[Template:Redirect](/wiki/Template:Redirect" \o "Template:Redirect) [Template:Certainty](/wiki/Template:Certainty) **Nihilism** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en) or [Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en); from the [Latin](/wiki/Latin) [*Template:Lang*](/wiki/Template:Lang), nothing) is a [philosophical](/wiki/Philosophy) [doctrine](/wiki/Doctrine) that suggests the lack of belief in one or more reputedly [meaningful](/wiki/Meaning_of_life) aspects of life. Most commonly, nihilism is presented in the form of [existential nihilism](/wiki/Existential_nihilism), which argues that life is without objective meaning, purpose, or [intrinsic value](/wiki/Intrinsic_value_(ethics)).[[1]](#cite_note-1) [Moral nihilists](/wiki/Moral_nihilism) assert that [morality](/wiki/Morality) does not inherently exist, and that any established moral values are abstractly contrived. Nihilism can also take [epistemological](/wiki/Epistemology), [ontological](/wiki/Ontology), or [metaphysical](/wiki/Metaphysics) forms, meaning respectively that, in some aspect, knowledge is not possible, or that reality does not actually exist.

The term is sometimes used in association with [anomie](/wiki/Anomie) to explain the general mood of [despair](/wiki/Despair) at a perceived pointlessness of existence that one may develop upon realising there are no necessary norms, rules, or laws.[[2]](#cite_note-2) Movements such as [Futurism](/wiki/Futurism_(art)) and [deconstruction](/wiki/Deconstruction),<ref name=phillips>[Template:Cite journal](/wiki/Template:Cite_journal)</ref> among others, have been identified by commentators[[3]](#cite_note-3) as "nihilistic".

Nihilism is also a characteristic that has been ascribed to time periods: for example, [Jean Baudrillard](/wiki/Jean_Baudrillard) and others have called [postmodernity](/wiki/Postmodernity) a nihilistic epoch,[[4]](#cite_note-4) and some [Christian theologians](/wiki/Christian_theologian) and figures of religious authority have asserted that postmodernity[[5]](#cite_note-5) and many aspects of [modernity](/wiki/Modernity)<ref name=phillips/> represent a rejection of [theism](/wiki/Theism), and that such rejection of their theistic [doctrine](/wiki/Doctrine) entails nihilism.

## Contents

* 1 Forms of nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]
  + 1.1 Metaphysical nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]
  + 1.2 Epistemological nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]
  + 1.3 Mereological nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]
  + 1.4 Existential nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]
  + 1.5 Moral nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]
  + 1.6 Political nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]
    - 1.6.1 Russian nihilist movement[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]
* 2 History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]
  + 2.1 19th century[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]
  + 2.2 Kierkegaard[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]
  + 2.3 Nietzsche[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]
  + 2.4 Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]
  + 2.5 Postmodernism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]
  + 2.6 Transcendental nihilism / methodological naturalism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]
  + 2.7 Nihilism and Buddhism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

## Forms of nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[Template:Essay-like](/wiki/Template:Essay-like) [Template:Nihilism](/wiki/Template:Nihilism) Nihilism has many definitions, and thus can describe philosophical positions that are arguably independent.

### Metaphysical nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Metaphysical nihilism is the [philosophical](/wiki/Philosophy) theory that concrete objects and physical constructs might not exist in the [possible world](/wiki/Possible_world), or that even if there exist possible worlds that contain some concrete objects, there is at least one that contains only [abstract objects](/wiki/Abstract_object).

An extreme form of metaphysical nihilism is commonly defined as the belief that nothing exists as a correspondent component of the self-efficient world.[[6]](#cite_note-6) The American Heritage Medical Dictionary defines one form of nihilism as "an extreme form of skepticism that denies all existence."[[7]](#cite_note-7) A similar skepticism can be found in [solipsism](/wiki/Solipsism); however, the nihilist would deny the [self](/wiki/Self_(philosophy)) whereas the solipsist affirms nothing but.[[8]](#cite_note-8) Both these positions are considered forms of [anti-realism](/wiki/Anti-realism).[[9]](#cite_note-9)

### Epistemological nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Epistemological nihilism is a form of [skepticism](/wiki/Epistemological_nihilism) in which all knowledge is accepted as possibly untrue or unable to be known.

### Mereological nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Mereological nihilism (also called compositional nihilism) is the position that objects with proper parts do not exist (not only objects in space, but also objects existing in time do not have any temporal parts), and only basic building blocks without parts exist, and thus the world we see and experience full of objects with parts is a product of human misperception (i.e., if we could see clearly, we would not perceive compositive objects).

This interpretation of existence must be based on resolution. The resolution with which humans see and perceive the "improper parts" of the world is not an objective fact of reality, but is rather an implicit trait that can only be qualitatively explored and expressed. Therefore, there is no arguable way to surmise or measure the validity of mereological nihilism. Example: An ant can get lost on a large cylindrical object because the circumference of the object is so large with respect to the ant that the ant effectively feels as though the object has no curvature. Thus, the resolution with which the ant views the world it exists "within" is a very important determining factor in how the ant experiences this "within the world" feeling.

### Existential nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Existential nihilism is the belief that life has no intrinsic meaning or value. With respect to the universe, existential nihilism posits that a single human or even the entire human species is insignificant, without purpose and unlikely to change in the totality of existence. The meaninglessness of life is largely explored in the philosophical school of [existentialism](/wiki/Existentialism).

### Moral nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Moral nihilism, also known as ethical nihilism, is the [meta-ethical](/wiki/Meta-ethics) view that morality does not exist as something inherent to objective reality; therefore no action is necessarily preferable to any other. For example, a moral nihilist would say that killing someone, for whatever reason, is not inherently right or wrong.

Other nihilists may argue not that there is no morality at all, but that if it does exist, it is a human construction and thus artificial, wherein any and all meaning is relative for different possible outcomes. As an example, if someone kills someone else, such a nihilist might argue that killing is not inherently a bad thing, or bad independently from our moral beliefs, because of the way morality is constructed as some rudimentary dichotomy. What is said to be a bad thing is given a higher negative weighting than what is called good: as a result, killing the individual was bad because it did not let the individual live, which was arbitrarily given a positive weighting. In this way a moral nihilist believes that all moral claims are void of any truth value. An alternative scholarly perspective is that moral nihilism is a morality in itself. Cooper writes, "In the widest sense of the word 'morality', moral nihilism is a morality."[[10]](#cite_note-10)

### Political nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Political nihilism, a branch of nihilism, follows the characteristic nihilist's rejection of non-rationalized or non-proven assertions; in this case the necessity of the most fundamental social and political structures, such as [government](/wiki/Government), [family](/wiki/Family), and [law](/wiki/Law). An influential analysis of political nihilism is presented by [Leo Strauss](/wiki/Leo_Strauss).[[11]](#cite_note-11)

#### Russian nihilist movement[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The Russian Nihilist movement was a Russian trend in the 1860s that rejected all authority.[[12]](#cite_note-12) Their name derives from the [Latin](/wiki/Latin) [*nihil*](/wiki/Wikt:nihil), meaning "nothing". After the assassination of Tsar [Alexander II](/wiki/Alexander_II_of_Russia) in 1881, the Nihilists gained a reputation throughout Europe as proponents of the use of violence for political change.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) The Nihilists expressed anger at what they described as the abusive nature of the [Eastern Orthodox Church](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church) and of the tsarist monarchy, and at the domination of the Russian economy by the aristocracy. Although the term *Nihilism* was coined by the German theologian [Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi](/wiki/Friedrich_Heinrich_Jacobi) (1743–1818), its widespread usage began with the 1862 novel [*Fathers and Sons*](/wiki/Fathers_and_Sons_(novel)) by the Russian author [Ivan Turgenev](/wiki/Ivan_Turgenev). The main character of the novel, [Eugene Bazarov](/wiki/Eugene_Bazarov), who describes himself as a Nihilist, wants to educate the people. The "go to the people[Template:Spaced ndashbe](/wiki/Template:Spaced_ndash) the people" campaign reached its height in the 1870s, during which underground groups such as the [Circle of Tchaikovsky](/wiki/Circle_of_Tchaikovsky), the [People's Will](/wiki/Narodnaya_Volya_(organization)), and [Land and Liberty](/wiki/Land_and_Liberty_(Russia)) formed. It became known as the [Narodnik](/wiki/Narodnik) movement, whose members believed that the newly freed [serfs](/wiki/Serfdom_in_Russia) were merely being sold into [wage slavery](/wiki/Wage_slavery) in the onset of the [Industrial Revolution](/wiki/Industrial_Revolution), and that the middle and upper classes had effectively replaced landowners. The Russian state attempted to suppress the nihilist movement. In actions described by the Nihilists as [propaganda of the deed](/wiki/Propaganda_of_the_deed) many government officials were assassinated. In 1881 [Alexander II](/wiki/Alexander_II_of_Russia) was killed on the very day he had approved a proposal to call a representative assembly to consider new reforms.

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

### 19th century[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

The term *nihilism* was first used by [Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi](/wiki/Friedrich_Heinrich_Jacobi) (1743–1819). Jacobi used the term to characterize [rationalism](/wiki/Rationalism)[[13]](#cite_note-13) and in particular [Immanuel Kant's](/wiki/Immanuel_Kant) "critical" philosophy to carry out a [reductio ad absurdum](/wiki/Reductio_ad_absurdum) according to which all rationalism (philosophy as criticism) reduces to nihilism—and thus it should be avoided and replaced with a return to some type of [faith](/wiki/Faith) and [revelation](/wiki/Revelation). Bret W. Davis writes, for example, "The first philosophical development of the idea of nihilism is generally ascribed to Friedrich Jacobi, who in a famous letter criticized [Fichte's](/wiki/Fichte) idealism as falling into nihilism. According to Jacobi, Fichte’s absolutization of the ego (the 'absolute I' that posits the 'not-I') is an inflation of subjectivity that denies the absolute transcendence of God."[[14]](#cite_note-14) A related but oppositional concept is [fideism](/wiki/Fideism), which sees reason as hostile and inferior to faith.

With the popularizing of the word *nihilism* by [Ivan Turgenev](/wiki/Ivan_Turgenev), a new Russian political movement called the [Nihilist movement](/wiki/Nihilist_movement) adopted the term. They supposedly called themselves nihilists because nothing "that then existed found favor in their eyes".[[15]](#cite_note-15)

### Kierkegaard[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|175px|right|Søren Aabye Kierkegaard](/wiki/File:Kierkegaard.jpg) [Søren Kierkegaard](/wiki/Søren_Kierkegaard) (1813–1855) posited an early form of nihilism, to which he referred as [*levelling*](/wiki/Leveling_(philosophy)).[[16]](#cite_note-16) He saw levelling as the process of suppressing individuality to a point where the individual's uniqueness becomes non-existent and nothing meaningful in his existence can be affirmed:

[Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

Kierkegaard, an advocate of a [philosophy of life](/wiki/Philosophy_of_life), generally argued against levelling and its nihilist consequence, although he believed it would be "genuinely educative to live in the age of levelling [because] people will be forced to face the judgement of [levelling] alone."[[17]](#cite_note-17) George Cotkin asserts Kierkegaard was against "the standardization and levelling of belief, both spiritual and political, in the nineteenth century [and he] opposed tendencies in mass culture to reduce the individual to a cipher of conformity and deference to the dominant opinion."[[18]](#cite_note-18) In his day, [tabloids](/wiki/Tabloid_(newspaper_format)) (like the Danish magazine [*Corsaren*](/wiki/Corsaren)) and apostate [Christianity](/wiki/Christianity) were instruments of levelling and contributed to the "reflective [apathetic](/wiki/Apathy) age" of 19th century Europe.[[19]](#cite_note-19) Kierkegaard argues that individuals who can overcome the levelling process are stronger for it and that it represents a step in the right direction towards "becoming a true self."[[17]](#cite_note-17)[[20]](#cite_note-20) As we must overcome levelling,[[21]](#cite_note-21) [Hubert Dreyfus](/wiki/Hubert_Dreyfus) and Jane Rubin argue that Kierkegaard's interest, "in an increasingly nihilistic age, is in ***how*** we can recover the sense that our lives are meaningful".[[22]](#cite_note-22) Note however that Kierkegaard's meaning of "nihilism" differs from the modern definition in the sense that, for Kierkegaard, levelling led to a life lacking meaning, purpose or value,[[19]](#cite_note-19) whereas the modern interpretation of nihilism posits that there was never any meaning, purpose or value to begin with.

### Nietzsche[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|175px|right|Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche](/wiki/File:Nietzsche1882.jpg) Nihilism is often associated with the German philosopher [Friedrich Nietzsche](/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche), who provided a detailed diagnosis of nihilism as a widespread phenomenon of Western culture. Though the notion appears frequently throughout Nietzsche's work, he uses the term in a variety of ways, with different meanings and connotations, all negative[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed). Karen Carr describes Nietzsche's characterization of nihilism "as a condition of tension, as a disproportion between what we want to value (or need) and how the world appears to operate."[[23]](#cite_note-23) When we find out that the world does not possess the objective value or meaning that we want it to have or have long since believed it to have, we find ourselves in a crisis.[[24]](#cite_note-24) Nietzsche asserts that with the decline of Christianity and the rise of physiological decadence,[Template:Clarify](/wiki/Template:Clarify) nihilism is in fact characteristic of the modern age,<ref name=Michels>Steven Michels, "Nietzsche, Nihilism, and the Virtue of Nature", Dogma, 2004, [Free.fr](http://dogma.free.fr/txt/SM-Nietzsche.htm)</ref> though he implies that the rise of nihilism is still incomplete and that it has yet to be overcome.[[25]](#cite_note-25) Though the problem of nihilism becomes especially explicit in Nietzsche's [notebooks](/wiki/Nachlass) (published posthumously), it is mentioned repeatedly in his published works and is closely connected to many of the problems mentioned there.

Nietzsche characterized nihilism as emptying the world and especially human existence of meaning, purpose, comprehensible truth, or essential value. This observation stems in part from Nietzsche's [perspectivism](/wiki/Perspectivism), or his notion that "knowledge" is always by someone of some thing: it is always bound by perspective, and it is never mere fact.[[26]](#cite_note-26) Rather, there are interpretations through which we understand the world and give it meaning. Interpreting is something we can not go without; in fact, it is something we *need*. One way of interpreting the world is through morality, as one of the fundamental ways that people make sense of the world, especially in regard to their own thoughts and actions. Nietzsche distinguishes a morality that is strong or healthy, meaning that the person in question is aware that he constructs it himself, from weak morality, where the interpretation is projected on to something external. Regardless of its strength, morality presents us with meaning, whether this is created or 'implanted,' which helps us get through life.[[27]](#cite_note-27) Nietzsche discusses Christianity, one of the major topics in his work, at length in the context of the problem of nihilism in his notebooks, in a chapter entitled "European Nihilism".[[28]](#cite_note-28) Here he states that the Christian moral doctrine provides people with [intrinsic value](/wiki/Humanism), belief in God (which [justifies](/wiki/Theodicee) the evil in the world) and a basis for [objective knowledge](/wiki/Objectivity_(philosophy)). In this sense, in constructing a world where objective knowledge is possible, Christianity is an antidote against a primal form of nihilism, against the despair of meaninglessness. However, it is exactly the element of truthfulness in Christian doctrine that is its undoing: in its drive towards truth, Christianity eventually finds itself to be a construct, which leads to its own dissolution. It is therefore that Nietzsche states that we have outgrown Christianity "not because we lived too far from it, rather because we lived too close".[[29]](#cite_note-29) As such, the self-dissolution of Christianity constitutes yet another form of nihilism. Because Christianity was an interpretation that posited itself as *the* interpretation, Nietzsche states that this dissolution leads beyond [skepticism](/wiki/Skepticism) to a distrust of *all* meaning.[[30]](#cite_note-30)[[31]](#cite_note-31) [Stanley Rosen](/wiki/Stanley_Rosen) identifies Nietzsche's concept of nihilism with a situation of meaninglessness, in which "everything is permitted." According to him, the loss of higher metaphysical values that exist in contrast to the base reality of the world, or merely human ideas, gives rise to the idea that all human ideas are therefore valueless. Rejecting idealism thus results in nihilism, because only similarly transcendent ideals live up to the previous standards that the nihilist still implicitly holds.[[32]](#cite_note-32) The inability for Christianity to serve as a source of valuating the world is reflected in Nietzsche's famous [aphorism](/wiki/Aphorism) of the madman in [*The Gay Science*](/wiki/The_Gay_Science).[[33]](#cite_note-33) The death of God, in particular the statement that "we killed him", is similar to the *self*-dissolution of Christian doctrine: due to the advances of the sciences, which for Nietzsche show that man is the product of [evolution](/wiki/Evolution), that Earth has no [special place](/wiki/Geocentrism) among the stars and that [history](/wiki/History) is not [progressive](/wiki/Progress_(history)), the Christian notion of God can no longer serve as a basis for a morality.

One such reaction to the loss of meaning is what Nietzsche calls *passive nihilism*, which he recognises in the [pessimistic](/wiki/Pessimism) philosophy of [Schopenhauer](/wiki/Arthur_Schopenhauer). Schopenhauer's doctrine, which Nietzsche also refers to as [Western Buddhism](/wiki/Western_Buddhism#Buddhism_and_Western_Intellectuals), advocates a separating of oneself from will and desires in order to reduce suffering. Nietzsche characterises this [ascetic](/wiki/Ascetic) attitude as a "will to [nothingness](/wiki/Nothing)", whereby life turns away from itself, as there is nothing of value to be found in the world. This mowing away of all value in the world is characteristic of the nihilist, although in this, the nihilist appears inconsistent:[[34]](#cite_note-34) [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

Nietzsche's relation to the problem of nihilism is a complex one. He approaches the problem of nihilism as deeply personal, stating that this predicament of the modern world is a problem that has "become conscious" in him.[[35]](#cite_note-35) Furthermore, he emphasises both the danger of nihilism and the possibilities it offers, as seen in his statement that "I praise, I do not reproach, [nihilism's] arrival. I believe it is one of the greatest crises, a moment of the deepest self-reflection of humanity. Whether man recovers from it, whether he becomes master of this crisis, is a question of his strength!"[[36]](#cite_note-36) According to Nietzsche, it is only when nihilism is *overcome* that a culture can have a true foundation upon which to thrive. He wished to hasten its coming only so that he could also hasten its ultimate departure.[[37]](#cite_note-37) He states that there is at least the possibility of another type of nihilist in the wake of Christianity's self-dissolution, one that does *not* stop after the destruction of all value and meaning and succumb to the following nothingness. This alternate, 'active' nihilism on the other hand destroys to level the field for constructing something new. This form of nihilism is characterized by Nietzsche as "a sign of strength,"[[38]](#cite_note-38) a wilful destruction of the old values to wipe the slate clean and lay down one's own beliefs and interpretations, contrary to the passive nihilism that resigns itself with the decomposition of the old values. This wilful destruction of values and the overcoming of the condition of nihilism by the constructing of new meaning, this active nihilism, could be related to what Nietzsche elsewhere calls a 'free spirit'[[39]](#cite_note-39) or the [*Übermensch*](/wiki/Übermensch) from [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*](/wiki/Thus_Spoke_Zarathustra) and [*The Antichrist*](/wiki/The_Antichrist_(book)), the model of the strong individual who posits his own values and lives his life as if it were his own work of art. It may be questioned, though, whether "active nihilism" is indeed the correct term for this stance, and some question whether Nietzsche takes the problems nihilism poses seriously enough.[[40]](#cite_note-40)

### Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[Martin Heidegger's](/wiki/Martin_Heidegger) interpretation of Nietzsche influenced many postmodern thinkers who investigated the problem of nihilism as put forward by Nietzsche. Only recently has Heidegger's influence on Nietzschean nihilism research faded.[[41]](#cite_note-41) As early as the 1930s, Heidegger was giving lectures on Nietzsche’s thought.[[42]](#cite_note-42) Given the importance of Nietzsche’s contribution to the topic of nihilism, Heidegger's influential interpretation of Nietzsche is important for the historical development of the term *nihilism*.

Heidegger's method of researching and teaching Nietzsche is explicitly his own. He does not specifically try to present Nietzsche *as* Nietzsche. He rather tries to incorporate Nietzsche's thoughts into his own philosophical system of [Being, Time and *Dasein*](/wiki/Heidegger#Philosophy).[[43]](#cite_note-43) In his *Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being* (1944–46),[[44]](#cite_note-44) Heidegger tries to understand Nietzsche’s nihilism as trying to achieve a victory through the devaluation of the, until then, highest values. The principle of this devaluation is, according to Heidegger, the [Will to Power](/wiki/Will_to_Power). The Will to Power is also the principle of every earlier *valuation* of values.[[45]](#cite_note-45) How does this devaluation occur and why is this nihilistic? One of Heidegger's main critiques on philosophy is that philosophy, and more specifically metaphysics, has forgotten to discriminate between investigating the notion of *a* Being (*Seiende*) and *Being* (*Sein*). According to Heidegger, the history of Western thought can be seen as the history of metaphysics. And because metaphysics has forgotten to ask about the notion of Being (what Heidegger calls [*Seinsvergessenheit*](/wiki/De:Seinsvergessenheit)), it is a history about the destruction of Being. That is why Heidegger calls metaphysics nihilistic.[[46]](#cite_note-46) This makes Nietzsche’s metaphysics not a victory over nihilism, but a perfection of it.[[47]](#cite_note-47) Heidegger, in his interpretation of Nietzsche, has been inspired by [Ernst Jünger](/wiki/Ernst_Jünger). Many references to Jünger can be found in Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche. For example, in a letter to the rector of Freiburg University of November 4, 1945, Heidegger, inspired by Jünger, tries to explain the notion of “[God is dead](/wiki/God_is_dead)” as the “reality of the Will to Power.” Heidegger also praises Jünger for defending Nietzsche against a too biological or anthropological reading during the [Third Reich](/wiki/Third_Reich).[[48]](#cite_note-48) Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche influenced a number of important postmodernist thinkers. [Gianni Vattimo](/wiki/Gianni_Vattimo) points at a back-and-forth movement in European thought, between Nietzsche and Heidegger. During the 1960s, a Nietzschean 'renaissance' began, culminating in the work of [Mazzino Montinari](/wiki/Mazzino_Montinari) and [Giorgio Colli](/wiki/Giorgio_Colli). They began work on a new and complete edition of Nietzsche's collected works, making Nietzsche more accessible for scholarly research. Vattimo explains that with this new edition of Colli and Montinari, a critical reception of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche began to take shape. Like other contemporary French and Italian philosophers, Vattimo does not want, or only partially wants, to rely on Heidegger for understanding Nietzsche. On the other hand, Vattimo judges Heidegger's intentions authentic enough to keep pursuing them.[[49]](#cite_note-49) Philosophers who Vattimo exemplifies as a part of this back and forth movement are French philosophers [Deleuze](/wiki/Deleuze), [Foucault](/wiki/Michel_Foucault) and [Derrida](/wiki/Derrida). Italian philosophers of this same movement are [Cacciari](/wiki/Massimo_Cacciari), [Severino](/wiki/Severino) and himself.[[50]](#cite_note-50) [Jürgen Habermas](/wiki/Jürgen_Habermas), [Jean-François Lyotard](/wiki/Jean-François_Lyotard) and [Richard Rorty](/wiki/Richard_Rorty) are also philosophers who are influenced by Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche.[[51]](#cite_note-51)

### Postmodernism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Postmodern](/wiki/Postmodern_philosophy) and [poststructuralist](/wiki/Poststructuralist) thought question the very grounds on which [Western cultures](/wiki/Western_culture) have based their 'truths': absolute knowledge and meaning, a 'decentralization' of authorship, the accumulation of positive knowledge, historical progress, and certain ideals and practices of [humanism](/wiki/Humanism) and [the Enlightenment](/wiki/The_Enlightenment).

[Jacques Derrida](/wiki/Jacques_Derrida), whose [deconstruction](/wiki/Deconstruction) is perhaps most commonly labeled nihilistic, did not himself make the nihilistic move that others have claimed. Derridean deconstructionists argue that this approach rather frees texts, individuals or organizations from a restrictive truth, and that deconstruction opens up the possibility of other ways of being.[[52]](#cite_note-52) [Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak](/wiki/Gayatri_Chakravorty_Spivak), for example, uses deconstruction to create an ethics of opening up Western scholarship to the voice of the [subaltern](/wiki/Subaltern_(postcolonialism)) and to philosophies outside of the canon of western texts.[[53]](#cite_note-53) Derrida himself built a philosophy based upon a 'responsibility to the other'.[[54]](#cite_note-54) Deconstruction can thus be seen not as a denial of truth, but as a denial of our ability to know truth (it makes an [epistemological](/wiki/Epistemological) claim compared to nihilism's [ontological](/wiki/Ontological) claim).

[Lyotard](/wiki/Lyotard) argues that, rather than relying on an [objective](/wiki/Objectivity_(philosophy)) truth or method to prove their claims, philosophers legitimize their truths by reference to a story about the world that can't be separated from the age and system the stories belong to—referred to by Lyotard as [*meta-narratives*](/wiki/Meta-narrative)*.* He then goes on to define the [postmodern condition](/wiki/Postmodernity) as characterized by a rejection both of these meta-narratives and of the process of [legitimation](/wiki/Legitimation) by meta-narratives. "In lieu of meta-narratives we have created new [language-games](/wiki/Language-game) in order to legitimize our claims which rely on changing relationships and mutable truths, none of which is privileged over the other to speak to ultimate truth."[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) This concept of the instability of truth and meaning leads in the direction of nihilism, though Lyotard stops short of embracing the latter.

Postmodern theorist [Jean Baudrillard](/wiki/Jean_Baudrillard) wrote briefly of nihilism from the postmodern viewpoint in [*Simulacra and Simulation*](/wiki/Simulacra_and_Simulation). He stuck mainly to topics of interpretations of the real world over the simulations of which the real world is composed. The uses of meaning was an important subject in Baudrillard's discussion of nihilism:

[Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

### Transcendental nihilism / methodological naturalism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

In *Nihil Unbound: Extinction and Enlightenment*, [Ray Brassier](/wiki/Ray_Brassier) maintains that philosophy has avoided the traumatic idea of [extinction](/wiki/Extinction), instead attempting to find meaning in a world conditioned by the very idea of its own annihilation. Thus Brassier critiques both the phenomenological and hermeneutic strands of Continental philosophy as well as the vitality of thinkers like [Gilles Deleuze](/wiki/Gilles_Deleuze), who work to ingrain meaning in the world and stave off the “threat” of nihilism. Instead, drawing on thinkers such as [Alain Badiou](/wiki/Alain_Badiou), [François Laruelle](/wiki/François_Laruelle), [Paul Churchland](/wiki/Paul_Churchland), and [Thomas Metzinger](/wiki/Thomas_Metzinger), Brassier defends a view of the world as inherently devoid of meaning. That is, rather than avoiding nihilism, Brassier embraces it as the truth of reality. Brassier concludes from his readings of Badiou and Laruelle that the universe is founded on the nothing,[[55]](#cite_note-55) but also that philosophy is the "organon of extinction," that it is only because life is conditioned by its own extinction that there is thought at all.[[56]](#cite_note-56) Brassier then defends a radically anti-correlationist philosophy proposing that Thought is conjoined not with Being, but with Non-Being.

### Nihilism and Buddhism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

Although [the Buddha's](/wiki/Gautama_Buddha) relativism came in the form of a negation of axiological laxity, outcome variables of the Buddhist thought are indeed elements of a negative dialectical anthropology. In [Buddhism](/wiki/Buddhism), the concept of the emptiness of conceptual structures bears resemblance to [ontic](/wiki/Ontic) nihilism.

[Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

The Buddha argued that all structures, whether physical or conceptual are impermanent and empty of any consistent substance or essential nature. The doctrine of [Dependent Origination](/wiki/Pratītyasamutpāda) emphasizes that forms originate due to dynamic conditions which as well are essentially empty in and of themselves. Another central Buddhist doctrine known as [anatta](/wiki/Anatta) is the concept that phenomenal existence is empty of a self or anything pertaining to a self.[[57]](#cite_note-57) According to [Nāgārjuna](/wiki/Nāgārjuna), the 2nd century Buddhist philosopher, sentient beings are temporarily composed of the [five elements](/wiki/Mahābhūta) and they have no being of their own, in the ultimate sense, a self doesn't exist.[[58]](#cite_note-58) [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

In the Buddhist understanding, if existence exists, then it has to be infinite in quantity, since there can be no absolute quality that is in an of itself, to limit it.[[59]](#cite_note-59) According to early Buddhist commentaries, such as that of [Sarvastivada](/wiki/Sarvastivada),[[60]](#cite_note-60) nature works in a dialectical manner where all forms negate each other until the ongoing stream in a given system eventually dissolves into what is called as the possessionless state - a state that is devoid of any attribute.[[61]](#cite_note-61)