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Why I Am a Nihilist

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Funding: This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research, CNCS–UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-PD-2021-0624, within PNCDI III.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Abstract

If nihilism is delirious existentialism, can existentialism be a valid cure for nihilism? Can we in fact be active (pre-anti-) nihilists?

Why indeed and how can somebody be one?

Because I've tried being an existentialist and my 'floor' of meaning exploded. I can't recall if I fell or if I jumped into the abyss. A nihilist is an existentialist for whom finitude is the crux – an existentialist in rage.

For the existentialist, death is seen from the POV of life: the fact that we are mortal makes us live plenary our finite lives. Death wakes us up to an authentic existence while we usually live as numb zombies trapped in our everyday cycle of work-distraction-sleep. For the nihilist, life is seen from the POV of death: the fact that we are mortal removes meaning from a potentially plenary life. Why should I strive to become somebody when even the best of us are corpses-to-be? Why should I love existence, when it eventually ceases, when Being reeks of decay?

Quick quiz. Choose your poison.

1. "If we were to knock on gravestones and ask the dead whether they would like to rise again they would shake their heads" (WWR 2, §41, p. 482).
2. "Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you said Yes too *taall* woe ... *For all joy wants – eternity*" (TSZ, IV, 'The Drunken Song', 10).
3. "Schopenhauer maintains that, if we were to invite the dead back to life, they would refuse. I believe, on the contrary, that they would die a second time from too much joy" (Cioran 1998, 101).

If you have chosen (2), you probably are an existentialist. (1) — maybe (passive) nihilism is right for you. (3) — you may be a happy nihilist/existentialist.

Let me remind you that meaning is dead. So what? I can be a pleasurable nihilist in hedonism as well. I can be a stoic nihilistic over-achiever or a sceptical meontologist. I can be a nihilistic anti-nihilist who worships life while exploring thanatophilic aestheticism: 1), 2), 3) at the same time. Think about it: what if Schopenhauer/Nietzsche/Cioran have seen us in their mirror, not just the other way around?

References

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