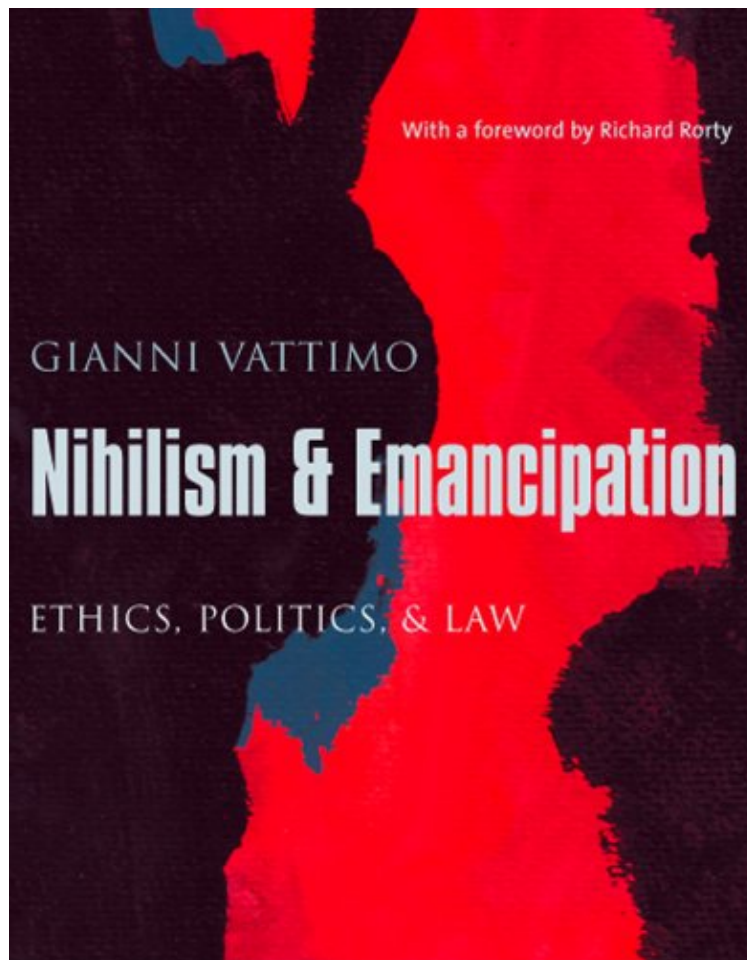


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Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism)

Gianni Vattimo

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Gianni Vattimo : Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Review *_Nihilism and Emancipation_*By Javier Cardoza-KonExcellent and articulate collection that takes the work of late Heidegger (as well as others such as Foucault, Weber, etc.) and questions concerning contemporary political issues surrounding liberty and peace. An important collection for anyone who is concerned with the state of philosophy in the current world market.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Justice Against the LawBy Peyman VahabzadehThe fourteen essays gathered in this

volume have one major aspect in common: they all reflect the concerns and anxieties of one of Europe's most original thinkers, the leading hermeneutics philosopher, and a former member of the European Parliament from the European Socialists. But more so these essays engage in responses to the issues that summon our humanity at this age of accomplished metaphysics. As counterintuitive as they appear, oddly enough, these responses are "practical." At the time when metaphysical justifications, grounds, fundaments, and rationalities appear utterly impoverished, notwithstanding their holding sway upon our era of globalization and militarism, the very notion of philosophy is questioned because, la Heidegger, it can no longer be a search for, and discourse of, foundations. Rather, postmodernity, the age of such radical epochal awareness (50), heralds the re-emergence of philosophy as "sociological impressionism," or to adopt a term from Foucault, an "ontology of actuality" (3, 87). Why actuality? Because attunement to the actual, to the sociological "facts," enable us to receive Being not as stable presence but as an "event" (6). In this situation, philosophy can no longer claim to hold the supra-historical stance that dwells in ageless Truth(s) (60). Together, philosophy and sociology allow us to remember Being historically as we witness, in our actual positions, the destiny of Being in appearing in an irreducible multiplicity of existences, or put simply, in our undeniable cultural diversity (7, 9, 38, 52) that "practically" challenge the reductive technological Enframing (Ge-Stell) despite the latter's current planetary expansion into the farthest corners through globalization. No wonder why "otherness" has increasingly become the issue of our postcolonial times; or why maintaining universalities--colonial dominations or cultural melting pots--has become ever more difficult and unjustifiable. The chapters of the book attend to the conclusions of the above-mentioned situation. A need for a revised understanding of ethics, an "ethics of finitude," amounts to the exclusion of violence (46). Reduction of pain is therefore a necessity for postmetaphysical ethics (71-77). And that is how Vattimo's "weak thought" (*il pensiero debole*) is connected to the question of the law. Running justice against the law--that is to say, taking the law at every moment as it holds sway and is implemented in the form of sanctions and punishments back to the pre-edifying impulse of justice--remains on par with, and represents the "institutional" practice of, Vattimo's postmetaphysical ethics. Justice, as the event that gives rise to normative *fiats* we call the law, without causing them, does not itself resemble a norm. Justice must be understood as the singular event behind every regime of laws--an archic moment without archic intentions. The law can only "do justice" through interpretation (136). The postmetaphysical mode of acting--*Verwindung*--introduces this epochal awareness, this specific historicity, to the law. Epochal awareness, then, is expressed in our critical epoch--a historical view that unmasks the nonjustice in the law through nihilistic interpretation (140). Vattimo advocates a "nihilistic left" that is not based on (a normative notion of) equality but on the reduction of violence. This left leans toward competition, but unlike the rightwing notion of competition, the leftist notion lacks violence. While this left does not advocate tribalism, it acknowledges the fact that we live in a plurality of ideas of which we can choose what fits our aspirations (99). One result of this, according to Vattimo, is the loss of Gramscian concept of the "organic intellectual" (82). "The effort to rethink the left in the light of a philosophy of history of a nihilistic kind might also mean recuperating (paradoxically, but only up to a point) utopian dimensions that we have resigned ourselves much too hastily to casting aside" (101). Vattimo does not endorse the messianic hope (145), a point he makes, implicitly having Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* in mind perhaps. With this rejection, one infers, the two concepts of proceduralism and projectuality come to the fore. Once again and put in different terms, our subscription to projectuality stems from our sober attempts at dwelling in possible epochal openings at a time of caesurae when epochal principles qua permanent, stable presence in theoretical foundations (these handiworks of the philosophers) have become shaky, indefensible and ultimately unjust. Dwelling in the possible is therefore an essentially political move that involves preferring a "liberal, tolerant, and democratic society rather than an authoritarian and totalitarian one" (19). Like most of other writings of Vattimo, the book is an event!

A daring marriage of philosophical theory and practical politics, this collection is the first of Gianni Vattimo's many books to combine his intellectual pursuits with his public and political life. Vattimo is a paradoxical figure, at once a believing Christian and a vociferous critic of the Catholic Church, an outspoken liberal but not a former communist, and a recognized authority on Nietzsche and Heidegger as well as a prominent public intellectual and member of the European parliament. Building on his unique position as a philosopher and politician, Vattimo takes on some of the most pressing questions of our time: Is it still possible, long after Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, to talk of moral imperatives, individual rights, or political freedom? Are these values still relevant in today's world? Tackling these crucial issues, Gianni Vattimo argues that nihilism is not the absence of meaning but a recognition of a plurality of meanings; it is not the end of civilization but the beginning of new social paradigms. Commonly associated with the pessimistic belief that all of existence is meaningless, nihilism, as a philosophical principle, is far less sensationalist than the ethical doctrine that there are no moral absolutes or infallible natural laws, that "truth" is inescapably subjective. Because the conditions for equality and liberty are not "naturally" given, society must actively create these ideals or it will inevitably fall prey to irrationality, prejudice, and oppression. Vattimo contends that the infighting, timidity, and confusion that have overtaken contemporary liberal thought and politics are the products of a prolonged and indulgent mourning over the loss of the transcendental father figure, any institution or power structure that defines truth,

knowledge, and reality. Until humanity overcomes its need for external authority whether it be organized religion, the nation-state, or free-market capitalism emancipation will remain unattainable. Collecting fourteen of Vattimo's most influential essays on ethics, politics, and law, *Nihilism and Emancipation* is a provocative reevaluation of meaning, values, and the idea of freedom in Western culture.

The fluid writing and the translator's "invisible" inclusion of explanatory phrases...makes this accessible to undergraduate and lay readers, as well as of interest to scholars...Highly recommended. (Library Journal) *Nihilism and Emancipation* gives an excellent picture of Gianni Vattimo's recent work and of the interesting and original challenges he offers to what are often seen as philosophical certainties. Even those who disagree with where Vattimo ultimately takes his argument would benefit from pondering his suggestive and imaginative remapping of our philosophical landscape. (Charles Taylor, Northwestern University) About the Author Gianni Vattimo is emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Turin and a member of the European Parliament. His books with Columbia University Press are *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue* (with Ren Girard), *Not Being God: A Collaborative Autobiography*, *Art's Claim to Truth, After the Death of God, Dialogue with Nietzsche*, *The Future of Religion* (with Richard Rorty), *Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and the Law*, and *After Christianity*. Richard Rorty has taught at Wellesley, Princeton, the University of Virginia, and Stanford. With Gianni Vattimo, he is the author of *The Future of Religion*. Santiago Zabala is ICREA Research Professor at the University of Barcelona. He is the author of *The Remains of Being: Hermeneutic Ontology After Metaphysics* and *The Hermeneutic Nature of Analytic Philosophy: A Study of Ernst Tugendhat*; editor of *Art's Claim to Truth, Weakening Philosophy, and The Future of Religion*; and coeditor (with Jeff Malpas) of *Consequences of Hermeneutics*. William McCuaig is a translator living in Toronto.