



Religion, Politics, and the Earth: The New Materialism (Radical Theologies)

Clayton Crockett, Jeffrey W. Robbins

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This book takes its leave with the realization that Western-driven culture is quickly reaching the limits of global capitalism, and that this reality manifests itself not only economically and politically, but that it is at once a cultural, aesthetic, political, religious, ecological, and philosophical problem. While Western capitalism is based upon the assumption of indefinite growth, we have run up against real, physical constraints to growth, and humanity must face the real, physical ramifications of the short-sighted and ultimately counter-productive choices made on behalf of the capitalist machine. While there is widespread angst and numerous scenarios of apocalyptic crisis and collapse, there is little or no comprehension of the problem and a coherent picture of reality is left wanting. Drawing primarily from the discourses of contemporary continental philosophy, cultural theory, and radical theology, the new materialism is being offered up as a redress to this problem by its effort to make sense of the world as an integrated whole.

The book emphasizes three aspects of the current crisis: the ecological crisis, which is often viewed primarily in terms of global warming; the energy crisis, which involves peak oil and the limits of the ability to extract and exploit the cheap energy of fossil fuels; and finally the financial crisis, which involves the de-leveraging and destruction of massive amounts of money and credit. Each of these problems is inter-related, because money is dependent upon energy, and energy is a product of natural physical resources that are finite and diminishing.

Rather than despair or the cynicism that passes for realpolitik, the authors will suggest that this crisis provides an opening for a new kind of orientation to thinking and acting, a new way of being in and of the earth. This opening is an opening onto a new materialism 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. This materialism counters idealism in its practical and philosophical forms, which constructs an ideal world that we wish to inhabit and then mistakes that world for the real one. Furthermore, in contrast to classical materialism which rejects religion as a form of false consciousness, this new materialism recognizes religion as an effective means of political mobilization and as a genuine source of piety, and thus does not oppose religion per se; instead, it opposes fanaticism and fundamentalism, including the fairy-tale expectations that a God or gods will rescue us from our predicament and punish the evil-doers while rewarding the righteous.

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