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*Review of Philip Mirowski, Never
Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How
Neoliberalism Survived the Financial
Meltdown, New York, Verso, 1st edition,
2013, ISBN: 978-1-781-68079-7, 384 pages*

Șerban Brebenel



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Review of Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown*, New York, Verso, 1st edition, 2013, ISBN: 978-1-781-68079-7, 384 pages

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Philip Mirowski's work is an important contribution to the post-2008 crisis economic literature. The book aims to show how Neoliberalism (or the Neoliberal Thought Collective – NTC, as it is referred to here) took over aspects of society beyond the economy and became integrated in everyday societal life, to the degree to which neoliberal thinkers were able to manipulate evidence and realities.

One of the great themes of the book is the concept of 'Russian dolls'. In order to explain how Neoliberalism became so influential, Mirowski introduces the 'Russian dolls' as a concept, essentially agents of influence in favor of Neoliberalism that operate at the societal level in the United States, from think-tanks, to politicians to the media. The doll in the very core of this interlocking system is represented by the Mont Pelerin Society, a Neoliberal laboratory of ideas.

This innermost doll was subsequently wrapped in a favorable rhetorical campaign aimed to promote Neoliberalism. The theory and ideas were there, the next phase, as Mirowski shows, was to make them acceptable for the masses as a mainstream current. To Mirowski, the acceptance and embrace of Neoliberalism came as a result of its resonance with basic American principles, such as the laissez-faire. Neoliberalism relied on ideas such as promoting entrepreneurship and reduced government to resonate with many of the Americans for whom all these were principles of successful leadership. To the degree to which this was initially an economic current and a public

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policy approach, it is now today a cultural and societal expression. This is the primary reason for which Neoliberalism remains so successful today, despite the economic and financial crisis it has passed through.

After presenting some general considerations on the crisis in chapter 1, Mirowski goes down history lane in Chapter 2 ('Shock Block Doctrine') in order to present to the reader key incipient figures of Neoliberalism (primarily Friedrich von Hayek) who shared a common belief: all economic issues could be solved by further encouraging the development of free markets.

The acceptance of Neoliberalism at the societal level is a result of the interlocking relationship between different entities, from corporations to the government to the individual and academic institutions. The informational society in which we live today is fundamentally and culturally Neoliberal, it favors the free flow of information, increased communication through new forms and platforms of interaction and so on. Mirowski's belief is that Neoliberalism has become an everyday activity for the masses, redefining today's society, and he argues this throughout chapter 3 ('Everyday Neoliberalism'), using an analysis of French philosopher Michel Foucault and various views on today's American society.

It is also, in Mirowski's view, a gross manipulation of realities by the Neoliberals, as emphasized in chapter 5 of the book. The manipulation is done perfectly, because reality is not only altered, but new realities are actually created for the individual. The author resumes his argument from chapter 2, per which 'the relation of the control of knowledge to political power has been a neoliberal specialty' (p. 242). He quotes a Bush administration official saying, in 2002, that, embracing its new quality as a global empire, when the US acts, 'we create our own reality' and that 'while you are studying that reality, we'll act again, creating other new realities.' (p. 243)

Mirowski understands the final success of Neoliberalism through its successful penetration of what used to be the Left. Citing examples such as Paul Krugman, he believes that the Left only exists today as a form of altered Neoliberalism, one in which those supporting the Left have no intention to renounce some of the Neoliberal principles on which today's society is, in fact, based on.

The main contribution that Mirowski's work brings to the public is the logical correlation between incipient Neoliberal ideas, subsequent Neoliberal economic thought and current integration of Neoliberal ideas into everyday American life. This theory remains plausible, particularly linked with the ideas of globalization and its implication for communication and information exchange. The paradigm of the 'Russian dolls' is thus reflective of the current situation.

Some of the changes that Mirowski argues for are worth particular attention, such as his proposal to create a code of ethics that could attempt to regulate the economic and political motivation beyond media articles supporting a particular line of thought. The readers may remember, in this context, the movie 'Inside Job', where individuals who had received different forms of sponsorship from financial institutions had not recognized, in their articles and public statements, the signs of a future financial and economic crisis.

Some other book contributions are rather problematic, for example, his intentional lack of comprehensiveness when discussing arguments against his theory. An obvious part of the analysis could obviously be whether the penetration of the Left by Neoliberalism is, in fact, more related to the lack of alternatives that the Left provided over the last decades and, following this line of thought, to the fact that the Left has not been able to bring any other relevant concepts beyond the social welfare state that was successfully introduced in Europe after the Second World War. In fact, this seems to be one of the characteristics of the book: generalization or, to the contrary, a reduction of information in order to prove Mirowski's perception and understanding of things. The argumentation could also benefit from referring to those Neoliberal economists who have advocated the needs for change after the financial crisis, so as to better understand the Neoliberals other than as a solid conglomerate. Mirowski tends to present things often in just white and black, intentionally missing the fact that, in today's complex environment, things are often gray.

Mirowski's book succeeds in accomplishing the impressive task of addressing the global economic crisis of 2008 from a comprehensive rather than from a strict economic perspective. His knowledge of Neoliberalism, even from an opponent's view, brings in coherent arguments to support his ideas and to the explanation of new concepts he introduces, including the 'Russian dolls'. The book can be understood not from a right

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vs. wrong perspective, but from an instrument of reflection on what led the world to an economic and financial crisis of this dimension and what to do in the future to avoid it.

Șerban Brebenel is a PhD Candidate with the Bucharest University of Economic Studies in Bucharest and works with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (serban.brebenel@gmail.com).