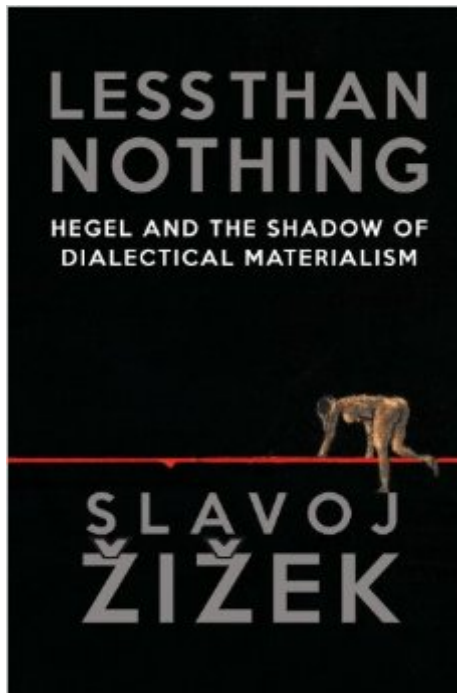


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Less Than Nothing: Hegel And The Shadow Of Dialectical Materialism



Synopsis

For the last two centuries, Western philosophy has developed in the shadow of Hegel, an influence each new thinker struggles to escape. As a consequence, Hegel's absolute idealism has become the bogeyman of philosophy, obscuring the fact that he is the defining philosopher of the historical transition to modernity, a period with which our own times share startling similarities. Today, as global capitalism comes apart at the seams, we are entering a new period of transition. In *Less Than Nothing*, the product of a career-long focus on the part of its author, Slavoj Žižek argues it is imperative we not simply return to Hegel but that we repeat and exceed his triumphs, overcoming his limitations by being even more Hegelian than the master himself. Such an approach not only enables Žižek to diagnose our present condition, but also to engage in a critical dialogue with key strands of contemporary thought—Heidegger, Badiou, speculative realism, quantum physics, and cognitive sciences. Modernity will begin and end with Hegel. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Book Information

File Size: 3888 KB

Print Length: 1049 pages

Publisher: Verso; 1 edition (May 22, 2012)

Publication Date: May 22, 2012

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B007HXF2Q0

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #579,592 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #378

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Modern
#505 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Criticism #1900 in Books > Politics &
Social Sciences > Philosophy > Movements

Customer Reviews

This is a warning: once you open this book and start to read, it is almost impossible to close it.

There are great balls of fire jumping out every time you turn a page. Since the book contains 1038 pages, some of them must be read carefully, it may disrupt your plans, not just for the evening, but for the following days. What is especially provoking and enlightening is the way Zizek is positioning not just Hegel, but also Marx, in a Christian tradition. By turning Christianity upside down, and defining it as an atheist religion, he is able to make sense of the myths in a new and surprising way. And at the same time it suddenly is possible to see the links between Christianity, Marxism, and the Communism of Eastern Europe in a new way. His interpretation of Hegel is to me as a sociologist new and refreshing. Zizek not just defends Hegel in an admirable way, he clarifies the deep contemporary relevance of Hegel and his version of dialectical materialism in a way which demands attention, not just among philosophers, but also among sociologists trying to make sense of our contemporary political economy. In a work with this scope, it goes without saying, there are also ideas and sections which demands further work and discussion. My critical comment (after 500 pages) is the way Marx political economy is treated. Seen from the point of departure of Hegel, it is justified with a main emphasis on Capital Volume 2, on circulation, and the relation to modern financial capitalism, which are our time-travelers, borrowing money from the future, and destroying it. According to my opinion, Marx analysis of technology, which is crucial to the ways in which humans relate to nature, deserves more attention.

It is a cardinal rule of pretentious academic existence that anyone who fancies herself a philosopher has to love Hegel. I've spent an embarrassing amount of time studying philosophy and even managed to pick up one of those fancy philosophy degrees that no one wants. But I'm just going to come right out and say it: I hate Hegel. I hate him so much that I seriously contemplated taking antidepressants during an undergraduate class on The Phenomenology of Spirit. I broke my computer trying to write a paper during the same class. And no, I didn't break it because I was typing furiously, inspired by new ideas. I broke it having a massive temper tantrum that has left my long-suffering dog permanently traumatized. Instead of re-reading Hegel to inspire further understanding (or further suicidal ideation), I responded to the Phenomenology of Spirit by making a video involving puppets, robots and a rapping dog all emphasizing exactly how much Hegel sucks. That is how much I hate this philosopher. But the thing is, I really love Zizek. Even when he goes off on his insane rants wherein everything somehow ties back to Lacan, vampires or communism, I find myself swooning. I love him so much that I have spent a significant portion of my time trying to convince my husband that, were I to actually meet Zizek, we would immediately become best friends and would wear matching friendship bracelets. I've always ignored Zizek's respect for Hegel,

thinking it was just one of his many weird predilections that I don't really need to understand. But Zizek has sold me. Hegel is not all of the horrible things I have called him (but damnit, he is some of them). It took a crazed Slovenian philosopher to help me appreciate a crazed German one.

This is quite probably the most treasured book I own. You can take my Nietzsche, Hegel or Lacan away, but don't you ever dare separating me from this book. I'll try my best to avoid simply summarizing the ideas of this giant theoretical masterpiece (which I find to be virtually impossible - and even dialectically counterproductive), and rather try focusing on its "mission", its inherent project and its most basic general propositions. This book is an immense zeit/weltgeist. It's Zizek's once-in-a-lifetime effort at delivering "a high quality failure", as his Beckettian leninism would have probably put it. One also has the feeling that a hegelian totality (or the lacanian notion of the non-All) is also in course here throughout this entire effort, immanently preventing it from acquiring "wholeness", as any proud hegelian/lacanian would have probably noticed it. This difficulty also reflects our own epoch - a transitioning one akin to Hegel's and the start of modernity and the french/haitian revolution. It's a book expressing a profound political, ethical and philosophical deadlock. The core of the zizekian project is basically to rehabilitate materialism - a sort of "hegelian materialism beyond Hegel" (which means "to be even more hegelian than the master himself"), not only repeating his philosophy, but (much more critical and important) his "transcendental gesture".

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