

This small excerpt is taken from Graeber's book '*Debt. The First 5,000 Years*'. Written in 2011, following the 2007-2008 Financial Crisis in the US and the Credit crunch in the UK. Graeber is an American anthropologist whose book describes the history of debt and credit systems in a global context. Placing the writing of this book into a political context, I aim to highlight the influences of the writer and hence the writing. During President Reagan's time in US congress in the 1980s, he implemented what Graeber calls 'Reaganism', similarly, during the 1970s, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was in office, the influence of this, Graeber calls 'Thatcherism'. The mutual significance of both of these political periods is the outcome of Neo-Liberalism. 'Neo-Liberalism is a term for political and economic policy, it is associated with unrestrained free market and global capitalism'. (Havard, 0:00 – 0:15). The reason many people have issue with Neo-liberalism is due to the way that it leaves socially and economically vulnerable people in society unprotected. From analysing Graeber's writing it is clear that he is not sympathetic towards the growth of Neo-liberalism, with it having led to the mass privatisation of business and property and has resulted in increased disparities in wealth. This is due to a lack of government control and due to ordinary working people being told to aim towards 'buying a piece of capitalism', they have become indebted. The UK credit crunch of 2007 and the US Financial Crisis of 2007- 2008 meant that access to loans was reduced, and it should be acknowledged that the book from which this excerpt is taken was published in 2011, following these national economic climates.

There are clear Marxist undertones throughout the whole piece, where Graeber's political leniencies become clear, shown through his distaste towards Neo-Liberalism and the strong descriptive imagery used. This short excerpt suggests that the author's distaste for neo-liberalism stems from the legalisation of political corruption, and the way that it has allowed for a lack of governmental responsibility towards the working class. Graeber compares the new government system to that of the loan shark and pawn broker – compares them alike, not in contrast, because in Graeber's eyes they're alike. Graeber also compares '[...] judges, lawyers, bailiffs and police' as the kind of people who '[...] place mutilated animals on their victims doorsteps'. This is quite strong imagery which is demonstrative of Graeber's feelings towards the Bourgeoise, (As he described that Neo-Liberalism has become 'the organising principle of almost everything' I believe it is justified for me to use Marxist terminology whilst describing my impression of Graeber's expression). Furthermore, I'd argue that Marx's theory of alienation can be used to highlight the experience of homeownership and indebtedness, and deepen Graeber's writing; '[...] [T]he product of the worker is 'alien to him, and ... stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force', (Giddens, 1971, pp.11-12). I'd argue that this is highly relevant to the situation of home ownership following Neo-Liberalism. The home being a product of labour that has 'autonomous power' (Giddens, 1971, p. 11) over the working class, evident in their indebtedness to it, through mortgage. The anthropological perspective of this can be seen through the social implications of debt. The emotional impact of this described by Graeber through his description of those whom enforce it as '[...] the sort of people who place mutilated animals on their victims' doorsteps', (Graeber, 2011, pp. 376-377).

The use of descriptive imagery should be analysed from this writing, as it is demonstrative of the mindset of the writer. At the end of the excerpt Graeber describes the social impact of neo-liberalism, and uses quite dehumanising imagery to describe not only the relationship between 'investor and executive' and the public and their money, he also describes the

human beings themselves in a dehumanising tone. The fact that people are described as 'tiny corporations' shows how Graeber understands the new movement of neo-liberalism as one which is dehumanising not only to the laymen, but also to people in control such as bankers. This idea of a 'warrior who, indebted, has abandoned any sense of personal honour and turned himself into a kind of disgraced machine' is clearly demonstrative of Graeber's understanding of and feelings towards those who become indebted. I would argue however, that this understanding is heavily romanticised, and demonises those who become indebted. The idea of a working class member as a 'warrior' is romantic to such an extent that it is almost derogative and despite all of Graeber's prior arguments from this piece, it suggests that he sees indebtedness as a choice and thus, the working class 'warrior' as devoid of the influences of structural violence. Furthermore, Graeber calls the working class 'warrior [...] a kind of disgraced machine'. I understand that the imagery here is in reference to the use of credit systems and mortgages, and thus the visualisation of the human being becoming a machine in this society where 'capitalism [...] [has] become[e] the organising principle of almost everything' is not unjust or far from that of the symbolic reality, however my issue lies with Graeber suggesting this social position is achieved through choice.

References:

Giddens, A. (1971) *Capitalism and modern social theory: an analysis of the writings of Marx Durkheim and Max Weber*. London: Cambridge University Press. Pp.10-13

Graeber, D. (2011) *Debt. The First 5,000 years*. New York: Melville House Publishing. Pp. 376-377

Havard, (2018) *Pros and Cons of Neoliberalism*. Available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t41rFqVpB1I> (Accessed on: 06/03/19)

Climate Change: What Would Marx Think?

The Anthropocene is the term given to the current state of ecological affairs, where human behaviour is changing the ecological state of the planet at an alarming rate.

Marxism is a social theory that was created by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the 19th century, which aimed for increased economic equality.

Anthropocene Marxism is the area of social science that is using Marxist theory to attempt to analyse the social systems that have led to the contemporary Anthropocene. Not only this, but it aims to use Marxist theory to find a solution to the Anthropocene by analysing social structures and social- environmental relations under capitalism.

T. Laughlin (2017) argues that Anthropocene Marxism is an attempt at using social theory to comprehend the ways in which human beings can change their behaviour, by first acknowledging their 'totalitarian' state, and the role that all human beings play in the Anthropocene.



Image 3, Lowe (2015)



Image 1, Wikipedia, (2019)

Laughlin suggests that '[...] [they] [(human beings)] have entered a “new human” age in which [they] must understand [their] existence as a species not separated from nature but embedded within and coevolving with nature’. (Laughlin, 2017. p.149)

'[...] through our socially organized and mediated relationship with “external nature,” we are actively creating an increasingly hostile environment for human development and at the same time threatening the existence of thousands of other species’. (Laughlin, 2017, p. 149)

The term '**External Nature**' used by Laughlin here, is a Marxist term which describes the Marx calls 'non-human nature' (p. 149).

“Alienation” and the “alienation of nature”.

· John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett turn in Marx and the Earth: An Anticritique (2016). Both authors have made a name for themselves as proponents of ecological Marxism: Burkett in Marx and Nature (1999) and Foster in Marx's Ecology (2000).

· **Inorganic Body (Marx as cited by Laughlin, 2017, p.151)** Laughlin suggests that Marx's idea of the environment being man's inorganic body points towards a sensitivity towards '[...] the co-evolution of society and nature'. (Laughlin, 2017. p151) highlighting the ways in which society and environment live and develop together.



Image 2, Wikipedia, 2019



Image 4, Monsieur Plant, (2017)

Image 1, Wikipedia, 2019 Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Communist_Manifesto

Image 2, Wikipedia, 2019 Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism>

Image 3, Lowe, A. (2015) *Threats and Extinction*. Available at: <https://biodiversityrevolution.wordpress.com/2015/03/14/move-to-recognise-human-epoch-the-anthropocene/> (Accessed on 26/02/19).

Galene, F. (2017) *Monsieur plant*. Available at: <https://monsieurplant.com/portfolio-item/human-nature/> (Accessed on 26/02/19)

Laughlin, T., A., (2017) *Anthropocene Marxism* Chicago: Haymarket Books