

# Nietzsche and the Concept of Nihilism and Its Development

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**Abstract.** Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was a German philosopher (1844-1900), he has been appropriated as a leading figure in modern philosophy by many scholars. One of the most famous theories proposed by Nietzsche is Nihilism. Nihilism is the belief that all religion and moral principles are rejected, and life is meaningless. Nietzsche believes that “every belief, every considering something true is necessarily false because there is simply no true world”. It implies that the only objective structure or order in our universe is the one we have given it. This paper is going to discuss how Nietzsche developed the theory of Nihilism after he discovered the fact that scientific development will eventually lead to the death of Christianity. On the other hand, the paper also focuses on how Nihilism is viewed in modern society, and the stereotypes it is associated with.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche; Nihilism; Religion; Humanity.

## 1. Introduction

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was a German philosopher (1844-1900), he has been appropriated as a leading figure in modern philosophy by many scholars. One of the most famous theories proposed by Nietzsche is Nihilism. Nihilism is the belief that all religion and moral principles are rejected, and life is meaningless. Nietzsche believes that “every belief, every considering something true is necessarily false because there is simply no true world” [1]. It implies that the only objective structure or order in our universe is the one we have given it. This paper is going to discuss how Nietzsche developed the theory of Nihilism after he discovered the fact that scientific development will eventually lead to the death of Christianity. On the other hand, the paper also focuses on how Nihilism is viewed in modern society, and the stereotypes it is associated with.

It is interesting that if one searches the term “Nihilism” on Instagram, all the content is not showing up. Instagram would advise you to get help because “the word you are searching for often encourages behaviors that can cause harm and even lead to death”. Society often misunderstands the concept of Nihilism because people associate it with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns living. However, Nihilism is beyond a superficial interpretation that “life is meaningless”. Nietzsche is the first philosopher who found the root of Nihilism in European society’s traditional metaphysics and morality in Christianity, and he located Nihilism in the field of values and morality. What is the actual meaning of Nihilism, and after Nietzsche discovered this concept what method did he propose to resolve this issue?

## 2. Nietzsche and His Concept of Nihilism

Nietzsche has frequently been taken to be a nihilist. However, after carefully reading his work, it is clear that Nietzsche only denies the traditional belief system, not the truth in the world. He holds a contradictory understanding of nihilism, affirming that it is a damaging transition to a new worldview while simultaneously rejecting it. If Nihilism is taken as an end in itself. Nietzsche critiques the foundation of Western thoughts very radically. According to Nietzsche, the reality is a flux of changing forms permeated by negation, alternation, opposition, and variation. Nietzsche thinks that any attempt to understand reality, which is often called the “truth”, is superficial. The “truth” is only a temporary perspective in the process of becoming.

In the Madman, Nietzsche announced that “God is dead. God remains dead, and we have killed him” which reveals that the idea of God and by extension The progress of human culture, philosophy, and science has destroyed Christian morality. The madman asks rhetorical questions in an effort to

convince the villagers that "God's" death will be disastrous.: "Who will wipe this (God's) blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games will we have to invent?"[2] What principles can we believe in, what morality can we follow, what goal can we live for—and do principles, morality, and purpose really matter anymore—given the annihilation of objective morality, meaning, and purpose? It basically comes down to nihilism. The madman started feverishly looking for means of escape as well as sources of objective morality, meaning, and purpose after coming to terms with his realization of nihilism and the experience that went along with it.

Nietzsche proposes that Nihilism is a peculiar form of certainty that is a reverse image of the traditional doctrine of truth. Nihilism is called “belief in unbelief”, a preference for a state of ambiguity over the certainty of nothing. Nihilism, no matter how valiant it may seem, is nevertheless a symptom of fragility and hopelessness. [3] Nietzsche's purpose to declare the death of God was not to destroy the belief of all values in Western Society; he sees the transcendent, monotheistic God who suspends every aspect of human beings as diminishing human strength and making people ignorant of their power. Nietzsche believes that society should quit its belief in God, so people can be free from the control of God. This view is Radical Nihilism which even though facing the reality of the collapse of faith, still dares to live with a positive attitude.

Nietzsche thinks that Radical Nihilism is the only way to create a better society with new values. Radical Nihilism teaches people the process of denying previous values and then re-evaluating them. By discovering that values might serve as a compass based on this practice alone without further objective support, Nietzsche employs this tactic to combat nihilism. However, disorientation will be avoided while the previously held values are kept, but despair will still develop because they are still unattainable.[4] Nietzsche reconsiders his position in terms of the will to power in an effort to combat sadness. The desire to overcome opposition in the pursuit of a certain first-order objective is how the will to power should be interpreted. He embraces becoming and allowing his critique of condemnation of suffering to make sense. Nietzsche proposes his theory of “will power” which he draws from Schopenhauer's will to live. The essence of life is a will, which is a self-desire, an instinctive impulse and a creative force. “Will power” shows the vitality of developing and transcending oneself, and it helps Nietzsche to overcome despair.

For Nietzsche, Nihilism could be a bridge to a new form of being. He denies the previous traditional Christian morality and values and encourages people to be free from being the slave of God. Nihilism to Nietzsche doesn't represent meaninglessness but rather a way to guide humanity to a better place. [5] While Nietzsche is overcoming the negativity associated with Nihilism, he develops many new theorized such as “the will power” and “the eternal recurrence”, which could be interpreted as Nihilism helping to spark new cultural and philosophical developments.

### 3. Today's Nihilism

In the 21st century, that is an interesting literary genre called “cosmicism” or “cosmic horror” is developed based on the concept of Nihilism. Cosmicism theorized that there is no benevolent God watching over humanity. In the vast scheme of the cosmos, stretching out to infinity, humanity is less than insignificant. Individuals are nearly unnoticeable. Cosmicism was first brought up by H.P Lovecraft, an American writer in his Weird Fiction. Lovecraft drew upon the power of the sublime to make the reader feel inconsequential and totally helpless against something gigantic and natural. [6] Lovecraft's friction established the Cosmicism philosophical movement, and horror is just a branch of the movement. The advancement of technology allows humanity to explore the universe, and it turned out that just like what the cosmos nihilist suggested, the planet Earth is so insignificant in the cosmos. The human race is nearly invisible compares to the species of the other trillions of planets.

Cosmicism has influenced countless subgenres of literature. Lovecraft has become a pulp fiction figure. He inspired many literary works and cinematic works such as *Amy of Darkness* and *Witch Hunt*. [7]

On the hand, Nihilism is very popular in the conversations of generation zero. Young people are facing a world full of issues. Climate change, political turmoil and many more issues have caused a rise in nihilist attitudes. Nihilism is becoming a more popular strategy among Gen Z for surviving in the modern world. Many young people automatically adopt this mentality, which has the potential to be both euphorically liberating and nauseatingly dismal. By each measure, the society we've got built through the Long-term self-preservation of capitalism is failing. People are repeatedly reminded that the Earth is burning, that a small number of affluent people are hoarding money for their own benefits, and that inequality and conflict will inevitably spread over the world no matter who is in power. [8] Nihilism doesn't provide Gen Z with the solutions, but it does embrace the understanding that nothing in this world was intentionally created. Everything we experience now is transient and brief. Perhaps this feeling of transience appeals to a generation that is buried under stress and unrest. [9]

Moreover, nihilism these days is often associated with suicidal thoughts and depressing attitudes toward life. Many people claimed to be nihilists whenever they feel worthless and don't see the meaning of life.

#### 4. Conclusion

After coming to the conclusion that God is dead, Nietzsche realized that his belief system is destroyed. Can we still believe in objective morality, meaning, and purpose after all this destruction? What principles can we follow if there is no objective reality to which they apply? And even if there were, what relevance would these principles have in a world without meaning or purpose? [10] As the realization of nihilism sets in, Nietzsche begins to look for ways to escape its effects. He may try to find objective morality, meaning, and purpose in life. Nietzsche suggests that nihilism is a peculiar form of certainty and is a reversal of the traditional truth doctrine. Nihilism is a belief that leads to a preference for the certainty of nothingness over the condition of uncertainty. Nihilism is a sign of vulnerability and despair. However, Nietzsche believes that Radical Nihilism might be the only way to create a better society. It teaches people to deny previous values and reconsider them. It is a process of reflection and learning from history and creates new opportunities for the future. Nihilism to Nietzsche doesn't represent meaninglessness but rather a way to guide humanity to a better place.

Additionally, Nihilism has a profound influence on modern society. The idea of cosmicism is introduced to the public, theorizing that humanity is less than insignificant on the scale of the grand universe. Many writers and filmmakers such as H.P Lovecraft are inspired by the concept of Nihilism.

Seeing how Nietzsche theorized the concept of Nihilism and trying to overcome it teaches everyone an important lesson. Once we recover our creative wills from God, people can once again be the heroes of their own stories. Nietzsche exhorts us to view life as the production of art and to learn from the artists how to accept and even appreciate who we are.

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