

# 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Communism

## Including Hermeneutic communism

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>21st-century communist theorists</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	See also . . . . .	1
1.2	External links and further reading . . . . .	1
1.3	Notes . . . . .	1
<b>2</b>	<b>Hermeneutic Communism</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Contents and arguments . . . . .	3
2.2	Reviews . . . . .	3
2.3	References . . . . .	4
2.4	External links . . . . .	4
2.5	Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses . . . . .	5
2.5.1	Text . . . . .	5
2.5.2	Images . . . . .	5
2.5.3	Content license . . . . .	6

# Chapter 1

## 21st-century communist theorists

According to the political theorist Alan Johnson there has been a revival of **serious interest in communism in the 21st century** led by Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. Other leading theorists are Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Gianni Vattimo, Alessandro Russo, Jodi Dean and Judith Balso. Also Alberto Toscano, translator of Alain Badiou, Terry Eagleton, Bruno Bosteels and Peter Hallward. Many of these advocates contributed to the three-day conference, “The Idea of Communism,” in London in 2009 that drew a substantial paying audience.<sup>[1]</sup> Theoretical publications, some published by Verso Books, include *The Idea of Communism*, edited by Costas Douzinas and Žižek, Badiou’s *The Communist Hypothesis*, and Bosteels’s *The Actuality of Communism*. The defining common ground is the contention that ‘the crises of contemporary liberal capitalist societies—ecological degradation, financial turmoil, the loss of trust in the political class, exploding inequality—are *systemic*; interlinked, not amenable to legislative reform, and requiring “revolutionary” solutions.’<sup>[2]</sup> In the introduction to *The Idea of Communism*, (2009) Žižek and Douzinas also identified four common premises among the thinkers in attendance:

- 1) The Idea of Communism confronts de-politicization through a return to voluntarism.
- 2) Communism as a radical philosophical idea. It must be thought of as taking distance from economism and statism, as well as learning from the experiences of the 21st century.
- 3) Communism combats neoliberalism by returning to the idea of the “common.”
- 4) Communism as freedom and equality. Equality cannot exist without freedom and vice versa.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 1.1 See also

- *Hermeneutic Communism*

### 1.2 External links and further reading

- Costas Douzinas, editor and contributor; Slavoj Žižek, editor; Alain Badiou, contributor; Judith Balso, contributor; Bruno Bosteels, contributor; Susan Buck-Morss, contributor; Terry Eagleton, contributor; Peter Hallward, contributor; Michael Hardt, contributor; Jean-Luc Nancy, contributor; Antonio Negri, contributor; Jacques Rancière, contributor; Mark Russo, contributor; Alberto Toscano, contributor; Gianni Vattimo, contributor; *The Idea of Communism* (Vol. 1), Verso (December 13, 2010), hardcover, 224 pages, ISBN 184467455X ISBN 978-1844674558; trade paperback, Verso (December 13, 2010), ISBN 1844674592 ISBN 978-1844674596
  - book review by Mark Harvey, February 2011 in *Socialist Review*
- Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, Verso (July 13, 2010), hardcover, 288 pages, ISBN 1844676005 ISBN 978-1844676002
- Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, Verso (June 1, 2011), hardcover, 256 pages, ISBN 1844676951 ISBN 978-1844676958
- Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, Verso (October 9, 2012), hardcover, 240 pages, ISBN 1844679543 ISBN 978-1844679546
- Communism, A New Beginning? October 14–16, 2011
- “Full Communism” blog post at versobooks.com by Huw Lemmey May 3, 2012

### 1.3 Notes

- [1] Campbell, Duncan (March 12, 2009). “Move over Jacko, Idea of Communism is hottest ticket in town this weekend”. *The Guardian*. Retrieved May 18, 2012.

- [2] Johnson, Alan (May–June 2012). “The New Communism: Resurrecting the Utopian Delusion”. *World Affairs*. A specter is haunting the academy—the specter of “new communism.” A worldview recently the source of immense suffering and misery, and responsible for more deaths than fascism and Nazism, is mounting a comeback; a new form of left-wing totalitarianism that enjoys intellectual celebrity but aspires to political power.
- [3] Douzinas, C., & Žižek, S. (2010). Introduction. In *The idea of communism* (pp. vii-x). London: Verso.

## Chapter 2

# Hermeneutic Communism

*Hermeneutic Communism: from Heidegger to Marx* is a 2011 book of political philosophy and Marxist hermeneutics by Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala.

### 2.1 Contents and arguments

The authors explain the book as follows “Although the material published here has never been released before, there are two books that have determined the production of this text: Gianni’s *Ecce Comu: Come si diventa cio che si era* (2007) and Santiago’s *The Remains of Being: Hermeneutic Ontology After Metaphysics* (2009). In the former, Vattimo emphasized the political necessity of reevaluating communism; in the latter, Zabala insisted on the progressive nature of hermeneutics. *Hermeneutic Communism* can be considered a radical development of both.”<sup>[1]</sup> In 2004, after leaving the party of the Democrats of the Left, he endorsed Marxism, reassessing positively its projectual principles and wishing for a “return” to the thought of Karl Marx and to a communism, rid of distorted soviet developments, which have to be dialectically overcome. Vattimo asserts the continuity of his new choices with the “weak thought,” thus having changed “many of his ideas.” He namely refers to a “weakened Marx,”<sup>[2]</sup> as ideological basis capable of showing the real nature of communism. The new Marxist approach, therefore, emerges as a practical development of the “weak thought” into the frame of a political perspective.

Part 1 of the book is called “Framed Democracy” in which he characterizes contemporary capitalism as “Armed capitalism”. Also while analysing current western parliamentary democracies he speaks of “A politics of descriptions does not impose power in order to dominate as a philosophy; rather, it is functional for the continued existence of a society of dominion, which pursues truth in the form of imposition (violence), conservation (realism), and triumph (history).”<sup>[3]</sup> Part II is called “Hermeneutic Communism” where he talks of “Interpretation as Anarchy” and affirms that “existence is interpretation” and “hermeneutics is weak thought”. Afterwards advocates a “weakened communism” and praises as models for change the contemporary Latin American left wing governments such as those of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela,

Evo Morales in Bolivia and Lula in Brazil. For him “this new weak communism differs substantially from its previous Soviet (and current Chinese) realization, because the South American countries follow democratic electoral procedures and also manage to decentralize the state bureaucratic system through the misiones (social missions for community projects). In sum, if weakened communism is felt as a specter in the West, it is not only because of media distortions but also for the alternative it represents through the same democratic procedures that the West constantly professes to cherish but is hesitant to apply”.<sup>[4]</sup>

The authors dedicate the book to “Castro, Chavez, Lula, and Morales.”<sup>[5]</sup>

### 2.2 Reviews

“Hermeneutic Communism is one of those rare books that seamlessly combines postmetaphysical philosophy and political practice, the task of a meticulous ontological interpretation and decisive revolutionary action, the critique of intellectual hegemony and a positive, creative thought. Vattimo and Zabala, unlike Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, do not offer their readers a readymade political ontology but allow radical politics to germinate from each singular and concrete act of interpretation. This is the most significant event of twenty-first-century philosophy!” — Michael Marder, author of *Groundless Existence: The Political Ontology of Carl Schmitt*

“Hermeneutic Communism is much more than a beautifully written essay in political philosophy, reaching from ontological premises to concrete political analyses: it provides a coherent communist vision from the standpoint of Heideggerian postmetaphysical hermeneutics. All those who criticize postmodern ‘weak thought’ for its inability to ground radical political practice will have to admit their mistake—Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala demonstrate that weak thought does not mean weak action but is the very resort of strong radical change. This is a book that everyone who thinks about radical politics needs like the air he or she breathes!” — Slavoj Žižek, author of *Living in the End Times*

“The authors argue that ‘weak thought,’ or an antifoundational hermeneutics, will allow social movements to avoid both the violence attending past struggles and, if triumphant, a falling back into routines of domination—the restoration of what Jean-Paul Sartre called the ‘practico-inert.’ Vattimo and Zabala end with Latin America as a case study of applied weak thought politics, where the left in recent years has had remarkable success at the polls.”  
— Greg Grandin, New York University

“Those interested in the potential for theoretical reformulations made possible by postfoundational political thought and those following the rebellion of marginal sectors of society have a lot to learn from this remarkable book.” — Ernesto Laclau, author of *On Populist Reason*

“The work of Vattimo and Zabala clears a new stage for political theorizing based on a careful probe of the current state of destitution and hidden edges of social vitality. While I do not always agree with the conclusions drawn by these marvelous writers, I thank them for sparking an essential debate and replenishing our critical vocabularies.”  
— Avital Ronell, New York University and the European Graduate School

“...action-packed...” — *Asia Times*

“...Vattimo and Zabala offer a refreshing alternative to the hegemonic discourse, a breath of fresh air from the violent imposition of “metaphysics” by those in power.”  
— *Ceasefire Magazine*

“Despite its thin profile the content itself is formidable in achieving both its critical and scholarly aims.” — Maxwell Kennel, *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, Issue 16.2 (2012): 251-259.

- Santiago Zabala’s *New York Times* op-ed How To Be a European (Union) Philosopher
- Review from Marx & Philosophy Review of Books
- Interview with Santiago Zabala

## 2.3 References

- [1] Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala. *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* Columbia University Press. 2011. Pg. VII
- [2] Gianni Vattimo. *Ecce comu. Come si ri-diventa ciò che si era*. Fazi. Rome, 2007
- [3] Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala. *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* Columbia University Press. 2011. Pg. 12
- [4] Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala. *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* Columbia University Press. 2011. Pg. 122
- [5] Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala. *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* Columbia University Press. 2011. Pg. VIII

## 2.4 External links

- Interview with Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala

## 2.5 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

### 2.5.1 Text

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