

JÜRGEN KOCKA:

Capitalism: A Short History

Princeton University Press 2016, 198 p.

In his book *Capitalism: A Short History*, which was recently re-released as a paperback, Jürgen Kocka gives us a wide-ranging historical and critical analysis of Capitalism. In the book the author reviews the origins and controversial development of the concept. He differentiates between different types of capitalism, namely: merchant, plantation, industrial and finance capitalism. He also explores the duality of capitalism: as an engine of innovation and growth, and a cause of crisis and exploitation.

In the first chapter Kocka explains what capitalism means (p. 6). Kocka discusses three classical authors who broadly contributed to the formation and spread of the concept: Marx, Weber and Schumpeter. He discusses their main ideas and also offers constructive critique and his own working definition of capitalism, where he underlines de-centralization, commodification and accumulation as the basic characteristics of capitalism (p. 21).

In the second chapter of his book, Kocka explores the beginnings of capitalism. He discusses how the formation of markets and states went along in symbiosis and how early rudiments of merchant capitalism emerged in different parts of the world during ancient times (p. 26). He discusses particularities of merchant capitalism in China, Arabia and in Europe (p. 27-31). Then he turns his attention to the fundamentals that were laid for financial capitalism – bank transactions, borrowing and lending, cheques and bills, and currency exchange (p. 42).

Kocka postulates that the main difference between capitalist developments in Europe and those in China and Arabia rests in the expansion of European merchant capitalism into spheres of production and financing (p. 50-52). At the end of chapter two the author concludes that in many respects all the developments listed in the chapter could be considered only as an early form of capitalism; however, he positively identifies it as a capitalist phenomenon. He strongly distances himself from Marxist tradition, which would consider such developments only as pre-capitalist (p. 52).

In the third chapter the author discusses impacts of colonialism and world trade on the expansion of capitalism in the 16th-18th centuries. The entanglement of trade, warfare, capitalist dynamism and violence jump-started a new world trade system with Western Europe at its center (p. 56). New and complex capitalist enterprises such as the Dutch “United East India Company” exercised extensive quasi-governmental powers, with rights to wage war, sign treaties and conquer lands as well as to trade (p. 59). Kocka gives us insight into the rise of banks and how credit, financial transfers, insurance, bills of exchange, and shares slowly became commodities traded on stock exchanges, how investors started to bet and speculate and how this led to the first economic crises (p. 62).

Kocka states that around the middle of the 18th century capitalism became established in western Europe as merchant and financial capitalism without any actual reorganization of the sphere of production, i.e. industrialization, which is in stark contrast with the Marxist tradition (p. 65). This rearrangement manifested itself in plantation labor, agriculture, mining and proto-industrial manufacture. Forced labor and its commodification through the slave trade proved to be essential for plantation business, transforming the sphere of production through a goal-oriented organization of work (p. 66-68). Kocka notes that in contrast with the eastern Europe, agrarian capitalism took a completely different turn in more developed parts of Europe, for example in the Netherlands. There it was strongly based on town-country trade links, intensification and specialization, leading to the active development of agricultural wage labor. Similar developments were noticeable in England. The profit orientation of agriculture in England and Netherlands led to innovations, an eagerness of wage workers to do more for higher wages, reorganization of the sphere of production, and agricultural revolution in its own right (p. 76). The demands of the market forced some of the merchants to become merchant-distributors, profoundly changing cottage industries and textile manufacture, creating a special kind of “rural industry” that employed people in rural areas in a very similar manner to wage laborers (p. 79-81). Kocka claims that capitalism was changing the world of production long before the Industrial Revolution. He thinks that the impacts and restrictions of these proto-industrial developments were essential for industrialization to occur (p. 83).

As Kocka explains, to some extent capitalist principles were present in trade, finance, agriculture and commercial manufacturing in Europe. He notes that even though with the more developed capitalist system social inequality increased, overall living standards increased as well. He also positively assesses the ability of fully established capitalist England and the Netherlands to avoid the Malthusian trap and supply crises prevalent in other parts of Europe (p. 92). Finally, he discusses reasons why capitalism did not become the dominant guiding principle in the economically equally well-developed territories of eastern China.

In the fourth chapter of his book Jürgen Kocka examines developments that occurred at the beginning of the industrial era. He points out how industrialization greatly changed capitalism: innovations in technology and organization, new energy sources, emergence of factories and manufacturing plants – these are the three main developments at the center of industrialization. An unprecedented increase in productivity and fundamental improvement of living conditions together with unevenly distributed, but sustainable growth, followed (p. 98). Further he discusses how contracted wage labor turned into a mass phenomenon, how the accumulation of fixed capital skyrocketed and how technological and organizational innovations became important and at the same time reshaped social-structure and contributed “to the unpopularity of capitalism” (p. 102). According to Kocka, new types of crises that were mostly caused by uncontrolled speculation and flaws in the financial sector now affected not only speculators, but also different layers of society. He also discusses how the globalization of capitalism accelerated and expanded. The transition from ownership to managerial capitalism led to the democratization of large

enterprises and also contributed to increasingly irresponsible behavior by salaried managers in the upper ranks of firms (p. 113).

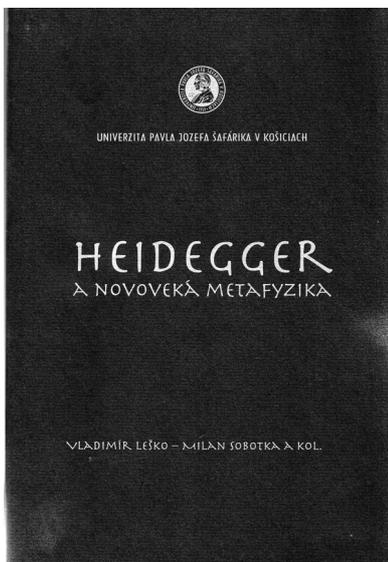
He considers labor movement, government interventions and the existence of state-controlled, organized capitalism to be the main reasons for the welfare state to have come into existence (p. 148-150). However the crisis of the 1970s convincingly showed the limits of such a system. It was just a matter of time before tantalizing potential of market capitalism slowly eroded the existing social consensus and paved the way for the neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatization and to some extent the dismantling of the welfare state. Deregulation in the field of finances could be considered as one of the most internationally shared qualities of the neoliberal shift (p. 151-152). This is why the financial crisis in 2008 so destructively affected the legitimization of neoliberalism, since its most important principles of market autonomy and self-regulating ability were completely discredited by the main practitioners of finance capitalism themselves. In order to avoid the complete collapse of the system, national governments had to bail out those financial actors, consequently increasing public debt astronomically (p. 152-153). Kocka also discusses the challenge posed by the organization of political power in nation states when in contrast global capitalism is not restricted by boundaries of nation state anymore and how the destabilizing social consequences of capitalism can be addressed and softened if there is enough political will (p. 157-161).

In the fifth and concluding chapter of this book, Jürgen Kocka reiterates that the concept of capitalism emerged as a tool of analysis and critique, and explains why this dual function is so important. He compliments progress that has been achieved in large parts of the world with the help of capitalism and observes that all alternatives to capitalism have been proven to be inferior by far (p. 164). Then he again briefly discusses different faults and shortcomings of capitalism, specifically mentioning growing inequality, extreme individualization and perennial insecurity, neglect of public interest and erosion of social welfare. He also fears that the capitalistic need of constant growth and expansion might lead to the complete exhaustion of natural and cultural resources (p. 168).

In conclusion, I would like to praise the work of Jürgen Kocka – *Capitalism: A Short History* for its concise, but at the same time very informative character. It offers a comprehensive and captivating critique and analysis of capitalism. Kocka's engaging style and easy-to-understand language make his analysis accessible to a wide range of readers.

Irakli Chedia

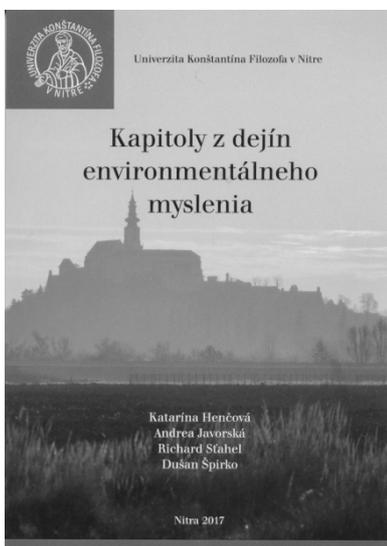
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Vladimír Leško – Milan Sobotka a kol.: *Heidegger a novoveká metafyzika*. Košice: Vydavateľstvo UPJŠ 2017, 890 s.

Kolektívna monografia skúma myšlienkový vývoj riešenia otázky bytia Martina Heideggera v konfrontácii s novovekou metafyzikou. Heideggerovo dielo ponúka obrovský filozofický materiál vyrovnávania sa s novovekou metafyzikou ako *metafyzikou subjektivity*. Hlavné problémy tejto problematiky sú v práci rozdelené do troch častí – 1. *Od Descarta ku Kantovi*, 2. *Nemecký idealizmus a Nietzsche* a 3. *Neskorý Heidegger a Hegel*. Ide v nich o *syntetické* zachytenie Heideggerovho filozofického riešenia otázky bytia v *mysliteľskom rozhovore* s vrcholnými predstaviteľmi novovekej filozofie: Descartom, Leibnizom, Kantom, Schellingom, Hegelom, Kierkegaardom a Nietzsche. Začiatok tohto skúmania predstavuje kritické vyrovnávanie sa s Descartovou filozofiou, ale to hlavné sa potom postupne vyprofiluje najmä v konfrontácii s Hegelovou filozofiou. Heidegger sa prekvapujúco v roku 1971 úprimne vyznáva, že

sám ešte nevie dosť jasne, ako má určiť svoju pozíciu k Hegelovi. Na celom probléme je vari najzaujímavejšie práve to, že Heidegger odmieta stanoviská tých filozofov, ktorí hovoria o *zrútení* Hegelovho systému. Podľa Heideggera je *zrútené* všetko to, čo nasledovalo po Hegelovi, vrátane Nietzscheho učenia samého. Skúmanie tohto Heideggerovho názoru sa stalo hlavným problémom, ktorému sa v práci venuje v našich domácich podmienkach po prvý krát adekvátna pozornosť.



K. Henčová – A. Javorská – R. Štábel – D. Špirko: *Kapitoly z dejín environmentálneho myslenia*. 1. vyd. – Nitra: UKF, 2017, 114 s.

Kniha je filozofickou analýzou vybraných prúdov environmentálneho myslenia. Prvá kapitola, *Sociálna ekológia Murraya Bookchina* (K. Henčová), sa zaoberá konceptom sociálnej ekológie Murraya Bookchina, ktorý ako jeden z prvých mysliteľov postrehol, že spôsob, akým ľudia vnímajú spoločnosť, súvisí s tým, ako vnímajú prírodu. Druhá kapitola, *Hľadanie koreňov environmentálnej krízy – „ekologické obvinenia a rehabilitácia“ kresťanstva* (D. Špirko), skúma reflexie environmentálnej krízy z pozície kresťanského myslenia, a to tak kritické výhrady voči kresťanskej tradícii (White, Toynbee, Passmore), ako aj nové koncepty, ktoré ju rehabilitujú (Skolimowski). Tretia kapitola, *Prírodný svet a úcta k životu v eko-fenomenologickej reflexii* (A. Javorská), odhaľuje „environmentálne potencie“ fenomenológie. Posledná kapitola, *K východiskám nitrianskej školy kritického environmentalizmu* (R. Štábel), analyzuje dielo J. Kučírka a I. Dubníčku. Obaja

poukazovali na to, že globálnu environmentálnu krízu je nemožné prekonať bez vyriešenia sociálnej nerovnosti a útlaku.