

Friedrich Nietzsche
THE WILL TO POWER
Edited by Walter Kaufmann

12 (Nov. 1887-March 1888)
Decline of Cosmological Values

Nihilism as a psychological state will have to be reached, *first*, when we have sought a "meaning" in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged. Nihilism, then, is the recognition of the long *waste* of strength, the agony of the "in vain," insecurity, the lack of any opportunity to recover and to regain composure -- being ashamed in front of oneself, as if one had *deceived* oneself all too long.-- This meaning could have been: the "fulfillment" of some highest ethical canon in all events, the moral world order; or the growth of love and harmony in the intercourse of beings; or the gradual approximation of a state of universal happiness; or even the development toward a state of universal annihilation -- any goal at least constitutes some meaning. What all these notions have in common is that some-thing is to be *achieved* through the process -- and now one realizes that becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*.-- Thus, disappointment regarding an alleged aim of becoming as a cause of nihilism: whether regarding a specific aim or, universalized, the realization that all previous hypotheses about aims that concern the whole "evolution" are inadequate (man no longer the collaborator, let alone the center, of becoming).

Nihilism as a psychological state is reached, *secondly*, when one has posited a totality, a systematization, indeed any organization in all events, and underneath all events, and a soul that longs to admire and revere has wallowed in the idea of some supreme form of domination and administration (--if the soul be that of a logician, complete consistency and real dialectic are quite sufficient to reconcile it to everything). Some sort of unity, some form of "monism": this faith suffices to give man a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on, some whole that is infinitely superior to him, and he sees himself as a mode of the deity.-- "The well-being of the universal demands the devotion of the individual"-- but behold, there is no such universal! At bottom, man has lost the faith in his own value when no infinitely valuable whole works through him; i.e., he conceived such a whole in order *to be able to believe in his own value*.

Nihilism as psychological state has yet a *third* and *last* form. Given these two insights, that becoming has no goal and that underneath all becoming there is no grand unity in which the individual could immerse himself completely as in an element of supreme value, an escape remains: to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a *true* world. But as soon as man finds out how that world is fabricated solely from psychological needs, and how he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a *true* world. Having reached this standpoint, one grants the reality of becoming as the only reality, forbids oneself every kind of clandestine access to afterworlds and false divinities -- but *cannot endure this world though one does not want to deny it*.

What has happened, at bottom? The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of "aim," the concept of "unity," or the concept of "truth." Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not "true," is *false*. One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a *true* world. Briefly: the categories "aim," "unity," "being" which we used to project some value into the world -- we *pull out* again; so the world looks *valueless*.

2 (Spring-Fall 1887)

What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer.

3 (Spring-Fall 1887)

Radical nihilism is the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes; plus the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be "divine" or morality incarnate.

This realization is a consequence of the cultivation of "truthfulness" -- thus itself a consequence of the faith in morality.

13 (spring-Fall 1887)

Nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage (what is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all): whether the productive forces are not yet strong enough, or whether decadence still hesitates and has not yet invented its remedies.

Presupposition of this hypothesis: that there is no truth, that there is no absolute nature of things nor a "thing-in-itself." This, too, is merely nihilism -- even the most extreme nihilism. It places the value of things precisely in the lack of any reality corresponding to these values and in their being merely a symptom of strength on the part of the value-positers, a simplification for the sake of life.

14 (Spring-Fall 1887)

Values and their changes are related to increases in the power of those positing the values.

The measure of *unbelief*, of permitted "freedom of the spirit" as *an expression of an increase in power*.

"Nihilism" an ideal of the highest degree of powerfulness of the spirit, the over-richest life -- partly destructive, partly ironic.

15 (Spring-Fall 1887)

What is a *belief*? How does it originate? Every belief is a considering-something-true.

The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that *every* belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world*. Thus: a *perspectival appearance* whose origin lies in us (in so far as we continually *need* a narrower, abbreviated, simplified world).

--That it is the measure of strength to what extent we can admit to ourselves, without perishing, the merely *apparent* character, the necessity of lies.

To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a *divine way of thinking*.

22 (Spring-Fall 1887)

Nihilism. It is *ambiguous*:

- A. Nihilism as a sign of increased power of the spirit: as *active* nihilism.
- B. Nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit: as *passive* nihilism.