

Preface

How did the early ideologues of capitalism engage with the Bible and theology? How did they wrestle with the Bible in constructing myths to justify what was still a new economic order? What is it like to read those whom Marx read when researching *Capital*? These are some of the questions that played in our minds as we read, discussed, and wrote this book. Hugo Grotius, John Locke, Adam Smith, and Thomas Malthus are our concerns, and into their thoughts we have delved. We have been intrigued, surprised, exasperated, underwhelmed at their banalities, often laughing out loud at their astonishing contortions as they sought to retell biblical stories. Or rather, they try to retell the story of the Fall, and of Adam more generally, finding there the origins of private property, self-interest, labor, exchange, commerce, law, and states. In the process, greed becomes a social benefit, acquisitiveness part of the divine plan, and labor a result of God's command to subdue the earth. Idols indeed, worshipped and justified by a text that systematically condemns those idols. After all, it takes some deft storytelling to make the biblical text say almost exactly the opposite of what it does say.

In the process of writing, we have been assisted by those who have read and commented on regular posts on Roland's blog, *Stalin's Moustache* (stalinsmoustache.org). Often these posts contained some

of the more outlandish quotations from these early economic thinkers, quirky and offensive pieces that reveal the truth about their proposals as a whole. In addition, Warren Montag provided sage advice on John Locke and Adam Smith. Mika Ojankangas from Finland gave insight into the workings of their thoughts, as well as those of Grotius and Malthus, on human nature and moral philosophy. And the participants of the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar (which meets annually in a pub somewhere in Australia or New Zealand) asked pointed questions. Last but not least, Neil Elliott of Fortress Press urged and encouraged us to write this work. To all these people, we are extremely thankful.

As we read and wrote, we were mindful of the fact that we were treading in Marx's footsteps to some extent. He read these same texts in the slow process of writing *Capital*. Although we cannot hope to match his critique and insight, we have undertaken this project with a similar approach: to ascertain the patterns of argument, myth-making, and the blind spots of what became the ideological carapace for capitalism. For many a long year we have discussed and debated our individual projects, but this is the first full work we have written together. As such, it is truly a joint project.

On the Красная стрела (Red Arrow) train
Somewhere between St. Petersburg and Moscow
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