

III

NIHILISM AS EMANCIPATION: GIANNI VATTIMO AND THE PROJECT OF EMANCIPATION¹

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INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to present nihilism in a new light. Drawing from Nietzsche and Heidegger, Vattimo extends the concept of nihilism to the emancipatory side of postmodernity, which the two German thinkers have earlier discussed. Vattimo, nonetheless, sees in the rise of postmodernity quite a different nihilism that takes up the softer side of Nietzsche and Heidegger to affirm a genuine hermeneutic tolerance of the plurality of discourses, including, for instance, religious propositions. The importance of these propositions to emancipatory projects Nietzsche would have completely dismissed. Heidegger, for his part, would have found in religion the obliviousness for which humans have failed in understanding Being, a forgetfulness that exhibits a reactive form of nihilism from which much of history has drawn its propensity to use violence.

Vattimo would go as far as to say that the emancipatory promise of nihilism is expressed in the proposition, "Nothing is absolute," which is what *nothing* means in nihilism. Certainly, this encourages plurality and difference, and a more prudent exercise of freedom, if anything, a radical understanding of freedom as an exercise in emancipative nihilism. Vattimo, however, issues a warning that in a world where truth has lost its universal appeal, the exercise of nihilism must be continually secured against the tendency to absolutize the practice of individual transcendence as would befit another claim to ultimacy or an absolute that endorses the use of violence. It is in this context where this article takes up the notion of evil, using Vattimo's rereading of Nietzsche and Heidegger.