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A review of Clayton Crockett & Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Religion, Politics, and the Earth: The New Materialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. xxii + 181 pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-26892-1

This book is an outcome of a cognitive rainbow coalition of philosophy, natural sciences, art, social sciences and theology. It is a unique attempt on the part of the writers to string together divergent fields of knowledge under a unified plank whose singular mission is to garner support for a new *radical materialism* that conscripts a survival manifesto for humanity in the present conjuncture when global capitalism and fundamentalism, two reigning ideologies have led to the crisis of ecological and theological apocalypse. The concept of radical political theology has been doing the rounds for a long time now and both the authors are well known names to scholars of this field. This new book comes as a sequel to what Clayton Crockett and Jeffrey Robbins have written before but what makes the present work so compelling is its range and radical innovation in transcending disciplinary boundaries to constitute a new road map for the *coming community*. Here, theology, Non-equilibrium thermo-dynamics, Nuclear energy, Spinoza's ethics, art and politics, etc – domains as diverse as nature have been aligned to fashion a dialogue (*multilogue?*) of vision for the days to come. The book can be characterized as eco/philo/materialist-theological in its approach and range of analysis. Interestingly enough, the authors have acknowledged the monumental task of their mission and have not hesitated to rope in external help in terms of chapter contributions by other writers who are specialists in those fields. For example, the chapters on 'Energy' and 'Radical Alternative Nuclear energy' have been collaboratively written with the help of external writers other than Crockett and Robbins. This is indeed a unique practice and bodes well for future academic ventures. This also speaks volumes about the complexity of the present crisis that requires holistic approaches, and the book seeks to unpack the emerging contours of a *dharma*/theology of existence in the aftermath of global capital that has robbed the earth of its life and resources. The present project takes off when the existential *End Game* is virtually on and provides us a way forward by redefining religion, politics and philosophy in the present conjuncture. The introductory chapter begins by articulating the universal apprehension that 'the being of human beings is used up' today, and continues to document various other apocalyptic fears after the complete technologisation of life. The authors cite postmodern infotainment, war, terror and economic meltdown to expose the crisis of western capitalism, which is premised on the deceptive narrative of the infinite growth of the economy while the natural resources are finite. To overcome this, the book proposes a new materialism, a new theology that concerns our current material conditions of existence and crisis of energy/ecology/ethics. The new materialism as proposed is a new theology that takes into account the Earth, as the primary signifier. Under this rubric, thinking returns to itself as earth and this, according

to the authors, is a Hegelian or quasi Hegelian synthesis where the dialectic is viewed as functioning through negation – spirit moving to become more nuanced form of matter but always returning to itself the way the earth realizes.

Crockett & Robbins summarize the new materialism as something that is “neither a crude consumerist materialism nor a reductive atomic materialism, but a materialism that takes seriously the material and physical world in which we live.” (xvi) They go on to add that this new materialism is a materialism, ‘based on energy transformation’ that provides radical theological vision, transcending what is usually understood by theology almost beyond recognition. What is proposed is a theology that connects to the earth without ‘lapsing into wishful thinking about what it means to live in harmony with nature or new age platitudes about *Gaia* that produces a false spirituality” (xvi). This conception of political theology grapples with the significance of the return of religion in contemporary politics, philosophy and cultural phenomena.

In the *New Materialism*, thinking returns to itself as earth, and this is a “Hegelian or quasi Hegelian synthesis.”(xix). Hegel is generally viewed as a totalitarian thinker but the authors challenge this view by reading Hegel through Zizek and Catherine Malabou’s interpretation of Hegel and the dialectic. The book interprets the dialectic in “more plastic terms to use one of Malabou’s most fundamental concepts.” (xix) It goes beyond the duality of the real and the ideal, embracing the third path that sees a complexity and non-reductive significance already at work within matter itself and this “matter is not just matter but should be viewed as matter- energy.” This is their Hegelian understanding of materialism, “which is not a crude, reductive or atomic rendering of materialism.” (xx) Within this Hegelian or quasi-Hegelian space they infuse a Deleuzian emphasis on earth and this marks a new radical “geology of morals” which posits an earth centric approach to ethics and truth. Crockett & Robbins claim that

... the Earth comes to self-awareness through thought and this is a dialectical process not in the stereotypically accumulative Hegelian manner but in a more profoundly dialectical or differentiating process. Earth becomes itself by thinking through its own materiality, energy forces, layered strata, atmosphere, magnetosphere, enfolded forms of life, and so on. This process is a dynamic and entropic process, but it relies upon a reconceptualisation of thermodynamics provided in part by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*. Entropy is not heat death, irrevocable loss of order and life, but rather a reduction of gradient differentials, the intensive force that drives repetition. Deleuze critiques the “transcendental illusion of thermodynamics” and asks us to consider the asymmetrical synthesis as a dynamic process from high to low, which is the reduction of gradients. This new insight is the core of the new science of non-equilibrium thermodynamics (NET) which argues that nature abhors a gradient. (xx-xxi)

Following these interpretations of science and philosophy, the book proposes that “energy is immanent Deleuzo-Hegelian spirit and energy avoids the traditional dichotomy of matter and spirit “because everything is energy transformation”. Therefore, this book comes as ‘an experiment in thinking’, an experiment necessitated by the present socio-political and ethical crisis, and as a ‘desedimentation and deformation of our conventional understanding and the efforts to create a new earth’. This is a materialist plan that engages with contemporary realities and is executed through eight key topics as chapters, namely, Digital Culture, Religion, Politics, Art, Energy, Radical Proposal for Nuclear Energy, Being (A Brain), and Logic to construct a new materialist vision of life.

The first chapter of the book on digital culture, pins hopes on the subversive potential of digital culture, which forms the material base of life today. The digital space contains revolutionary *anarcho-resistive* potential but it is largely under the control of corporate capital and this recognition of praxis brings one to the domain of real politics which forms the third chapter and there the book premises largely on Antonio Negri and Ranciere’s idea of democratic politics. Drawing on Negri, the authors emphasize the Spinozian distinction between *potentia* (creative revolutionary power) and *potestas* (sovereign authority), a distinction that signifies the importance of an insurrectionist politics that envisages the empowerment of the citizens or the *multitude*. But how to undo the existing patterns of power? Materialist political imaginaries must envisage new tools or mechanisms to forge new ethics of counter culture and art or ethics can prove to be of great use in this context. The book makes a quest for a *sublime of communism* and in that direction the authors are helped by Catherine Malabou’s idea of *plasticity* that postulates a radical power of sublimity. The *avant garde* strategy of constituting ‘temporary autonomous zones’ through art within the monopoly of capital provides the *anarcho-ethical* tirade against the hegemony of capital. Following the *anti-art* or *anti-sublime* of Dada and the Cabaret Voltaire that confronted ‘the apocalyptic spectacle of capitalist imperialism’, the book hopes to release similar ‘moments of repressed anarcho-socialist yearnings’ (62) through art. The task of artists ‘is to create revolutionary actions that free subjectivity from the sublime force of capital’.

Crockett and Robbins define the sublime as a formless form that defies representation. This shape of the sublime form which is not opposed to sublimity or unrepresentability is akin to Catherine Malabou’s conception of *plasticity*. According to Malabou, *Plasticity* contains three characteristics, the ability to give form, the capacity to receive form and thirdly and most importantly an *explosive plasticity* which pertains to an autodestructive aspect of form itself. For Malabou, “plasticity is also the capacity to annihilate the very form it is able to receive or create” and this suggests a sublime element of immanence or a form that works to unground itself, a power the book cherishes as a form of hope.

The book also examines the role of ethics today and here initially, we see an engagement with Badiou's idea of Evental ethics as contrasted with Deleuzian hypothesis of event. It further prescribes an alignment of Heidegger and Spinoza in reimagining ethics because capitalism has reduced everything as a substitutive entity where even human beings can be substituted, or exchanged in financial terms. On this account, the authors believe Spinoza is the best bet. For Spinoza, "Substance, or Nature, or God, is the immanent cause of all things and everything that exists is a modification of this one infinite substance." (81). Life is perceived in terms of what Spinoza calls Nature or Substance and here life is not just linked to organic creatures but with everything and in this way ethics connects to Life. Ethical "knowledge allows us to value from the standpoint of the infinite, or substance, or life itself" and it affirms the fact that we are part of nature and we participate in it.

If we participate in nature and partake of it, then, life is energy conversion and therefore, in a way, being or reality is also energy. Energy is fundamental to everything we are and everything we do. Here the authors examine the crucial role of energy in the sustenance of technology based civilizations and the present depletion and crisis in the energy sector. In fact in this case, the book incorporates scientific ideas of Einstein and electromagnetism to think of a future beyond oil and heat. The avowed task of this chapter is to "think of the Earth in an athermal way" and to do that one needs to conceive of 'physics beyond heat'. We are all heat dependent beings but the time has come to radically think beyond heat. Non-equilibrium thermodynamics explains the chaotic complexities of matter in a better way through a complex discussion of the Earth's magnetic fields or what they call magnetohydrodynamics. Without the Earth's magnetic field no life could exist, and the *new materialism*, therefore

is an energetic ... that refuses both hard core reductionism and transcendentalist new age mysticism. This energy is truly Hegelian Geist, and it is fully material, fully immanent in and as us. Energy is immanent Hegelian spirit, as opposed to heat, which is too extrinsic, transcendent and teleological. The answer to our current energy crisis, which is also a crisis of belief, is the Earth. The Earth becomes what it is through us if we have the foresight and courage to realize it. Hegelian Spirit is also importantly Deleuzian. Who does the Earth think it is? The Earth, like the world, is an egg, and this egg is composed of energetic intensities, spatiotemporal dynamisms and layered strata. If energy is reality, then we require a new way of thinking about being. (110)

If Being is to be thought in terms of energy, then Being too is energy transformation. So *New Materialism* is a radical 'theological sketch for a potential post-capitalist world' and we are guided to learn how to think and how to live, and theology, devoid of orthodoxy and transcendental ideas can provide such road maps for living. Under *New Materialism*, one takes this material world seriously and as we cannot have another Earth, we have to transform our relation to the existing Earth radically to protect it and life. The Earth in "Hegel's

term must cease to be a substance and become a subject, but in a truly dialectical way ... we need a new *Nomos* of the earth.”(152) Such a *nomos* or nomadology would generate deterritorialisation of thought which ultimately would forge a new Earth. *New Materialism* seeks the smooth “nomos space of earth, the intensive *magnetolectric* energy that pulses us, an earth that in Hegelian terms is not simply an inert substance but a dynamic subject, a Deleuzian nomadic-subject”. (152) The Earth still has a future and “the Earth is becoming itself through us; we can participate in this project or we will go extinct”. A radical political theology must ‘untie’ itself from the closure of a single event like crucifixion and can embrace a new materialism of the earth as the new event. It is indeed very difficult to capture the densely philosophical and complex scientific narratives of the book in the short span of a review but the bottom line is, this book rethinks religion, politics and science. Hopefully a sequel to this book would provincialise this project and engage other religions and philosophical trajectories.

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