At the same time however, while the standardisation of practices and required paperwork did yield a modicum of results (pp. 252–254), what soon became obvious was the clash between ambiguous historical legacies and the inconsistent practices of socialist authorities themselves (pp. 255–257). Furthermore, a crucial issue was that while old-age pensions could be used as an incentive to create a top-down defined 'socialist labour ethos', the immediacy of work accidents created a contingent ebb and flow of productivity that was not easily plotted in a long-term plan (pp. 257–259). For instance, it became obvious from the early 1950s that, at the factory level, the budget for work accidents was one of the first budgets to end up overstretched, forcing managers to divert funds that had been earmarked for other welfare benefits (p. 257). On a deeper level, however, the issue was that the attempts to socialise the risk of work accidents 'brought actuarial and insurance strategies onto the shop floor', which effectively 'altered the nature of the wage relationship by formally making the body of the worker, rather than labor power, the object of the employment contract' (pp. 260–261). This clashed with the reality that workers in fact had to 'artfully navigate' an intricate maze that involved both the amorphous institutional infrastructure and a range of actors – medical offices, accounting offices, labour inspectors, trade union representatives, each with contingently defined interests. The existence of multiple porous boundaries essentially forced authorities to simultaneously suspect workers and state functionaries *and* to legitimise the critique and 'public denunciation of work safety inspectors, union officials and sometimes even of workers themselves' (p. 269).

Summing up, Marsha Siefert's book impresses through a level of analytical clarity that transforms detailed and otherwise disconnected historical narratives into a rich and coherent conceptual map of communist history. By drawing on the conceptual toolkit of global history, all chapters unearth new facets of pre-existing explanations and causal relationships regarding the intricacies of the state-labour relationship in socialist economies. By creating an open dialogue with the bourgeoning literature on global labour, the book sends out the strong message that the historical development of labour relations in communist countries is far more than a story of 'backwardness'.

Sergiu Delcea
Central European University, Vienna
sergiu.delcea@gmail.com

References

Hofmeester, K. and M. van der Linden. 2018. *Handbook of the Global History of Work.* Oldenbourg: De Gruyter

Kaufmann, F. X. 2013. *Variations of the Welfare State.* Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

Stråth, B. and P. Wagner. 2017. *European Modernity: A Global Approach*. London: Bloomsbury.

Vanhuysse, P. 2006. *Divide and Pacify: Strategic Social Policies and Political Protests in Postcommunist Democracies.* Budapest and New York: Central European University Press.

Vanhuysse, P. 2007. 'Workers without Power: Agency, Legacies, and Labour Decline in East European Varieties of Capitalism.' *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 43 (3): 495–522.

Vanhuysse, P. 2008. 'Kneeling at the Altar of (Il-) liberalism. The Politics of Ideas, Job Loss and Union Weakness in East Central Europe.' *International Labor and Working-Class History* 73 (1): 137–151.

Maja Göpel: *Unsere Welt Neu Denken: Eine Einladung*
Berlin 2020: Ullstein Buchverlage,
208 pp.

In this ambitious book, the German economist and political scientist Maja Göpel gave herself a near-impossible task: to change the way we are thinking about our society and our role in the environment. By discussing

economic growth and development, technological progress, consumption, the role of the state, and justice, and other key topics, she demonstrates how humans have to view themselves as part of the ecological system and accept that the current way of life cannot go on forever. The book is organised in ten short but ambitious chapters that promise to give insights into how this endeavour can succeed. Throughout the book, Göpel supports her arguments with evidence of the ecological and social costs of the economic system, builds on or argues against the positions of scholars that came before her, such as Daly, Solow, Keynes, and Rawls, and presents her arguments in an accessible way.

Following a brief introduction on the structure and goals of the book, the second chapter deals with the fact that humans nowadays are facing a drastically different reality. With population growth exploding over the last half century and biocapacity and natural resources depleting, Göpel claims we are living in an altered setting that we are not adapting to. While there is less room for growth and expansion – economically or ecologically – we are stuck in thought patterns that assume we can outgrow distributional conflicts. As part of this critique, she posits that small-scale solutions, praised for their efficiency, have been unable to solve the bigger problems.

In the third chapter, 'Nature and Life', Göpel presents two opposing views on growth and sustainability: the Brundtland Report and Solow's model of substitutability. The latter posits that every element of natural capital can be exchanged by a technological solution. While we are extracting resources and degrading ecosystems, we are ignoring the complexity and regenerative capacity of the ecosystem, as well as the numerous 'services' that it provides. The fourth chapter, 'Humans and Behaviour', deals with homo economicus. Göpel claims that most economists are working with a false assumption: humans as selfish utility-maximisers. Referring to the ultimatum game, she argues that science has since proven this concept to be false. She identifies further fundamental problems in economics, such as a tendency towards methodological individualism, and scholars that are often taking the old ideas of Smith, Ricardo, and Darwin out of their historical context and present them as laws of nature. Göpel argues that the role of ideas, especially in this influential branch of social science, is bigger than we often assume. They shape the way we view the world and influence our decision-making processes. A change in the system, therefore, would have to start with rethinking human behaviour and the basic 'truths' of economics.

The fifth chapter, 'Growth and Development,' asks whether we need to reconsider the true costs of our economic system. Looking at, for example, the correlation between growth and climate change, Göpel posits that we are working with the wrong perception of growth. Expecting eternal growth in a limited world with limited resources would be naive. She further remarks that more growth does not necessarily equal more welfare and argues that we need to be aware of the inflation of economic indicators by unproductive economic sectors, such as the finance industry. Finally, by arguing against the validity of our measures for extreme poverty, she claims that the success story of economic growth and development is built on false perceptions of the economy and people's living situations.

In the sixth chapter, 'Technological Progress', Göpel takes apart the notion that technological progress alone can solve the problem. Referring to the spread of the steam engine, the light bulb, automobiles, and others, she argues that we are observing a 'rebound effect' (p. 98). Every time a technology takes a significant step forward, increasing its efficiency, its reach widens in the population, leading to a higher toll on

the environment than before the improvement. What this teaches us, according to Göpel, is that we should not rely on technological progress to solve the problem of climate change for us. If we want to be able to use it for our advantage in fighting climate change, we need the right guidelines and circumstances for helpful innovation to thrive.

Breaking down a second myth on fighting climate change, chapter 7 argues that we need to drastically change the way we consume and set prices. Göpel argues that decoupling the economy from its pressure on the environment – through innovation – has not been successful, as also described in chapter 6. Being left without this 'deus ex machina,' Göpel considers how the market could be influenced in order to induce more environmentally friendly consumption. As consumers are expected to purchase according to price levels, this could be achieved through internalising the environmental costs of goods or services.

In chapter 8, 'Market, State, and Public Domain', Göpel goes back to an argument introduced at the beginning of the book: many small solutions do not necessarily lead to a good outcome for society. With this reference to the 'Tragedy of the Commons', she lays out her arguments as to why the 'invisible hand' is currently not governing the market towards the best outcome for society. First, market failures exist, and they justify the involvement of the state. Second, the market cannot exist without the state around it. And lastly, many of the most important innovations are based on state-funded research.

In the last two chapters, Göpel introduces the dimension of justice, and tries to give the reader ideas on how to move forward. As a start, she argues that different individuals will have different responsibilities to act and to change their behaviour. Based on studies highlighting the inequality-enhancing effects of climate change, she puts justice at the centre of the endeavour to rethink society. In the last chapter, she chiefly focuses on discerning the main lessons from her book and how people can use them to affect change in their surroundings, or rather, not despair, when change does not come quickly.

The added value that Göpel brings with this book is clear. In a very comprehensive and approachable take on the state of sustainability in society, she manages to find a good mix between detail and the bigger picture. If the audience for her book is the general population, it can help them to take a look behind the curtain. If the audience are policy makers, then maybe this book can act as a wake-up call that there is more at stake than we think, and that the truths (of economics and human behaviour) that we hold to be self-evident appear not so true anymore. The author repeatedly invites the reader to rethink the way we organise our societies, be it our taxes, consumption, the role of the state, or, most importantly, our ideas and values. In this also lies the strength of her arguments. It appears to be far from logical to reduce our consumption and, therefore, our welfare, in a world that allows endless growth. When we, however, change the way we look at the world, we realise some problems in the argument. Firstly, our world is not limitless and we are working with scarce resources. Secondly, disaggregating the principle of growth we observe that much of its drive comes from the expansion of the rather unproductive financial economy. And lastly, is there actually a neat linear correlation between consumption and welfare? Following these critiques, our limited world makes it reasonable to put a hold on our consumption, as value does not only come from the amount of goods and services we consume. In a short take on agricultural subsidies, Göpel shows how these critiques can be applied to a specific field of policy. If we assume that we have limitless resources and that growth itself is the goal, it seems plausible to grant

subsidies based on the size of farms. A simple change in our priorities, and a step away from the golden cow called economic growth, allows us to reconsider and come up with solutions that offer more value to both humans and their environment.

If these arguments do not read like a revelation, that is because most of them are not. It is nothing new, that the market will need steering and that the current economic system appears to be driving us towards ecological disaster. The caveats and dangers here have not only been predicted by earlier economists (from Smith to Keynes, as Göpel points out) but have since then again and again been supported by evidence. Göpel's arguments in this book also closely resemble at least in their basic form those of William Ophuls, another scholar of political transformation. In a daring treatise on scarcity and political institutions (originally published in 1977), Ophuls [Ophuls and Boyan 1992] argued that our institutions and values do not recognise the gravity of the ecological impact of our way of life. He furthermore similarly criticises the almost naïve belief in salvation through efficiency. And while his recommendations for political change are rather unorthodox and questionable, his warnings are still relevant today. Nearly forty years later, now less focused on state coercion and rather on value change, Ophuls [2011] repeats his warnings that we require a fundamental shift in our perspective on the ecosystem and our role in it. Like Göpel, he argues for a move away from a growth-centred society and a view on human welfare that is detached from its classical relationship to consumption, a view that is shared by a growing number of economists and political scientists.

Finally, it must be remarked that, while Göpel aims to present the different topics in a comprehensive and inviting manner, this sometimes comes at a cost. A rather unfortunate example of this is the chapter on justice. Based on the issue of inequality in resource use and wealth, she introduces the reader to the difficulty of assigning responsibilities for both future climate action and past emissions. From this point onwards, it is not clear anymore which concepts of justice she is basing her arguments on, and the theoretical base for her arguments in this chapter is sparse. The only theory of justice mentioned in this chapter – by John Rawls – receives just a few paragraphs of attention and adds nothing much to the question of how justice can be understood in an intergenerational context and how this connects to ecological degradation caused by humans. This, after all, would have to be the basis for all proponents of sustainable policy. It is unfortunate, as the literature is not short on different approaches to this particular question [see, e.g., Shue 2014; Wolf 1995]. The reader therefore remains in the dark about the ethical foundations for Göpel's use of the word 'justice', and the ninth chapter reads more like an op-ed than an ambitious piece of political science literature.

Fortunately, this remains an isolated case, as the rest of the book manages to present complex issues in plausible yet not too crude ways. She connects topics from different fields and makes a rather successful case for her central argument: If we want to avoid ecological degradation, the human suffering that comes along with it, and other negative aspects of our current socio-economic environment, we have to adopt a new way of thinking. She supports this clearly with examples throughout the book and offers the reader many opportunities to change perspective. And while most of her individual arguments are not new, the fact that they are still painfully relevant today is – alongside her comprehensive and inviting approach – the raison d'être for this book.

Frederik Pfeiffer
University of Southern Denmark, Odense
pfeiffer@sam.sdu.dk

References

Ophuls, W. and A. Stephen Boyan. 1992. *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity Revisited: The Unraveling of the American Dream*. New York: W. H. Freeman.

Ophuls, W. 2011. *Plato's Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Shue, H. 2014. *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Wolf, C. 1995. 'Contemporary Property Rights, Lockean Provisos, and the Interests of Future Generations.' *Ethics* 105 (4): 791–818.

Annemarie Mol: *Eating in Theory*
Durham, NC, 2021: Duke University Press, 208 pp.

Anthropologist and philosopher Annemarie Mol presents this book as an 'exercise in empirical philosophy'. Pursuing the ambitious aim of rekindling theoretical terms in alternative ways, she examines the bodily, cultural, and social processes that are entailed in the act of eating. Based in science and technology studies, anthropology, and philosophy, Mol combines her philosophical argument with ethnographic examples. However, *Eating in Theory* is neither a contribution to food studies, nor does it elaborate a general theory on eating. Even if the author intensively engages with theoretical discourses, she calls her approach a *style*, not a *theory*. By taking inspiration from eating instead of thinking, Mol aims to escape humanist universalisms, revalue life-sustaining labour, and allow for greater inclusion of nonhumans in theory: 'What if we were to stop celebrating 'the human's' cognitive reflections about the world, and take our cues instead from human metabolic engagements with the world?' (p. 3)

While the book's theoretical ambition is laid out in the introductory and concluding sections, the other chapters, discussing alternative interpretations of the terms *being*, *knowing*, *doing*, and *relating*, serve as exemplary interventions of the proposed style. Like the dishes in a buffet, they do not add up to a coherent whole but are offered for selective inspiration. Thanks to the very comprehensible language, it is easy to follow Mol's thoughts even when she navigates us through challenging waters. All the chapters follow the same structural principle: An empirical story about eating is put into dialogue with a text from the canon of philosophical anthropology in regard to the realities it sought to address, but leading to alternative theoretical conclusions. Her repetition of the phrase 'this is the lesson for theory' allows for a purely result-oriented reading. Additional ethnographic examples, set off from the main text, run in parallel throughout the book. Even if the two-column division is difficult to follow at times, these examples effectively enrich the empirical basis of the book. Despite these regionally diverse illustrations, the book's theoretical focus is limited to authors writing in English, Dutch, French, and German, because Mol's aim is to revisit the dominant canon of continental philosophical anthropology. Accordingly, the author starts with an introduction to 20th-century continental philosophical thought. Acknowledging the relevance and historical validity of works such as Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, Mol criticises the hierarchical conceptualisation of 'the human' that prioritises the political as a distinguishing feature of humanity while relegating bodily and life-sustaining aspects, perceived as 'too close to nature', to the background. In her view, this conceptualisation does not provide an adequate response to current challenges such as planetary ecological fragility: 'The Anthropocene requires us to revisit what we make of Anthropos' (p. 20). Mol's suggestion is to revisit historically evolved concepts for contemporary purposes by using the principles of empirical philosophy. She sketches the initial divergence between philosophical normativity and the empirical gathering of facts and