

NIHILISM AND THE POSTMODERN IN VATTIMO'S NIETZSCHE

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He who sees the abyss, but with an eagle's eyes – he who *grasps* the abyss with an eagle's claws: *he* possesses courage. (Nietzsche 1969, p. 298)

Abstract

A connection is often made between postmodernism and nihilism, but the full meaning of such a connection is rarely explored. The contemporary Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo is one of the few philosophers to have devoted much work to explaining this connection. Vattimo extrapolates the relevance of Nietzsche's theory of nihilism for the postmodern condition, arguing that the concept of the postmodern can only be thought rigorously in relation to the nihilistic destiny of the West. This article explores Vattimo's postmodern reading of Nietzsche and argues that this reading helps to illuminate (1) the connection between nihilism and the postmodern; (2) the postmodern transformation of nihilism, which was originally a theory of the ails of modernity rather than of postmodernity; and (3) why postmodernists may wish to affirm nihilism rather than take the accusation that postmodernism is nihilistic as a charge that must be refuted.

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Postmodernism as a mode of thought is often accused of being nihilistic, and postmodernity is often seen as a nihilistic state of society.¹ An in-depth analysis of the connection between nihilism and the postmodern, however, is rarely given, and postmodernists themselves rarely respond to the charge. A rare exception to this state of affairs is found in the work of Gianni Vattimo, one of Italy's foremost contemporary philosophers, who has treated the connection between nihilism and the postmodern extensively. My purpose here is to examine Vattimo's work for the light it sheds on such a connection. Vattimo's thought is intensively informed by his readings of both Nietzsche and Heidegger, but I propose to focus exclusively here on his reading of Nietzsche.

Nihilism as a philosophical concept was given its most definitive form by Nietzsche, for whom it is 'the radical repudiation of value, meaning and desirability' (Nietzsche, 1968, p.7). Nihilistic thought has many related manifestations: ontological, epistemological, existential, moral,

political. Extreme nihilism is often thought of as vulgar relativism where no criteria exist for choosing one value, knowledge claim, or course of action over another. This nihilistic debilitation is usually associated with moods of despair, random destructiveness, and longing for nothingness. In its most extreme existential form, it is a denial of life itself because of its apparent meaninglessness. Suicide, for Nietzsche, is the *'deed of nihilism'* (Nietzsche 1968, p.143). Nihilism is an existential and psychological state an individual can experience, but it is also a symptom of society, and is generally thought historically as a diagnosis of an ailment in a society at a particular time in history. Nihilism is the sickness, destruction and decay symptomatic of the decline of the West. Likewise, while postmodernism may be seen ahistorically as a general type of theory bearing particular features, it is often thought “historically,” as a theoretical description of and response to the present state of the most technologically advanced societies, called “postmodernity.”

The discourse of nihilism began in modernity, and, generally speaking, in its “classical” formulations it is a diagnosis of and response to particular ailments of *modernity*. How, then, does nihilism relate to postmodernity? What is the status of nihilism in postmodernity? Presumably, the theory of nihilism that was developed as a diagnosis of modernity and modernism must undergo a *transformation* if it is to be applied to postmodernity and postmodernism. That is, if nihilism applies to specific social and historical conditions, and if those conditions have changed significantly (between modernity and postmodernity), then we should expect the diagnosis of nihilism itself to change. Postmodernity should be nihilistic *in different ways* than modernity was nihilistic.

This seems straightforward enough. Matters are significantly complicated, however, by the fact that the prime theorist of nihilism in *modernity*—Friedrich Nietzsche—is *also* one of the prime precursors of *postmodern* theory in the philosophical tradition. This means, then, that Nietzsche’s thought contains large elements of what—in retrospect—may be called “postmodern.” It also suggests that to a certain extent his theory of modernity may in fact be prophetic of postmodernity. The task of delineating a postmodern nihilism from a modern nihilism, then, is not simply a matter of contrasting nihilisms with wholly different theories of society and categories of thought. However, we should not infer that such a delineation is neither possible nor worthwhile on the grounds that Nietzsche’s theory of nihilism is wholly adequate for describing and responding to nihilism in the postmodern condition. The question of *interpretation* is pertinent here—Nietzsche is an ambiguous thinker, and his theory of nihilism (like all his theories) is open to multiple interpretations and extrapolations. It is possible to read Nietzsche in a modernist way. Likewise, it is only because of postmodern interpretations and extrapolations of his ideas that they may seem adequate to dealing with nihilism in postmodernity.

The task of delineating modern and postmodern nihilisms, then, is to a certain extent the task of delineating modern and postmodern interpretations of Nietzschean nihilism. Such an interpretation is undertaken by Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, who is one of the few theorists to develop a detailed account of the connection between nihilism and the postmodern. Vattimo’s Nietzsche therefore stands as a useful figure of thought for determining the connection between nihilism and the postmodern. While Vattimo’s writings on Nietzsche are quite clear and in little need of elucidation, what I want to do here is make a comparison between his

interpretation and what I shall broadly call “modernist” interpretations of Nietzschean nihilism. This comparison will show the general features of the postmodern transformation of nihilism, show why postmodernism and postmodernity might legitimately be called nihilistic, and why this nihilism might be affirmed, rather than denied, by postmodernists.

I. Modern Nihilism

For Nietzsche, writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, nihilism is a disease of the modern age—specifically, the modern *European* age. It infects European society and culture generally, as well as every individual. Nietzsche’s diagnosis of nihilism is also prophetic. He tells us, ‘What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *the advent of nihilism*’ (Nietzsche 1968, p.3). For Nietzsche, as well as its present, modern manifestation, nihilism has its roots in history and extends into the future. Nihilism has a typology; it is ambiguous and manifests itself in various forms that we may see as possibilities in its historical development.² Nietzsche identifies the historical origins of nihilism in a particular interpretation of the world: the *Christian-moral* one. This interpretation gives meaning to human life by positing objective grounds of value beyond Man in the form of God the Father, the divine legislator of value, the ‘spider of finality and morality which is supposed to exist behind the great net and web of causality’ (Nietzsche 1996, p.92). For Nietzsche, most of philosophy is also part of the Christian-moral interpretation of the world. It follows this model by positing a “true world,” a metaphysical world that lies behind this physical world of mere appearances. This “metaphysical” interpretation, while providing value in one way, is nihilistic because it devalues *this* world, the world in which we live, by understanding it as only having value in relation to another, *better* world. This form of nihilism is called

“religious nihilism.”

The Christian-moral interpretation of the world carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. This is because one of its primary values is *truth*. When the quest for truth is applied to the Christian-moral interpretation itself, it is eventually revealed to be untrue. This has occurred historically through the development of human knowledges, particularly the sciences, which have replaced religious explanations of the world with secular ones. The desire for truth has led to a widespread desire to restrict our knowledge claims to that which can be empirically verified and to be sceptical towards anything else. Thus, God, the “true world,” etc.—every claimed transcendent source of value beyond Man—is seen to be a myth. This is the second stage of nihilism, which Nietzsche calls “radical nihilism,” and is characterised by Nietzsche’s famous proclamation ‘God is dead.’

At this stage, transcendent sources of value are seen to be lacking, but the world cannot be seen as valuable on its own. There are no other categories of valuation but the old categories, yet nothing in *this world* lives up to them. The radical nihilist is one ‘who *judges* of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist.’ (Nietzsche 1968, p.318). Radical nihilism contains two possibilities: the *passive* nihilism of accepting a meaningless world in despairing resignation, or the *active* nihilism of seeking to destroy what remains of the traditional categories of valuation. Active nihilism—the *useful* form of radical nihilism (as opposed to passive nihilism)—is the attempt to destroy *all* values, including those that were attached to the “true” world. Nietzsche’s attacks on traditional religious, moral, and philosophical values such as God, metaphysics, truth, pity, compassion, humility, and the

distinction between good and evil, can be seen as active nihilism in action.

Active nihilism leads to accomplished or “complete nihilism,” that which is attained when no values whatever remain. Complete nihilism is the completed destruction of all values, but is paradoxically also the *overcoming* of nihilism. From the position of complete nihilism, it is possible to leave nihilism behind and *actively create* new categories of valuation that will be wholly affirmative and free from nihilism. The absence of all traditional, transcendent values allows a *new era* in which *new* values may be posited, values that are *immanent* and apply only to *this* world. These new valuations rest on the secure foundation of our disillusioned creative abilities, and apply to *actual* reality. In the historical sense, this constitutes a new era of valuation and human flourishing *after* nihilism has been overcome. According to Nietzsche, modernity is characterised by the advent of radical nihilism. The history of the next two hundred years will be the history of an increasingly radicalised active nihilism. The crucial point of what I am calling the modernist interpretation of Nietzsche is the possibility of *overcoming* nihilism, the conviction that there shall come a time in history when nihilism shall be left behind.³ After modernity—a time Nietzsche predicts to arise a hundred years from now—nihilism will be overcome and human culture will be reinvigorated by new categories of valuation, a “revaluation of all values.”

II: Postmodern Nihilism

(a) Modernity and Postmodernity

Modernity and postmodernity are epochs posited in a quite common, although by no means universal, philosophy of history. Although the dates of periodisation vary, a popular version identifies modernity as the period from the Enlightenment to the mid twentieth century, and

postmodernity as after that (Lyotard 1984, p.3). Modernity is typified by the setting into practice of the values of the Enlightenment project.

Simplifying greatly, this project aims at the emancipation of humankind through the application of reason to social practice. Historically, this has meant the proliferation of science and technology through industrialisation, the administration of many aspects of social life, and the application of politico-economic projects as diverse as Marxist communism and free market capitalism. Although there are competing theories of postmodernity, theorists agree that changing social conditions, typically thought to be occasioned by the development and proliferation of new information technologies, mean that the old theories of modernity no longer apply to societies in the most technologically developed nations at the present time. Postmodernity is generally thought to be characterized by the fragmentation of society into multiple, incommensurable forms of life. This fragmentation means that no single “metanarrative” (to use Lyotard’s well known term) can explain social reality as a whole, including metanarratives of history that attempt to make sense of the changes in society as part of an over-arching story about the meaning of history. Despite the differences between various theories of postmodernity, Vattimo believes that 'there is a general agreement as to the meaning of the very notion of postmodernity. If this notion has a meaning at all, it has to be described in terms of the end of history' (Vattimo 1986, p.22).

According to Vattimo, modernity is characterised by the concept of *progress*, a concept that rests upon a *unilinear* view of history. That is, if we posit a goal—such as the Enlightenment goal of emancipation—towards which mankind may be said to progress, we see all of history in relation

to this goal. We have only *one* view of history, and this view is constructed as a *line* along which society moves through time. In modernity, being “modern” or “new” is itself a value, as it is seen as *overcoming* and leaving behind the old, moving further along the line towards the goal. According to Vattimo, modernity will have come to an end when we are no longer able to view history as unilinear. This, he believes, *has* in fact occurred, and constitutes the advent of postmodernity. For Vattimo, the popular postmodern theme of “the end of history” means the end of *unilinear* history.

So why has history ended? Vattimo identifies three broad reasons (Vattimo 1992). Firstly, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries theory has exposed unilinear history as *ideological*. That is, it is a selectively biased view of history that clearly serves the political purposes of a limited group of people at the expense of others. Philosophers of history and historiographers alike have come to recognise that the unilinear view of history which supports modern progress only represents the history of European man. There are multiple histories which may be told from multiple perspectives, and to assert one history as dominant or totalising is to do unjust violence to the others. For example, the Western view of history as the progress of reason has been used to justify the colonization of countries where supposedly less rational (and therefore inferior) peoples have dwelt. The ideology of this history has supported the subjugation, slavery, and genocide of “inferior” races. Secondly, the breakdown of a unilinear history has been caused by practical events. Significantly, these include the end of European imperialism and colonialism. The subjugated peoples have rebelled and insisted that their stories be told, making us keenly aware both that there *are* alternative histories and that the ideology of progress is deeply implicated in severe injustices.

Thirdly, for Vattimo the meaning of postmodernity is linked to the fact that we live in a society of generalised communication, or mass media. In opposition to Adorno and Horkheimer's prediction that mass media would lead to a fully homogenized society (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997), Vattimo believes that the most obvious effect of this media explosion has in fact been a fragmentation of our view of reality and a deepening of pluralism in society brought about by the proliferation of a multitude of alternative points of view. More and more subcultures are allowed to "have their say." History has ended not only for the theoretical and practical reasons outlined above, but because the mass media has made us aware of the untenability of a unilinear history, since that history can only tell one story where there are many to be told. Media and information technology have made people increasingly aware that there are multiple histories, not just one. In summary, then, for Vattimo postmodernity is characterised by the "end of history" in societies of mass communication, instituting an era of fragmentation, multiplicity, and pluralism.

(b) Vattimo's Nietzschean Nihilism

It is the central contention of Vattimo's book *The End of Modernity* that the diverse theories of postmodernism only gain clarity and rigour when situated in relation to the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger, particularly the nihilistic aspects of their thought (Vattimo 1988). Vattimo provides an interpretation of Nietzschean nihilism which both illuminates postmodernism and is illuminated by postmodernism, and which elaborates the connection between nihilism and the postmodern. We might say, then, that Vattimo provides us with a postmodern Nietzschean nihilism.

If we compare the “traditional” or “modernist” interpretation of Nietzschean nihilism (outlined in section one above) with Vattimo’s theory of postmodernity, the essential points of difference become evident. That is, we can see why modernist nihilism does not seem to be applicable to postmodernity. Firstly, it is arguable that modernist nihilism follows modernism in general in employing a *unilinear* interpretation of history. It tells a single story, specifically about European man, as if it were the story of the destiny of the entire human race. While the fact that nihilism only refers to the West is often signalled, there is often an unspoken suggestion that this is the portion of humanity which really matters philosophically and culturally. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger also insist at times on hierarchical judgements about cultures and races, an insistence which risks the kind of cultural exclusions that modernist humanism appears guilty of. Furthermore, modernist nihilism is a *progressive* history; progress is thought of as the radicalisation of nihilism, with the accomplishment and *overcoming* of nihilism as the goal. Nihilism overcome is analogous to a state of emancipation in other modernist metanarratives. Since “the end of history” is central to postmodernity and postmodernism, nihilism as a philosophy of history (in the modernist, progressive sense) would not seem to apply. That is, we cannot diagnose nihilism in postmodernity by presenting it as a stage in a single, unilinear history.⁴ Furthermore, we cannot prescribe overcoming as a proper response to nihilism, since the idea of overcoming itself—at least in the modernist sense—is inextricably implicated in the notion of progress. When we overcome something, we progress beyond it, and find ourselves at a new stage of history.

Vattimo posits the beginning of postmodernism in Nietzsche’s work (Vattimo 1988, pp.164-5), and his interpretation of Nietzschean nihilism is meant to apply to postmodernity. In *The End of*

Modernity Vattimo brings out the postmodern elements of Nietzsche's thought through an analysis of his views on history; these views contribute to a philosophy which is appropriate for the postmodern age in which history has ended. In *Human, All-Too-Human* Nietzsche problematises the concept of "overcoming," the very concept which has been such an integral part of the modernist interpretation of his theory of nihilism. Nietzsche is concerned with the decadence of modernity, and how this cultural ill might be cured. Overcoming modernity, however, cannot be a viable solution. Modernity itself is defined in terms of constant overcoming; that is, creation of the new that overcomes the old. This overcoming is essentially bound up with the modern narrative of progress; by overcoming the old history moves towards a future state of enlightenment. This state of enlightenment is understood as a return to an origin, a secure ground or foundation for the rationality that illuminates society in its ideal state. In the ideology of modernity, the new is simultaneously the more original.

Nietzsche responds to the decadence of modernity by rejecting the category of overcoming along with a rejection of the ideal of the origin, thought of as ground or foundation. For Nietzsche, it is the very idea of a secure foundation for thought and cultural practice that is the root cause for decadence in modernity. This notion of foundation is the heart of metaphysics and of religious nihilism; it is the Socratic desire for a rational justification of life that implicitly makes a negative judgment on life: life is found to be *in need* of justification. This desire for the foundation is at work in the Christian-moral interpretation of the world and in the modernist ideology of progress. As such, it is at the heart of nihilism and decadence. Since the concept of overcoming is a thoroughly modernist concept, tied up with the idea of a progressive return to the origin, nihilism cannot be "overcome" by an overcoming. Instead, Nietzsche proposes a dissolution of

modernity through a radicalisation of its tendencies; this is radical nihilism. A key element of Nietzsche's radical nihilist strategy is a dissolution (or deconstruction) of the origin as ground.

Truth may be understood as relatedness to an origin or foundation. For Nietzsche, nihilism is characterized by the highest values devaluating themselves, and truth is a key value in this self-devaluation. Nietzsche's critique of truth—an exposure of the “truth” of truth—is a strategy of nihilist radicalisation that at once dissolves truth and the notion of origin. In “On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense,” Nietzsche presents what are taken as truths as metaphors (Nietzsche 1979). We do not know things in themselves as they truly are, but through a series of metaphorisations—from thing-in-itself to sense-data, to mental image, to word, to mediation in a cultural sphere of meaning, and back to reference to the thing. Each transformation can only be called a metaphor of what it transforms. There is no relatedness to an origin or foundation here, merely metaphoric transformations. In this way, truths are seen to be errors, or rather the results of processes of erring. According to Vattimo, Nietzsche exposes reality as a “tissue of erring,” displacing the modernist privileging of truth and origin. This displacement allows a refocusing of attention away from an origin as source of truth to the *proximity* of the errors by which we live. For Nietzsche, this move is essentially a life-affirming one. He writes: ‘the nearest reality, that which is around us and inside of us, little by little starts to display colour and beauty and enigma and a wealth of meaning – things which earlier men never dreamed of’ (Nietzsche 1982, aphorism 44).

In contrast to the modernist interpretations, which posit a purely affirmative state that is achieved after the overcoming of nihilism, Vattimo presents Nietzsche as stopping, in some sense, with

accomplished nihilism, and not positing an overcoming of nihilism beyond it. Or rather, according to Vattimo, Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism is *coextensive* with complete nihilism, and does not constitute a stage beyond it. For Vattimo, once the highest values have been devalued, we cannot pose *new* values that would in any sense be more *authentic* than the ones we have deposed. Similarly, once we have lost belief in the "true" world, *this* world cannot simply take its place with an equal sense of reality. This is because the old, transcendent values, the sense of ultimate reality we had in the belief in a "true" world, had the sense of *foundations*. We cannot pose new categories of value without believing that they are just as much *errors* as those we have deposed. For Vattimo's Nietzsche, then, there is no simple overcoming of nihilism as a revaluation of values resting on secure foundations. In so far as nihilism is the radical lack of foundation, *complete nihilism cannot be overcome* (in the sense of going beyond). Rather, what the overcoming of nihilism consists in, for Vattimo's Nietzsche, is the overcoming of the *desire* to overcome nihilism itself.

Arguably, the trait of postmodernism that most often attracts accusations of nihilism is this anti-foundationalism. It is typically thought that without a foundation, we have no criteria for determining knowledge claims, values, or preferable courses of action, leaving us with a debilitating relativism that induces bleak despair. Is this an inevitable outcome of anti-foundational, truthless thought? The question of relativism in Nietzsche's philosophy (and in postmodernism) is highly complex and a thorough discussion is beyond the scope of this essay. However, I wish to outline the response Vattimo's Nietzsche provides to the accusation of the despair of untruth in order to indicate (at least one reason) why postmodernists need not repent their nihilism, but rather may affirm it. Nietzsche raises and answers the question of nihilism and

untruth as follows:

A question seems to weigh down our tongues, and yet not want to be uttered: whether one *is capable* of consciously remaining in untruth, or, if one *had* to do so, whether death would not be preferable?... All human life is sunk deep in untruth... If this is true, is there only one way of thought left, with despair as a personal end and a philosophy of destruction as a theoretical end? I believe that a man's *temperament* determines the aftereffect of knowledge; although the aftereffect described above is possible in some natures, I could just as well imagine a different one...(Nietzsche 1984, pp.36-7).

For Nietzsche, the “overcoming” of nihilism consists in *taking a different attitude* towards the nihilistic interpretation of the world itself. While we may in a sense be stuck with a complete nihilism, this nihilism is not one of despair and life-negation, but of joyous affirmation. Nietzsche claims that once we have given up the desire to think solely in terms of foundations and grounded truths, we may see the value that lies in untruth—for *life itself* is a tapestry of errors, a tissue of erring, a wealth of unfounded interpretations. Vattimo, using Nietzsche's term 'philosophy of morning' to refer to complete nihilism, writes, 'the content of the philosophy of morning is nothing other than the very errancy of metaphysics, but seen from a different point of view, that of the man of good temperament, who possesses a firm, mild, and, at bottom, cheerful soul' (Vattimo 1988, p.171). The philosophy of morning, for Vattimo's Nietzsche, is the process of thinking through complete nihilism with an *affirmative* attitude. This, for Vattimo, is all that nihilism in postmodernity can be.

The ability to affirm rather than deny life in the face of foundationlessness, untruth and erring, however, depends upon temperament. One requires a strong and cheerful temperament in order to appreciate complete nihilism rather than fall into despair. This response does not answer the epistemological problems of relativism, but merely the common assumption that such relativism inevitably leads to despair. It is a common move for Nietzsche to take philosophical problems

usually only posed in terms of abstract rationality and to reinterpret them in extra-rational terms such as health, digestion, emotion, psychology, or, more broadly, will to power. We may see his recourse to temperament in responding to nihilism as just such a move. Furthermore, we may see such moves as enabled by the critique of rationality characteristic of Nietzsche's work and also of postmodernism generally. Broadly speaking, critics who accuse postmodernism of nihilism tend to phrase their problems and demand answers in terms restricted to abstract rationality, disallowing recourse to extra-rational terms. Vattimo's Nietzschean nihilism insists upon such terms, as do some other postmodern philosophies, and it is often this extra-rational element that allows postmodernists to affirm nihilism (in the sense of anti-foundationalism) rather than feel debilitated by it.

Conclusion

Vattimo's Nietzschean nihilism is not the only, and may not be the most adequate, theory of postmodern nihilism.⁵ However, it is useful in illuminating the connection between nihilism and the postmodern. A comparison between Vattimo's postmodern Nietzsche and the "modernist" interpretation shows some general features of the postmodern transformation of the theory of nihilism. These features are, firstly, that nihilism cannot be thought as a unilinear history, and secondly that the simple *overcoming* of nihilism, thought as a *new era* or a *new foundation*, cannot be an adequate response. Nihilism in its postmodern manifestation is complete nihilism. The way to "overcoming" the negative aspects of nihilism is not to overcome nihilism itself—thought as foundationlessness—but to change one's attitude towards it. Postmodernity can be seen as a nihilistic society on Vattimo's analysis because history has ended; the West has lost its

grounds for historical meaning. The pluralistic proliferation of alternative knowledges, beliefs and values coincides with a breakdown of any shared meanings and values to act as a common social ground. Postmodern society, too, is foundationless. Postmodernists such as Vattimo embrace nihilism, however, rather than seeing it as a challenge to the validity of their theories and values, because they embrace foundationlessness, seeing the tissue of erring as the essence of reality. Rather than searching for a new foundation, postmodern nihilists are content to continue 'living the errant in the light of a fundamentally different attitude' (Vattimo 1988, p.171).

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Notes

¹ For some examples of the view that postmodernity is a nihilistic epoch see Toynbee (1963); Mills (1959); Bell (1976); and Baudrillard (1993) and (1994). For examples of the view that postmodernism is a nihilistic mode of thought, see Rose (1984); Carr (1988); and Pope John-Paul II (1995).

² Here I follow the analysis of nihilism in White 1987. White’s typology of nihilism involves the three main stages of religious, radical and complete nihilism, and includes active and passive nihilism as forms of radical nihilism.

³ This “modernist” interpretation of Nietzsche is common in Nietzsche scholarship. For an interesting example of this “modernist” interpretation of Nietzschean nihilism in relation to the question of postmodernism, see Van der Will (1993). Van der Will presents a reading of Nietzsche’s vision of “postmodernity” as a post-nihilistic, post-democratic age in which “a new caste” of the strong should dominate the weak globally in order to push culture to new heights of risk, of tragedy, excellence and genius’ (p.50). Van der Will asserts that Nietzsche’s vision of postmodernity has little to do with the postmodernity celebrated by some French post-structuralist philosophers who cite Nietzsche as a prime influence in their thought.

⁴ It should be noted that Nietzsche explicitly rejects the notions of unilinear history and historical progress and these notions can only be attributed to what I am calling *modernist interpretations* of Nietzschean nihilism. See Nietzsche 1997 for a rejection of the view of history as containing its meaning in the present or some future time, and Nietzsche 1996 for Nietzsche’s genealogical view of history as a complex of competing forces.

⁵ Vattimo’s paradoxical “overcoming” of nihilism through its very affirmation is problematic, and raises in particular the problem of relativism in relation to value judgements. See Antiseri 1996 for a critical discussion of Vattimo’s attempt to overcome relativism in his philosophy.

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