

ative to capitalism across nation, gender, race. In these days of apocalyptic nuclear rhetoric, there has never been a more important time for Dunayevskaya's intersectional Marxist feminism, her radical feminist social philosophy,

articulated now through scenes of Eastern European migrations, anti-imperialist and anti-war movements of our times, and a longing for a new radical humanity based on solidarity to come.

Senka Anastasova

Crisis within crisis

Dario Gentili, *The Age of Precarity: Endless Crisis as an Art of Government*, trans. Stefania Porcelli in collaboration with Clara Pope (London and New York: Verso, 2021). 136pp., £12.99 pb., 978 1 78873 380 9

This is the new English translation of a book first published in Italian in 2018. In a world that is still struggling with the crisis of the pandemic and its aftershocks, the 2018 Italian edition feels prescient and the English edition timely, explaining the role of crisis in the contemporary world and giving some clarity to understanding why governments acted in the manner that they did in the face of the Covid-19 crisis.

Gentili identifies precarious living as a direct consequence of the role of crisis as a form of governmentality. He argues that under conditions of constant crisis and neoliberal forms of governance, precarity becomes a form of life defining every aspect of our lives. This implies a crisis within a crisis: the critical conditions enacted by governments as a response to collective forms of crisis place individual lives in a state of constant uncertainty and ruptures. This process transforms existence itself into a crisis.

The book is divided into three parts: Crisis, Modern Age, and Forms of Life. Gentili engages in a genealogical exercise to explore and uncover the origins and development of the meaning of crisis, showing that this meaning has changed from antiquity through modernity to the present. Etymologically 'crisis' is presented as meaning judgment, election or choice but also separation or division. Thus for the Ancient Greeks, crisis is related to two types of decision-making processes and judgements: a juridical type and a medical type. Placed together these two dimensions uncover the contemporary formulation crisis, which is a biopolitical one, whereby medical discourse becomes a political discourse.

From the outset, Gentili shows the originality and poignancy of his reading of crisis. He states that we

should be looking at crisis not as a concept but as a function, a *dispositif*. He argues that crisis functions as a means to govern by the established order of power to respond to an urgent or present need. Thus, the genealogical project undertaken by Gentili is not simply about the meaning of crisis, but is instead an uncovering of the notion of *dispositif* as developed by authors like Foucault, Deleuze and Agamben, leading towards a reading and understanding of crisis as a *dispositif*. Crisis has a governing function that allows the order of power to maintain its standing and to curtail any threats against it. This quality of crisis supports Gentili's claim that crisis is a form of *dispositif* that plays a dominant role in contemporary society.

The major significance of Gentili's argument lies in how he reveals the proximity between the medical role of crisis and its function as a tool to govern, thus showing that, in its contemporary iteration, crisis is a *biopolitical dispositif* that is enforced by the dominant force of the contemporary world, neoliberalism. In this way, the book is also a critical analysis of how neoliberalism has an ability to govern, and maintain its primacy, by controlling life itself. The book applies a radical rhetoric that reveals the ability of neoliberalism to control human life through various measures, and more unnervingly its potential for creating new forms of life, which serve to maintain and reinforce its stranglehold over society and its institutions. In this context, precarity is not just understood as a type of labour or industrial relation but is shown to be a state of being that defines the value and potential of those who fall within its bounds.

There are many works and authors that tackle the issues raised by neoliberal policies. What Gentili presents,

though, is a more profound reading of neoliberalism and its effects through critically engaging with its ideological and theoretical foundations. By looking back at Margaret Thatcher's famous claim that 'There is No Alternative', Gentili shows how neoliberalism has created a system in which crisis loses its function as an engine of change and instead becomes a means of reproducing and reaffirming the neoliberal agenda. The various cycles of economic crisis are not a way of rethinking our economies and politics, but a means of governmentality by which people are forced to change to suit the needs of those in power. This is why Gentili defines neoliberal crisis as a biopolitical crisis, because it opens up opportunities to regulate and mould people's conduct and way of life.

During the 2008 financial crisis, there were extensive calls for a complete overhaul of the financial sector and a rethinking of the economic model. There was a widespread consensus on the need to regulate the financial market and the way that banks conducted their business. Although these sectors were the guilty party who caused the crisis and upheaval, ultimately it was the people who had to withstand the worst of the consequences and foot the bill. Apart from losing their savings, their jobs and sometimes their homes, whole segments of the population were coerced into giving up their rights and their quality of life in the name of austerity. Austerity was the *pharmakon*, the medicine needed to cure the illness. New policies regulated the way that people had to behave, and in the meantime, eliminated the prospects and opportunities that people came to rely on, like a pension that guarantees a good quality of life. A similar scenario is also unfolding in the post-Covid world. All these events illustrate how neoliberal biopolitics functions.

Gentili's work also offers a critical evaluation of Hayek's politico-economic theories to show why precar-

ity is the logical and unavoidable consequence of Hayek's theoretical framework. For Hayek, the market is not a human institution but a cosmic order. The free market does not follow the principles of an economic order, which can be rationalised and is humanly driven, but instead it follows the structures of a cosmos. For Hayek, the universe is designed as a competitive order with embedded principles and laws that are unavoidable because they are reality itself. Living in a constant state of competition is thus the only way of living because this is how the universe we inhabit functions.

The enterprise of the self is not about free enterprise anymore. If one is forced into self-enterprise, then that is no longer a free enterprise. This analysis emphatically explains the false myth of the gig economy as a disruptive and liberating mode of work. Because of economic hardships or loss of employment, many find themselves having to take up roles as 'associates' or 'partners' to business platforms. These working conditions force those who enter into them to constantly compete with other individuals who are offering the same service and thus into inhumane working hours and conditions to make money. As Gentili observes, in a world in which everyone is your competition and work is an individualised and solitary activity, the possibility of class consciousness and class unity is drastically diminished, leading to an erosion of labour conditions and precarity becoming the norm.

The Age of Precarity offers an insightful reading of our human condition under the rule of neoliberalism. Gentili's work offers compelling reasons why, if we want to find ways of improving the conditions of the people, we need to think outside of the neoliberal framework and cannot satisfy ourselves with merely reforming it.

Francois Zammit