

they have virtually no say in any public decision-making and thus a quite rational excuse for non-participation in the political process (98).

In the final chapter, the authors suggest that, in order to create a new paradigm, an overcoming of the “democratic malaise” will be needed. Further, to move beyond neoliberalism, the creation/framing of an alternative paradigm to neoliberalism needs to be a major priority and needs to begin now.

Harvey, David. 2010. *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19975-871-5. Cloth: 27.95 CAD. Pages: 296.

Reviewed by Matthew Brett  
Concordia University

A seeming deluge of radical literature continues to emerge in response to the latest crisis of capitalism. David Harvey’s *The Enigma of Capital* offers a unique and compelling theoretical contribution to this growing body of literature. While *Enigma* finds its strength primarily as a theoretical text, the theoretical constructs are developed in a clear and accessible manner. This poses something of a trade-off, insofar as Harvey runs the risk of abandoning the conceptual rigour of classical Marxism in order to make its general ideas more accessible. *Enigma* is nevertheless one of the most dynamic recent theoretical constructs developed with which to understand and confront capitalism today.

*Enigma* can reasonably be situated within Harvey’s broader Marx project, a lifetime effort to make the works and ideas of Karl Marx relevant for a contemporary audience. The Marx project includes a series of online audio-video lectures thus far covering Volumes 1 and 2 of *Capital*. Harvey has also deliberately shifted away from the conceptual rigour of his earlier work, with *Limits to Capital* (1982) serving as a benchmark of theoretical density. *Enigma* simplifies away the often torturous conceptual apparatus that Marx constructed in favour of plain language. In this respect, *Enigma* would be an ideal text for anyone searching for an accessible theoretical understanding of the latest crisis and the nature of capital flow.

Like many books on the latest crisis, *Enigma* begins with a brief overview of the roots and consequences of the Great Recession. The central thesis of this chapter is that capitalism has become increasingly unstable since its neoliberal turn in the 1970s. This increasing volatility stems from capital’s inherent drive toward growth and expansion. This need to constantly grow presents the system with a “capital surplus absorption

problem,” in which profits generated must be reinvested again in order for the system to grow (28). Since the 1970s, this absorption problem has been resolved through an increasing reliance on high finance. The financialization of capitalism has spurred extreme volatility in the global economy, and it was only a matter of time before the bubble burst.

Harvey then shifts to developing a nuanced theoretical apparatus to make sense of it all. Capital is a process that must necessarily grow and circulate in order to survive. “Continuity of flow in the circulation of capital is very important. The process cannot be interrupted without incurring losses” (41). There is also a continual drive to speed up this circulation process, which necessarily entails reducing spatial barriers in the physical environment; innovations in transport and communications are therefore critical (42). There are nevertheless six potential barriers or blockage points to this accumulation process that must be overcome in order for capital to reproduce itself and grow. These barriers include: (i) insufficient money capital; (ii) scarcities or difficulties with the labour supply; (iii) inadequate means of production and natural limits; (iv) inappropriate technologies and organizational forms; (v) resistance or inefficiencies in the labour process; (vi) lack of demand backed by money to pay in the market. Blockage at any one of these points can disrupt capital flows and potentially lead to crisis. Chapters 3 and 4 then deal with each of these potential barriers in detail, offering clear and easy-to-understand examples.

Chapter 5 shifts to developing an additional theoretical apparatus which overlays these potential barriers and blockage points. Harvey argues that capital must revolve through seven inter-related yet distinctive “activity spheres” in search for profit. These spheres include: technologies and organizational forms; social relations; institutional arrangements; production and labour processes; relations to nature; the reproduction of daily life and the human species; and “mental conceptions of the world” (123). Again, clear examples are provided as a means of illustrating how these activity spheres operate in practice. While these theoretical constructs may sound complex, Harvey presents these ideas patiently and in a very accessible manner. It is also worth noting that this theoretical construct stems entirely from a passing footnote in Chapter 14 of *Capital* (Vol. 1). This footnote captures Marx’s dialectical method of thinking, which Harvey then builds upon to develop a fairly unique theoretical apparatus.

The book closes with an invigorating chapter on the struggle for an anti-capitalist transition. The blockage points and activity spheres developed in the preceding chapters are turned on their head, to be utilized for anti-capitalist ends. Harvey argues that “capitalism will never fall on its own. It will have to be pushed. The accumulation of capital will never cease. It will have to be stopped. The capitalist class will never willingly surrender its power. It will have to be dispossessed” (260). Harvey then sketches a revolutionary outline of how this dispossession can be achieved. Political organizing and thinking must work across all seven activity spheres in order to foster an anti-capitalist

transition. Relations to nature and to each other must be reconfigured; daily life habits must evolve along anti-capitalist lines; modes of production must be controlled by workers and communities; mental conceptions of the world must shift away from neoliberal ideology toward something entirely new. In this chapter, Harvey is seeking nothing less than a full-scale transformation of the dominant social order.

This closing chapter on anti-capitalist struggle has drawn its fair share of criticism. Some activists argue that his approach is already being implemented; anarchists may challenge his view that autonomist organizing is unable to develop large-scale organizational forms; others may argue that he downplays the role of race, gender and difference. Harvey's reference to violence may also draw criticism. These are all interesting criticisms worthy of pursuit and reasoned deliberation.

To this series of critiques, it is worth raising a level of concern over Harvey's drift away from classical conceptual rigour. On the one hand, removing Marx's dense conceptual baggage makes his ideas accessible and relevant. *Enigma* is receiving widespread attention precisely because Harvey has simplified classical Marxist concepts and theories. This is encouraging, insofar as the anti-capitalist ideas of *Enigma* will reach a broader audience than much of the Marxist literature currently available. On the other hand, removing classical language and concepts runs the risk of losing the theoretical roots of anti-capitalist theory and action. This is a fine balance. For example, Harvey never makes explicit reference to human labour as being the source for value in capitalist economies. This is problematic when adopting a Marxist framework of analysis.

Nevertheless, Harvey offers one of the most novel and accessible explanations of capitalism today. There is an element of dark humour in this as well: his novel theoretical constructs are based largely upon a passing footnote that Marx published over 140 years ago. *Enigma* offers both a method for understanding the world, and a course of action for changing it along anti-capitalist lines. Both contributions are welcome and, indeed, necessary.

Olsen, Gregg M. 2011. *Power and Inequality: A Comparative Introduction*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-544400-1. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 216.

Reviewed by Larry Patriquin  
Nipissing University

A book on inequality could not be more timely, when movements to occupy financial and other business heartlands have broken out in many countries, when even