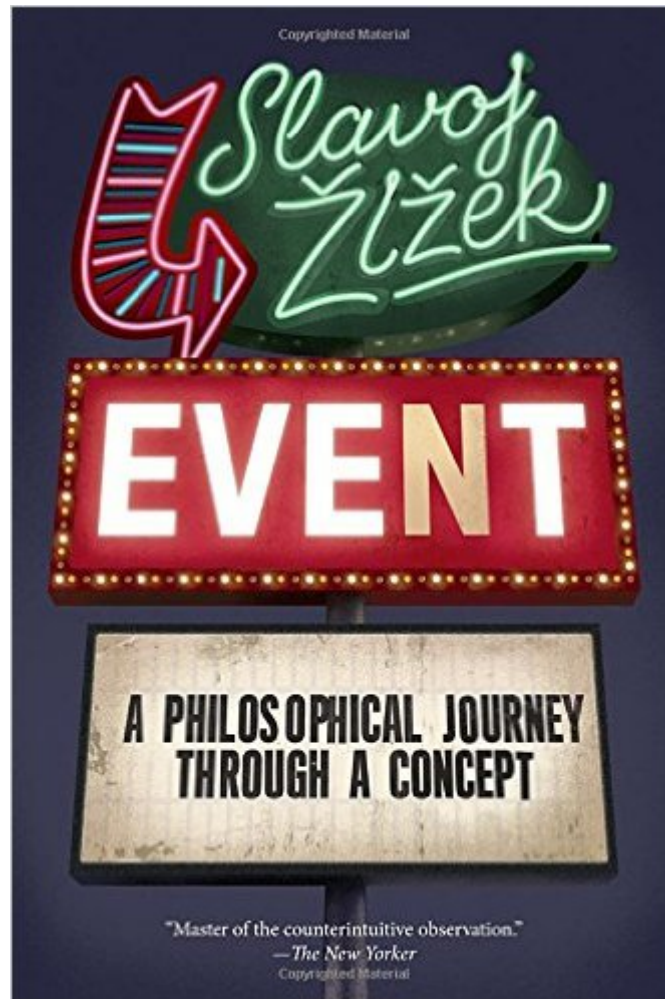


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Event: A Philosophical Journey Through A Concept



Synopsis

Probably the most famous living philosopher, Slavoj Žižek explores the meaning of events in this short and digestible book. An event can be an occurrence that shatters ordinary life, a radical political rupture, a transformation of reality, a religious belief, the rise of a new art form, or an intense experience such as falling in love. Taking us on a trip that stops at different definitions of event, Žižek addresses fundamental questions such as: are all things connected? How much are we agents of our own fates? Which conditions must be met for us to perceive something as really existing? In a world that's constantly changing, is anything new really happening? Drawing on references from Plato to arthouse cinema, the Big Bang to Buddhism, *Event* is a journey into philosophy at its most exciting and elementary.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

All one has to do is read the Wikipedia article on "Event" to see that it can be quite a complex concept. The great value of Slavoj Žižek's new book is that he brings unnecessary conceptualizations down to earth, and provides and discusses concrete examples of the Event and its relevance to everyday life with his characteristic aplomb, wit and incisiveness. In the beginning portions of the book Žižek gives several examples of and definitions to an "Event." Something shocking, out of joint, that appears all of a sudden and interrupts the usual flow of things. Something that emerges seemingly out of nowhere, without discernable causes. An appearance without solid being as its foundation. The Event appears as political occurrences. Žižek gives the example of the Fall of Mubarak and Tahrir Square. Along the same

lines, while he did not give these examples, The Assassination of President Kennedy or 9/11 could also qualify as "Events." What distinguishes the "Event" from ordinary happenings is that with an Event it is difficult if not impossible to differentiate the cause from the effect leading to the Event. Alan Watts once gave an example of the Event. Imagine, he said, watching a snake travel through the slit of a wooden fence. First you see, he said, the head, then the body, and finally the tail. This is an incorrect perception, because a snake is an entire Event, one whole reptile. In the same way, Žižek writes, cause and effect cannot be separated in an Event "it simply IS. They are distinct and discrete anomalies which veer outside the normal course and go against the grain. He also gives examples from the arts. The Film Noir is an Event, for example. While an Event is an occurrence which shapes society, it is clear from this example that the undercurrents of society can also inform and bring about the Event. According to Žižek the character and parameters of Events differ based on the context or system they are found. Žižek discusses the Event found in religious, or philosophical systems, and with examples from the arts and psychology. This is a short book, but it is a thought-provoking and stimulating read.

Slavoj Žižek is one of the most interesting contemporary philosophers, his synthesis of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Hegelian philosophy is thought provoking, and his cultural observations open up new ways of seeing and understanding films, novels and events. One gets the impression, reading his books and watching his lectures on You Tube, that one of his goals is to help people understand the world they live in, in order to impress on them the urgent need for radical change. In Event there isn't much that is new, however, it is a more accessible book than some of the others, and it does provide an interesting journey through the concept of event. What he says in this book about the three events of psychoanalysis (real, symbolic and imaginary) is not clear, one would have to go to his other books to find clearer explanations, but the big problem I have with Event is the section on Buddhism. Žižek views Buddhism as offering relief from the negative effects of capitalism and scientific/technological innovation. He finds it dangerous because it actually functions as capitalism's perfect ideological supplement. This is vague. He talks about Buddhism as if it were a monolithic institution with one set of beliefs and just one interpretation of those beliefs. He concentrates his critique on Zen Buddhism, and bashes it for not having a moral core. He likes to point out how D.T. Suzuki supported the war effort in Japan, etc. The point he wants to make is that Zen could be used by capitalists and torturers and therefore is a dangerous view. However, one could say the same thing about Christianity; it's all a question of how you interpret it, isn't it? One could be a Christian and a fascist, but does that mean that Christianity is inherently rotten and

flawed? He says that "everything the Buddhist does is ultimately for the attainment of Enlightenment." He claims that morality is advocated while on the road to Nirvana, but once there, one is beyond morality. But enlightenment is the existential, subjective experience of the truth of the three marks of existence, namely that even though there is happiness and joy in life it is also full of dukkha (suffering that results basically from the kind of beings we are, the five aggregates; anatta (no soul, entities, including ourselves, are not what they are due to an eternal essence); and anicca (there is change, things do not remain the same). The Buddhist strives to go beyond ideology, to experience the world beyond the symbolic and the imaginary, to the extent that such experience might be possible. When one has achieved Nirvana, one is where he or she was before, but hopefully that experience can be brought to bear on how life is lived. Nirvana is beyond morality because compassion becomes a direct response, not a rule that one has to follow. If someone is hungry, you give them food, not because it's the right thing to do, but simply because they are hungry. Zizek criticizes the Buddhist view that we don't have a self, but he falls into the fallacy of equivocation here. The self exists, but not as an essence, a fixed substance that survives the disintegration of the body. The self is an ephemeral, impermanent, fluid structure mostly made up of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. On page 68 Zizek accuses Buddhism of rejecting the Self as a free responsible agent, but he's attacking a straw man. It is only through enlightenment that we can become truly free, responsible agents. I don't understand why of late Zizek feels the need to bash Buddhism, but one thing is clear, his understanding of it is superficial. Except for the section on Buddhism, I found the book engaging and worthwhile.

Yes, he does repeat himself; yes, he meanders; yes, he jumps from topic to topic; yes, he is politically incorrect; yes, he is sometimes difficult to understand; yes, he is totally uncritical about Lacan, but Žižek is still one of the most interesting reads in today's barren field of philosophy. He will make you think, and he will make you laugh. And Žižek's is definitely one of his most accessible (and short) books. Žižek does not try to hide or sugarcoat his left leanings. He is sincere, he is critical (which is philosopher's duty), and he calls the bulls*** (one of his favorite words) when he sees it. And there's plenty to be called out these days...

It's amusing to read a philosopher who is up to speed on pop-culture. There are several laugh out loud commentaries, but the funniest was his deconstruction of Psy, the South Korean trance dance phenomena we're all still trying to forget. Other than the hoots, this book is great if you like the

circularity of Continental fare. Even though it strains the patience of Americans, 'lets get 'er done mentality', it also illumines each subject with untold nuances, as befits poetic elegance and a participatory world-view. Here and there, scattered throughout the text are insights worthy of Nagarjuna or Wallace Stevens - jewels that shatter our conventions and open facets of contemplative intensity. I enjoyed reading this book and came upon information and points of view that were genuinely new and interesting. Like any bard, Zizek sometimes gets lost in his own bombast. This can be funny, or annoying. In any case, the joke is on you!

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