

a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf

a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf has gained significant attention as an accessible and thought-provoking summary of how global economic and environmental systems have evolved through the lens of seven seemingly inexpensive yet fundamentally influential commodities. This PDF, based on the acclaimed book by Raj Patel and Jason Moore, offers readers an insightful analysis of the underlying drivers of modern capitalism, environmental degradation, and social inequality. In this article, we will explore the core themes of "A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things," the importance of the PDF version for learners and activists, and how this work contributes to understanding our interconnected world.

Understanding the Concept of "Cheap Things"

What Are "Cheap Things"?

The phrase "cheap things" in the context of the book refers to commodities that are artificially inexpensive due to systemic economic and environmental costs that are often hidden or externalized. These commodities include:

- Energy (such as fossil fuels)
- Food (industrial agriculture)
- Water
- Financial products (credit and debt)
- Minerals and metals
- Wood and paper
- Living labor (wages and social reproduction)

The "cheapness" of these items masks the broader social and ecological costs involved in their production, distribution, and consumption.

The Significance of "Seven" in the Title

The number seven is symbolic, representing a curated selection of the most influential commodities that have shaped the modern world economy. These seven "cheap things" serve as a lens through which to understand global history, highlighting the interconnectedness of ecological systems, capitalist practices, and social relations.

The Importance of the PDF Version

Accessibility and Distribution

The PDF version of "A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things" makes this critical analysis accessible to a broad audience. It allows students, activists, researchers, and general readers worldwide to access the content without the need for physical copies, which can be expensive or unavailable in some regions.

Ease of Use and Portability

Digital PDFs are portable and easy to search, enabling readers to quickly find specific topics or quotations. This format is particularly useful for educators and students incorporating the material into coursework or discussions.

Environmental Impact

Opting for a PDF reduces the need for paper, aligning with the book's environmental themes by minimizing resource consumption associated with printing and distribution.

Core Themes Explored in the Book and PDF

The Historical Development of Capitalism

The book traces the evolution of capitalist systems through the exploitation of these seven cheap things, illustrating how economic growth has often come at the expense of ecological health and social equity.

Environmental Externalities

It emphasizes how the true costs of commodities like fossil fuels or industrial agriculture are externalized,

leading to climate change, biodiversity loss, and water scarcity.

Global Inequality and Social Justice

The PDF highlights how the pursuit of cheap commodities perpetuates global inequalities, with marginalized communities bearing the brunt of environmental degradation and economic exploitation.

Interconnectedness of Systems

A key theme is that ecological, economic, and social systems are deeply interconnected. Changes or disruptions in one area ripple across others, emphasizing the need for systemic change.

The Seven Cheap Things Analyzed

1. Energy

Fossil fuels have historically been cheap sources of energy but at immense environmental costs. The extraction, burning, and pollution have contributed to climate change and environmental degradation.

2. Food

Industrial agriculture relies on cheap inputs like chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and monoculture practices that threaten biodiversity and soil health.

3. Water

Water is commodified and privatized in many regions, with access often linked to economic status, leading to conflicts and inequality.

4. Financial Products

The creation of credit, debt, and financial derivatives has made wealth appear cheap but has also led to economic crises and social instability.

5. Minerals and Metals

Mining for metals and minerals fuels technological development but causes environmental destruction and social displacement.

6. Wood and Paper

Deforestation driven by demand for timber and paper products contributes to habitat loss and climate change.

7. Living Labor

Wages and social reproduction are kept "cheap" through exploitative labor practices, affecting workers' rights and living conditions globally.

Implications for Contemporary Society

Rethinking Cost and Value

The book challenges readers to rethink what is considered "cheap" by exposing the hidden costs—environmental, social, and health-related—embedded in everyday commodities.

Promoting Sustainable Alternatives

Understanding these dynamics encourages the adoption of more sustainable and equitable practices, such as fair trade, renewable energy, and local food systems.

Activism and Policy

The insights from the PDF can inform activism and policy-making aimed at externalizing fewer costs and promoting systemic change.

How to Access and Use the PDF Effectively

Finding the PDF

The PDF may be available through various platforms, including university repositories, environmental organizations, or the publisher's website. Always ensure you access it legally and ethically.

Leveraging the Content

- Use it as a resource for academic research or coursework
- Incorporate insights into advocacy campaigns
- Share it with community groups interested in environmental justice
- Use it as a discussion starter in classrooms or workshops

Critical Engagement

Readers should approach the PDF critically, reflecting on how the themes relate to their local contexts and personal choices.

Conclusion

"A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things PDF" offers a compelling and accessible way to understand the complex systems that have shaped our modern world. By examining the seven commodities that appear inexpensive but carry hidden costs, the book encourages a shift towards more just and sustainable ways of living. Whether you're a student, activist, or curious reader, engaging with this PDF can deepen your understanding of global histories and inspire action toward a healthier planet and more equitable societies.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things' about?

It's a book that explores the history of the world through the lens of seven inexpensive resources—like nature, money, and labor—and examines how their exploitation has shaped global history.

Who are the authors of 'A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things'?

The book was written by Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, scholars who analyze economic and environmental history from a critical perspective.

Why has 'A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things' gained popularity recently?

The book has gained attention for its insightful critique of capitalism and environmental degradation, offering a new perspective on global history that resonates with current concerns about sustainability and inequality.

Is 'A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things' suitable for academic or general readers?

The book is accessible to both general readers interested in history and economics, as well as academics studying global history, environmental issues, and social justice.

Where can I find the PDF version of 'A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things'?

The PDF may be available through academic libraries, authorized online retailers, or open-access platforms. Always ensure to access it legally to respect copyright laws.

What are the seven 'cheap things' discussed in the book?

The seven cheap things are Nature, Money, Care, Food, Energy, Work, and Lives, which are analyzed for their roles in shaping global history and current crises.

How does 'A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things' contribute to contemporary environmental and social debates?

It offers a critical framework to understand how the exploitation of cheap resources has led to ecological collapse and social inequalities, encouraging readers to rethink sustainable and equitable alternatives.

Additional Resources

A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things PDF: Unpacking the Roots of Global Inequality and Environmental Crisis

In recent years, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* has emerged as a provocative and influential critique of the modern global economy. The book, available in a widely circulated PDF version, challenges readers to rethink the narratives of progress, development, and prosperity that have long been taken for granted. It offers a comprehensive analysis rooted in historical materialism, environmental sustainability, and social justice, emphasizing how seven seemingly inexpensive commodities—namely

nature, money, labor, food, energy, care, and lives—have shaped the modern world. As a scholarly work that blends history, economics, and environmental studies, it invites readers to see these so-called "cheap" things not as benign facilitators of growth but as complex, often destructive, forces embedded in global inequalities. This article explores the core themes, structure, and implications of the book, providing a detailed review grounded in its central arguments.

Understanding the Premise: The Concept of 'Cheap Things'

Defining 'Cheap' in a Global Context

The phrase “seven cheap things” initially appears paradoxical. How can something so integral to our daily lives—nature, labor, food—be considered cheap? The authors argue that these commodities have been historically undervalued and exploited in ways that mask their true social and environmental costs. Their affordability is often predicated on systemic inequalities, environmental degradation, and the erasure of the labor, resources, and risks involved in their production and distribution.

For example, the "cheapness" of food in Western supermarkets is underwritten by intensive industrial agriculture, often reliant on fossil fuels, synthetic fertilizers, and low-wage labor in developing countries. Similarly, energy appears inexpensive in consumer terms but is built upon fossil fuel extraction that damages ecosystems and contributes to climate change.

Historical Materialism as a Lens

The authors employ a historical materialist perspective, tracing how these seven commodities have evolved within capitalism to serve the interests of profit maximization. They argue that the “cheapness” of these items is a product of historical processes, including colonialism, technological innovation, and global trade regimes that have systematically undervalued ecological and human costs.

This approach reveals that the idea of cheapness is a social construct, shaped by power relations and economic structures that favor the accumulation of wealth over environmental sustainability and social equity.

Seven Cheap Things Explored

The core of the book centers around seven commodities, each examined through historical, ecological, and social lenses. Let's analyze each in detail:

1. Nature

Nature is regarded as the foundational "cheap" resource that sustains life and economic activity. Historically, nature has been treated as an infinite stock of free resources—forests, water, minerals—that could be exploited without regard for sustainability. This commodification, coupled with the myth of endless growth, has led to environmental crises such as deforestation, soil degradation, and climate change.

The authors highlight how colonialism and capitalism transformed nature into a commodity, stripping ecosystems of their intrinsic value and turning them into sources of profit. This process has often disregarded indigenous knowledge and stewardship practices, leading to biodiversity loss and ecological imbalance.

2. Money

Money, in this context, is not merely a medium of exchange but a potent symbol of power and control. The book discusses how the creation and expansion of monetary systems—particularly the shift to fiat currencies and global financial markets—have facilitated the accumulation of wealth and the deepening of inequalities.

The authors critique the notion that money is neutral or purely functional, emphasizing instead its role in perpetuating global disparities. The monetary system, they argue, often amplifies crises, encourages speculative behavior, and entraps nations and communities in cycles of debt.

3. Labor

Labor is presented as a "cheap" input in the production process, especially in the context of globalized supply chains. The narrative examines how capitalism has historically devalued labor—particularly that of marginalized groups—by relegating workers to low-wage, insecure jobs.

The book explores the exploitation of workers in factory settings, plantation economies, and sweatshops, many of which are located in the Global South. This underpayment and precariousness of labor are central to maintaining low costs for goods in wealthy nations, often at the expense of workers' rights, health, and dignity.

4. Food

The global food system is dissected as a prime example of the cheapening of essential resources. Industrial agriculture, with its reliance on chemical inputs, monoculture, and intensive resource extraction, has made food abundant and inexpensive—yet at severe ecological and social costs.

The authors critique food sovereignty and the destruction of small-scale farmers, emphasizing how the commodification of food has led to issues like malnutrition, loss of biodiversity, and dependence on fossil fuels. They argue that the true cost of "cheap" food is paid in environmental degradation and the marginalization of local food systems.

5. Energy

Energy, primarily derived from fossil fuels, is portrayed as a "cheap" enabler of industrialization and consumerism. However, the environmental toll—climate change, air pollution, habitat destruction—is often externalized or ignored in price calculations.

The book traces the historical shift from renewable energy sources to coal, oil, and gas, emphasizing how energy extraction and consumption underpin global inequalities. The reliance on fossil fuels also sustains geopolitical tensions and economic dependencies.

6. Care

The concept of "care" encompasses social reproduction—raising children, caring for the elderly, community work—that is often unpaid or underpaid. The authors expose how capitalism undervalues care work, which disproportionately falls on women, especially in marginalized communities.

This undervaluation perpetuates gender inequalities and depletes social and environmental resources, as care work is essential for the sustainability of societies but remains invisible in economic calculations.

7. Lives

Finally, lives refer to human and non-human lives sacrificed or marginalized in the pursuit of economic growth. This includes the deaths caused by environmental disasters, labor exploitation, and war, as well as the ongoing marginalization of indigenous peoples and vulnerable populations.

The book emphasizes that the "costs" of economic development are often paid in human suffering, yet these costs are rarely reflected in market prices or national accounts.

Historical and Contemporary Implications

The Colonial Roots of Cheapness

A central thesis of the book is that the origins of many "cheap" commodities are rooted in colonial violence and resource extraction. Colonial powers established global trade routes, exploited indigenous lands, and enforced systems of slavery and forced labor to ensure the low cost of raw materials.

This historical context is crucial for understanding contemporary inequalities. The wealth accumulated through colonialism continues to influence global economic disparities, with marginalized regions bearing the environmental scars and social injustices of past and present exploitation.

Environmental Crisis and the Myth of Infinite Growth

The authors critique the dominant narrative of continuous economic growth, which depends on the endless availability and cheapness of natural resources. They argue that this paradigm is unsustainable, leading to climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological collapse.

They advocate for a paradigm shift towards sustainability, emphasizing the need to recognize the true costs of these "cheap" things and to develop economic models that prioritize ecological health and social well-being over mere growth.

The Role of Global Capitalism and Financialization

The book examines how financialization—where financial markets, instruments, and speculation dominate economic activity—has deepened inequalities. The expansion of global capital flows often leads to "race to the bottom," where countries compete to offer the lowest wages and environmental standards to attract investment.

This dynamic locks in the cheapness of labor and resources, perpetuating cycles of exploitation and environmental degradation, while the benefits accrue disproportionately to the wealthy few.

Critical Perspectives and Debates

Environmental Justice and Indigenous Perspectives

The book emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge systems and land stewardship practices, contrasting them with Western capitalist approaches. Indigenous communities often maintain sustainable relationships with nature, challenging the narrative that exploitation is necessary for progress.

Environmental justice movements draw from these perspectives, advocating for reparations, land rights, and the recognition of ecological rights.

Alternative Economic Models

Given the critique of capitalism's reliance on cheap commodities, the authors explore alternative models such as degrowth, commons-based economies, and ecological economics. These frameworks prioritize social equity, ecological sustainability, and the valuation of unpaid care work.

They argue that recognizing the true costs of "cheap" things necessitates systemic change, moving beyond growth-driven paradigms.

Implications for Policy and Society

Rethinking Consumption and Production

The book calls for a fundamental re-evaluation of consumption patterns, encouraging reduced reliance on resource-intensive goods and promoting local, sustainable alternatives. It advocates for policies that internalize environmental and social costs, such as carbon pricing, fair wages, and resource quotas.

Environmental and Social Justice Movements

Understanding the history and interconnectedness of these seven cheap things bolsters social movements aiming for systemic change. Recognizing the embedded inequalities and environmental costs can galvanize

efforts toward justice, reparations, and sustainable development.

Educational and Cultural Shift

Finally, the authors stress the importance of education—raising awareness about the true costs of cheap commodities—to foster a culture that values ecological health, social equity, and

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a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: [A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things](#) Raj Patel, Jason W. Moore, 2017-10-17 Introduction -- Cheap nature -- Cheap money -- Cheap work -- Cheap care -- Cheap food -- Cheap energy -- Cheap lives -- Conclusion

a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things Raj Patel, Jason W. Moore, 2018-05-22 Nature, money, work, care, food, energy, and lives: these are the seven things that have made our world and will shape its future. In making these things cheap, modern commerce has transformed, governed, and devastated Earth. In *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore present a new approach to analyzing today's planetary emergencies. Bringing the latest ecological research together with histories of colonialism, indigenous struggles, slave revolts, and other rebellions and uprisings, Patel and Moore demonstrate that throughout history, crises have always prompted fresh strategies to make the world cheap and safe for capitalism. At a time of crisis in all seven cheap things, innovative and systemic thinking is urgently required. This book proposes a radical new way of understanding-and reclaiming-the planet in the turbulent twenty-first century.

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the implementation of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Greg Anderson and Christopher Kukucha have carefully selected expert contributors with diverse perspectives on the political economy of North American integration to conduct a rigorous examination of the agreement's impact.

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a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: Critical Praxis and the Social Imaginary for Sustainable Food Systems Max Stephenson, Kim Niewolny, Anna Erwin , Laura Zanotti, 2024-09-26 Scholarship and high-level diplomatic reports alike, including that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021, have highlighted the negative material and bodily inequities of our globalized industrial food system, one that is fuelled by a hegemonic politics of food access and availability. The effects of industrialized food systems on public health, human rights, food sovereignty, ecological sustainability for land and water, as well as for climate change are increasingly obvious. These ongoing challenges, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated existing social, economic, and political inequalities and vulnerabilities and placed them in the spotlight. The crisis in the Ukraine has also underscored how connected global industrialized food systems are to nation state geopolitical interests, international alliances, trade relations, and conflicts. The current industrialized resource-intensive food system has persisted because of a complex set of power relations, despite its continuing and deepening social, ecological, and cultural costs.

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readers of political ecology, animal geography, environmental anthropology, food system studies, and critical animal studies.

a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: Elgar Encyclopedia of Food and Society Lewis Holloway, Michael K. Goodman, Damian Maye, Moya Kneafsey, Alexandra E. Sexton, Ana Moragues-Faus, 2025-08-11 Featuring over 120 entries from international experts, this Encyclopedia provides a comprehensive overview of the activities, ideas, issues and challenges that shape relationships between food systems and society. Each entry includes an accessible and informative introduction to its topic, along with specific examples, recommended further reading and references to other sources. This title contains one or more Open Access chapters.

a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: Homes in Crisis Capitalism Marnie Holborow, 2024-02-22 Homes in Crisis Capitalism explores the core social reproduction role that individual households fulfil in our societies, and the class and racial effects of this on gender inequality and discrimination. Women now make up nearly half of the paid workforce globally, yet prevailing neoliberal social policy continues to rule out adequate state provision of child- and elder-care, choosing instead to rely on marketized services to fill the gap. It is mainly women who carry out this little valued care work, either in a non-paid or paid capacity, and gender inequality is entrenched across society. Official gender parity policies, often expressed in terms of equality of opportunity, have done little to ease the double burden of domestic and care work for the vast majority of women. Competitive labour markets discriminate against those expected to be the primary caregivers of children, the sick and disabled and older people. In addition, the presence across many societies of an acute housing crisis and soaring inflation have put added pressures on home life. A social reproduction crisis has developed, and it is working class women and women of colour who are paying the price. Holborow analyses homes in crisis capitalism through a Marxist lens of capitalist social reproduction. This book charts the interwoven social and political effects and outcomes of work and care provided in the home, and makes the case for a radical break with capitalism to give social reproduction the material resources and social recognition it deserves.

a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: Routledge Handbook of Sustainable and Regenerative Food Systems Jessica Duncan, Michael Carolan, Johannes S.C. Wiskerke, 2020-08-13 This handbook includes contributions from established and emerging scholars from around the world and draws on multiple approaches and subjects to explore the socio-economic, cultural, ecological, institutional, legal, and policy aspects of regenerative food practices. The future of food is uncertain. We are facing an overwhelming number of interconnected and complex challenges related to the ways we grow, distribute, access, eat, and dispose of food. Yet, there are stories of hope and opportunities for radical change towards food systems that enhance the ability of living things to co-evolve. Given this, activities and imaginaries looking to improve, rather than just sustain, communities and ecosystems are needed, as are fresh perspectives and new terminology. The Routledge Handbook of Sustainable and Regenerative Food Systems addresses this need. The chapters cover diverse practices, geographies, scales, and entry-points. They focus not only on the core requirements to deliver sustainable agriculture and food supply, but go beyond this to think about how these can also actively participate with social-ecological systems. The book is presented in an accessible way, with reflection questions meant to spark discussion and debate on how to transition to safe, just, and healthy food systems. Taken together, the chapters in this handbook highlight the consequences of current food practices and showcase the multiple ways that people are doing food differently. The Routledge Handbook of Sustainable and Regenerative Food Systems is essential reading for students and scholars interested in food systems, governance and practices, agroecology, rural sociology, and socio-environmental studies.

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creation, and knowledge production and appropriation within a Marxist framework. Nonetheless, the adopted approach pays heed to multiple fields of knowledge, providing rich discussions that facilitate the understanding of actual social totality in which capitalism, knowledge production and appropriation, and the struggles of appropriation mutually reinforce each other, although not devoid of antagonisms and contradictions. In light of contemporary capitalism, the transformations that social property relations are undergoing must be scrutinised – such as those brought about by the development of digitalisation and the convergence between big pharma and tech giants. What are the conditions of intellectual property creation today? What theoretical assumptions does it make? Under what social relations is intellectual property produced? Throughout, the emphasis is not on individual cases or symptoms but on the overarching logic: the logic of capitalism as revealed in intellectual property.

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a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: Degrowth in Movement(s) Nina Treu, Matthias Schmelzer, Corinna Burkhart, 2020-05-29 Degrowth is an emerging social movement that overlaps with proposals for systemic change such as anti-globalization and climate justice, commons and transition towns, basic income and Buen Vivir. Degrowth in Movement(s) reflects on the current situation of social movements aiming at overcoming capitalism, industrialism and domination. The essays ask: What is the key idea of the respective movement? Who is active? What is the relation with the degrowth movement? What can the degrowth movement learn from these other movements and the other way around? Which common proposals, but also which contradictions, oppositions and tensions exist? And what alliances could be possible for broader systemic transformations? Corinna Burkhart, Matthias Schmelzer, and Nina Treu have curated an impressive demonstration that there are, beyond regressive neoliberalism and techno-fixes, emancipatory alternatives contributing to a good life for all. Degrowth in Movement(s) explores this mosaic for social-ecological transformation -

an alliance strengthened by diversity.

a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: Chicken Paul R. Josephson, 2020-05-19 Why has the chicken become the meat par excellence, the most plentifully eaten and popular animal protein in the world, consumed from Beijing to Barcelona? As renowned historian Paul Josephson shows, the story of the chicken's rise involves a whole host of factors; from art, to nineteenth-century migration patterns to cold-war geopolitics. And whereas sheep needed too much space, or the cow was difficult to transport, these compact, lightweight birds produced relatively little waste, were easy to transport and could happily peck away in any urban back garden. Josephson tells this story from all sides: the transformation of the chicken from backyard scratcher to hyper-efficient industrial meat-product has been achieved due to the skill of entrepreneurs who first recognized the possibilities of chicken meat and the gene scientists who bred the plumpest and most fertile birds. But it has also been forced through by ruthless capitalists and lobbyists for "big farmer", at the expense of animal welfare and the environment. With no sign of our lust for chicken abating, we're now reaching a crisis point: billions of birds are slaughtered every year, after having lived lives that are nasty, brutish and short. The waste from these victims is polluting rivers and poisoning animals. We're now plunging "egg-first" into environmental disaster. Alongside this story Josephson tells another, of an animal with endearing characteristics who, arguably, can lay claim to being man's best friend long before the dog reared its snout or the cat came in from the cold. Lionized in medieval romances and modern cartoons, the chicken's relationship to humanity runs deep; by treating these animals as mere food products, we become less than human.

a history of the world in seven cheap things pdf: Liberating People, Planet, and Religion Joerg Rieger, Terra Rowe, 2024-05-29 There is growing consensus that life on the planet is in peril if climate change continues at its current pace. At stake is not only the future of many species but of humanity itself. As an increasing number of ecological economists have emphasized, these problems will only be adequately addressed by re-examining economic systems from an ecological perspective, fundamentally calling into question assumptions of unlimited growth and the maximization of shareholder profit foundational to neoliberal capitalism. Religion and ecology scholars have also increasingly emphasized the ways climate change challenges assumed divides between nature and culture, religion and labor, economy and ecology, and calls for critical and constructive engagement with the religion, economy, and ecology nexus. Often, though, religious engagements with economy and ecology have placed emphasis on individual morality, action, and agency at the level of consumption patterns or have suggested mere modifications within existing economic paradigms. Contributors to this volume call into question the adequacy of this approach in light of the urgency of climate change which is always ever entwined with ongoing patterns of exploitation, oppression, and colonialism in current economic systems. Rather than tweaking a system of exploitation, for instance by emphasizing individual consumption or care for human and non-human victims, these authors articulate important opportunities for religious engagement, activism, resistance, and solidarity around issues of production and labor. Recalling that Marx linked agencies and labor of people as well as the other-than-human world, these authors aim to articulate a sense in which liberation of people and the planet are intertwined and can be accomplished only through collaboration for their common good. The basic intuition driving this volume is that while Christianity has by and large become the handmaiden of exploitative capitalism and empire, it might also reclaim latent theologies and religious practices that call into question the fundamental valuation of labor without recognition or rest, of extractive exploitation, and a "winner take all" praxis. In the process, Christianity might reclaim and reinvest in tenuous historical materializations of transformed ecological and economic relationships while economics might be re-informed by a valuation of the shared oikos as well as a just accounting of and remuneration for labor. Together they might serve the aim of the flourishing of all people and the planet.

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one to an artificial one in which the quantity of man-made objects – houses, asphalt, cars, plastic, computers and so on – now exceeds the totality of living matter. And while biomass continues to decline due to deforestation and species extinction, the mass of man-made objects is growing faster than ever. We're on a treadmill to disaster. To get off this treadmill, argues Harald Welzer, we need to learn how to stop: as individuals and as societies, we need to stop doing what we're doing and say 'enough'. We find it hard to do this because our culture has trained us to regard endless escalation as desirable, and we're reluctant to surrender the material benefits of growth. But as long as the expansive cultural model continues to prevail, there will be no change of course in favour of sustainable and climate-friendly practices and lifestyles. We need a cultural model in which the beauty of stopping is given the recognition needed for the project of civilization to continue. Optimizing processes that are heading in the wrong direction only makes matters worse. Stopping is imperative: it is a human cultural technique that we must re-learn. Only then can we achieve a new beginning.

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