Most accounts on the Greek debt crisis miss three or four, so to speak, ‘big pictures’ or ‘images’, all of which are interlinked. Even when some of these ‘images’ are apparent in their accounts, they have not been understood together as a whole.

The theoretical ‘image’. This entails failure of theorizing the crisis on the basis of a heterodox theory of money and finance. But theory is important because, as we have argued, it is an abstraction that has the potential to describe and interpret reality better than any description. The generic understanding of financial crisis that stems from heterodox political economy is that financial crises are caused, primarily, by imbalances between the real values/commodities produced and exchanged in a specific market and the mass of money and paper (credit/debt) that circulate in the same market. So was the case with many financial crises in history, and so is the case with the European debt and banking crises today. This deficiency, coupled with the notion of the unequal distribution of actual values and the role of geo-politics/geo-culture, is at the heart of the disintegrative tendencies within the Euro-Atlantic core. And the question can be posed only in this way, because if the EU disintegrates, then NATO may do the same.

The ‘image’ of the power-shift to the ‘Global East’. This concerns the failure of analysts to examine the debt crisis in Greece and the European periphery in the context of what is happening in the world as a whole. If the 1900–40 was a period of transition from Europe’s, mainly formal, imperial system to the USA’s, mainly informal, neo-imperial hub-and-spoke power arrangements, then the period that ushers in with the stagflation of the 1970s opens up a long and protracted decline of the USA, accompanied by a concomitant power-shift to Asia and the ‘global
East/South’. We have tried to show that any comprehensive understanding of the current crisis in the eurozone would be insufficient if the issue is not placed within this broader and peculiar context of transition from one hegemonic system to another in a ‘global fault-lines’ context. We have also stressed that this transition is very peculiar. It does not resemble, for example, the transition from the British to US global hegemony, and this should be taken into account for any type of policy-making attempted by the forces of the Left in Europe, especially when they are in power. To give only one example, whereas British economic decline affected directly its military decay – for example, by World War I the USA had already achieved naval parity with Britain in the Atlantic – in the USA matters are rather the opposite: the USA’s economic decline occurs almost in inverse ratio to its military capabilities (this should not be confused with the country’s disastrous wars and, in fact, defeats in Iraq or Afghanistan). A ‘global fault-lines’ perspective helps us address this issue.

The ‘image’ of comparative history and comparative empirical analysis. Gramsci once famously said that ‘to write the history of a political party is to write the history of that country from a monographic viewpoint’.¹ But if a party, in the main, is a concentration of national contradictions and forces, then a country is a concentration of global contradictions and forces, of global and regional fault-lines. Thus, the metaphor can be extended: to write the history of a state is to write world history from a monographic viewpoint. We have indeed tried to write the history of Greece, from a globalist point of view and in a comparative perspective. This, in fact, is the correct method. It goes beyond the nationalist horizon of professional historians, whose job is usually ideological: it is to justify and glorify the actions of their ruling classes and pay tribute and allegiance to their kin-states or political party bureaucracies to accomplish personal ambitions. By viewing Greece from a globalist class perspective, that is to say, by viewing Greece as a terrain of concentration of global, regional and domestic contradictions, we have been in a position to overcome the trap of nationalist and ideological narratives on the current crisis.²

7.1 Seisachtheia in Greece, Europe and the world

We can list here the following generic propositions/findings concerning the inter-connection between Greece’s, Europe’s and the world’s crisis today. These propositions assist us in identifying and making plain our normative answers.