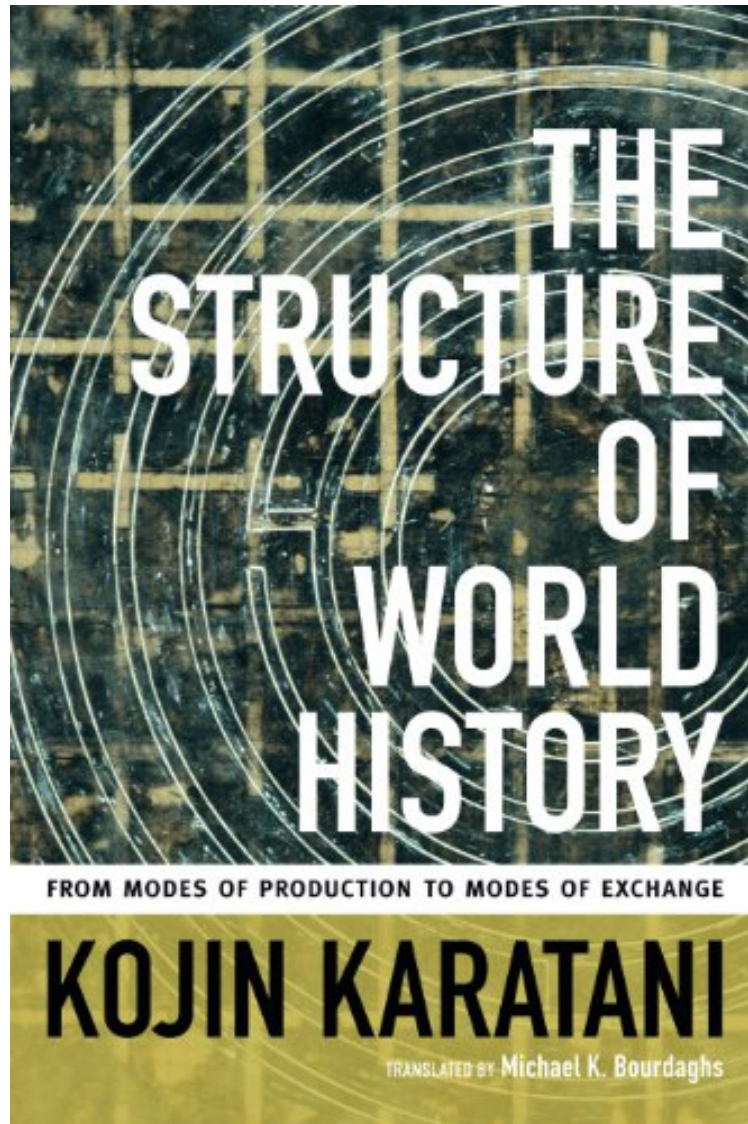


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The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange

Kojin Karatani

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Kojin Karatani : The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange:

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. A new conceptual tour de force to dymystify human historyBy Hubert SheaThis book covers a conceptual tour de force to dymystify vicissitudes of the history of social formations between the era of the nomadic hunters-gatherers and the twentieth-first century. Karatani utilizes four modes of

exchanges, including reciprocity, plunder and redistribution, commodity exchange, and return of reciprocity in a higher dimension, to offer a more comprehensive and vivid explication of why and how the borromean knot of state, nation, and capital has impinged on the historical evolution of social formations. In a nutshell, this book brings unique values to the study of human history with an amazing bit of certain prescience in the demonstration of the world system beyond capitalism. Unlike Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" hypothesis, Karatani concludes that communism is not necessary an oxymoron since the last phrase of human history is a "return of the repressed" in which social formation will be tantamount to restoration of the reciprocal mode in the ancient world but in a higher dimension. Karatani neither adopts nor supports a lineal view on human history and he pithily synthesizes a vast amount of Marxist, Hegelian, and Kantian literature to reconstruct the salient features of world history which are both cyclical and oblique. He further argues that the modes of production as adopted by Marx to adumbrate human history have demonstrated huge deficiency lest nation and state, as part of the ideological superstructure, are not taken into account succinctly by Marx. This book is impressive, comprehensive, and well-written with very unique and well-argued point of view. It advances our new understanding of the structure of world history as well as the likely trajectory of ongoing transformation — or not — of social formation in the twentieth-first century.

41 of 43 people found the following review helpful. Between Marx and Anthropology By Etienne RPT

There is a tradition of contemporary Japanese philosophers drawing from anthropology (the names of Shinichi Nakazawa and Akira Asada come to mind). There is also a Japanese tradition of philosophical re-readings of Marx (with Kozo Uno or Makoto Itoh). I am interested in the first tradition. I regard the second as negligible. In *The Structure of World History*, Kojin Karatani combines the two approaches. He offers a broad synthesis on the origins of the state, the market, and the national community, based on the works of classical anthropologists. And he provides a close reading of Marx's texts in order to construct his own philosophical system, encompassing the whole of human history. I found the first part based on anthropology most valuable. I only skipped through the second part. Below are a few reading notes and commentary intended to provide a cursory reading of Karatani's book.

Marx, like Comte and Hegel before him, saw the history of the human race as neatly divided into historical phases. He identified five such phases: the primitive horde, Asiatic despotism, the ancient classic state, Germanic feudalism, and the modern state under capitalism. The principle of that division was to be found in modes of production and the type of labor relations they generated. The stateless clan society was characterized by primitive communism: there was no private property, and goods were shared among all members of the clan. It was followed by the Asiatic mode of production in which the despotic king owned everything and his subjects nothing. Then came the Greek and Roman slavery system giving power to a minority of citizens, followed by the Germanic feudal system with its relations of allegiance and serfdom, and modern bourgeois capitalism characterized by the opposition between capital and labor. Thus Marx famously proclaimed that all history was the history of class struggle, and that it necessarily tended towards the advent of communism, in which class would disappear and the state would wither away. Other authors, mainly inspired by Marx, offered their own classification of social formations. To the five modes of production identified by Marx, Samir Amin added two others: the trade-based social system seen in various Arab countries, and the social formation based on the "simple petty-commodity" mode of production seen in seventeenth-century Britain. Building his own theory of world systems, Immanuel Wallerstein described a succession from mini-systems that preceded the rise of the state, to world empires that were ruled by a single state, and then world-economies in which multiple states engaged in competition without being unified politically. The modern world system of global capitalism itself went through the successive stages of mercantilism, liberalism, and imperialism, each dominated by a single hegemonic power: first Holland, then Britain, and then the United States. Yet other thinkers identified various stages of development by the dominant world commodity or technology: the wool industry in the stage of mercantilism, the textile industry in liberalism, heavy industries in imperialism, and durable consumer goods such as automobiles and electronics in the stage of capitalism. Our present times may witness the rise of a new stage in which information serves as the world commodity. Still for others, each historical phase is characterized by the dominant mode of energy supply: from biomass and wood to windmills and hydropower and then to coal and steam, then electricity and the oil engine, followed by gas turbines and nuclear power or renewable energies. These periodicizations are only variants of a dominant scheme that locates the crux of world history in the realm of production. While offering his own teleology based on modes of exchange as opposed to modes of production, Karatani introduces variants and correctives in these classifications in order to paint a more complex picture of world history. For instance, he argues that societies existed in the form of nomadic bands before the rise of clan society, and that the real turning point came with the adoption of fixed settlements, with its accompanying institutions of property, religious rituals, and political coercion. Contrary to the standard view of the Neolithic revolution that associates sedentarization with agriculture, he argues that fixed settlements preceded the appearance of agriculture, and first took the form of fishing villages located at the mouth of rivers and trade routes. Stockpiling was first made possible through the technology for smoking fish, not piling grain or herding livestock. Nomadic tribes on one side, and clan societies on the other, engaged in different modes of exchange and redistribution: pooling of resources and "primitive communism" for the first, and the logic of the gift and the forms of trade described by classical anthropologists for the second. Along with Pierre Clastres and Marshall Sahlins, he agrees that primitive

societies were "societies against the state", and actively resisted the concentration of power through warfare and reciprocity of exchange. Karatani also develops a more nuanced picture of the Asiatic state, considered by Hegel and Marx as well as by Karl Wittfogel as the symbol of despotism. Contrary to the vision of tyranny and oppression, he argues that the Asiatic social contract was based on a form of redistribution. People were not simply coerced: they voluntarily undertook to work for the sake of their king-priest, driven by religious beliefs and the offer for protection. State power is based on a specific mode of exchange, distinct from the first mode based on the reciprocity of the gift. Drawing resources from large-scale irrigation systems, the Asiatic state developed the first bureaucracies, created the first permanent standing armies, and organized long-distant trade with other communities. Through his bureaucrats, the despot was expected to rule, administer, show concern for, and take care of its subjects. It was not the Asiatic community that gave birth to the Asiatic despotic state; to the contrary, it was only after the establishment of a centralized state that a new community would emerge. Karatani also offers a revision of our understanding of Greek and Roman antiquity. As he demonstrates, political theories and philosophy did not first emerge in the Greek polis, as is sometimes alleged. The formation of Asiatic states was associated with intense philosophical debates, as in the Warring States period in China which saw the emergence of the Hundred Schools of Thought. This is because the appearance of the state required a breaking with the traditions that had existed since clan society. Greece and Rome existed at the periphery of Asian empires and retained many aspects of clan societies. Rome in the end did become a vast empire, but that was due if anything to its adoption of the Asiatic imperial system, which survived the fall of Rome with the Byzantine dynasty and then the Islamic empires. For this reason, historians should regard the despotic state that emerged in Asia not simply as a primitive early stage, but rather as the entity that perfected the supranational state (or empire). Likewise, they should regard Athens and Rome not as the wellspring of Western civilization, but as incomplete social formations that developed at the submargins of Asian empires. Drawing from Karl Wittfogel, Karatani sees a subtle dialectics between civilizations-empires at the core, vassal states at the margins, independent polities at the submargin, and out-of-sphere communities that retained their nomadic lifestyle. Moving to his third mode of exchange, based on money and commodities, Karatani enters classic Marxian terrain, and offers vintage Marx analysis. That is where he kind of lost me, and my reading of this part is wholly incomplete. Drawing from the classic formulas M-C-M' and M-M', he argues that the world created by this third mode of exchange is fundamentally a world of credit and speculation, and that it still needs the backing of the first mode (based on reciprocity) and the second mode (drawing from the social contract offered by the state) in order to sustain itself. My attention also lapsed during his discussions on world money, world commodities, and world systems a la Wallerstein. It was only revived when he described the different schools of socialist thinking, seeing great commonality between Proudhon and Marx as well as with the Young Hegelians who first developed a theory of alienation of the individual through a critique of religion, state power, and capital. Karatani then introduces his fourth mode of exchange, labelled mode D, which marks the attempt to restore the reciprocal community of mode A on top of the market economy of mode C, and without the state structure of mode B. Although this mode of exchange is an ideal form that never existed in actuality, it manifested itself in the form of universal religions and expressed the "return of the repressed" of the primitive community's mode of reciprocal exchange in a higher dimension. His analysis sometimes borders on the bizarre, as when he warns of a looming ecological catastrophe and generalized warfare that may take humanity back to the stage of the nomadic tribe. His description of Kant as a closet socialist advocating the disappearance of the state and of capital also seems far-fetched. But it is his reading of Marx and Hegel through Kant that may provide the greatest food for thought to modern philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek, who quotes Karatani eloquently in his books. Based on solid anthropological data and a re-reading of Marx's classic texts, Karatani's work may generate a thousand theoretical explosions, placing the construction of world history systems back at the heart of the philosophical agenda. 0 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By jgrompone An interesting point of view from a new-Marxist economist.

In this major, paradigm-shifting work, Kojin Karatani systematically re-reads Marx's version of world history, shifting the focus of critique from modes of production to modes of exchange. Karatani seeks to understand both Capital-Nation-State, the interlocking system that is the dominant form of modern global society, and the possibilities for superseding it. In *The Structure of World History*, he traces different modes of exchange, including the pooling of resources that characterizes nomadic tribes, the gift exchange systems developed after the adoption of fixed-settlement agriculture, the exchange of obedience for protection that arises with the emergence of the state, the commodity exchanges that characterize capitalism, and, finally, a future mode of exchange based on the return of gift exchange, albeit modified for the contemporary moment. He argues that this final stage marking the overcoming of capital, nation, and state is best understood in light of Kant's writings on eternal peace. *The Structure of World History* is in many ways the capstone of Karatani's brilliant career, yet it also signals new directions in his thought.

"Kojin Karatani's monumental and provocative synthesis testifies to a dramatic rebirth of universal history in recent times; but it does so by reuniting traditions—economics, politics, the social imaginary—which have proved

increasingly sterile developed separately. His proposal involves a Borromean knot in which the three distinct areas of Capital, the Nation, and the State are both distinguished from each other and structurally recombined in their historical moments. His rereading of the Marxian modes of production (Marx's theory of universal history) in terms of modes of exchange is heretical and revisionist, but also profoundly critical of both the anarchism and the social democracy it would seem to express. His discussion of nation and world empire replaces any number of globalization debates within a transformative or revolutionary framework. His luminous study of Marx's own work and politics then casts a whole new light on Hegel and Kant; and indeed the history of philosophy is as much at stake here as the histories of nationalism or anticapitalist movements. Finally, Karatani's own practical and theoretical experience of the cooperative moment opens up political perspectives which will be politically suggestive and energizing at a moment when left politics seems universally out of breath."