

Kostas Axelos. *Introduction to a Future Way of Thought: On Heidegger and Marx.* Ed. Stuart Elden. Trans. Kenneth Mills. Meson Press 2015. 183 pp. \$15.04 USD (Paperback ISBN 9783957960054).

Who is the *real* Kostas Axelos? And is he a Marxist? A Heideggerian? A Nietzschean? A *Situationiste*? Or simply a figment of French post-'68 thought? These are questions that might perplex readers of *Introduction to a Future Way of Thought: On Marx and Heidegger (IFWT)*, which represents Axelos' attempt to *think through* these two strong influences, and, by 'thinking through[,] ... to think beyond them' (37) to a future third way of thought. In his 'Introduction,' Stuart Elden labels Axelos a 'Left Heideggerian or a Heideggerian Marxist' (9), an oxymoronic description that raises the question: which is he, *really*? Marxist or Heideggerian? Communist or fascist? Leftist or rightist? —which are precisely the stereotyped terms Axelos attempts to think beyond. Considering whether Heidegger supersedes Marx, or Marx Heidegger, Axelos himself insists that 'a great thinker cannot supersede another great thinker' (56), a typically cryptic non-answer to an unanswerable question which leaves his own effort to supersede Marx and Heidegger, like his philosophical-political orientation, perplexingly in doubt.

As for his biographical background: Born in Greece in 1924, Kostas Axelos, while still in his teens, became a Communist militant in the Resistance struggle against the German and Italian occupation in World War II, and, afterwards, was caught up in the Civil War between the U.S. and British-backed provisional government, and the Greek Communist Party (KKE), with its military branch, the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE), and the former resistance groups, the National Liberation Front (EAM) and the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS). And so Axelos was there, when the first battle of the Greek Civil War, the *Dekemvriana*, erupted on December 3rd, 1944, and Greek security police, with British troops standing by, opened fire on an unarmed EAM demonstration, killing 28 protestors and injuring dozens. In the resulting mayhem, Axelos was captured, put through a faked execution, imprisoned in a detention camp on the Mediterranean, and finally sentenced to death. But he escaped by swimming seven kilometers through the frigid seawaters, and finally boarded the Greek refugee ship, the *SS Mataroa*, with Cornelius Castoriadis and Kostas Papaioannou aboard, bound for postwar France.

In Paris, Axelos contacted the French Communist Party (PCF), but found them too Stalinist and too orthodox, and, instead, became involved in founding the French-language journal, *Arguments*, which attempted to chart a post-Stalinist Marxist thought, somewhere between that of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les temps modernes*, Castoriadis' *Socialisme ou barbarie*, and the *Internationale situationiste*: journals which, twenty years later, after the May '68 student revolts, would come to represent what's called '68 thought.' But somewhere along the way, Axelos met Heidegger, who was still in recovery from his stint as the Nazi Rector of Freiburg University in 1933-1934, and from the postwar French denazification trials of the 1940s—served as his interpreter at the Cerisy-la-Salle Conference in 1955, and also spent time at his Black Forest hut, where Axelos absorbed Heidegger's post-*Kehre* thinking of 'Overcoming Metaphysics,' as is evident from *IFWT*, written between 1956 and 1966. Axelos then attempted to make Heidegger's post-*Kehre* thinking of 'Overcoming Metaphysics' compatible with the contrary thinking of 'the young Marx' of *The German Ideology*, with the mixed results evident in *IFWT*.

In addition to his public role as editor of *Arguments*, interpreter of Heidegger and Marx, and translator of Lukács, Korsch, and Adorno, Axelos wrote nine original works, arranged, as Elden describes them, by thematic content, in a 'trilogy of trilogies' (25), centered upon his master-work, *Le jeu du monde* (Minuit, 1969). *IFWT* also serves as an introduction to Axelos' thought for an Anglo-

American readership, for whom this strange combination of French post-Marxist dogmatics and German post-Nazi metaphysics may appear slightly curious, if not outrageous, objectionable, and politically incorrect. But *IFWT* is not typical of Axelos' works, which tend toward the cryptic, elliptical style of French post-'68 thought (think: Derrida's 'The Ends of Man,' Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Lyotard's *Just Gaming*, etc.); and the reader intrigued by *IFWT* might seek out *Le jeu du monde* (unfortunately still untranslated), which represents Axelos' attempt to forge the disparate fragments of his elliptical thought into a crypto-philosophical anti-system that depicts 'the play of the world,' carried out by a wayward, errant humanity, under a wandering star.

Superficially, it appears self-contradictory to bring together Marx and Heidegger under a single banner, since their diametrically opposed worldviews often stand at the antipodes of nineteenth and twentieth century western European politics. After all, Karl Marx's lifetime spanned what György Lukács called 'the early heroic period' of the nineteenth century bourgeois social revolutions; and the young Marx persisted in seeing in those bourgeois social revolutions the more hopeful signs of the Promethean liberation of working class humanity from the stifling constraints of the bourgeois capitalist State. This revolutionary liberation would come, the young Marx believed, when the workers of the world unshackled themselves from the diabolical machineries of industrial capitalism, threw off the chains of exploitation by wage labor, and inaugurated the utopian state of working class communism, foreboded, however faintly, by those nineteenth century bourgeois revolutions. But for Marx, the conquest of nature by technology and the globalization of western capitalism were a prerequisite of that future utopian communist state, and not themselves the sinister agencies which brought about working-class exploitation and the enslavement of man by machine in the first place, as some utopian socialists argued.

By contrast, Heidegger's lifetime was brutally punctuated by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, by the German National Socialist revolution of 1933-1934, and by World War II. These catastrophic events brought the whole world to the brink of self-annihilation with the weapons of mass destruction unleashed by a rampant, out-of-control, military-industrial-technological complex, as became starkly evident at Stalingrad, Auschwitz, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These catastrophic events signaled to Heidegger that the possibility of a socialist revolution against the global domination of western European military-industrial technocracy was definitely past, and that only by overcoming the western metaphysical worldview which created *both* communism and fascism, could the future survival of humanity be salvaged from the self-destructive holocaust foreboded by the cold war thermonuclear arms race. This is the crucial argument of Heidegger's 'Overcoming Metaphysics,' which stands in distinct contrast to that of the young Marx's socialist humanist writings; and if Axelos is not quite capable of making the two thinkers jibe, it's not his fault, but the fault of their perilous times, that they are so distressingly out of joint.

Beyond the incongruity of pairing the young Marx with the elder Heidegger, Axelos' *IFWT* still serves the crucial need for a critical theory that extends the Marxist analysis of western European domination of the capitalist world-system, beyond the strictly economic critique of what's called 'globalization,' into a critique of what Axelos, following Heidegger, calls the '*mondialisation*' (the 'becoming world') of the western European military-industrial-technological complex—precisely what Heidegger's 'Overcoming Metaphysics' incisively theorizes. For Heidegger, western European domination of the non-western world is not simply a function of the wholesale capitalization of the former pre-capitalist life-world, as Marx and Engels might suggest; instead, it is an effect of the extension of the western metaphysical world-view into the rampant technologization of the whole earth's biosphere by what he called '*das Ge-Stell*' ('the frame,' 'the in-stall-ation,' or, 'the im-plant-ation'): that is, by the computerized surveillance-and-information networks of the western technocratic military-industrial-corporate State.

Additionally, Heidegger argues, the extension of the western metaphysical world-view into the world-wide surveillance-and-information networks of *das Gestell* has also accomplished the subjection of sentient human beings to the technocratic world-system, as simply exploitable raw materials or expendable human resources, in the service of the 'will to will' to global domination. The theoretical connections between Heidegger's critique of the 'becoming world' of the western European metaphysical world-view in the postwar technocratic world-state, and the young Marx's critique of the 'becoming worldly' of Hegel's philosophy as 'The German Ideology' of the Prussian military State, are explored by Axelos in 'Marx and Heidegger: Guides to a Future Way of Thought' (48-54), while the closely connected analysis of what Heidegger calls 'the forgetting of Being,' seen as consistent with Marx's critique of the 'estrangement' or 'alienation' of the working class in capitalist wage labor, is also helpfully explicated in Elden's 'Introduction' (14-17). Together, Axelos and Elden then undertake the procrustean effort of bringing together the dissident thoughts of these two strikingly different thinkers, while also rehabilitating Marx's thought for a distinctly post-Marxist multinational world-age.

Kostas Axelos lived through the same catastrophic events described in Heidegger's 'Overcoming Metaphysics,' which led the postwar Heidegger to postulate a future world driven by its sinister impulses of self-annihilation and caught up in a fatal errancy, under a wandering star. Axelos even adopts the same metaphors as Heidegger, and his text is frequently punctuated by direct citations from Heidegger's post-*Kehre* texts. But Axelos does not appear to have adopted the sinister view of western technology and its weapons of mass destruction evident in Heidegger's 'Overcoming Metaphysics,' but, instead, sees western humanity caught up in 'the game of the world,' in 'the play of errancy,' which, however sinister and malevolent it may appear, is simply an effect of the will-to-power which drives both contemporary humanity and the whole earth along their wandering course. Whether that errant course leads toward self-destructive holocaust or toward revolutionary liberation, Axelos doesn't say, but, instead, leaves the fate of the sentient earth and of global humanity undecided by his future third way of thought.

Axelos clearly doesn't see western technocracy driven by the self-destructive will to self-annihilation that overshadows Heidegger's post-*Kehre* texts, nor has he given up hope on the Marxist project of revolutionary social liberation, as is evident in his attempts to read Heidegger's post-*Kehre* texts backwards into the socialist humanist texts of the young Marx. But whether that strenuous effort to somehow recuperate the utopian project of the young Marx can still be sustained, after the downfall of Soviet Communism and its Marxist/Leninist satellite-states, and the rise of the western technocratic world-state, described by Heidegger's 'Overcoming Metaphysics,' is a question to further perplex critical readers of *Introduction to a Future Way of Thought*.

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