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World-Economy or World-Ecology?

***Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* edited by JASON W. MOORE**

PM Press, 2016 \$21.95 USD

Reviewed by **ROBERT BROWN**

For the authors included in Jasons Moore's edited collection, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?*, the new age of man heralded by Paul Crutzen's Anthropocene harbours a concealed complicity with the maintenance and advancement of capitalism. The discourse of the Anthropocene has instilled a fatal calculus that sums the relationship between human action and the natural world as an inevitable planetary crisis to be solved by standard economic means (3). This metaphor, what Moore formalizes as "Green Arithmetic," proves to be exceedingly telling. It says that our relationship with the earth is calculable—that it can be easily quantified, reduced, organized by cost-benefit analysis, and remediated through market solutions. It also abstracts and generalizes an essentialized Humanity that shares a common stake, burden, or enterprise by, in Daniel Hartley's words, conceptualizing an ahistorical crisis undifferentiated by the "contradictions of power and re/production" (155). As Justin McBrien phrases it,

The 'Anthropocene' displaces the origins of the contemporary crisis onto the human being *as species* rather than *as capital*. It reinforces what capital wants to believe of itself: that human 'nature,' not

capital, has precipitated today's planetary instability. (119)

The Anthropocene must be forced to say what it is. This is not the age of man; it is the age of capital or the Capitalocene.

With the first section, "The Anthropocene and Its Discontents," the text presents a critique of the Anthropocene through two well-known reprints. Affirming some of the most trenchant aspects of the Frankfurt School, Eileen Crist's "On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature" argues that by normalizing standard models of population and economic growth while embracing technological fixes, what has emerged as the good or modernist Anthropocene has excluded "the possibility of challenging human rule" (15). As the age of man, the Anthropocene confirms itself through a totalizing narrative of mastery and domination thus blocking other existential and political narratives by concealing the power and freedom to choose otherwise. It is a similar thread developed by Donna Haraway's "Staying with the Trouble: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene" and her insistence on thinking-with matters. Building from both Crist's critique and Moore's articulation of the Capitalocene, Haraway stresses the method of naturecultures in the production of new narratives, while foregrounding the terms of this engagement.

Oppositional refrains like the Capitalocene could too easily become something like an anti-Anthropocene predicated on enmity, warfare, and the return to dualistic distinctions. Haraway wants something more militant or parasitical. She wants stories that trouble the purity and normative right that often rampart privileged positions of opposition.

The cause may be good and right and just, but that does not mean that by destabilizing the systems of capitalism we won't have to live and work through the violence of this system and the consequences of our own actions. "The Capitalocene was relationally made . . . the Capitalocene must be relationally unmade" (54).

Having outlined the agenda concealed by the discourse of the Anthropocene, the second and third sections, "Histories of the Capitalocene" and "Cultures, States and Environment-Making," posit a modified version of historical materialism, what Moore terms as *world-ecology*, to describe the multispecies histories of the Capitalocene while detailing the cultural and political significance of this shift.

Each of the essays in these sections make for compelling reading. For instance, with "Accumulating Extinction," McBrien makes an evocative correlation between deep ecology and the American military industrial complex by suggesting that their shared commitment to catastrophism has naturalized the logic of extinction. Or, arguing for a practice that opposes existing power structures through occupation and reorientation, Christian Parenti's "Environment Making in the Capitalocene" argues for the maintenance of the state as means for altering how nonhumans are managed, mediated, produced and delivered into capitalism (182).

Yet, despite their individual merits, all the essays in the second and third section are also largely committed to working through and expanding the intricacies of Moore's presentation of world-ecology and the Capitalocene. In this regard, it could prove difficult moving through the text without having worked through the reticulation of labour, capital,

and ecology set out by Moore in "The Rise of Cheap Nature."

For Moore, the trick of capitalism is to make the abstract difference between nature and capital a reality. Capitalism, echoing the language of early environmental thought, organizes first and second nature as a Cartesian dualism, thus advocating materialism as a means of domination (84). Once both "Humanity" and "Nature" have been divided and essentialized, capitalism can prodigiously "cheapen" anything conceptualized as Nature through a process of externalization, commodification, and appropriation. "The genius of capitalism . . . has been to treat nature as 'free gift' . . . to make the whole of nature work on the cheap" (112). Nor is this practice limited to the non-human. Cheap Nature is easily translated as cheap labour, that in turn naturalizes the inequality forced upon women, people of colour, and those living under colonial states (91).

Breaking with the standards of green Marxism, Moore prioritizes Marx's value theory by making the organization of labour and matter primary, and markets, prices, and money secondary (85). "What Marx understood better than most Marxists is that capitalism 'works' because it organizes *work* as a multispecies process" (93). Capitalism delineates "a new way of organizing nature, and therefore a new way of organizing the relations between work, reproduction and the conditions of life" (85). Capitalism, says Moore, moves from being "world-economy" to a "world-ecology" defined by the commodification of human labour, the enclosure of commons, and the creation of a worldview grounded on alienation and scientism (85-86).

Moore's shift to the language of world-ecology is both moving and

unsettling. World-ecology won't allow environmentalism to be the antithesis of capitalism. Because capitalism is in the business of organizing nature and constructing environmentality, capitalism has always been "green." This also suggests that there is no means of escaping capitalism if capitalism is understood as something that can be escaped rather than the multispecies process that it is. At the same time, while world-ecology may greatly expand the nature-history of capital, it will not permit the fatalism and misanthropy of the Anthropocene. "The problem today," writes Moore, "is the end of the Capitalocene, not the march of the Anthropocene. The reality is not one of humanity 'overwhelming the great forces of nature,' but rather the exhaustion of its Cheap Nature strategy" (113).

World-ecology does not provide a clear line in the sand and it will not promise liberation and a return to untouched nature. World-ecology, does however, provide a practical strategy for challenging the rule of capital by disrupting the labour practices that sustain it as a means of emancipating "all life" (114). Moreover, the Anthropocene does not encapsulate the

essence of human/nature, but rather, the appropriation of human/nature and its exploitation under the Capitalocene. While the text is not without several internal difficulties inherited from Moore's presentation of world ecology—his use of the Cartesian dualism is under-developed and the arguments against radical "greens" are often vague, reliant on soft-targets, and drawn from sources decades old—none of this is fatal. If anything, the points of weakness in Moore's world-ecology should be viewed as spaces for expansion and collaboration. The authors represented in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* have offered a reading of capitalism that effectively disrupts the paralysis and misanthropy of the Anthropocene while affirming the end of the Capitalocene through tangible, practical, and inclusive actions. The environmental humanities should take note.

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