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leaving voluntarily, the member has been expelled by the movement – or ‘deprogrammed’ (Barker 1989; Bromley and Hadden 1993).

Since the 1970s, groups of people have banded together to spread warnings about the dangers of NRMs (Shupe and Bromley 1980; Beckford 1985). Members of the ‘anti-cult movement’, like members of NRMs, vary greatly in their beliefs and practices; some are anguished parents, some are ex-members, others are evangelical Protestants or members of other religious bodies; a few engage in the illegal practice of ‘deprogramming’, charging worried parents tens of thousands of dollars to kidnap adult children and hold them against their will until they renounce their commitment to their NRM – or escape and return to it.

An obvious but often forgotten feature of NRMs is that, with the passage of time, they are likely to change more rapidly than are longer-established religions. Some, like the Shiloh community, disintegrate and cease to exist. Those that continue to survive, if not to flourish, may change in a number of different ways. The variety of responses that contemporary NRMs are making to the passage of time cannot be explored here, but it may be noted that a movement composed of drop-out hippies enthusiastically following a charismatic leader in the 1960s is unlikely to have the same characteristics when, by the 1990s, the leader has died and the membership consists of young children, teenagers who may be rebelling against the movement into which they were born and brought up, and possibly worn-out and somewhat disillusioned middle-aged members who are trying to cope with an economic and social reality which has proved to be remarkably resistant to the changes they had hoped to bring about. At the same time, it should be recognized that many members claim that their lives have been, and continue to be, far more satisfactory and fulfilling than they would have been had they not joined their movement.

With the approach of the second millennium, various predictions have been made about the future of NRMs (Bromley and Hammond 1987). Some commentators point to the rise of FUNDAMENTALISM, others to the influence of NEW AGE and the Human Potential movement as trends

that are expected to become increasingly significant. There are so many variables, however (economic, political, military, cultural), which are bound to affect the fortunes of the movements that it is unlikely that much can be said with certainty. One might none the less expect that, while the movements will be more visible at some periods than at others, in pluralist democracies which support a mass media and have high rates of social and geographical mobility, new religious movements may not enjoy the successes that they dream of, but are almost bound to continue to be with us in a multitude of different and often unanticipated guises.

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Nihilism (from the Latin *nihil*, ‘nothing’) arose in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a literature expressing a putative new historical predicament of humankind. Its intuitive sense is given in the epigrammes fashioned by nihilist and anti-nihilist writers: ‘If God does not exist, everything is permitted’; ‘a nihilist is a man who does not bow down before any AUTHORITY, who takes no principle, however sacred, on

trust’; ‘the most extreme form of nihilism is to be that *all* belief – all TRUTH – is false, because there is no *one* belief that does nihilism mean? That nihilism has devalued themselves. In response to the question, For What? nihilism indicates, nihilism is experienced as an insight into the illusory character of moral codes, and rational belief or unbelief carried to an extreme, in a feeling of estrangement.

Nihilism made its debut in the work of Russian politico-philosopher who relished intimidating others, saying that ‘everything that is not God will perish’. Ivan Turgenev gave a literary representation in *Fathers and Children* where the student Bazarov, on authority, experiences a sense of being in a universe governed by the laws of mechanics. The experienced reflection on the nature of the universe whose vastness is beyond human action and whose laws are through the laws of force and nature. Bazarov’s response is an abiding anger at the ‘curse’ rather than warring on all ‘curse’ and subsequently caused by carelessness in his actions.

Nihilism was a continuation of the ideas of Feodor Dostoevsky who was ATHEISM. Deeply religious Dostoevsky sought to confront the nihilist’s notions of fashionable atheism and the abyss of radical freedom and godlessness; for in that case, *Karamazov* says, ‘everything that is not God will perish’. Individuals who absorb this nihilism with actions that nihilism Dostoevsky gave extended meaning to violent acts expressive of nihilism and SUICIDE. The first nihilist that in an atheist society nihilism second illustrates the annihilation of bonds, since the nihilist has no obligation to near and dear ones constitutes a compelling nihilism. Dostoevsky also interpreted nihilism from the perspective

trust'; 'the most extreme form of Nihilism would be that *all* belief – all TRUTH assumption – is false, because there is no real world'; 'what does nihilism mean? That the highest values have devalued themselves . . . there is no answer to the question, For What?' As these quotations indicate, nihilism is experienced as a moment of insight into the illusory character of religion, moral codes, and rational beliefs. It is scepticism or unbelief carried to an extreme that rebounds in a feeling of estrangement.

Nihilism made its début as the self-description of Russian politico-philosophical anarchists who relished intimidating the bourgeoisie by saying that 'everything that exists deserves to perish'. Ivan Turgenev gave nihilism an early literary representation in *Fathers and Sons*, where the student Bazarov, who takes nothing on authority, experiences his own nothingness in a universe governed by the purposeless laws of mechanics. The experience consists of an anguished reflection on the futility of life in a universe whose vastness dwarfs the scale of human action and whose remorseless workings through the laws of force mock noble aspirations. Bazarov's response to this experience is an abiding anger at the human condition, but rather than warring on all that exists, he 'just curses' and subsequently dies of an infection caused by carelessness in his medical duties.

Nihilism was a continuing theme in the writings of Feodor Dostoevsky, for whom its core was ATHEISM. Deeply religious himself, Dostoevsky sought to confront the intellectual pretensions of fashionable atheism by exhibiting the abyss of radical freedom yawning before the goddess; for in that case, Ivan in the *Brothers Karamazov* says, 'everything is permitted'. Individuals who absorb this enlightenment experiment with actions that fill the ethical abyss. Dostoevsky gave extended treatment to two violent acts expressive of anger, aimless homicide and SUICIDE. The first illustrates his belief that in an atheist society none are secure. The second illustrates the annihilation of all social bonds, since the nihilist has stripped himself of the obligation to near and dear that ordinarily constitutes a compelling reason for existence. Dostoevsky also interpreted the meaning of nihilism from the perspective of society's

governors. In one of the memorable passages of modern letters, the Grand Inquisitor gives the Devil's reasons for imposing faith by gruesome means. He argues that dogma creates a meaningful world governed by moral purposes comprehensible to ordinary people. While the Christian view of the Fall and Salvation is a myth that conceals the gratuitous exploitation characteristic of the actual world, it is a transfiguring myth that saves the multitude from a fate worse than the Devil's torment – moral aimlessness. The myth does not change the world; the Inquisitor relishes his superiority as a persecuting exploiter. But the religious deceit transfigures SUFFERING and DEATH into a moral interpretation that redeems the brute ugliness of actual existence.

Nihilism reached maturity as a philosophy in the later writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). He held that the nihilism latent in European CULTURE was the presiding fatality of his times. The future would either tend toward degeneration, or else a new creative act would renovate European culture. Nietzsche intended his writings to prepare or constitute that creative act.

Nihilism, he thought, is a permanent human possibility apt to suggest itself to perceptive minds in transient moments. Numerous spirits in various cultures have grasped something of it, and some speculation, especially the Buddhist, is close to explicit nihilism. Nevertheless, for Nietzsche the discovery that the primary impulses driving a culture for millenia culminate in Nothing is a unique cultural event. It is then that the highest values are experienced as devaluing themselves, resulting in a loss of purpose. The Western philosophical-scientific tradition devalues itself when the search for TRUTH, after many heroic attempts, culminates in the discovery that truth is the name that a particular animal gives to the emotions that impel its life choices. Similarly, God and the Good merely name the authoritative values of PERSONS and peoples.

It is important for Nietzsche's thesis about the latency of nihilism that these outcomes really do result from the application of the rationalist and ultimately mechanistic principle to the interpretation of life. He called this interpretation of human knowledge 'perspectivism'

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to stress the biological conditions of animal perception. It is akin to the positivism of Ernst Mach and the conventionalism of Pierre Duhem, but Nietzsche is more explicit that Truth in the last instance rests upon the fiat, *Thus I (or we) will it*. In morals, he was an evolutionist who viewed valuation as adaptive response and values as coping strategies. His standard for judging Truth and Goodness was the 'will to power', that is, the scale of ascending and diminishing vitality. Diminishing vitality, or decadence, selects values adaptive for an organism competing defensively with stronger natures. Nietzsche believed that Christianity and Buddhism propounded decadent values, while Hinduism, Judaism and Islam were religions of ascending strength. He shared Machiavelli's violent antipathy to the Christian inversion of the values of antiquity; this was the source of his anti-Christian animus.

Nietzsche believed that his philosophy overcame nihilism by incorporating it into a new human type, the Over-man (*Übermensch*). The *Übermensch* overcomes the mere man in himself, and creates a higher plateau of spirituality by accepting that Truth and Falsity, Good and Evil, are circuits composing part of the repertoire of the human animal's information-processing and motivational systems. The extreme contingency that values are episodes of animal life will terrify the decadent but invigorate strong spirits by making them acutely conscious that they are the sole authors of the worlds that they will and make. This is a variation on the central thought of German Idealism and of much European humanism. But rather than aiming at a speculative or moral fulfilment, as the humanist tradition usually did, Nietzsche aimed for the aesthetic exuberance of life in service to a cultural renewal.

The discovery of Nietzsche in France and England around 1900 was a sensation. Here was a writer of many moods, by turns witty and sombre, elevated and brutal, with a fine capacity to delineate character and riddle the secrets of the heart. Not the least of his appeal was the iconoclasm directed against the sacred cows of the cultural vanguard. DEMOCRACY, solidarity with the suffering masses, humanitarianism, LIBERALISM, SOCIALISM, utilitarianism,

the progress enthusiasm, NATIONALISM, and equality of the sexes were all teased and embarrassed by aphoristic satires. But more importantly, Nietzsche seemed to have discovered a new way of thinking that, in melting down old certainties, opened unimagined horizons. Upheaval of accustomed certainties was indeed the keynote of fin-de-siècle culture: in the plastic arts, Impressionism and Cubism; in literature, the stream of consciousness; in music, atonality; in psychology, the discovery of the subconscious and of sexuality; in physics, the paradoxes of quantum and relativity thinking. His new style of thought was, in his own phrase, 'beyond good and evil' and one may add, beyond truth and falsity. This means that one's thought is no longer in service to the Good and the True, e.g. advancing the cause of humanity and of knowledge. These categories are interrogated as motivational filters that organize the chaos of appearance into meaningful matter. As for humanity, Nietzsche's new ranking of values construes it as a 'bridge to the future', or 'matter' to be used for the creation of *Übermensch*; for self-overcoming.

The First World War commenced with patriotic enthusiasm in all belligerent nations. But as the drum roll of glory gave way to the meaningless carnage of trench warfare, many soldiers lost all dedication to national war aims and fought because of solidarity with comrades-in-arms. This 'nihilism of the trenches', depicted by the writers Robert Graves and Ernst Jünger, was a piquant mass experience of the highest values devaluing themselves. Among civilians too there was disenchantment with the ideals for which the war was ostensibly fought. Revolutions in Russia, Italy, and Germany confirmed the disenchantment by declaring that the old order deserved to perish. The extent to which these revolutions may have been animated by the nihilist thought remains to be assessed. The question was raised by Hermann Rauschnigg, a religious conservative who defected from the Nazis. In *The Revolution of Nihilism*, Rauschnigg concluded that all professed Nazi beliefs were excuses for a power drive that had no aim outside itself (Rauschnigg 1939). Today it is understood that Nazi policies were consistently directed toward creating a Nordic empire from the Atlantic to the Urals. The empire was to be

based on a population pyramid of destruction of competition of a higher human some to be consistent with glorification of immoral 'tics' of *Übermensch*. Some cadres were, like Nazi capitalism in service to party of the Soviet New Market that the contribution of capital furies was to facilitate secular impulse to perfection of redeemed humankind construction of large numbers the ungodly, i.e. a sacrilegious humanity.

The cultural and intellectual marked in America prompted investigation in European nihilism. Some argue that relativism in political and cultural values and Nietzsche, but and Margaret Mead are to examine if the case for be made. Nietzsche's evolutionary and of J.S. Mill's argument with this approach that utilitarianism is based on relativity, and he applied Mill's exhortation to 'live' in service to self as chief criticism of utilitarianism's image of humankind's policy that denied the cruelty, risk, and grandeur of utilitarianism is a philosophy popularized by Benjamin and sociable philosopher whose tolerance of values the rational interest of individual. But hedonic to heroic endeavour and what happened in the civilizational television growth of youth cultures and other mutations. Yet less a threat to Western civilization of it. The basic p...

based on a population policy which justified the destruction of competing peoples for the creation of a higher human type – aims taken by some to be consistent with Nietzsche's apparent glorification of immoralism and the 'great politics' of Übermensch. Soviet communist party cadres were, like Nazi cadres, drilled in immoralism in service to party power and the creation of the Soviet New Man. It has been suggested that the contribution of nihilism to these political furies was to facilitate the substitution of a secular impulse to perfection for the Christian vision of perfecting corrupt nature as the work of redeemed humankind. On this view, the destruction of large numbers is the purgation of the ungodly, i.e. a sacrifice to the new god of humanity.

The cultural and intellectual relativism so marked in America since the Sixties has prompted investigations of its possible sources in European nihilism. Critics of this initiative argue that relativism is a native growth from political and cultural pluralism. Not Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, but J.S. Mill, John Dewey and Margaret Mead are the relevant sources to examine if the case for a nihilist influence is to be made. Nietzsche's evaluation of English utilitarianism and of J.S. Mill in particular is consistent with this approach. He was keenly aware that utilitarianism is but one step from value relativity, and he appears to have accepted Mill's exhortation to conduct 'experiments in living' in service to self-expression. Nietzsche's chief criticism of utilitarian thinking was that its image of humankind was a diminished anthropology that denied the human 'taste' for pain, cruelty, risk, and grandeur. The American form of utilitarianism is a pragmatic orientation first popularized by Benjamin Franklin. It is a hedonic and sociable philosophy of self-realization, whose tolerance of value diversity is accepted as the rational interest of each self-realizing individual. But hedonic toleration can mutate into heroic endeavour and a lively sense of justice, as happened in the civil rights movement. Sensationalized television greed and lust, overtly nihilist youth cultures and thrill killings may be other mutations. Yet value relativism may be less a threat to Western pluralism than an expression of it. The basic pluralist idea is that liberty

is to be restrained only so far as is necessary for the maintenance of public goods such as the rule of law. This because there is no objective determination of the individual good beyond the minima of life, liberty, and pursuing happiness in one's own way; or alternately, the freedom to choose and act on choice is the one good that profoundly moves most human beings.

The nihilist experience of the abyss of choice and the absurdity of life has found many echoes in popular culture. Nihilist styles are marked among the youth, who are likely to be confounded by the conflicting values impinging directly on their lives. The morbid and fragmented images, the conscious irreligion and sometimes sadistic lyrics of rock music are perhaps 'just cursing' an existence whose triviality offends the longing for a pure Good.

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