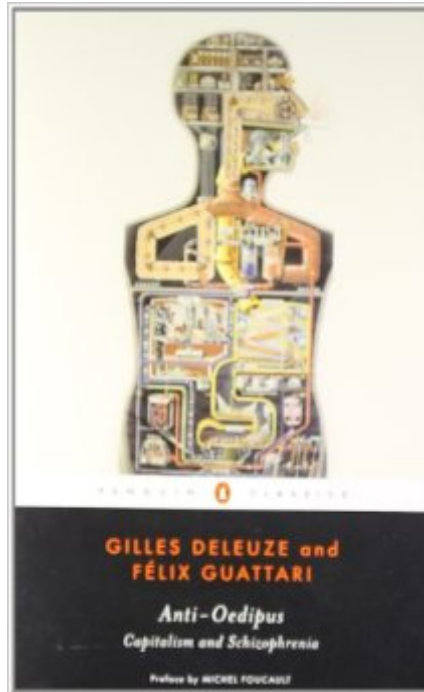


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Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism And Schizophrenia (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

An "introduction to the nonfascist life" (Michel Foucault, from the Preface) When it first appeared in France, *Anti-Oedipus* was hailed as a masterpiece by some and "a work of heretical madness" by others. In it, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari set forth the following theory: Western society's innate herd instinct has allowed the government, the media, and even the principles of economics to take advantage of each person's unwillingness to be cut off from the group. What's more, those who suffer from mental disorders may not be insane, but could be individuals in the purest sense, because they are by nature isolated from society. More than twenty-five years after its original publication, *Anti-Oedipus* still stands as a controversial contribution to a much-needed dialogue on the nature of free thinking.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Published in France in 1972, *Anti-Oedipus* was the first of several collaborations between Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. A few years later they would go on to write the even larger and more complex *A Thousand Plateaus*, perhaps Deleuze's most famous work. Zizek argues that Deleuze's collaborations with Guattari represent his weakest work, and that his best books are actually *The Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*, works written in the years prior to *Anti-Oedipus*. Since I have not yet read these latter two books, I cannot judge their merits, but I must say I was very impressed with *Anti-Oedipus*, though I think *A Thousand Plateaus* is the better book. Whereas *A Thousand Plateaus* ranges through the disciplines, *Anti-Oedipus* is more narrowly focused upon

psychoanalysis and its relationship to capitalism. Provocatively, they argue that schizophrenia is embedded in capitalism, a sort of by-product of its axiomatic political metabolism. The schizophrenic out for a walk, they point out, is a better model for their 'schizoanalysis' than the neurotic stretched out on the psychoanalytic couch. The schizophrenic is immune to neurosis, they insist, because he has already transcended it: the desiring machines within him link him to the outer world in a series of assemblages and flows that it is normally the job of psychoanalysis to repress. Deleuze and Guattari substitute polyvocality and multiplicity for unity: not the Id or the ego, but machines and many of them. Their model for the unconscious is that of a factory of production, as opposed to the Freudian theater enacting the tragic dramas of Oedipus.

Why am I giving this book a five star rating? Because this work is an effort at a new theory that is systematic and terminologically consistent and must have been a torture for the writers to conjure up in their head. It certainly is a torture to read this work. Not because I can't understand hard-core philosophy - I have read, understood and liked Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre and Derrida, considered amongst the most abstruse stylists - but because it is difficult to empathize with writers who characterize themselves and their readers as 'desiring machines' rather than as subjects with consciousness and will. Is desire the only thing that defines human beings - what about will, thinking, compassion, judgment? And further why am I supposed to be a machine and in what sense? These are the questions that came to my mind. The authors never explain. The question of the subject is dismissed in one sentence. It is also difficult to agree with writers who dismiss all seeking of power and all active resistance by implication as fascism and preach escape/flight as the most radical ideology of resistance and hope. And it is difficult to find hope in the vain jargon of molecular vs. molar, in the lines of escape or flight, or in a schizoid approach to life (a schizophrenic has no control over himself - is a machine and hence is the authors' favorite). The authors fail in their synthesis of Marx and Freud although they come close and fail to understand Nietzsche, one of their favorite philosophers. Marx, Freud and Nietzsche would turn violently in their graves, if they ever know what Deleuze/Guattari did to their philosophies. Their speculations on incest, kinship etc., are just too weak, sketchy and merely assertoric to be taken seriously.

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