

LAUGHING  
AT  
NOTHING

Humor as a Response to Nihilism

John Marmysz

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*Humor as a Response to Nihilism*

JOHN MARMYSZ

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## Introduction

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# THE PROBLEM OF NIHILISM

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For the wise man as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance,  
seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten.  
How the wise man dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because  
what was done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity  
and a striving after wind.

—Ecclesiastes 2:18

The problem of nihilism, as this passage from the Old Testament suggests, is nothing new. It is, in fact, a perennial concern and a source of anxiety that has had an influence upon human life and thought throughout history. A phenomenon that has affected both individuals and whole cultures, nihilism has been likened to a “malaise,” a “cancer,” and a “sickness,” while also having been called a “divine way of thinking,” and an inspiration to artists and scholars. Nihilism has been deemed both a “disease” and a “cure”; something to be feared as well as welcomed. In short, it is a phenomenon that has been considered both an evil and a good.

However, by far the most common and widely accepted understanding of nihilism today places it in the category of things to be avoided and shunned. The term has come to be used as a popular expression of ridicule or insult, though it is, even in scholarly literature, often utilized without much precision. These days, the term *nihilism* is regularly deployed as a weapon, calculated to dismiss an opponent’s “overly negative” or “pessimistic” line of reasoning. Tellingly, despite the many accusations of nihilism, very few of those

so charged have been eager to accept the label. The energy directed against dispelling allegations of nihilism testifies to the disturbing power of the word, yet rarely have either the attacks or their rebuttals been informed by an adept understanding of the history or philosophical ideas that accompany the word and the concepts to which it is attached. One purpose of this book is to explore and clarify these meanings.

As traditionally constituted, the problem of nihilism exhibits itself in a tendency toward despair that accompanies philosophical reflection on the discrepancy between realistically attainable accomplishment and the superlative standards that humans formulate for themselves. Simply put, the problem of nihilism asks, "Why should I strive for knowledge when certainty is never attained? How can I avoid despair when the greatest excellence eludes me? Why should I struggle to do good when in the end I, and everyone who remembers me, will die?" All human effort, nihilism incessantly torments us, is a "striving after wind." Because of the emphasis that nihilism places upon the hopelessness and vanity of life's struggles, it has often been assumed that it always necessarily leads to an attitude dominated by despair. This is untrue. A second goal of this book is to demonstrate that nihilism is compatible with, and indeed preferably accompanied by, a more well-balanced attitude that includes a sense of humor.

The two major foci of this investigation, then, are to explore the complexities and ambiguities that are involved in the concept of nihilism, ultimately with the aim of formulating a clear and philosophically adequate definition of the term; and to demonstrate that the phenomenon of nihilism may be responded to with an attitude of good humor.

The opening four chapters of this investigation pursue the first goal. Chapters 1 through 3 offer a selective historical survey of philosophers, literary figures, and political movements that have explicitly dealt with the problem of nihilism. This beginning step toward scrutinizing the phenomenon proceeds by simply presenting the problem and describing the manner in which it has been confronted in the past. I focus in these sections not necessarily upon those who have analyzed and offered scholarly studies of nihilism, but on those who have wrestled with the problem existentially, expressing their struggles passionately in their works and actions. In this manner I illustrate how the concept has evolved over time, taking on the associations that help to explain why today the term *nihilism* contains so many difficult ambiguities.

During the course of the fourth chapter I isolate the fundamental issues that are important to the problem as considered in the previous chapters and propose a richer, more complete and clear definition of nihilism than has been previously offered. Nihilism, I find, is a philosophy that rests upon three basic assumptions: (1) Humans are alienated from such perfections as absolute Being, Truth, Goodness, Justice, Beauty, etc.; (2) This circumstance of alien-

ation is other than it ought to be; (3) There is nothing that humans can do to change this circumstance. The premises of this philosophy imply a circumstance that I call “nihilistic incongruity.” Nihilistic incongruity is an incongruity between actual human capacities and the ideal standards against which those capacities are judged. In the course of clarifying this point, I contrast certain non-nihilistic thinkers with the more fully nihilistic thinkers from the first three chapters. A common misunderstanding is thus cleared up, and we discover that while many different kinds of thinkers deal with nihilistic issues, this does not mean that they themselves are nihilists.

Chapters 5 through 7 pursue this study’s second focus. Having already formulated a working definition of nihilism, in these chapters I show that the phenomenon as defined does not necessarily lead to unmitigated despair. My strategy for doing so is to demonstrate that the incongruity implied by nihilism might be viewed from a perspective such that it appears to serve a constructive and useful, rather than a simply negative and destructive, purpose for nihilists. Interpreted in this manner, nihilistic incongruity is transformed into an unthreatening kind of incongruity that is compatible with an attitude of good humor.

In chapter 5, I pursue an inquiry into the experience underlying the nihilist’s adherence to the premises of nihilism. What I find is that the acceptance of these assumptions derives from a sort of sublime admiration for the “highest” of ideals. This insight provides us with a point of leverage with which to separate nihilism from its association with absolute negativity and despair. The experience of nihilistic incongruity, it turns out, is not the result of a wholesale rejection of value, but of a deep, almost religious sense of respect for that which is of superlative value. In light of this ideal standard, everything that actually exists may, from one perspective, appear substandard and relatively worthless. However, as I show in chapter 6, from another perspective, this same admiration for the superlative may also confer degrees of value upon things that exist in the actual world. Our accomplishments in this world, though they are all ultimately worthless failures according to the nihilist, are judged to be so in relation to an ideal and absolute standard. Insofar as the failures of this world serve to make us mindful of our objects of highest aspiration, however, they might be thought of as possessing a degree of instrumental value. They serve to reveal something of the absolute, if only in a negative fashion. Failure, thus, might act to attune and bind nihilists into a relationship with their most supreme objects of value. In striving for the unattainable superlative and constantly failing to achieve it, nihilists might not only find an inexhaustible source of inspiration for purposeful, unending activity, but they also might succeed in cementing a relationship between themselves and that which is most valuable to them.

The seventh and final chapter examines the relationship between incongruity and humor. Not all incongruities are occasions for negative emotional

reactions, and the potential usefulness of nihilistic incongruity makes it a possible candidate for a more positive psychological reception than is generally recognized. Incongruity theories of laughter and humor suggest that amusement is a natural and appropriate response to those kinds of incongruities that are understood to be unthreatening. When viewed from the perspective of usefulness, thus, nihilism may potentially be greeted with good humor.

The final chapter of this project navigates its way through the phenomena associated with laughter and humor in an attempt to isolate and identify the conditions underlying the humorous attitude. My claim is that the humorous attitude involves an ability to create and adopt novel and unexpected perspectives from which the otherwise painful, frustrating, and threatening incongruities of life may be revealed as potential objects of merriment. Humor is not simply an emotional response. Rather, it is an ability, talent, or capacity for interpreting life's incongruities in a manner that brings pleasure rather than pain to the humorist. It differs from the easy pleasures involved in enjoying a joke or a comedy in that humor takes work. The humorist has developed the capability to step outside of a rigidly self-centered and self-interested viewpoint in order to imagine the ways in which seemingly isolated and unrelated phenomena might be connected in previously unanticipated ways. This ability is associated with feelings of competency, mastery, and superiority.

In adopting a humorous attitude, an individual breaks the boundaries of those background expectations that normally constrain the way we think about a subject when we are serious. In so doing, expectations are shattered, yet they are shattered in such a manner that we are given access into a new way of regarding the world. With humor, though we abandon the usual way of looking at things, we still have an avenue of retreat open to us, and as we withdraw in this direction, we demonstrate to ourselves and others that we are strong enough and clever enough to find alternatives to our run-of-the-mill viewpoints. We exercise a degree of psychological mastery and creativity in building bridges that link the usual and the mundane with the unusual and surprising. When ready-made systems of thought are unable to account for something, it is at that point that a shift of our own perspective becomes necessary. A humorous attitude encourages us to practice becoming adept with such shifts. The development of this kind of flexibility allows us to make some sense, even if it is a comic sort of sense, out of incongruities that might otherwise remain painfully baffling, frustrating, and disillusioning.

Approaching the experience of nihilism with a humorous attitude does not serve to eliminate or do away with the nihilist's suffering, but it helps to make sense of that suffering, allowing the nihilist to endure the unavoidable frustrations of life. The authentic nihilist, as we will see, always speaks from the perspective of fatalism. Existence necessarily offers much failure and frustration. The nihilist's highest hopes are doomed to failure. Yet fatalism is not

the same as determinism.<sup>1</sup> Though we are fated to fall short of our highest goals, this does not determine what we should do or how we should choose to live our lives. The nihilist, in claiming that our fate is unfair, unwanted, and unfavorable nevertheless need not take this as a signal that it is necessary to collapse in despair or to abdicate a passionate adherence to the highest and most unattainable ends. Rather, with humor this individual might understand life, and all of the failures that we endure during its course, as part of a comic drama that is amusing in its ultimate absurdity.

Though many individuals have speculated on the physical and psychological benefits of laughter and humor, no one has attempted systematically to apply these speculations to nihilism, the greatest spiritual concern of modern times. This book attempts to carry past discussion a step farther in this direction and to draw some previously unnoticed, and perhaps unanticipated, connections. By emphasizing those aspects of humor that are uplifting and regenerative, I shall demonstrate its power to confront and to transform the experience of nihilistic incongruity into an occasion for the pursuit of unending activity, progress, and the improvement of the human soul.

With this study I offer more than just a novel synthesis and interpretation of past thought on the topic of nihilism. I also offer a unique and sympathetic confrontation with a troubling and pervasive philosophical syndrome. While my own belief is that there is no "solution" to the problem of nihilism, I do hope to suggest a means of utilizing the despair and anxiety that is associated with the problem as a spur toward liveliness, activity, and the celebration of life. This study is, thus, not simply an abstract, academic exercise. It also aspires to offer practical suggestions for the those who are engaged in the battle with meaninglessness.

Before undertaking the substance of this investigation, I would like briefly to discuss some contemporary scholarly treatments of nihilism in order to highlight a current controversy in the field. This controversy concerns the question of whether or not the problem of nihilism is unique to a specific time in the history of the West. The literature tends to be divided into two camps. The first views nihilism as a phenomenon unique to European culture in the modern age. The other camp, in contrast, sees in nihilism a chronic danger for all humans regardless of place or time. A brief assessment of the strengths and shortcomings of these accounts will offer an appropriate introduction to some of the issues that we will be encountering and will serve to situate this book within the current debate.

Originally published in 1960, Johan Goudsblom's *Nihilism and Culture* represents one attempt to analyze nihilism as a cultural problem stemming from the West's tacit acceptance and adherence to the Socratic "truth imperative."<sup>2</sup> Though Goudsblom consciously seeks to avoid reducing "nihilism to a trivial abstraction,"<sup>3</sup> he nevertheless does focus predominately on the epistemological elements of nihilism as they are interpreted and experienced

through Western culture. As a result, he tends to underemphasize nihilism's ontological, existential, ethical, and political themes, and to overemphasize nihilism as a distinctively European phenomenon.

According to Goudsblom, we can think of any culture in terms of a complicated set of "options" and "commands"<sup>4</sup> that shape human behavior and allow for the expression of human nature. The options and commands that a culture makes available not only define the culture itself, but shape the society and psychologies of the individuals within that culture. Goudsblom uses the example of wearing clothes to illustrate his point. The particular clothes that individuals wear in the West are largely a matter of personal choice or taste. The fashion that one follows is, thus, an option that allows for personal, individual expression, in turn contributing to the overall flavor and texture of society, which in turn influences others in their optional choices. However, it is not an option for Westerners to go around unclothed in public. There is a cultural command demanding that people wear garments of some type. Those who break such cultural commands are punished, formally or informally, and excluded from interaction with others. Cultural commands cut to the core of what defines a civilization. They are the soil that allows for human cultivation.

One of the fundamental commands that lies at the heart of Western culture, writes Goudsblom, is the "truth imperative." This imperative command can be traced all the way back to the beginning of Greek philosophy. It is operative in the efforts of the Presocratics and their attempts to find the true nature of Being behind the appearances of the world, but, according to Goudsblom, "Socrates is the first to give the truth imperative explicit expression."<sup>5</sup> This imperative touches upon an element that already was present in Greek culture, and it was for this reason that Socrates was, first, able to formulate the imperative and, second, able to find students receptive to his teachings. The truth imperative commands that the truth is the highest and most worthy of all pursuits. It belittles and criticizes anything that falls short of absolute certainty, demanding irrefutability as the criterion of knowledge. In accordance with this imperative, Socrates used logic and argument to expose the inconsistencies and vanity of those who pretended to wisdom, while at the same time admitting that the only thing he knew was that he knew nothing. The standards set by the truth imperative were so high that if followed faithfully, all beliefs and assertions were exposed as inadequate.

The influence of Socrates, according to Goudsblom, has been powerful in Western culture, but the ultimate implications of the truth imperative did not become fully apparent until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the emergence of greater democratization and individual freedom to think and formulate beliefs. This change in European society has led to the multiplication of faiths, opinions, and philosophies. The availability of these claimants to the "truth" has produced a bewildering situation. With so many beliefs to choose from, and so many arguments and counterarguments poking holes in

them from all sides, modern humans are exposed in full force to the problem of nihilism. Nothing seems true, since everything is up for dispute. All beliefs are devalued when, in accord with the Socratic truth imperative, individuals uncover the contradictions and inconsistencies in and between the myriad competing systems of belief that are up for grabs. No ideas remain sacred. The solution to this situation, Goudsblom tells us, is to recognize that the truth should not be pursued at the expense of all other social and cultural commands. Sometimes the truth must be mediated by other group considerations for the sake of societal confidence and cohesion. Nihilism can be cured, then, by resisting the urge to regard the truth imperative as supreme.

Goudsblom's treatment gives a clear, sociological account of nihilism. However, the tradeoff for this clarity is an oversimplification of the subject matter. Goudsblom emphasizes nihilism as a problem of epistemology at the expense of its ontological, existential, ethical, and political themes. In fact, he classifies all but the epistemological manifestations of nihilism as "spurious" forms of the problem. "A full range of possibilities extends, then, from the most 'authentic' forms of nihilism which arise from the dilemmas of the truth imperative on the one hand to, on the other, the more 'spurious' forms assumed by the problematic when it has been assimilated into the personality as a ready-made cultural element."<sup>6</sup> As a consequence of his too narrow focus on the truth imperative as the core of nihilism, Goudsblom neglects to provide an adequate account of nihilism in general, but especially of those threads of nihilism that participate most heavily in the ontological and existential manifestations of the phenomenon. By his own admission, he treats nihilism solely as an "intellectual problem" and so leaves out of his account any discussion of "political terrorism and hooliganism."<sup>7</sup> But such an omission ignores an important and historically influential part of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, overemphasis on Greek origins tends to highlight nihilism as a distinctively European occurrence that, again, ignores important aspects of the phenomenon. "Something has changed in European culture,"<sup>8</sup> Goudsblom tells us, and it is due to this critical change, he thinks, that nihilism has emerged. Nihilism, he suggests, is a crisis specific to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western European culture. However, as we will see, the eighteenth-century Germans and the nineteenth-century Russians also wrestled with nihilism. In addition, Asian thinkers have long grappled with similar issues in their religions and philosophies, and as the quote at the beginning of this introduction suggests, nihilistic worries are present even in the Old Testament. The issues and themes characterizing nihilism are not, in fact, unique to twentieth-century Europe, but are concerns cutting across geographical regions and historical periods. Focusing on the truth imperative and its formulation by Socrates tends to distort our view of the issues by limiting our field of vision to only those traditions that participate in the Greek legacy.



Goudsblom is not alone in his view of nihilism as an occurrence unique to the West. Michael Allen Gillespie also finds the roots of nihilism in the Western tradition, though he sees the problem stemming from around the late medieval and early modern period, really gaining steam with Descartes' notion of the absolute will and Fichte's extreme subjectivism. In contrast to Nietzsche, Gillespie argues that it was not the death of God, but the birth of an inscrutable and all-powerful God, leading to the emphasis of will over reason, that defines the nihilistic impulse. "The history of nihilism is the history of the development of this notion of will."<sup>9</sup> Unlike Goudsblom, Gillespie has a place for the movements of political nihilism in this tradition. However, like Goudsblom he overemphasizes one strand of nihilism while suppressing the significance of the others. Active, existential themes dominate Gillespie's treatment, and so nihilism is represented as a "Promethean" movement, in reference to the Greek Titan who stole fire from the gods. Again, a narrow focus on one theme in Western thought produces a clear, yet overly simplified view of the phenomenon.

In contrast to those like Goudsblom and Gillespie who present nihilism as a modern, Western occurrence, many other writers see something more universal and chronic at work. Stanley Rosen, for instance, writes, "Nihilism is a permanent danger to the human condition. . . ."<sup>10</sup> He sees in the phenomenon a tendency that is not unique to modern Europeans, but one that characterizes all rational, human creatures. This tendency is the desire for "complete speech." Humans, by their very natures, want to know "why" things are the way that they are. They ask questions and look for solutions to problems and puzzles. When confronted with contradictory and partial accounts of the world, the natural, human response is to try to reconcile them or look for criteria by which to dismiss the false ones. Humans are speaking animals, or, in other words, rational animals. But this rationality is inextricably bonded with desire, and so humans both need and desire justification for the way things appear to be. They try to make sense of the world, demanding explanations that satisfy their curiosities. More than this, they desire complete, fully certain, and justified explanations.<sup>11</sup>

The reason why humans demand justification is because they are separated from the world around them. "Men speak because they are partially detached from things and try to overcome this disjunction with a bridge of language."<sup>12</sup> Language and rationality are tools used to try and come into contact with and understand a world from which we are alienated. To be reunited with the ultimate, to experience reality as it is "in itself," is the supreme human goal. However, this is impossible. The nature of language and rationality is that it needs distance in order to perform its function. Bridges only work when straddling a gap, and the bridge that is language requires separation so that it may engage in "discrimination, restraints, or evaluations."<sup>13</sup> So, humans as a whole find themselves in a paradoxical situa-

tion. They desire a completeness in understanding that, if attained, would eradicate their very natures as reasoning animals.

Rosen draws a connection with politics and ethics. Conservative and radical political movements are both attempts to dissolve the human paradox of desire and understanding. On the one hand, conservatives try to separate philosophy from the public sphere, relegating the desire for ultimate answers and perfect understanding to the private domain of prayer and religion. Radicals, on the other hand, encourage the multiplication of philosophies in the public sphere, believing that the satisfaction of free expression will replace the desire for ultimate answers. Neither of these responses, however, is adequate according to Rosen: "[E]verything I have said is intended to show that there cannot be any final solutions to man's problems, that man is a problem (or paradox), however little this may appeal to common sense, and that to 'solve' the problem would be to dissolve man."<sup>14</sup> Humankind is separated from the world by language, and it is the impossible struggle to overcome language that defines the species. Action directed toward closer and closer approximations of ultimate and complete reality is a Sisyphean struggle. It is never ending, yet at each moment it is a fulfillment of human nature.

As with Albert Camus, Rosen conceives of nihilism as the desire for peace and the end of life's struggles; the end of speech. He points to the philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger as two very influential nihilistic systems that, in refusing to speak rationally about foundations, reduce speech to silence. The alternative, he claims, is a return to the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle, and the Greek notion of an interrelationship between Truth and Goodness in Wisdom. Our incomplete understanding of the world only makes sense as incomplete if we have a shared notion of completeness as the criterion against which to judge all philosophical approximations. But this means that we already, at some level, have an intuition into the ultimate. This intuition is our common, shared, traditional Wisdom. Humans periodically forget this intuitive Truth, and it is then that there is a descent into nihilism, irrationality, and fragmentation. The opposite of nihilism is genuine philosophy, and philosophy may only be intelligibly pursued in the light of Wisdom, which is the nexus of Truth and Goodness. The appeals of ordinary language philosophy or Heidegger's radical historicity are aimed toward dismantling the notion of transcendent forms of Truth and Goodness, and so they also dismantle the notion of Wisdom, which in turn makes genuine philosophy impossible. There are just some things, these nihilists claim, that you can't talk about.

Rosen's account does justice to the many themes that permeate the concept of nihilism, although his solution to the problem seems hopelessly Platonic. Like Nietzsche, he looks for a subjective standpoint from which to reconcile the individual with the ultimate, but unlike Nietzsche, he seems to suggest that it is an intuition into the forms of intelligibility that will provide

humans with this standpoint. It is not enough to love wisdom. Rosen wants us to believe, in addition, that we already possess wisdom. We just forget this from time to time, and it is then that nihilism rears its head. Nihilism is a constant threat to rational beings, but it may be surmounted during our most lucid moments of rationality.

Rosen is one among a whole host of contemporary authors who, contrary to Goudsblom and Gillespie, see in nihilism a perpetual threat to human well-being. "It is false, or certainly inadequate, to say that nihilism is a contingent historical event."<sup>15</sup> Nihilism is, on this view, one of the many dangers inherent in being human. It arises out of either human nature or the human condition. Keiji Nishitani, Martin E. Marty, Michael Novak, and Cornel West all consider the problem of nihilism to be a lurking danger that breeds negativity because it threatens the human desire for certainty, meaning, hope, connectedness, and potency.<sup>16</sup> Though I think that these commentators have hit upon an important point in stressing the chronic nature of nihilism's dangers, I also think that they underplay the constructive and positive role of nihilism in both individual and collective human history.

Karen Carr, who seems to think of nihilism as a distinctively modern problem and not as a universal menace, comes close to recognizing the potentially positive role of nihilism's negativity. However, she still considers nihilism as "something from which we must escape."<sup>17</sup> Carr never produces a very satisfying definition of nihilism, though she does attempt to delineate five different themes that are often times "layered" together in the problem. "Epistemological nihilism" denies the possibility of knowledge, "alethiological nihilism" denies the reality of truth, "metaphysical nihilism" denies the world's existence, "ethical nihilism" denies the reality of moral value, and "existential nihilism" is a feeling of emptiness.<sup>18</sup> Carr claims that the most common sense of the term is this last one.

Carr thinks that postmodernism has succeeded in "banalizing" nihilism to the point where the themes that characterize the phenomenon are no longer regarded as a threat, but are rather greeted with "a yawn."<sup>19</sup> This situation, which she sees especially in the work of Richard Rorty, robs nihilism of its transformative power. Postmodernists are resigned to nihilism, and so have no motivation to create new values, truths, and meanings. She worries that this development will produce stagnation and a "reification" of the current attitude of historicism and relativism. Instead of vital and dynamic intellectual activity, "the banalization of nihilism" leads, ironically, to absolutism. It does so, according to Carr, because with the belief that all justification is in vain, the nihilist loses the desire and the need to search for absolute standards of behavior. All determinations of morality and truth reduce to matters of personal taste and community norms. Because there is no higher authority to which an appeal can be made on these issues, there is no motivation for individuals to try and

responsibly seek social change through reasoned discourse and political activism. In the words of Rosen, nihilism reduces speech to silence.

My agreement extends farther than my disagreement with Carr, and I intend to develop some of the themes that she only touches upon in her book. With her, I emphasize the transformative power of nihilism, but against her I argue that the escape from nihilism is not such a self-evidently good thing. Nihilism does not ultimately have to lead to absolutism, despair, or destruction. Instead, the unpleasantness of nihilism is a potentially useful spur toward unending change, progress, and spiritual development. Against Goudsblom, Gillespie, and Carr, I claim that the symptoms of nihilism reach far beyond the modern, European experience. Nihilism, and here I agree with Rosen, constitutes a predicament lying at the very heart of the human condition. The entire fabric of human existence is woven through with a particular pattern of ontological, epistemological, existential, ethical, and political nihilistic threads. Exploring and giving voice to the form of this design is the task to be undertaken in what follows.

Perhaps the most serious shortcoming of recent scholarly treatments of nihilism is that they fail adequately to define nihilism and so they throw about the term as though any vaguely “negative” philosophy falls into this category. Too often scholars proceed to draw conclusions about nihilism itself on the basis of philosophies that are, in fact, very poor models. This has only contributed to further confusion and ambiguity. In order to truly understand the concepts behind the word, it will be necessary to embark upon our own investigation into the background of the usage of the term *nihilism*. Once we have explored the thought and intentions of those who have explicitly grappled with, and thus given shape to, the problem, we will be in a position to offer a more precise definition than has previously been attempted. Once this is accomplished it will become clear that an attitude of good humor is not as incompatible with nihilism as we have been led to believe by modern scholars. Instead of being concerned with “overcoming” nihilism, we might come to appreciate its recurrent experience as something that contributes to our ongoing spiritual education.

Let us now look at the evidence for ourselves.

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*Part One*

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## SCRUTINIZING NIHILISM

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