

at that the unifying theme of the choice of critical matters. While this is true, we have one characteristic is that each in one way or another. By Meerten ter Borg, we find first the output of scholarly parlance, after once having said will be questioned by readers who note the theme of *Closing of the American Mind*, which contains criticisms against popular culture and higher discussions of such books as he reinterprets existing theory. Using primarily examples is that the primary use of the concept of person or group that has threatened the

nihilism is explored is that of the process of the work of Michael Aloisi's Parsonian analysis of modern society. Critics have suggested that Parsons be used on this subject, and the reader is offered an interesting perspective as he moves toward a theory of ideological change from the theories of economics and Collins'

which remind us of the necessity of having. Having found some surprisingly detailed work in the American colonies of 1776, they are granted assumptions about the people, as they say in a footnote, that "even they fail to look up statistics." Added into the mix the article by Doyle Paul is analyzed as he attempts to put together William Jaynes' concept of the transition of modes of thought to modern consciousness, proven theory. Jeffrey Levin and Kyriakos Markides bring to well-being, this time among Mexican editors, and soon to be editor of the journal of history for a fascinating combination of

do.

Barbara Hargrove

## The Problem of Nihilism: A Sociological Approach<sup>1</sup>

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*The critique of nihilism, defined as nothingness, caused by the complete lack of authentic values and true ends, has almost completely disappeared from the Western intellectual discourse. In this article the author tries to find the reason for this.*

*Examining the concept of nihilism, one discovers that there is no common property that causes persons or society as a whole to be called nihilistic. Therefore, nihilism is studied, not as an existing thing, but as a label. Since the concept of nihilism was first used in the context of the process of modernization in the time of the French revolution, some major figures from the French sociological tradition who have an articulate opinion on it—for or against—are selected for a case study: pre-revolutionary writers, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau; and post-revolutionary writers, Maistre, Tocqueville, Comte, and Durkheim.*

*They all are found to label as "nihilistic" people who are, in one way or another, their adversaries on the issue of modernization. They feel threatened by the labelled, in Wittgenstein's terminology, in their form of life. Therefore, the use of the concept of nihilism is a case of what Berger and Luckmann call "nihilation," the conceptual elimination of a competing form of life.*

*Typical of the label of nihilism is an understanding of the world in metaphysical, not in theological terms, as was the case in earlier times of great upheaval, when heresy and witchcraft were the appropriate labels. There is a continuity between these labels, now extensively studied, and the use of "nihilism."*

### INTRODUCTION: THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A CONCEPT

In the past, modern Western society has been criticized in many ways. The most influential critique, crystallized in the word "capitalism," states that all vices of modern society can be traced back, in one way or another, to that big constellation of wealth and misery. Another critique, often heard in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, was that of "nihilism." The modern world was said to lack values and ends, and therefore life seemed meaningless. There were many intellectual circles in which this critique was the more influential of the two.

1. This article is both a summary and a further elaboration of some points I worked out in my book *Nihilisme en de Franse sociologische traditie* (ter Borg, 1982).

Today this severe critique seems to have disappeared almost completely from the intellectual discourse. What has happened? Has the problem it denoted eclipsed? Is there no longer nihilism in Western society? Have we overcome nihilism, as Alfred Weber hoped?<sup>2</sup> We do not know. We have some idea of what happened with that other critique: capitalism has changed, and there are several theories that try to describe its development in the post-war years, or to explain the coming of the welfare state in those terms. The Marxist tradition may be a little outmoded at the moment, but it is still there, either as a firm tradition, or as an element of other sociological theories. The reverse seems true for the critique of nihilism. We do not know whether we are nihilistic or not; or whether the problem has disappeared. The only thing we can say about the problem of nihilism is that nobody seems to be interested in it anymore. The intellectual tradition in which this critique had a central place has vanished. It has just faded away, leaving hardly any traces in contemporary thought. Granted, we sometimes hear the word mentioned, but this has hardly any consequence. It is not a part of a sophisticated theory. Nihilism as a theme in the critique of society or as the nucleus of an internationally significant theoretical tradition has disappeared. So we might say that the story of nihilism just petered out. People no longer care.

Why is this? The reasons may be either intellectual or social. Its disappearance may be due to the concept itself, or to the philosophical context in which it played a role. This may have been untenable. Or it may have disappeared because of the role it played in the life of people and in society. To find the answer we must go back to the critique as it was in its heyday. What was nihilism supposed to mean? Who used the concept and for what reason? Perhaps after considering such issues we will be able to come to a deeper understanding of the disappearance of the critique of nihilism, or of nihilism itself.

#### THE CONCEPT OF NIHILISM AND ITS PROBLEMS

In its broadest connotation, to say that one is nihilistic is to say that one has no authentic values, no real ends, that one's whole existence is pure nothingness. If one denies this, then it is easy to unmask the values and ends one claims as untrue, unreal, and worthless. This critique can be directed at persons, but it can be extended easily to groups or even to society as a whole. People can see others as nihilistic, but also themselves.

This is the standard definition I have in mind when I speak of nihilism, or when I say others use the concept, perhaps even without actually using the term. The term nihilism was introduced in several places in Europe in the period of the French Revolution (Goussblom, 1977:3ff). It started as a term of abuse against modern trends, especially the destruction of Christianity and tradition in general. It was the German philosopher Jacobi who initiated a serious discussion of nihilism (Pöggler, 1974: 307ff.), calling Kantian and Fichtean idealism nihilistic because it abstracted from traditional, Christian contents. It was Hegel who replied that two kinds of nihilism could be discerned. What Jacobi named so, he would rather call "false nihilism"; he himself would propagate "true nihilism" (ibid.). Here, in a highly sophisticated metaphysical discussion, we can see the beginnings of the enormous confusion that grew up around the concept. The Russian nihilists contributed not a little to this. Ivan Turgenev, well acquainted with German culture, introduced it in 1862 in Russian literature (in *Fathers and Sons*). It was picked up with enthusiasm by a group of youngsters who wanted

2. The conquest of nihilism was for a long time an important issue in German sociology and philosophy (cf. Alfred Weber, 1947; L. Langrebe, 1946; D. Arendt, 1974).

to change Russian society radically to the broad definition I just gave demolishing tradition they wanted t Enlightenment (Bannour, 1974). T definition. It was Dostoevsky who novels<sup>3</sup> that destroying the traditor everything; opposing tradition imp toevsky wrote highly impressed Nie notes on nihilism, in what was to l concept was back in Germany aga

Nietzsche is still the most imp will build on some of his insights. quest for truth that is Platonic as uncompromising probing that result truth itself was undermined. Also, beautiful. In the end, then, we have and senseless. Life has become poi to "resentment," and thus to the v

Isn't the irony of Socrates an Doesn't he, as one of the oppr he getting his own back on the

This unending quest leads, in its equality. This reinforces nihilism

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In my analysis I will keep in mind the sociology of knowledge. Two what follows. First, there is Nietzs It is perhaps not so much a questi

One interpretation was destroy seems meaningless, all seems

Secondly, there is Nietzsche's awa nothing is worthwhile, there is no

. . . acting, suffering, willing pathos of the 'for nothing,' ar

3. This is a main theme in Dostoevsky first part of the *Notes from the Und* forerunners of the Russian nihilists.

4. Nietzsche was not a theorist, but a Consequently, every description of his

almost completely from the intellectual eclipsed? Is there no longer, as Alfred Weber hoped? We do not know. The critique: capitalism has changed, development in the post-war years, or to the Marxist tradition may be a little more firm tradition, or as an element of the critique of nihilism. We do not know the problem has disappeared. The only person nobody seems to be interested in it who had a central place has vanished. It is a temporary thought. Granted, we sometimes have a consequence. It is not a part of the life of society or as the nucleus of an idea. So we might say that the story

of social. Its disappearance may be the time in which it played a role. This may be the use of the role it played in the life of society to the critique as it was in its heyday. The concept and for what reason? Perhaps we need to a deeper understanding of the concept itself.

It is to say that one has no authentic meaning. If one denies this, then it is untrue, unreal, and worthless. This is easily to groups or even to society as themselves.

When I speak of nihilism, or when I say I am using the term. The term nihilism was introduced by the French Revolution (Goudsblom), trends, especially the destruction of the philosopher Jacobi who initiated a new calling Kantian and Fichtean idealism in his contents. It was Hegel who replied to Jacobi named so, he would rather call it "nihilism" (ibid.). Here, in a highly significant beginning of the enormous confusion which contributed not a little to this. Ivan introduced it in 1862 in Russian literature by a group of youngsters who wanted

to change Russian society radically and decided to call themselves "nihilists." But according to the broad definition I just gave, they were not nihilists at all. On the contrary, after demolishing tradition they wanted to form a new society according to the ideas of the French Enlightenment (Bannour, 1974). This use of the term was very far away from the standard definition. It was Dostoevsky who brought this back. He tried to point out in some of his novels<sup>3</sup> that destroying the tradition of Russian Christianity was the beginning of destroying everything; opposing tradition implied in the end nihilism as defined above. The way Dostoevsky wrote highly impressed Nietzsche. It inspired him in the writing of most of his famous notes on nihilism, in what was to be published posthumously as *The Will to Power*.<sup>4</sup> So the concept was back in Germany again.

Nietzsche is still the most important theorist on nihilism and, like everyone after him, I will build on some of his insights. For Nietzsche, the origin of nihilism is the unquenchable quest for truth that is Platonic as well as Christian. No established truth can stand the uncompromising probing that results from this thirst for truth. So eventually, even the belief in truth itself was undermined. Also, in the Platonic tradition, truth implies the good and the beautiful. In the end, then, we have lost all standards, and everything seems to be meaningless and senseless. Life has become pointless. Nietzsche traces this unending quest for truth back to "resentment," and thus to the will to power. We see this in Socrates's dialectics:

Isn't the irony of Socrates an expression of revolt? Of the resentment of the populace? Doesn't he, as one of the oppressed, enjoy the fierceness of his stabbing syllogism? Isn't he getting his own back on the aristocrats who are fascinated by him? (1973, Vol. 2:954).

This unending quest leads, in its utmost consequence, to nihilism, but also to a complete equality. This reinforces nihilism for it leads to

the disappearance of the higher race, whose inexhaustible fertility and power keeps faith in man alive . . . (op. cit., Vol. 3:553).

In my analysis I will keep in mind Nietzsche's perspective, which makes him a forerunner of the sociology of knowledge. Two other points of Nietzsche's analysis are also important in what follows. First, there is Nietzsche's open eye for the relativity of the problem of nihilism. It is perhaps not so much a question of absolute values, as of familiar ones:

One interpretation was destroyed: but because it passed for the interpretation, existence seems meaningless, all seems futile (op. cit., Vol. 3:853).

Secondly, there is Nietzsche's awareness of the problematic logical status of the concept. If nothing is worthwhile, there is no point in getting excited:

. . . acting, suffering, willing, feeling have no meaning; the pathos of the nihilist is the pathos of the 'for nothing,' and as such it is an inconsistency (op. cit., Vol. 3:549).

3. This is a main theme in Dostoevsky's great novels. The first time it appears in a concise way is in the first part of the *Notes from the Underground* (1864), where he attacks Chernyshevsky, one of the forerunners of the Russian nihilists.

4. Nietzsche was not a theorist, but a writer of aphorisms, which are not always mutually consistent. Consequently, every description of his "theories" is an interpretation.

issue in German sociology and philosophy (1974).

And therefore:

... this is the most crippling thought, especially when one realizes that one is fooled, and is not able to do without being fooled (op. cit., Vol. 3:853).

So much for a very sketchy description of the ups and downs of the term nihilism and some of its connotations. Due to its history and meaning, we can say that nihilism has too many connotations to be a consistent concept. This problematic status was for Nietzsche, the main theorist on nihilism, no reason to denounce the concept. Rather, he saw it as an expression of the enormous confusion that was caused by the complete breakdown of the traditional values and ends.

Philosophers may think that the problematic logical status of the concept will make it unattractive. As a social scientist I am inclined to think the opposite.<sup>5</sup> After Nietzsche had made the concept prestigious, its perplexity gave all thinkers the opportunity to project into it their own frustrations about modern society. This was an opportunity many took. "Nihilism" received ethical, metaphysical, social, political, and theological connotations. We already have come across "true" and "false" nihilism, but there is also "positive" and "negative," "active" and "passive," "manifest" and "latent" nihilism. Very different things and persons were called nihilistic. Heidegger saw Western thought in its totality as nihilistic (1961: Vol. 2). As opposed to this, the American philosopher Stanley Rosen claimed that everything is nihilistic which is not rational (1969). In the thirties, Hermann Rauschning called Hitler and nazism nihilistic (1975). But Tolstoy was called nihilistic as well.<sup>6</sup> And these are only a few out of many examples.

What needs to be explained is why so many eminent thinkers used the concept. Why did they not choose a less problematic concept? Both the brilliance and the fragmentary character of Nietzsche's analysis had made the concept not only prestigious, but also inspiring and imaginative. Thanks to Nietzsche, "nihilism" had become a powerful concept, apt to impress people. This helps to explain why they used it, but not why they used it for such divergent things and persons. What have they in common that the concept of nihilism should be used for them? Nothing, I am afraid. It seems to me that it is not a common property that makes them victims of this fate, but a common relationship to the subject that is eager to call them so. Therefore, in studying nihilism we may be dealing not with properties of an object, but with the characteristics of relations between a subject and an object. This means that a sociological theory of nihilism should not be about some actual feature in a so-called nihilistic society, but about the habit of persons labeling people or even society itself as nihilistic. What I am arguing is that it is not fruitful to study nihilism as a property. We should study "nihilism" as a label.

To make this plausible I will turn to the French sociological tradition. It is not well known that the concept of nihilism was also important in this tradition because the word, "nihilism" is only used occasionally. But the broad meaning, as given in the standard definition above, is often referred to. How and why this is done in 18th and 19th century France is the subject of this article as a case study that will enable us to learn something more of the way the concept of nihilism was used.

5. Here I jump from a logical to a sociological level of analysis. I can do so without falling into the trap of relativism, that everlasting danger of the sociology of knowledge, because I started with a logical analysis of the concept of nihilism. Finding this concept problematic, I turn to social science to understand its success. The fallacy of relativism is committed only when the social function of a concept is taken as a reason for denying its validity.

6. By Gorki, Thomas Mann, and Isaiah Berlin, cited in Goudsblom, 1977:18.

## NIHILISM IN THE FRENCH SOC.

For investigating the use of the tradition has many advantages. To be of their predecessors. Secondly, it is on society, without hiding behind o like the Germans. This makes their the concept of nihilism has something us to a third advantage. As oppo incorporated into traditional societ France were more abrupt, making th are two parties, one in favor of mod that the authors belonging to the di them were ambivalent; their person cal opinions they advocated. I see th in a clear-cut situation often have to clear for their public and their alli

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For investigating the use of the concept of nihilism as a label, the French sociological tradition has many advantages. To begin with, it is a real tradition: authors build on the results of their predecessors. Secondly, it is a truly sociological tradition. The French reflect directly on society, without hiding behind or slipping away completely into all kinds of metaphysics, like the Germans. This makes their critique of society straightforward. As we saw, the use of the concept of nihilism has something to do with the arrival of modern society, and this brings us to a third advantage. As opposed to the English case, where modernity was slowly incorporated into traditional society through a long process of adaptation, the changes in France were more abrupt, making the situation relatively clear, and thus easier to grasp. There are two parties, one in favor of modernization, and one against it. This clarity does not imply that the authors belonging to the different sides themselves had clear-cut positions. Many of them were ambivalent; their personal ambitions were sometimes inconsistent with the political opinions they advocated. I see this also as an advantage of France, for ambiguous authors in a clear-cut situation often have to express their position with extra force, not only to make it clear for their public and their allies, but also for themselves.

French classical sociology was born in the context of the political debate on modernity. This debate lasted for at least two centuries. It was continuously linked to the threat of physical violence. During the 18th century the protagonists of modernity could easily be captured. Both Voltaire and Diderot actually were. Voltaire could not live, but only die in Paris. He always lived near the border of the country. Rousseau was on the run for a long time and ended as an estranged paranoid. And from 1789 on, France was the country of revolutions and counter-revolutions.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, modernization in France meant, in the first place, centralization at the cost of the power of the traditional feudal nobility. The central government was run mainly by well-trained bourgeois professionals, most of them lawyers. Both groups, the higher nobility and the higher bourgeoisie, suffered from status inconsistency. The nobility, partly impoverished in the country, partly subjected to a bizarre etiquette at the court of Versailles, was prestigious but powerless, while the bourgeoisie became more discontented with its lack of prestige as its wealth and power grew. This caused ambiguities in the personal lives of many people: bourgeois buying noble titles in order to gain prestige, and noblemen identifying with the bourgeois values in order to get more real influence.

This shift in social positions was accompanied by a debate on modernity. And it is in this debate that the argument of nihilism appears embryonically but very clearly.

In the beginning the debate was fought with traditional arguments: the so-called Romanists stood against the so-called Germanists, disputing the question of whose rights were the oldest: those of the king as heir of the Roman stadtholder, or those of the nobility as the heir of the old German invaders. As science advanced, these traditional arguments were partly replaced by modern, mechanistic ones, taken from Newton and Locke (Gay, 1973, Vol 2: 466f., Göhring, 1946). We see this in the work of Montesquieu (1689-1755) (Althusser, 1959; Barrière, 1946; Shackleton, 1961; Starobinsky, 1953). As the main protagonist of the case of the nobility, the "these nobiliare," he defended tradition with modern arguments, a theory of forces and counterforces. In his vision, intermediate powers, such as the nobility, were necessary to counterbalance royal power. The disappearance of nobility would unbalance the monarchy, changing it into mere despotism. And since centralization, so typical of modernization, means a weakening of the nobility, it also bears in it the seed of despotism, described by Montesquieu in his *L'Esprit des Loix* as follows:

... There is no law but the will of the prince (1748, Vol. 5:16).

but in a despotic government, where there is neither honour nor virtue . . . (op. cit., Vol. 5:17).

men are all equal, . . . because they are nothing (op. cit., Vol. 6:2).

Obviously, these utterances are not true. They stand in a violent contrast to the scientific sophistication that characterizes the book as a whole, which is a monument of Enlightenment. We see a fierce statement of conservatism, according to which the consequences of centralization lead to nothingness. Here, we have, in the middle of the 18th century, a prelude of what will be a full-fledged debate in the next: the critique of nihilism. And here we see quite clearly the political bias and the emotional weight of the statement. It is hardly an analysis, it is a derogatory label.

What made Montesquieu, the cool analyst, lose himself in this way? One reason could be the ambiguity of his social position. On the one hand he was one of the most famous intellectuals of France, on the other he was a member of the feudal-landed nobility, and as such hated centralization and everything else Louis XIV achieved.

Another aspect of the concept of nihilism, the one we saw in the work of Dostoevsky, is foreshadowed by Voltaire (1694-1778) (Bestermann, 1969; Gay, 1969; Alderidge, 1975; Pomeau, 1955), the most outspoken advocate of centralization in the same debate on modernity. Following Descartes, Voltaire thought that a condition for progressive reform of society was to make *tabula rasa* of traditional institutions and beliefs, to be brought about by a strong central government:

Do you want good laws? Burn the old and make new (cited in Pomeau, 1955:78).

But the implications of this were dangerous. Radical skepticism about the social order meant the end of the outdated feudal system, the corrupted and narrow-minded clergy ("écrasez l'infame!"), and the hated court-elite; but, Voltaire realized, it might in the end destroy any order, even the one to which he owed his social position. Therefore, his skepticism had to be restricted.

It (i.e., traditional belief) must be destroyed among respectable people but maintained for the canaille large and small for whom it was made (Gay, 1973, Vol. 2:521).

For

I want my attorney, my tailor, my servants, even my wife to believe in God; and I think that I shall then be robbed and cuckolded less often (cited in Gay, 1959:265).

Radical skepticism will cause what we might call normlessness or even nihilism. God is the remedy:

If God did not exist, one would have to invent him (ibid.).

Voltaire's well-known disdain for the people led to a severe stigmatization: society would be normless as a consequence of democratized skepticism. In fact, Voltaire drew for his time, in which skepticism advanced, the consequences of an older argument, used for instance by Grotius, that belief in God creates obedience of the people and thus order in the society. Apart

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We will deal shortly with progress. Jean-Jacques Rousseau Hendel, 1974; May, 1961; Staro the Lisbon earthquake. Rousseau not the earthquake itself. Had t injured nor killed.

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stigmatization: society would be act, Voltaire drew for his time, in argument, used for instance by id thus order in the society. Apart

from this, his fear is not limited to the common people: it applies to the elite as well:

An atheist king is more dangerous than a fanatical Ravaillac (Gay, 1973, Vol. 2:527).

The solution of Voltaire's problem is then simple: the country should be governed by an enlightened, central meritocracy: Plato's philosopher-king. The people should be led very slowly from Christianity to a simple version of deism (Bestermann, 1969:469).

The changes Voltaire wanted were very radical, and yet very restricted. This reflects the ambiguity of his social position. Voltaire was a parvenu in 18th century court-society, which he hated for the humiliations he had to suffer. But he needed court and king to make his ambitions come true. He had two kinds of ambitions: the social climbing of himself as a person, and the climbing of the group of French *philosophes* of which he was a leader. For his personal climbing he used all the means available, exhausting his talents for brilliant conversation, writing plays and poems, buying noble titles, only to discover that he was still not taken seriously. To allow the *philosophes* as a group to climb, he proposed that new society. But here he faced the problem with which the "haute bourgeoisie" would become familiar during the coming decades. His own position, however unsatisfying, was nevertheless coupled with the tradition he was so skeptical about. Too radical a skepticism meant sawing the branch on which he himself was sitting.

We will deal shortly with another aspect of modernity: civilization and the belief in progress. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) (Déraethé, 1970; Green, 1955; Grimsley, 1973; Hendel, 1974; May, 1961; Starobinsky, 1971) attacked this in his famous letter to Voltaire on the Lisbon earthquake. Rousseau held that it was civilization, city-life, that caused the horror, not the earthquake itself. Had the people lived near nature, they would have been neither injured nor killed.

I for one see the disasters wrought by man to be far more cruel than those that nature brings us. But however clever we may be at increasing our wretchedness through our institutions, we have till today not succeeded in perfecting ourselves so far that life in general has become a burden for us and we chose nothingness above being (Rousseau, 1959, Vol. 4:1062).

But it is not civilization as such that leads to nothingness, but the civilization of luxury and pomp like that of the elites in French society. Rousseau advises Voltaire to consult the petty bourgeois to get to know the true life:

Who did you consult on that, sir? The rich perhaps, glutted as they are with their evil pleasures, and oblivious of their real needs, always bored with life and constantly afraid to lose it? Or the learned who sit on a chair more and are therefore sicker than anybody else, who think more and are therefore less happy than other men. . . . Why don't you talk with the honest citizen, who has led a quiet anonymous life, without plan and ambitions; a good craftsman, living out of his craft, or a farmer even, not from France of course, where farmers are allowed to starve in order to let us live, but a farmer from a free country, from Geneva for instance (op. cit., 1063).

To appreciate fully the passion with which Rousseau attacks high society, again we must consider his ambiguity. He was of modest descent, but due to his intellectual capacities he was highly appreciated by the elites of his time, and he was charmed by this admiration. However, at the same time, he was embarrassed by his popularity. Time and again he had to cast this spell off, and often he did this by ravaging his friends.

Cultivating his estrangement, he abhorred high society, be it noble or high-bourgeois. But it was only in the high-bourgeois salons that he could put forth his talents. He wanted to use these talents for the sake of the humble people, but just these were not taken seriously in the salons. So, we see that in fact status-inconsistency was a major part of his problem.

Now Montesquieu warned of the nihilism of the absolute monarch; Voltaire, advocating centralization, was afraid of the nihilism of the "canaille," and Rousseau, taking the perspective of what Voltaire would call "canaille," accused the haute bourgeoisie of nihilism.

Did these three writers, who all died before the French revolution, have at their disposal a full-fledged concept of nihilism? No, but together they did use arguments, such as skepticism and nothingness, that will in later times cluster around the concept of nihilism. These arguments seem to be the prototype of what is coming. As such we might learn from these three pre-revolutionary authors something about the use of this type of concept. It is remarkable that the arguments are used as a derogatory label against their social and political adversaries. They are stigmatized as being or bringing about nothingness, whatever their position is. The fierceness of the attack may be ascribed to the writer's ambivalence resulting from his status-inconsistency. What we see in all three cases is mainly a prognosis, a warning of what could happen if the author's side were to lose. This obviously changes after the struggle has taken place.

The revolution changed the debate on modernity. The themes were often the same: centralization and freedom, the value of tradition, and the effect of skepticism; but the mood in which the discussion took place was different. After the big confrontation, there were winners and losers, and the price paid, especially by the losers, had been high. This made the discussion more fierce.

To get a balanced vision on the use of the concept of nihilism after the revolution, we will study both losers and winners. "Losers" are those who felt that the revolution meant a dramatic deterioration of the social perspectives of themselves or their class. We will first turn to two losers, both of them noblemen: Joseph de Maistre and Alexis de Tocqueville.

Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) was the main spokesman of the reactionary party (Barth, 1958; Cioran, 1952; Gignoux, 1963; Le Brun, 1965; Triomphe, 1968.) In his analysis, we see the same rhetoric against his adversaries as we saw earlier, only fiercer:

Learned barbarism, systematic cruelty, calculating decadence and especially irreligion have never achieved anything; the strength of youth leads to maturity; decay leads to nothing (Maistre, 1952:198).

This vehemence, due no longer to ambivalence alone, but also to the bloodshed, is not the only difference. What in the work of the 18th century writers was only an incidental prognosis, has now become a full-fledged diagnosis. Nihilism is seen as a reality. As such it needs a theory that both explains its causes and shows a way out. Such a theory is to be found in the works of Maistre. Nihilism, the revolution, that is to say the most radical overthrow of tradition, is nothing else than the utmost consequence of the reformation (Maistre, 1966:355). What the "rienisme protestant" did on the level of religion has now come about in all sectors of society. We have now learned that skepticism of tradition knows no end, bringing terrible consequences. Actually, this theory is the prototype of the theory on the origin of nihilism which we find in the work of Nietzsche. The horror of Robespierre's "terreur" and the Napoleonic wars were for Maistre lessons from God, to prepare us for the acceptance of what is indispensable for an orderly society: the absolute authority of pope and king (Maistre, 1952:184).

7. Sic. cited by Barth, op. cit. 153. Luther and Calvin are called "hommes de néant," 1966, 354.

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The work of Alexis de Toc 1897; Lively, 1962; Mayer, 19 like that of Maistre, can be inte theoretical point of departure Catholic reactionary, but a co: tional society does not exist, elements of it, if necessary in a had been for Montesquieu: po is the main reason for his famo modern and decentralized.

This difference in temper: least two things: Tocqueville li the Revolution, and he had a : second generation. His father l no family tradition, he did not not even know which side to : against everything untradition honorable noble family, with : sticking to one's post as long separation of public behavior emotional abuse. So we will n works he himself published. V quences will be of what he, li

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I feel more misplaced every day (cited by Triomphe, op. cit., 352).

I die with Europe (cited by Cioran, op. cit., 33).

The work of Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) (Birnbaum, 1970; Buiks, 1979; Eichtal, 1897; Lively, 1962; Mayer, 1939; Pierson, 1938; Poggi, 1972; Redier, 1925; Vossler, 1973), like that of Maistre, can be interpreted as an attempt to undo the revolution. But his social and theoretical point of departure is completely different, and so is his mentality. He is not a Catholic reactionary, but a conservative humanist. He realizes that the way back to a traditional society does not exist, and that the most he can do is to try to save some essential elements of it, if necessary in a modern shape. For him, the essentials were exactly what they had been for Montesquieu: power should not be concentrated in a centralized state. This idea is the main reason for his famous journey to America, where he found a system that was both modern and decentralized.

This difference in temperament between Maistre and Tocqueville can be ascribed to at least two things: Tocqueville lived in a relatively calmer era and could look from a distance at the Revolution, and he had a different family history. Maistre was a nobleman only of the second generation. His father bought the title. This caused him some uneasiness. There was no family tradition, he did not know how to behave. In the beginning of the revolution he did not even know which side to choose. This may have been a factor in his fierce utterances against everything untraditional. Tocqueville, on the other hand, came from an old and honorable noble family, with a strong tradition of *honnêteté*—a. This *honnêteté*—a implied a sticking to one's post as long as possible, and trying to make the best of it, and a strict separation of public behavior and private feelings. This mentality is not compatible with emotional abuse. So we will not find him fiercely attacking his opponents very often in the works he himself published. When he does, it is in a prophesy of what the ultimate consequences will be of what he, like Montesquieu, seeks to fight—centralization of government:

It is in vain to summon a people who have been rendered so dependent on the central power to choose from time to time the representatives of that power; this rare and brief exercise of their free choice, however important it may be, will not prevent them from gradually losing the faculties of thinking, feeling, and acting for themselves, and thus gradually falling below the level of humanity (Tocqueville, 1945, Vol. 2:339).

If we want to know how he really felt about modern times, we should turn to his private writings: his "Souvenirs" and his correspondence. There he describes what happened to him when, as a boy, he came into contact with modern ideas in the library of his father:

Until then my life had unrolled in a full belief that never allowed doubt to penetrate my soul. At that moment, it did so, or rather, the doubt thrust itself into my mind with an enormous force—not a question of this or that, but a universal unbelief. I experienced something like an earthquake, . . . the whole of nature in disarray. I was seized by the blackest melancholy, by a loathing for life that was new to me . . . now and then the impressions from my childhood (I was sixteen at the time) take hold of me again. Then I again see the world of the mind revolving, and I feel lost and alarmed in this universal movement that upsets all the truths on which I have built my faith and my deeds and turns them upside down (cited by Redier, 287f).

Shortly before his death, despairing of the realization of his ideals, due to the coups d'état of Napoleon III, he wrote to his friends words not unlike those of Joseph de Maistre:

We belong to a moral and intellectual family that is dying out. In the past people had ideals, now they only have interests. There used to be bonds between people that have disappeared. It is sad, sir, to outlive one's Fatherland (cited by Vossler, 1973:177).

The feeling that the turn from tradition to modernity causes in the losers can be put into a short formula: since *my world is destroyed, the world is destroyed.*<sup>8</sup> Everything seems useless, meaningless, nothingness. The stigmatizing of the adversary is here combined with a deep melancholy. The adversary is no longer a well-defined category of people. It is the whole world. Therefore, existence has lost its value.

What both Maistre and Tocqueville are talking about fits quite well into my standard definition of nihilism. In Maistre there is an elaborate theory of its history and in Tocqueville we see the existential side of nihilism. Both authors are evaluating as nihilistic a change that has indeed come about in society. It is perceived as an unbearable but unescapable truth.

How do the winners evaluate this change? A winner is here defined as a person who identifies with the class that gained power after the revolution.

One such winner is Auguste Comte (1798-1857) (Gouhier, 1933, 1965; Lacroix, 1973; Levy-Brühl, 1910), not because he was very successful in life, but because he consequently believed in the coming of an industrialized paradise in which he and his theories would play a major part. Disillusionment did not cause bitterness, but at most religious mania. Analyzing the condition of his time, the first half of the 19th century, he spoke of "spiritual anarchy." But unlike Maistre or Tocqueville, he sees it as a necessary but temporary stage that can easily be overcome when properly understood. True, people had no values, no ideals that could give their lives meaning and a direction. This was reinforced by young poets who spoke of the "mal du siècle," the "evil of the century." They stuck to this idea, according to Comte, because they did not understand what was going on. To explain this, Comte combined the theories of Maistre and Condorcet, the 18th century prophet of progress. To what the first had attributed an absolute significance, the second completely despised—tradition. Because of this total opposition of tradition and progress, neither could understand the development of society, in which progress comes forth out of tradition. To fill this gap, Comte developed his rather sophisticated theory of the three stages, according to which society developed from a theological, via a metaphysical, into a scientific, positive era. We might say that Comte provides us with a sociological theory of the genesis of nihilism, that is superior to that of Nietzsche in his elaborateness and precision. In the first half of the 19th century, everything traditional has come to an end, or completely lost its credibility. But nobody can see yet what positive content is about to take its place. That is to say, nobody but Auguste Comte. He is the prophet, literally, of the new, positive era. He will lead society out of the present spiritual anarchy by formulating a new faith:

Faith, that is the inclination to believe spontaneously, without preceding proof, in dogmas that are proclaimed by a capable authority. This is indeed the indispensable condition for establishing and maintaining a true intellectual and moral community (1978:319).

What the lack of such a community means is deeply analyzed in his early works:

The decline of theological philosophy and the associated spiritual power has robbed society of every moral discipline (288-293).

8. Eliade says: "... in the view of archaic societies, everything that is not 'our world' is not yet a world." (1959:32). Here the reverse is going on: what is no longer our world is no longer a world.

This has severe consequences:

The intelligence of the people  
Almost all public morality  
The purely materialist

Everyone has his or her own. Comte takes completely as negative he called it can of course be interpreted as pluralism: three stages, and especially the thought that there should be pluralism.

This is exactly the point on (1917) (Aron, 1967; Giddens, 1984; Tiryakian, 1978.) He was a witness to the third republic. In his *Division of labor*, that essentially pluralism possible, thanks to Durkheim also saw the problem spread, from time to time, over moral, moral weakness, anomie as such, but by temporary concerns of Durkheim. He still claimed to be able to measure the tradition of Montesquieu and a better integration and discipline caused so much harm.

The cause of the moral crisis, science, or the ideas of the Enlightenment criticized against this opinion. He called it in moral terms, calling it "innate development were responsible for or not:

The anarchist, the aesthete, despair of the future, have disgust for the existing order. Collective melancholy would undergo a morbid development.

So we see that the social nihilism, both by winners and debate on modernization. But it is seen as an adequate description of essence and genesis. But losers:

9. These terms play the most important role. It shows that he was familiar with it, the metaphysical and ethical concepts.

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Jouhier, 1933, 1965; Lacroix, 1973; in life, but because he consequently which he and his theories would play a part at most religious mania. Analyzing it, he spoke of "spiritual anarchy." But that temporary stage that can easily be given no values, no ideals that could give us young poets who spoke of the "moral idea, according to Comte, because this, Comte combined the theories of progress. To what the first had attributed sacred—tradition. Because of this total understand the development of society, in this gap, Comte developed his rather than society developed from a theological. We might say that Comte provides us is superior to that of Nietzsche in his 19th century, everything traditional has already can see yet what positive content Auguste Comte. He is the prophet, and out of the present spiritual anarchy by

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This has severe consequences:

The intelligence of the people completely going astray.

Almost all public morality disappearing.

The purely materialistic point of view much gaining in importance (ibid.).

Everyone has his or her own opinion; a common opinion is lacking. It is interesting that Comte takes completely as negative what could be taken more positively. Spiritual anarchy, as he called it can of course be interpreted as an undesirable state of affairs, but it can as well be positively interpreted as pluralism, as a sign of a really free society. But then the theory of the three stages, and especially the positive stage, would need some reconsideration. Comte still thought that there should be perfect consensus on morals and politics.

This is exactly the point on which he was criticized by another winner, Durkheim (1858-1917) (Aron, 1967; Giddens, 1971; König, 1978; Lukes, 1973; Nisbet, 1975; Poggi, 1972; Tiryakian, 1978.) He was a winner because he could completely identify with the successful third republic. In his *Division of Labor in Society* he criticized Comte for not seeing that division of labor, that essential property of modern society, makes a certain degree of pluralism possible, thanks to organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1967:352). Nevertheless, Durkheim also saw the problems caused by differentiation and pluralism, that might even spread, from time to time, over society as a whole. Here he spoke of a moral crisis, "asthenic moral," moral weakness, anomie, and egoism.<sup>9</sup> This state of society is not caused by pluralism as such, but by temporary shortcomings of social integration. This was one of the main concerns of Durkheim. He studied it during his whole career in a scientific way. He even claimed to be able to measure it (Durkheim, 1967:226). Durkheim sought the remedy in the tradition of Montesquieu and Tocqueville: small-scale structures, of any kind, implying a better integration and discipline, should keep people from the abyss of mal-integration, that caused so much harm.

The cause of the moral crisis of the time was, according to Durkheim, not modernity, or science, or the ideas of the Enlightenment, as its adversaries suggested. He fiercely polemicized against this opinion. He defended the Enlightenment as the only remedy, even speaking in moral terms, calling it "innocent." People who hated modern society and tried to stop its development were responsible for the ongoing nihilism, whether they were explicitly reactionary or not:

The anarchist, the aesthete, the mystic, the socialist revolutionary, even if they do not despair of the future, have in common with the pessimist a single sentiment of hatred and disgust for the existing order, a single craving to destroy or to escape from reality. Collective melancholy would not have penetrated consciousness so far, if it had not undergone a morbid development. . . (Durkheim, 1970:370).

So we see that the social and political confusion after the revolution is described as nihilism, both by winners and losers. The concept still functions as a polemical tool in the debate on modernization. But now it is more than just a rhetorical means. Since nihilism is seen as an adequate description of the social confusion, theories have been developed about its essence and genesis. But losers and winners analyze it in a different way, according to their

9. These terms play the most important role in his work. He sometimes uses the word "nihilism," which shows that he was familiar with it. It is possible that he did not often use it because of his familiarity with the metaphysical and ethical connotations this word had.

political aspirations. Losers see it as the final outcome of a fatal historical flaw, winners see it as a temporary evil, as a stage in history, that can be overcome.

*"NIHILISM" AS A LABEL AND FORMS OF LIFE*

We have seen that the criticism of "nihilism" is used against groups of people who have little in common. What is constant is not a property of the object, but the relation between subject and object. "Nihilism" is a label, used in specific kinds of relations. So what are the relations in common between Rauschning and Hitler, Rosen and a-rationality, Nietzsche and Christianity, Rousseau and the civilized French elite, Maistre and the revolutionaries? Fear. The labelers feel threatened by the labelled, in what I would call with a term borrowed from Wittgenstein, the form of life<sup>10</sup> of the labelled. They may, as Nietzsche or Rosen, call the form of life itself nihilistic, or a person or group that stands for that form of life. They fear it because it is a real alternative for the form of life they themselves live in or long for.

A property of forms of life, as I understand them here, is that they are objectivated: experienced as objective and often as absolute. This absolute validity makes their functioning relatively unproblematic. The absoluteness of the form of life makes people feel safe and at home. This means that all people in it have a great interest in the maintenance of their form of life and of its absoluteness.

Because of the sense of absolute validity of a form of life, every alternative is a challenge and a threat. It shows people that their own form of life is not as absolute as they thought it was, and this makes them feel uncertain. This feeling has its grounds. What begins as the challenge of an alternative may end as the destruction of the original form of life. Now, real alternatives occur relatively seldom. Often, other forms of life are too weak to be viable alternatives. They are perceived as deviations, and as such serve to strengthen the dominant form of life. Or they can be too strange to be competitive. To be a convincing alternative, and thus a threat, a form of life has to be quite akin to the existing one. Then, if it has enough prestige, for instance because it is supported by powerful people, it can be perceived as competing. Then strategies are developed to destroy it, or at least to neutralize its effects. One of these strategies is what Berger and Luckmann call "nihilation," defined as the ascribing of a negative ontological status (1967:114f). So a competing form of life may be called decadent, or sinful, or heretic. To be really effective, of course, these qualifications have to be objectivated. They have to be seen as essential properties of the competing alternative form of life and not as qualifications made by people who feel threatened. The label is hypostasized. It becomes a definition or a redefinition of a part of reality. The label is not experienced as a label but as a real state of affairs.

In my view, the most radical form of nihilation is to say that a life form, or the people who propagate it, are nothing at all—that is to say, nihilistic.

This interpretation of nihilism as a label leaves much to be explained. Why, to begin with,

10. Of all the concepts I had the opportunity to choose from, here Wittgenstein's seems the most elegant. "Form of life" expresses in simple words the importance of the thing it connotes. This is not the place for a long argument about the exact meaning of Wittgenstein's term. I will use it in its widest sense. Then it refers to a set of rules, values in which people live, and which constitute what Schutz called their paramount reality. Furthermore, I will use the concept not as a philosophical but as a sociological concept. Disregarding many philosophical subtleties, I will combine it with sociological theory, especially that of Berger and Luckmann. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Frankfurt am Main: 1971; Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, New York: 1967).

did the concept of nihilism appear? This was this radical label not used! After all, there have been earlier forms of life.

In those times, however, the went along, so until the 18th century vague feelings of uneasiness abated.

The label of nihilism, how physical terms. The intellectual means that a certain degree of skepticism. This was indeed the case at that thought was an important quality by step, the value of the aristocratic skepticism. However, the claim correct. There were many efforts unshakable system. From 16th Hobbes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley others. These constructions were role. But the absolute as such was thought, or even of forms of life. Comte was not able to interpret still looking for that one system and charismatic as the aristocracy not yet seen as a human set of absolute—or, as Hegel and Comte direction of an absolute end.

In this kind of thinking, even This sin against logic should not have not yet been discovered, as logic.) At any rate, the discovery of living is a terrible one for philosophy discovery coincides, not accident seems very appropriate to the going on, in its confusion to the that the many losers feel.

It is, in my opinion, quite evident. The dominant intellectual tradition the losers, for the greater part way, they had to conform to this from Montesquieu to Maistre as labels were still in use. Maistre devilish. But these are not his ideas.

The winners used the label of had projected in modernity did not far removed from their ideals as with were most often in power revolution was only a rather un

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did the concept of nihilism appear only at the end of the 18th century as a label of abuse? Why was this radical label not used before, but only in this stage of the process of modernization? After all, there have been earlier attempts to overthrow tradition or to challenge the dominant form of life.

In those times, however, the social order was interpreted in religious terms, and nihilism went along, so until the 18th century competing forms of life were called heretic or pagan, and vague feelings of uneasiness about the forms of life might be worked off with tales of sorcery.

The label of nihilism, however, presupposes that the world can be understood in metaphysical terms. The intellectual discourse must be a metaphysical, not a theological one. This means that a certain degree of secularization is necessary for the use of the label "nihilism." This was indeed the case at the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th century. Secular thought was an important quality of the bourgeoisie, that took over power little by little. Step by step, the value of the aristocratic tradition was questioned intellectually, up to Hume's total skepticism. However, the claim of August Comte that this philosophy was only negative is not correct. There were many efforts to construct the foundation of what was intended as a new, unshakable system. From 1600 on, there were the grandiose philosophical systems of Hobbes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Wolf, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and many others. These constructions were highly rational, and in them God played only a secondary role. But the absolute as such was still immensely important. The absoluteness of systems of thought, or even of forms of life, was taken as objective, not as a human postulate. Even Comte was not able to interpret what he called "anarchie spirituelle" in a positive way. He was still looking for that one system that seemed monolithic, and that could become as prestigious and charismatic as the aristocratic form of life had been.<sup>11</sup> In this period the forms of life are not yet seen as a human set of values and norms, but as a set of rules that are in principle absolute—or, as Hegel and Comte saw it, that are changing according to a fixed pattern in the direction of an absolute end.

In this kind of thinking, everything that is not absolutely true may seem absolutely untrue. This sin against logic should not amaze us. (Perhaps in a world where the relativity of truth has not yet been discovered, and truth is absolute by definition, it is not even a sin against logic.) At any rate, the discovery that there are no absolute values or ends outside one's form of living is a terrible one for people who have an absolute trust in their values. When this discovery coincides, not accidentally, with great social upheavals, then the concept of nihilism seems very appropriate to the situation. It corresponds in its totality to the struggle that is going on, in its confusion to the turmoil that exist, and in its hopelessness to the melancholy that the many losers feel.

It is, in my opinion, quite easy to understand why both losers and winners used the label. The dominant intellectual tradition was a bourgeois one, that of metaphysics and science. If the losers, for the greater part aristocrats, wanted to nihilate the new situation in a credible way, they had to conform to this tradition. This is what all the adversaries of modernity did, from Montesquieu to Maistre and Tocqueville. It was, of course, not the only way; religious labels were still in use. Maistre, for instance, quite often calls the revolution godless or devilish. But these are not his most influential passages.

The winners used the label of nihilism, because the metaphysical, i.e. absolute ideals they had projected in modernity did not come true. The chaos that came out of the revolution was as far removed from their ideals as it was from feudalism. But since the groups they identified with were most often in power, they had a chance to redress the situation. For them, the revolution was only a rather unfortunate beginning. For the losers, it was the end indeed.

11. Here he does not differ, as Durkheim correctly notes, from the metaphysicians.

But who were losers and who were winners? After more than 150 years, it is as easy to tell who won and who lost as it is to describe the process of modernization. At the time, these things were not so clear cut. It was hard to see what was going on, and to choose with which party to side. Whatever the diagnosis, one could hope for a favorable turn. Moreover, there is a difference between belonging to the group of losers or winners from an objective and from a subjective point of view. The authors we just studied identified themselves personally with winners or losers, in the end. But as many times it was as difficult to choose as it was to see who was winning. There were revolutions every twenty years. The loser in one epoch saw himself as a winner in the next. So the situation, though clear in principle, was very ambiguous in reality. The corresponding ambivalence, in any author I described, was considerable. One of the functions of nihilism and labeling in such a situation is not only to strengthen their own form of life by characterization of the rival as nothingness, but also to create clarity. This partly explains the fierceness of the labeling.

Now losers can be found to label nihilistic not only their opponents' form of life, but also their own. In their disappointment they experienced the whole world, including themselves, as nothingness. This feeling, as the example of Maistre and Tocqueville showed, is bound to a deep melancholy, which results from the loss of power to carry things through. And after all, to say that everything is worth nothing may also in a way be comforting. It is good to see that one's failure is of no consequence, because both failure and success are part of the general nothingness.

It is no wonder that the concept of nihilism became very popular in intellectual circles. It was able to explain the crisis that was going on in many ways, on many levels, in an emotionally satisfying way.

#### WHY THE CONCEPT DISAPPEARED

Understanding the way the concept of nihilism functioned in society leads to understanding why it disappeared. In the first place it was bound to the crisis of the coming of modern society. Where the values of modernity could be introduced relatively early and smoothly and found wide acceptance, as in the Anglo-Saxon countries, the concept of nihilism never played an important role. In countries where the coming of modernity involved intense turmoil, it did. But the crisis passed away, and so did the concept of nihilism. One dominant form of life lost its power, and was gradually replaced by another; that was all. Slowly, people became familiar with the idea that absolute ends and values do not exist, but that relative values may do as well. In other words, people learned that pluralism is not the same as chaos, as long as there is some consensus over some important values and a certain amount of tolerance. In fact, pluralism itself became a central value in the West.

The struggle between modernity and tradition is over. Of course there are still disputes over values, but they are not about modernity but about issues within the boundaries of modernity. Nevertheless, the concept of nihilism comes back from time to time. It has become a part of our cultural inheritance. It played an important role in the work of many thinkers whose works have become classics. Therefore, the concept will not disappear completely. From time to time, it will be used when there are crises concerning our forms of life. Adolescents will discover it as a sophisticated way of describing and understanding their situation. Politicians and moralists will try to reinforce their arguments by using it. Its nihilizing function will then be obvious. But however eloquently the concept is used, it will never regain the strength it had around the end of the 19th century.

So why bother about the concept at all? Can we still learn something from the fortunes of

a concept that is out of date? sociological reflection on social context. This could make us a little in our own time of the culture of this. When we speak disdainfully wrong not with them, but with our most sophisticated and elaborate.

And so we come to the second that tales of sorcery and witchcraft that in modern times the same th even a scientific shape? This is continuity between the use of this difficult to recognize this continuing. Although out of use, it is part of

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more than 150 years, it is as easy to tell of modernization. At the time, these s going on, and to choose with which or a favorable turn. Moreover, there is winners from an objective and from a identified themselves personally with as difficult to choose as it was to see y years. The loser in one epoch saw though clear in principle, was very in any author I described, was consid- g in such a situation is not only to f the rival as nothingness, but also to e labeling.

their opponents' form of life, but also e whole world, including themselves, and Tocqueville showed, is bound to a to carry things through. And after all, y be comforting. It is good to see that e and success are part of the general

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learn something from the fortunes of

a concept that is out of date? Yes, we can. First, we have seen how philosophical and sociological reflection on social reality, on values and norms, can be influenced by its social context. This could make us a little suspicious of cultural criticism in general. When we speak in our own time of the culture of narcissism, for instance, or secularism, we should be aware of this. When we speak disdainfully about others, or about culture, there might be something wrong not with them, but with our relation with them. We should always be prepared that our most sophisticated and elaborate concepts might, in the end, turn out to be nihilating labels.

And so we come to the second point. We are familiar with theories about the functions that tales of sorcery and witchcraft may have in times of social upheaval. But do we also realize that in modern times the same thing may occur, not in a religious, but in a philosophical or even a scientific shape? This is what happened with the concept of nihilism. There is a continuity between the use of this concept and the much studied European "witchcraze." It is difficult to recognize this continuity, for the concept of nihilism is still very familiar to us. Although out of use, it is part of the conceptual tradition that is ours.

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## Vatican II, Ecumenical Analysis of Church

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*This article provides an analysis of the Second Vatican Council's approach to personal autonomy, within the context of the mechanisms for change. The capacity of the Roman Catholic Church by the Council are ongoing toward the establishment of all "men of good will." Fote attempted transformations of elements of Parsonian theory and, it is hoped, illustrated*

The Second Vatican Council's contours and the spirit of the Council sessions was not tott the '40s and '50s within that chu rationale strengthened by papal Church and its relation to the m in motion can only be surmised. of writers have recently underta

In the process of reading at Church and the significance of V perspective in sociology might motion by the Council. It might which these changes have occur being experienced.<sup>2</sup>

1. O'Dea (1966) points out that se; updating, throughout the last 150 ye

2. I have been reminded that the Par may differentially shed light on and t that for many purposes the Parsonian for understanding the contemporary