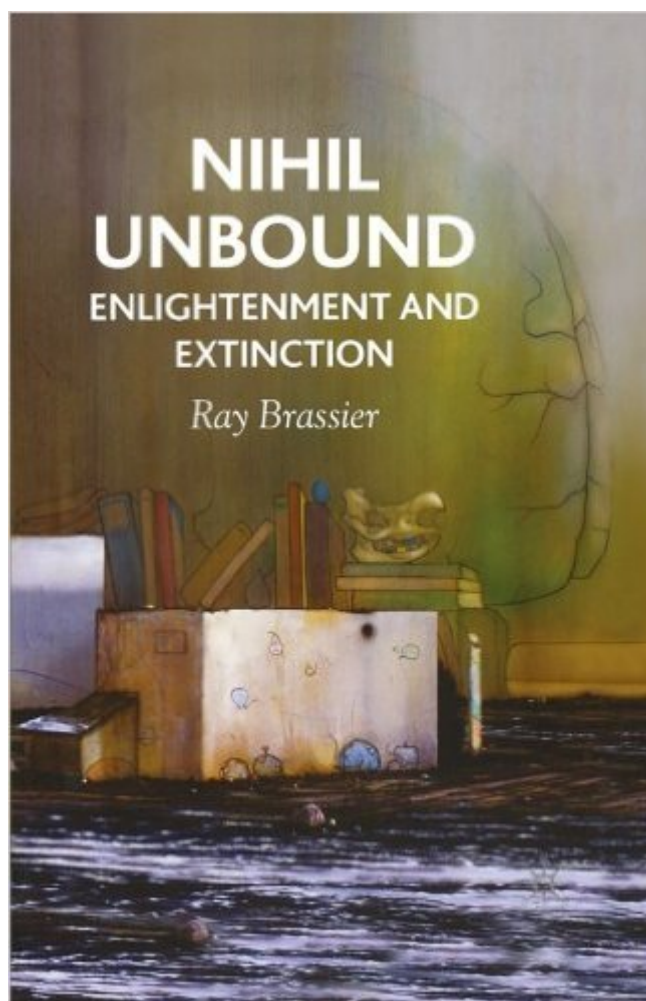


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Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment And Extinction



Synopsis

This book pushes nihilism to its ultimate conclusion by linking revisionary naturalism in Anglo-American philosophy with anti-phenomenological realism in French philosophy. Contrary to the 'post-analytic' consensus uniting Heidegger and Wittgenstein against scientism and scepticism, this book links eliminative materialism and speculative realism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For disclosure: I am not a professional philosopher (an "amateur" at best!), and lack the requisite background to really judge Brassier's readings of Badiou, Laruelle, and a few of the other philosophers cited in this book. I skipped Part II (principally on Badiou and Laruelle), so this review pertains only to the chapters in Part I and Part III. I should also note that I picked this book up owing to Brassier's identification as a "speculative realist" - a label which has also been applied to the work of Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, and Jane Bennett. I have read and enjoyed several books by these other authors; but "speculative realism" is a very loosely applied label, and Brassier is pursuing a different project than these other authors. I have two general criticisms of Brassier's book. The first is its presentation. It is fair to note that Brassier's writing style is dense and allusive. In itself this is not a bad thing; I am not one to judge a writer for being "difficult." Other readers should be aware of the Brassier's difficulty, however, especially given the fact that you cannot look inside the book on or the publisher website. More problematic is the way in which Brassier presents his overall argument. The individual chapters often do not clearly "link up": The chapter on Horkheimer

and Adorno's "Dialectic of Enlightenment," for example, seems out of place and does not add to Brassier's argument. In other places, Brassier takes far too much space to make his point: his discussion of Paul Churchland's work, for example, can be summed up in a single sentence, but includes a diversion of several pages through the internal tensions of Churchland's philosophy.

I am writing this review for the same reason I read Brassier's book: it's for class. But it is a fun class and the book is just as good, so don't let that fact discourage you from reading the remainder of this review. Let's just say that I would much rather read Brassier for a second time than read something boring like Descartes or some other dead guy or even the remainder of this review for a first time. That is not to say that this is a bad review (or a review that is bad). If I were assigned to review my review of Brassier's book I'd give it a 3/5, good at times but overly self-aware and a bit off-topic. I would rather read Brassier than this review. And I would rather read Chapter 7 of his book six more times than read the whole thing twice. *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* is dense in content and form. Brassier reads Paul Churchland, Adorno and Horkheimer, his colleague Quentin Meillassoux (if you haven't read much of this 'speculative philosophy' stuff but want to continue I'd say you should definitely read Meillassoux's *After Finitude*), Alan Badiou, Heidegger, Deleuze, Nietzsche and some other names. He tries to acclimate you with the philosophers he critiques, but in some chapters I found myself wishing I were better acquainted with some of the primary literature. For example, I couldn't keep up with the chapter on Badiou to be honest. It was out of my range. There were certain parts in which I had to do that thing where you go back and reread a passage several times before concluding that you just don't get it. So it's not an easy read but it's well organized and very interesting. The format is very simple for the most part.

If you ever thought you were important, you're wrong. In so many words, this is one of the axioms of Brassier's *Nihil Unbound*. In three parts and seven chapters, Brassier sets up the argument that because extinction is nigh, there is no point in trying to extract a meaning from the lives we perceive. As Brassier states in the book's preface, "Philosophers would do well to desist from issuing any further injunctions about the need to re-establish the meaningfulness of existence, the purposefulness of life, or mend the shattered concord between man and nature." Brassier defends nihilism as a necessity. No longer is nihilism thought of as the bleak alternative to Meaning, but a necessary realization of imminent extinction. Brassier calls nihilism a "crisis of meaning," with both the crisis and the concept of meaning understood through the way that we have been historically conditioned to understand. Whereas the nihilistic view of the past came from the acknowledgement

that "God" is beyond our understanding, therefore our lives fall short of any kind of substantial Meaning, the nihilistic view of contemporary times comes from the fact that now we can grasp the science from which nature and our universe is constructed. The more that is known about science, the more a single point is driven in like a nail into the fibers of our being: humanity is not important. Each chapter of "Nihil Unbound" focuses on a different philosopher. Brassier's main focus in spotlighting each of these thinkers is to rail against any kind of human-centered philosophy. With extinction as imminent as ever, "philosophy should be more than a sop to the pathetic twinge of human self-esteem" (xi).

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