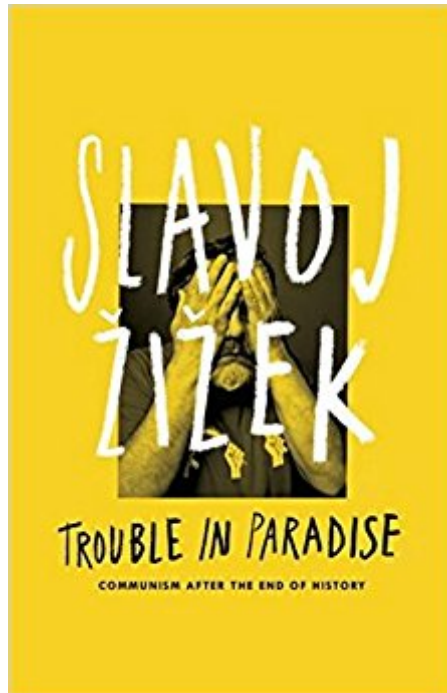




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Trouble In Paradise: Communism After The End Of History



Synopsis

In *Trouble in Paradise*, Slavoj Žižek, one of our most famous, most combative philosophers, explains how by drawing on the ideas of communism, we can find a way out of the crisis of capitalism. There is obviously trouble in the global capitalist paradise. But why do we find it so difficult to imagine a way out of the crisis we're in? It is as if the trouble feeds on itself: the march of capitalism has become inexorable, the only game in town. Setting out to diagnose the condition of global capitalism, the ideological constraints we are faced with in our daily lives, and the bleak future promised by this system, Slavoj Žižek explores the possibilities - and the traps - of new emancipatory struggles. Drawing insights from phenomena as diverse as Gangnam Style to Marx, *The Dark Knight* to Thatcher, *Trouble in Paradise* is an incisive dissection of the world we inhabit, and the new order to come. 'The most dangerous philosopher in the West' - Adam Kirsch, *New Republic* 'The most formidably brilliant exponent of psychoanalysis, indeed of cultural theory in general, to have emerged in many decades' - Terry Eagleton 'Žižek leaves no social or cultural phenomenon untheorized, and is master of the counterintuitive observation' - *New Yorker* Slavoj Žižek is a Hegelian philosopher, Lacanian psychoanalyst, and political activist. He is international director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities and the author of numerous books on dialectical materialism, critique of ideology and art, including *Less Than Nothing*, *Living in the End Times*, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* and, most recently, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*.

Book Information

Hardcover: 196 pages

Publisher: Allen Lane; Third edition (December 2, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0241004969

ISBN-13: 978-0241004968

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.9 x 8.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 13 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #956,602 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #123 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles > Art](#) #1603 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Communism & Socialism](#) #1608 in [Books > Business & Money > Economics > Theory](#)

Customer Reviews

The most dangerous philosopher in the West -- Adam Kirsch New Republic Zizek is a thinker who regards nothing as outside his field: the result is deeply interesting and provocative Guardian The most formidably brilliant exponent of psychoanalysis, indeed of cultural theory in general, to have emerged in many decades -- Terry Eagleton Zizek leaves no social or cultural phenomenon untheorized, and is master of the counterintuitive observation New Yorker Never ceases to dazzle -- Brian Dillon Daily Telegraph Zizek is to today what Jacques Derrida was to the '80s: the thinker of choice for Europe's young intellectual vanguard Observer

Slavoj Žižek is a Hegelian philosopher, Lacanian psychoanalyst, and political activist. He is international director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities and the author of numerous books on dialectical materialism, critique of ideology and art, including *Less Than Nothing*, *Living in the End Times*, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* and, most recently, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*.

I still enjoy reading Zizek, but I find so many problematic issues in his views. His style and sense of (sometimes twisted) humor are on full display in this, something of a reprise of his "Living in End Times", but much less heavy on the triumvirate of Hegel, Lacan, and Badiou. All three appear of course along with many others, philosophers, novelists, film makers, and so on. His hammer falls squarely on Capitalism generally, and global Capitalism in particular. The book's over-arching subject is the socio-political-economic situation of our present world. Zizek's scholarship is as broad here as always. It isn't possible to say "there is no truth" in Zizek's analysis. Published in 2015 he makes a statement that proves to be a prescient prophecy in his own terms: "...if moderate liberal forces continue to ignore the radical Left, they will generate an insurmountable fundamentalist wave". Isn't this exactly what happened in the 2016 presidential elections in the U.S? Once she gained her party's nomination, Hillary Clinton more or less ignored her primary opponent's positions along with his substantial base who, while not radical, were to the political left of her. Sanders' supporters are here exactly in the position of the "ignored left" of which Zizek speaks. As a result, a large cohort of Bernie's supporters in critical states simply did not vote and effectively cost Clinton the election. Having established that Capitalism is a part of the problem Zizek calls for something else, but what? He would like, I think, to see a more egalitarian world, something of a more level playing field economically at least, but in the first half of his book he recognizes that the inclusive forces that initiate a true "emancipatory movement" (Zizek is careful to distinguish these from

purposeless violence, though they can and perhaps must [Zizek's opinion] have a violence of their own) are never the forces that ultimately take power if the movement succeeds in its initial aim; ridding themselves of an unjust regime in the aegis of some particular master. If nothing else history teaches us that some less inclusive (often out-rightly intolerant) agency, whether of the left or right, has always got the edge in the in-between time, when the government has collapsed but nothing yet has crystallized in its place. Zizek cites numerous examples of this process. Zizek well knows that today, with more than seven billion people on Earth, any transition, even leading to a better outcome eventually (something highly unlikely in itself), would if globalized, precipitate the death of billions! He also knows that this fate likely awaits us anyway as ecological catastrophe catches up with us eventually. Perhaps that is the ultimate fountain of Zizek's inclination to an "any movement having some genuine aim is better than nothing" position. But while there is truth in Zizek's analysis, it is distorted, in my opinion, by his reliance on art, particularly literature and film (along with a few jokes) to support his over all view of human nature. Fiction is wonderful for highlighting particular characteristics of the human condition, for contrasting them to a real environment that otherwise might swamp them out. But their very value in this regard is also a liability because they accomplish their mission precisely by distorting reality. I think it is unfortunate also that Zizek uses the word 'violence' as ambiguously as he does. In an appendix, among many other things, he mentions this and addresses one of his critics. I would take a different tack. Earlier in the book he uses the Christian notion of 'agape' as an example of violence because it aims at precipitating the destruction of the existing (speaking of Biblical times) order. An atheist by reputation and declaration, Zizek cannot but have a distorted view of theology. A true "emancipative act" need not be violent in the normal sense of that term. Christian emancipation in the proper sense has nothing to do with the politico-economic order as such (be it Biblical Rome or modern global Capitalism). In the Christian sense, agape is "beyond the law" (among the senses of violence he seems to mean) because it goes farther than the law being more just, more fair; an act that would be approved by the law. Zizek is surely right that anything that is aimed at the politico-economic order, if successful, will surely precipitate violence of the literal kind as it collapses, but that is a distinction, the violence (or lack of violence) of the act versus the violence it precipitates elsewhere, he seems not to recognize. Was the violence of the Jacobins who commandeered the French Revolution greater than the violence the European system visited on countless peasants for hundreds of years? Perhaps not, but the same cannot be automatically said today of violence perpetrated by left or right in relation to the overall impact of global Capitalism. For one thing, in the 18th century there were fewer people in all of Europe than live today in any one of its countries. In this book, Zizek has a decision to make.

Global Capitalism is a fact and seven-and-a-half billion people on Earth is also a fact. Žižek insists that no amount of "adjustments to the present system" can overcome its inherent contradictions. True as this is, he surely sees that such adjustments can extend the life of the inconsistent system precisely by, perhaps periodically, ameliorating excessively wide discrepancies. He describes such adjustments. If he understood the distorting nature of his reliance on fiction to provide his archetypes, he might realize that "adjustment" constitutes a more ethical course under the circumstances than even a successful emancipatory event. In the end the most pressing issue is the future ecological catastrophe. While Capitalism is certainly a contributor, there doesn't seem to be any likely outcome of an "emancipatory event" that would halt the slide to that disaster anyway. Perhaps I am even more of a pessimist than Žižek?

Well-written and often brilliant analysis of the global capitalist crisis in Žižek's trademark style with jokes and references to pop culture. Žižek makes the point I've long suspected that the so-called experts running the world really don't know what they're doing (except looking out for themselves) and that a new way of creating emancipatory politics is needed. Žižek is smart enough to know (and say) that traditional forms of communism have created generalized misery, oppression, and poverty for most, but his critique of capitalism is spot-on, timely, and well, expert. His voice is honest and unique and he boldly tells the truth, even humorously. I found myself getting fired up reading this book; it should be required reading for people to understand the incredible dark side of global capitalism (to nature, people, economics, politics, etc) and some alternate ways of thinking available as we head into pre-apocalyptic times. My only real complaint is that sometimes he laboriously describes another thinker's philosophy with words, when a simple chart or diagram would get the point across better; and the extensive footnotes in the back of the book are like a whole 'nother book in itself. But these are minor criticisms. When we find ourselves in really really deep trouble as a species I think we will look back on this book and say "More people should've listened to Žižek, he was trying to tell us."

Žižek is not only a philosopher, but also a well-known Marxist theoretician and cultural commentator. Thus, a book about the crisis in global capitalism from a Marxist perspective, from a legitimate Marxist philosopher no less, raises the expectation of new insights into the crisis from a noted social philosopher. Sadly, this is not the case. Nowadays, writings on the crisis in capitalism are nothing new. This book is unique in that this is the most direct statement from Slavoj Žižek on capitalism. It is not a commentary

about Žižek's *Trouble in Paradise* by Peripatetic Reader. "These elites, the main culprits for the 2008 financial meltdown, now impose themselves as experts, the only ones who can lead us on the painful path of financial recovery, and whose advice should therefore trump parliamentary politics, or, as Mario Monti put it: 'Those who govern must not allow themselves to be completely bound by parliamentarians.' -Žižek, Slavoj. *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism* (p. 41). Melville House. Kindle Edition. Now I could have randomly picked any from this particular book and still be able to make today's point: that Peripatetic was correct in his/her point that this is one of Žižek's most accessible books. You might notice from Žižek's quote, for instance, the striking absence of the deeper Lacanian explanations of the phenomenon at work and the etherspeak that comes with them. And I have yet to see them in what I have read so far. But where I depart from Peripatetic on this matter is their underestimation of the value and import of the book. Whereas they see Žižek simply repeating the more nominal/accessible points he has scattered throughout his books, I see a Žižek that, in the face of urgency of our situation in the face of producer/consumer Capitalism, has recognized that high theory and social activism are two different kinds of activity, and that high theory, at best, has a trickle-down effect on day to day matters. Whereas Peripatetic sees a lull in Žižek's talent, I see Žižek (by working somewhere between the high theory he has mastered and the social criticism of a Naomi Klein (taking on the Promethean heroics of bringing fire to the people at a crucial time.

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