

Radical Movements

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Derek Wall, *Babylon and Beyond: The Economics of Anti-capitalist, Anti-globalist, and Radical Green Movements*, Pluto Press, 2005.

For the radicals at the WTO/IMF protest in Seattle, the FTAA protest in Quebec, and the G8 Summit protest in Genoa, to name only a few, the effects of capitalism on the environment and the sustainability of human communities have become increasingly visible. These protests have become central figures in what is broadly known as the anti-globalization movement. Terms can be misleading, though; not all protestors are against globalization, and not all those against globalization are against globalization for the same reasons. Books such as Carolyn Merchant's *Radical Ecologies* have attempted to differentiate the philosophic differences between various radical eco-movements, but the lines remain blurry. In *Babylon and Beyond*, Derek Wall, an academic and member of the U.K.'s Green Party, takes a refreshing new angle by offering insight into the economic visions underlying global resistance movements.

Early in the book Wall writes, "At its most subversive the anti-capitalist movement is about ideas; it attacks the key concepts of conventional economics" [p. 2]. This line takes on significantly more depth later in the book in light of a quote from Cuba's Fidel Castro, "It would not be necessary to mention a commodity, it suffices to mention a concept: inequality has made more than 80 percent of the people on the planet unhappy, and this is no more than a concept" [p. 102]. Understanding the underlying economic concepts of these various radical movements elucidates the means by which each envisions transforming the economy and, necessarily, our way of life. In the book Wall explains the economic concepts espoused by capitalists who are anti-corporate. He unearths the economic nuances of myriad strands of Marxism and green localism. His discussion penetrates anarchist movements and their close relative, autonomists. Wall eventually works his way to an exploration of ecosocialist alternatives that seem most closely aligned with his own beliefs. He does little to disguise the fact that as his critique follows movements that are increasingly more radical, he becomes increasingly more complimentary.

Babylon and Beyond provides an encyclopedic reference to anti-capitalist theories, scholars, and movements. Prominently featured authors include Naomi Klein, Joel Kovel, John Bellamy Foster, and even Kurt Vonnegut. The work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* is discussed at length, as is the politics of Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist of the World Bank, and George Soros, financier extraordinaire. Herein lies both a strength and a weakness of the book. In such a vast overview of global movements rich in theory and narrative, it is not to be expected that the literature review will include every activist, scholar, or theorist to throw in a stick; personal choices must be made, and Wall is clearly attempting to trace significant lines of influence. This being said, one particular omission—significantly, from the bibliography as well as the text—that resonated with this reader was that of Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*. Throughout the book Wall tirelessly delineates the exterior, or physical, and interior, or psychological, effects of capitalism. Yet Guattari's overt critique of, what he terms, Integrated World Capitalism on the environment, social relations and human psyche does not make the cut. Wall is not the only eco-critic to discuss the influence of Deleuze and Guattari's seminal work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, on Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, yet who also fails to mention Guattari's solo work. It is surprising, though, that Wall describes Guattari simply as

Deleuze's "co-author" [p. 142], considering that he, like Wall, was an activist in his own right and also ran for political office.

The concluding chapter of the book is entitled "Life after Capitalism: Alternatives, Structures, Strategies," and in it, as the title suggests, Wall draws from the radical economic concepts he has isolated and defined in order to present his own activist vision. Wall notes that "we should be cautious about the balance between religious and political radicalism" [p. 186], yet his hopeful examples lie with the peaceful principles of Zen Buddhism and the localism of Rastafarian Italism. He also mentions movements such as Slow Food, whose dedication to food culture may be considered spiritual. Here is found a great strength of Wall's work. He is able to articulate concrete anti-capitalist economic concepts to strive *for* rather than simply reiterate the many evils it protests against. He concludes the book with his own "open-source approach" to anti-capitalist globalization rooted in "sensual materialism." In its move away from transcendence toward an immanent being-in-the-world, the philosophy of sensual materialism is not a far cry from eco-phenomenology's assertion that in order to recognize environmental problems, we must first be physically engaged with them. Wall, like the oft-cited Kovel, seeks a move away from exchange-value toward concrete use-value and a "sincere enjoyment of the world...[as] a way of resisting a throwaway economy and associated commodification" [p. 189].

Babylon and Beyond questions the principles upon which contemporary global capitalism functions and not-so-subtly hints at a more just and sustainable means of interacting. Wall's witty humor and clear analysis of such a seemingly obtuse topic as political economy keep the reader engaged and would prove an excellent text for any number of college courses across the social sciences. The bibliography is extensive, and the almost 15-page index makes referencing easy. This book should be of interest to anyone who fears the day when:

"...the mighty multinationals have monopolized the oxygen so it's as easy as breathing for us all to participate."