, what is obscured: The report of the commission on the social determinants of health. *Social medicine*, *4*(3), 183-185.

Felton, A., Lindbladh, M., Brunet, J., and Fritz, Ö. (2010). Replacing coniferous monocultures with mixed-species production stands: An assessment of the potential benefits for forest biodiversity in northern Europe. *Forest ecology and management*, *260*(6), 939-947.

Finlay, L.M. (2000). All the world's a stooge? Globalization as aesthetic system. *Topia. A Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, *2000/*4, 39-51.

Florby, G., Shackleton, M. and Suhonen, K. (Eds.). (2009). Introduction to Canada: images of a post/national society. *Canadian Studies*, *19*, 1-22.

Florio, M. (2004). *The great divestiture. Evaluating the welfare impact of the British privatizations 1979-1997*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, UK: The MIT Press.

Gaggi, M. (2008, November 7). Ibm e i big Usa: chi ha paura del Barack 'statalista'. *Corriere della sera*. Retrieved from Governo Italiano: rassegna stampa: http://rassegna.governo.it/rs_pdf/pdf/JSM/JSMF0.pdf

Galbraith, J. K. (1967/2007). *The new industrial State, with a new foreword by James K. Galbraith*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Galbraith, J. K. (1977). *The age of uncertainty*. London: BBC.

Glyn, A. (2006) *Capitalism unleashed. Finance, globalization, and welfare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greenspan, A. (2009, January 1). Quotes of 2008. *The Independent*. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/quotes-of-2008-we-are-in-a-state-of-shocked-disbelief-1220057.html

Halimi, S. (2008, November). Thinking the unthinkable. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, pp. 1A, 5A.

Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science, 162*, 1243-1248.

He, Z., Bu, J., Tanf, Y., and Sun, K. (1991). *An intellectual history of China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.

Henrich, K. (2003). Krieg gegen natur? Feind-opfer-metaphern und ihr erkenntnis. *Natur und Kultur*, 4(1), 34-54.

Hodgson B.J. (2001). Can the beast be tamed? Reflections on John McMurtry's Unequal freedoms: The global market as an ethical system. *Journal of Business Ethics, 33*(1), 71-78.

Humphreys, D. (2003). Life protective or carcinogenic challenge? Global forests governance under advanced capitalism. *Global Environmental Politics 3*(2), 40-55.

ICESCR. (1966). *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* [adopted 16 Dec. 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A, U.N. GAOR, 21st Sess., Supp. No. 16, at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), entered into force Jan. 3, 1976]. Retrieved from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm

Imprenditori suicidi. Il grido di Scola. (2010, March 3). *Corriere della sera*. Retrieved from http://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/veneto/notizie/cronaca/2010/3-marzo-2010/imprenditori-suicidi-grido-scola-la-chiesa-chi-soffre-crisi-1602585918437.shtml

International Labour Organization. (2006). *Labour inspection 2006* [General surveys by the committee of experts on the application of conventions and recommendations]. Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/resource/subject/labourinsp.htm

Jackson, T. (2009). *Prosperity without growth. Economics for a finite planet*. London: Earthscan.

Johnston, J. (2003). Who cares about the commons? *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, *14*(4), 1-41.

Johnston, J., Gismondi, M. and Goodman, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Nature's revenge: Reclaiming sustainability in an age of corporate globalization*. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Jollimore, T. (2010, April 23). On Why Democracy Needs the Humanities. *Truthdig*. Retrieved from http://www.law.uchicago.edu/news/nussbaum042310

Jonas, H. (1993). Sul razzismo. In H. Jonas, *Il concetto di Dio dopo Auscwitz. Una voce ebraica* (pp. 41-49). Genoa: Il melangolo.

Jordan B., (2004). Growth to freedom or support to life? *Res Publica*, *10*(2), 193- 205.

Kaara, W. (2005). *Statement for a religious leaders' consultation on global poverty*. Retrieved from http://www.nationalcathedral.org/pdfs/050911/WahuKaara_Stmt.pdf

Korten, D. (2001). *When corporations rule the world.* 2nd ed. Herndon: Kumarian Press.

Law no. 173/2008 [um ráðstafanir í ríkisfjármálum (2008). Iceland]. Retrieved from http://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2008.173.html

Law no. 70/2009 [um ráðstafanir í ríkisfjármálum (2009). Iceland] Retrieved from http://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2009.070.html

Le Maldive risparmiano per comprarsi una nuova 'patria' (2008, November 10). *La Stampa*. Retrieved from http://www.lastampa.it/redazione/cmsSezioni/esteri/200811articoli/38055girata.asp

Loeppke, R. (2008). The value of health and the power of prevention. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, *1*(2), 95-108. Retrieved from ABI/INFORM Global. (Document ID: 1550795601).

'Major Global Downturn' says IMF (2008, October 8). *BBC News*. Retrieved

from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7659086.stm
McMurtry, J. (1991) Education and the market model, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *25*(2), 209-219.
McMurtry, J. (1998). *Unequal freedoms: The global market as an ethical system*. Toronto: Garamond Press.
McMurtry, J. (1999). *The cancer stage of capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.
McMurtry, J. (2002). *Value wars: The global market versus the life economy*. London: Pluto Press.
McMurtry, J. (2005). Principles of the good life: The primary theorems of economic reason [Unpublished manuscript circulated amongst EOLSS contributors to the encyclopaedia entitled "Philosophy and World Problems"].
McMurtry, J. (2009-10). What is good? What is bad? The value of all values across time, place and theories. In *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems*. Retrieved from http://www.eolss.net
Mook, L. and Sumner, J. (2008). Knowing what counts: Social accounting for sustainability. [Presentation to the Association of Co-operative Educators (ACE) conference, Ottawa, July 30, 2008]. Retrieved from http://www.ace.coop/portals/0/institute/08/ACE_LaurieMook_SEC_July30_08.pdf
Noonan, J. (2006). *Democratic society and human needs*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Quenn's University Press.
Nozick, R. (1974). *Anarchy, State, and utopia*. New York: Basic Books.
Nussbaum, M.C. (1997). *Cultivating humanity: A classical defense of reform in liberal education*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
Nussbaum, M.C. (1999). *Sex and social justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Nussbaum, M.C. (2010). *Not for profit. Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
Nussbaum, M.C., and Sen, A. (Eds.; 1993).*The quality of life*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
OECD. (2010). Country notes. Finland. In *Economic policy reforms: Going for growth*. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/17/54/44651474.pdf
Oslington, P. (2008). Divine action, Providence and Adam Smith's invisible hand. [Working paper available online for comments to be presented at the

21st conference of the history of economic thought society of Australia, Rosehill, NSW, 9-11 July 2008].

Pachauri, R.K. and Reisinger, A. (Eds.), *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*, Geneva: IPCC, Geneva. Retrieved from http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_synthesis_report.htm

PISA. (1997-2010). OECD Programme for International Student Assessment [Official website], http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2987,en_32252351_32235731_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

Putin, V. (2009, January 28). Prime minister Vladimir Putin's speech at the opening ceremony of the 39th World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Retrieved from http://www.weforum.org/pdf/AM_2009/OpeningAddress_VladimirPutin.pdf

RFA tracks increased speculation in corn markets, predicts 'more exaggerated' market (2010, September 10). *Biofuels Digest*. Retreievd from http://biofuelsdigest.com/bdigest/2010/09/10/rfa-tracks-increased-speculation-in-corn-markets-predicts-more-exaggerated-market/

Roessler, N. (2010, August 26) Do as I say, not as I do: Martha Nussbaum defends the humanities. *Broad Street Review*. Retrieved from http://www.broadstreetreview.com/index.php/main/article/martha_nussbaum_defends_the_humanities/

Roosevelt, F. D. (1941). The four freedoms speech [January 6, 1941 State of the Union address]. Retrieved from http://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm

Rubino, S. (2010). Assiologia dominante: Struttura del neoliberismo tra scienza e superstizione [*Laurea* degree thesis available at the library of the Faculty of letters and philosophy of the University of Genoa, Italy].

Sarkozy, N. (2010). Speech by M. Nicolas Sarkozy President of the French Republic at the 40th World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Wednesday, January 27, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=viewandlang=frandcat_id=7andpress_id=3303

Scarfe, A. (2006). Global interdependence, process, and environmental **praxis**. *Revue-E-Journal, 1*(1). Retrieved from

http://www.ustpaul.ca/Philosophy/revue/articles/2006_scarfe.html
Sen, A. (1992). *Inequality re-examined*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
Shackman, G. (2006-9). Understanding the world today [Website of the Global Social Change Research Project], http://gsociology.icaap.org/
Sheptycki, J.W.E. (2002). *In search of transnational policing*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
Shurville, S., Brown, T. and Whitaker, M. (2009). Accommodating the newfound strategic importance of educational technologists within higher education: A critical literature review. *Campus-Wide Information Systems, 26*(3), 201-231.
Smith, A. (1759/1790). *A theory of moral sentiments*. 6th edition. Retrieved from http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smMS.html
Smith, K. (2007, April 4). 'Obscenity' of carbon trading. *BBC News*. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/6132826.stm
Soros, G. (1998). *The crisis of global capitalism: Open society endangered*. Jackson: Public Affairs.
Stiglitz, J. (2003). *Globalization and its discontents*. New York and London: Norton.
Stiglitz, J. (2010). *Freefall: Free markets and the sinking of the global economy*. London: Allen Lane.
Streeck, W. (2009). Four books on capitalism. *Socio-Economic Review, 7*(4), 741-754.
Stuckler, D., King, L. P., and Basu, S. (2008). International monetary fund programs and tuberculosis outcomes in post-communist countries. *PLoS Medicine, 5*(7). doi: e143.doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0050143
Sukys, A. (2009). Dehumanizing the humanities: Neoliberalism and the unethical dimension of the market ethic. *Forum on public policy online, 2009*(1). Retrieved from http://forumonpublicpolicy.com/spring09papers/archivespr09/sukys.pdf
Sumner, J. (2005). *Sustainability and the civil commons: Rural communities in the age of globalization*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Sumner, J. (2008). From academic imperialism to the civil commons: Institutional possibilities for responding to the United Nations decade of education for sustainable development. *Interchange: A Quarterly Review of Education, 39*(1), 77-94.

Threat of inflation sky high (2009, March 22). *The Washington Times*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/mar/22/threat-of-inflation-sky-high/

Troppi pesticidi nell'acqua (2008, December 19). *La Repubblica*. Retrieved from http://www.repubblica.it/2007/06/sezioni/ambiente/goletta-verde/rapporto-ispra-acqua/rapporto-ispra-acqua.html

Turner, T. and Brownhill, L. (2004). Why women are at war with Chevron: Nigerian subsistence struggles against the international oil industry. *Journal of Asian and African Studies 39*(1–2), 63–93.

Union of Concerned Scientists. (1997). *World scientists' call for action* [Document presented at the 1997 Kyoto Summit on climate change]. Available from Eolss.org http://www.eolss.net

United Nations. (2002-10). *Encyclopedia of life support systems*. Paris and Oxford: Eolss Publishers. Available from Eolss.org http://www.eolss.net

Verri, P. (1771). *Meditazioni sulla economia politica*. Livorno: Stamperia dell'enciclopedia.

Wargo, D.T., Baglini, N., and Nelson, K. (2009). The global financial crisis—caused by greed, moral meltdown and public policy disasters. *Forum on public policy online, 2009*(1). Retrieved from http://www.forumonpublicpolicy.com/spring09papers/archivespr09/wargo.pdf

Westhues, K. (1999). If the market is not god, what is? [Presented at the symposium on J. McMurtry, *Unequal Freedoms: the Global Market as an Ethical System*, Toronto: Garamond, 1998, Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities, Sherbrooke, Quebec, 5 June 1999]. Retrieved from http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/~kwesthue/mcmurtry.htm

Whelan, D.J. and Donnelly, J. (2007). The West, economic and social rights, and the global human rights regime: Setting the record straight. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *29*(4), 908-949.

World Health Organization. (2009). *Obesity and overweight*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/publications/facts/obesity/en/print.html

Worldwatch Institute. (2009). *State of the world 2009*. Washington, D.C.: The Worldwatch Institute Press.

Zagaitov, I. B., and Yanovskii, L. B. (2007). The population of the Russian Federation: Solvency dynamics and depopulation. *Studies on Russian Economic Development, 18* (1), 94-101.

Ziegler, C.E. (1990). *Environmental policy in the USSR.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Zizek, S. (2001). *The fragile absolute: Or, why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?* London: Verso.