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# Origins of Nihilism: Actual and Alleged

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**Nihilism Before Nietzsche**, by Michael Allen Gillespie. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994. xxiv + 312 pp. \$27.50 cloth. \$15.95 paper.

As was clearly shown by Frederick C. Beiser in his 1987 work on neglected aspects of the history of German philosophy during the time of Kant and Fichte, *The Fate of Reason*, the drawn-out, so-called "*Pantheismusstreit*" is of crucial importance for a deeper understanding of the transition from Enlightenment philosophy to romanticism and idealism. *Der Pantheismusstreit* gradually involved all the leading thinkers of the age—Mendelssohn, Kant, Herder, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Hegel. But the *Streit* was initiated by a comparatively lesser known thinker, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who in 1783 launched an attack on the kind of rational Enlightenment thinking represented by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Jacobi accused Lessing of having been a "Spinozist"—an epithet which was regarded as equivalent to "pantheist," and "pantheist" in turn to "atheist." Jacobi's scandalous allegation took the form of

a criticism of Lessing's like-minded friend Mendelssohn: Mendelssohn, said Jacobi, had misunderstood the true nature of his friend's worldview.

Why did all the leading thinkers feel compelled to take sides or make personal statements? It was not that they had strong opinions about Mendelssohn's and Jacobi's understanding of Lessing's relation to Spinoza; rather, the issue involved the status of Enlightenment reason itself. If it could be shown that Lessing had in fact been an only slightly disguised atheist, there was reason to believe that Enlightenment reason in and of itself was suspect. In Jacobi's analysis, rationalism of any kind necessarily implied atheism or had atheism as its ultimate consequence, unavoidably leading through scepticism and determinism to the denial of the truths of religion, freedom, morality, and society.

Others rejected Jacobi's somewhat

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extreme interpretation and argued against it from various viewpoints. Mendelssohn tried to defend the tradition of natural theology; Kant insisted on his necessary postulates of practical reason; Fichte questioned the moral worth of "heteronomous" Christian ethics; Hegel set up a remarkable, renewed and different kind of idealist rationalism; Herder, Goethe, and Schelling even defended Spinoza. But no one could ignore Jacobi's penetrating criticism; he seemed to have hit the truly weak spot of all contemporary philosophy. Jacobi summed up what he considered to be the ultimate defect and disastrous dead-end of modern thought in a dramatic and expressive term—*nihilism*. He seems to have been one of the first to grasp the scope of modern subjectivism. Viewing the *cogito*, the individual reason, as the only indubitable foundation of knowledge ultimately led, on Jacobi's interpretation, to a denial of all reality *except* this thinking subject, and to a denial of all objective values and ethical norms. The inflated human ego replaced God and even itself became God. But this peak of expansion and power revealed itself as identical with emptiness and nothingness. This, in Jacobi's view, was the nihilism of Fichte. But the objectivist, rational determinism of Spinoza and the Godless universe of mechanistic natural science were also the products of the defective faculty of individual reason—*der Verstand*—and were similarly nihilistic.

The term nihilism had been used by a few thinkers earlier in the eighteenth century, but it was Jacobi who gave the term its new, decisive conceptual mean-

ing. Since it has long been associated exclusively with attitudes later depicted in novels by Turgenev and Dostoyevsky, with later intellectual and political currents such as anarchism, and with the analysis of Nietzsche, the historical perspective that Gillespie introduces in this book is to be welcomed. Gillespie, author of *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History* (1984), gives us a highly readable account of the later history of nihilism, but also sets himself the task of relating the better-known later current to what he obviously does not regard as merely the pre-history of nihilism but as the decisive stages of nihilism *avant la lettre*. Gillespie not only tries to show how the later definitions and analyses of nihilism differ from those of Jacobi but tries to trace the history of the phenomenon of nihilism even further back—in fact, all the way back to the nominalism of the late Middle Ages.

Gillespie discusses the various analyses of modernism by Heidegger, Löwith and Blumenberg. But since Gillespie regards nihilism as a basic tendency, almost inextricably involved in some of the essential currents of modern Western thought, various reactionary, Catholic traditionalist and similar criticisms of modernity naturally come to mind: certain brands of Neo-Thomism, the thought of Erich Voegelin, Leo Strauss, Tage Lindbom, and Richard Weaver. Gillespie is writing here as a historian of philosophy and culture, but he is also a political scientist, moralist and philosopher in his own right, who cannot avoid commenting on crucial philosophical issues of today. His declaration in the Foreword is therefore of some im-

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portance:

The modern world is not bankrupt, and much that is of value is the consequence of the work and thought of the very thinkers whose other ideas I find so problematic. My project aims not at condemning particular thinkers but at identifying those core elements in the thought of each that helped to produce nihilism so that we can more clearly come to understand what nihilism is.

And in the Introduction:

This focus on the negative, however, is not intended as a condemnation of modernity. In fact, I want to argue that Nietzsche's account of the origin and nature of nihilism has led us wrongly to devalue the modern world, especially in implicating liberalism in nihilism. In his view, liberalism is the final triumph of slave morality and destroys the last remnants of the old hierarchical order. It thus produces the banal last man, and it is the last man whose weakness finally destroys God. Liberalism, for Nietzsche, thus plays an important role in the nihilistic destruction of traditional values.

My argument suggests that this view is fallacious. Nihilism is not the result of liberalism but of a strain of modern thought that is largely at odds with liberalism, which sees man not as a limited and imperfect being who "muddles through," but as a superhuman being who can create the world anew through the application of his infinite will. While liberalism may end in relativism, it rejects such Promethean visions; and while it may in some instances produce banality and boredom, it

does not produce a politics of terror and destruction. Indeed, despite the fact that liberalism has in many respects embraced relativism, it has shown great resilience in the face of terroristic regimes.

Nihilism arises in the context of a new revelation of the world as the product not of reason but of will. The argument presented here suggests that the solution to nihilism thus lies not in the assertion of the will but in a step back from willing. Understanding how such a step back from willing can be achieved, however, requires a more fundamental encounter with the question of the origin and nature of the notion of will. The solution to nihilism thus can arise only out of a deeper understanding of the collapse of the scholastic synthesis that gave rise to the nominalistic notion of will. Only in this way can we adequately understand the character of modernity and of nihilism.

While undoubtedly signaling a much-needed discernment and appreciation of the truths of modernity, and while rejecting medievalist pseudo-solutions, these statements—and the whole consecutive historical analysis—also contain numerous problematic interpretations and positions.

Gillespie is no doubt basically right on the nature of Nietzschean politics, although one or two things could perhaps be said about the purported merits or sufficiency of liberal muddling through. I will, however, concentrate here mainly on what is Gillespie's central thesis: that the roots of nihilism are to be found in Ockham, Descartes, Enlightenment rationalism and the incipient idealism and romanticism of the

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late eighteenth century.

Gillespie relies on the medieval synthesis of Biblical theism and Hellenic philosophy—originally the assimilation of the Platonic theory of ideas into the concept of God, later undergoing considerable changes in Aristotelian scholasticism but still recognizable in its basic rationalistic outlines—as the norm and as the sole viable alternative to nihilism. I do not know if Gillespie believes that this synthesis can be extolled in a liberal society without being watered down in the banality and boredom of the last man. But the root of the problem of nihilism, if we are to believe Gillespie, is the nominalistic overturning of scholastic rationalism, which regarded God as intelligible in his objective nature, as acting in necessary accordance with fixed eternal truths and values. Since according to Ockham we can have no rational insight into the objective nature of God, or rather, since the binding of God by an objective ideal pattern, intelligible even by created human reason, is not compatible with the almighty, supreme God of scripture, God has rather to be understood only as absolutely free and all-powerful will.

In this situation, philosophical skepticism ensued, countered in turn by the renewed attempts at foundational epistemology by empiricism and rationalism respectively. It is here that Descartes, according to Gillespie, takes the next decisive step in the development of nihilism. Descartes tames this new God of absolutely free will and subordinates him—through strict philosophical argumentation—to human will, as his sole function becomes that of guarantor of the new human science, the

*mathesis universalis*. Gillespie endeavors to show how the sovereign power and “unpredictable” will of God in Descartes’s system is, in effect and at least potentially, transferred in its entirety to man. According to Descartes, a perfect and almighty God cannot be a *deus deceptor*, not to mention a *spiritus malignus*. God has himself created the eternal truths, even of mathematics. But the important point, according to Gillespie, is that God’s perfection also makes human scientific knowledge perfect and that, paradoxically, God is in fact now considered *unable* to change and intervene in the human order and the human exercise of power over nature. At the basis of human knowledge, for all its rational universality, and at the basis of the exercise of its power, lies the “irrational” will of the nominalistic God, transferred to man.

With Rousseau, the irrational will is collectivized in the depth of the People. With Kant even the minimalistic but general and sufficient knowledge of God which Descartes allowed is questioned. The stage is thus set for Fichte’s absolute I, for romantic subjectivism, for solipsism put into practice, for a moral relativism taken to the extremes of Faust’s pact with the Devil, for Schopenhauer’s sub-rational, cosmic will, for Dionysos, for Superman—in short, for nihilism.

Surely Gillespie here catches some important truths about the roots of modern nihilism. Still, in his often interesting exposition Gillespie is prone to historically and philosophically somewhat extreme positions. Most importantly, he seems to make too much of the “new” God of nominalism and of

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Ockham and Descartes as precursors and originators of nihilism. In the first place, Gillespie, although not unaware of the fact, does not make sufficiently clear that Ockham's fideistic stance was supported by a rich tradition of precedent: from the very beginning, opposition to Hellenic philosophy was at least as common as the attempts at synthetic incorporation. From the beginning St. Paul set his face against the gnostics and the philosophers, and Tertullian and Iraeneus, to name but the best known, were vehemently hostile to any liaison with the world of classical philosophy. More importantly, voluntarism also had significant earlier advocates. In Hellenic philosophy, the concept of active intelligence was introduced by Aristotle and developed by Plotinus. As Irving Babbitt realized, voluntarism is an essential aspect of the religion of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospels, and it is an equally essential aspect of the God of the Old Testament. This voluntarism was developed above all by St. Augustine, but later also by Duns Scotus. Gillespie dutifully and briefly reports all this, but plays down its importance.

What he does not mention, however, is how the idealistic generalism of Hellenic philosophy was deeply modified early on by the Jewish and Christian Platonists of Alexandria, the very thinkers who first established the new synthesis with Biblical theism and integrated the theory of ideas into the Biblical concept of God. Already Philo subordinated the Platonic ideas to the all-powerful God and even saw them as the supreme expression of this very power! From the infinite variety of ideas in the thought of God—identical with

Himself, expressions of His being and in no way restricting His freedom—He freely chooses some to serve as ideal patterns for the world he desires to create. Many complex philosophical issues are involved here, but it is interesting to note in this connection the *character* of the Philonic modification of Hellenic generalism in the light of the Biblical understanding of God's power and individual providence. And this line of thought was carried on by Origen, whose concept of divine will clearly distinguishes him from the non-Christian Platonists.

Certainly Gillespie is right about some of the philosophical difficulties in Ockham's and Descartes's conceptions of God. Their concept of omnipotence is clearly different from the older one in that God is considered as having freely created even the eternal truths of mathematics. Arguably, Ockham was wrong in regarding the amalgamation with Hellenic idealism as incompatible with Biblical theism. No doubt Ockham also moves closer to some of the more extreme modern doctrines of pure subjectivity, dislodging subjectivity from its ontological and substantial moorings, and the subjective will from "objective" truths and norms. But even in his understanding that God is free to change a rigid objective order, there is something deeply in tune with the Biblical view. Surely the ways of the Lord are unpredictable and inscrutable. But the point is that they are His ways, and that we are dependent on Him. His Law is not enough; His Grace is supreme.

Ockham's claim to be closer to the Biblical view than the scholastic synthesis is also justified if his philosophy is

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understood as an attempt to restate the Biblical view of God as the creator *ex nihilo*: God and the world do not belong to the *same* order of being, and the world is gratuitously brought into existence by God's supreme will alone. True or not, tenable or not, this position was not invented by Ockham. Gillespie is aware of this himself, but the absence of any more elaborate presentation of these historical perspectives sometimes makes his basic thesis about a "new" God of modernity and his focus on Ockham seem disproportionate.

Its philosophical one-sidedness notwithstanding, nominalism was also a necessary reaction against what can be termed an equally one-sided medieval (and Platonic) logico-epistemological *generalism*. Nominalism's attempt to grasp the individual and the unique was also in accordance with the Christian tradition, as reflected in its doctrine of providence and in its understanding of the unique person in God and man. The Reformers, although of course to a greater extent admitting the knowability of God, basically agreed with Ockham in his criticism of scholasticism, and certainly they stressed forgotten aspects of the Biblical God.

Gillespie's thesis thus amounts to a position which could be summed up in the hard saying that the Biblical God is the source of nihilism. In the Epilogue, Gillespie is even quite explicit about this. Apart from the question of nihilism and the valuation of the God of the Bible, this of course also means that he must be at one with the fideistic critics who deny that the scholastic God is the Christian God, and he has hereby also endorsed Ockham's historical claims.

Now many people certainly feel that there are some cruel aspects to the God of the Old Testament, "beyond reason, beyond nature, beyond good and evil," who is calling into question "all that is stable and certain . . . a god of terror and of joy . . . everything's creator, everything's destroyer, and everything's redeemer—whose absolute power reduced nature to a chaos of radically individual and unconnected beings." According to Gillespie, the deepest truth of modernity is modern man's attempt to master and control the skeptical consequences of this God, who is generally presented not as the old God, but as a new God. For a while modern man seems to succeed, but "[a]t the end of modernity, man awakens from his long dream of freedom and reason to discover that he has become the monster he sought to slay." Indeed, modern man "bears a surprising resemblance" to the God described above. But surely Gillespie here goes a little too far: he hardly does justice either to modern man or the ancient God. One indeed has to make an effort to keep in mind Gillespie's reservations in the preface while reading passages such as this one.

For Gillespie, the omnipotence of the nominalistic God stands in the starkest possible contrast to the objective restrictions of the rationally intelligible truths and norms of the scholastic God. Gillespie is certainly right about the difference between the scholastic God, the basis of a common order of being including the world, and the super-substantial, absolutely free and willing God of nominalism. For Gillespie, after all, nihilism is the consequence of the presumed death of the Christian moral

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God who is compatible with modern liberalism. In his historical analysis he really blames only the irrational power-God of the Old Testament and nominalism, who was respected even by Nietzsche, and the kind of modern man who, created in his image, threatens liberalism. But on the one hand Gillespie seems to go too far in reducing the scholastic God to the rationally determinable order of being and ideal objective standards. With so much emphasis on the objective rational nature of the scholastic God, God seems at least as restricted in his role as guarantor of the moral order as the God of Descartes in his role as the guarantor of human science. And on the other hand, as we shall see, Gillespie also seems to obscure the necessary dialectic of modern philosophy, which by no means shows an unambiguous development away from the scholastic conception in the direction of pure, normless subjectivity, but periodically restates the objectivist, ontological and substantialist positions, even in ever-sharper forms.

Gillespie's "encounter with the question of the origin and nature of the notion of will" most definitely is not "fundamental" enough. He not only downplays the significance of the earlier history of voluntarism, but also excludes the concepts of higher, moral will, rational will and holy will from his recapitulation of the history of *modern* voluntarism. These concepts are indispensable to the deeper, dynamic personalist understanding of life, which is both central to Biblical—as to other—religion and to decisive new discoveries of modern philosophy, not least modern personal idealism, which is

probably, along with the New Humanism, the most important philosophical tradition in the United States. The concept of will is not only susceptible to philosophical reconciliation with moral objectivism; the forms of will just enumerated are inseparable from it. They avoid the relativism which Gillespie seems almost ready to excuse in the face of threatening Nietzschean politics, but which in reality is the worst enemy of true liberalism, undermining it from within and preparing the way for the perverted reaction of the monsters. But equally important: as in personal idealism, the demonstration of the philosophical unity of will and the objective moral order also frees classical and medieval objectivism from static rigidities and one-sided generalistic distortion.

The emphasis on the will in God and man is certainly not as such at odds with an understanding of God's or man's nature or with an objective moral order. The rationalistic, objective realism of scholasticism tended to obscure the true character of spiritual life as a living personal relationship in faith and love. Of course Gillespie is to a considerable extent right also about Descartes's conception of the will: there is a clearly discernible tendency in his early philosophy that fits well into the drama Gillespie is trying to reconstruct. But Gillespie is himself aware that quite a few leading Descartes scholars have modified the view of the Cartesian construction of a metaphysic as undertaken for the sole purpose of securing man's egoistic exploitation of nature through secular science. Descartes's later work was devoted to metaphysics in its own right, to a deepened vision of God and

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man apart from considerations of natural science.

Gillespie explains that he is studying only a few of the many thinkers who would have to be included in a more comprehensive history of the development of nihilism. Yet considering the still admirable historical scope of the present work—the wide range of different thinkers, mastered within comparatively small space and, partially at least, brought to yield a revealing pattern of protonihilism—one wants to ask why the book has omitted a more sustained treatment of Spinoza. “Spinozism” was after all the first main target of Jacobi’s attack. For Jacobi, there was an obvious continuity and similarity among rationalist pantheism, Enlightenment rationalism, idealistic subjectivism, and romantic pantheism: all of them ended in nihilism. But Gillespie insists that voluntaristic irrationalism is the relevant ancestry of nihilism, insidiously lurking behind the various facades of modern rationalism, or cataclysmically breaking forth in its own right. Therefore, the rationalist, logical, objectivist, substantialist, ontological, even determinist pantheism of Spinoza, unifying God and the world in a single order of rationally determinable being, and leaving no place for a free Christian or Ockhamist Creator-God, falls almost completely outside Gillespie’s historical and analytical model. Nothing could be further removed from voluntaristic irrationalism than Spinoza, or for that matter Hegel, who because of his insufficient understanding of the status of finite selves was the main target for accusations of both pantheism and nihilism by the early-nineteenth-

century Swedish personal idealist Erik Gustaf Geijer.

According to Gillespie the “story of nihilism before Nietzsche” is “the story of the way in which the late-medieval conception of an omnipotent God inspired and informed a new conception of man and nature that gave precedence to will over reason and freedom over necessity and order.” That story “begins with Descartes’s notion of thinking as willing, passes through Fichte’s notion of the absolute I, and culminates in the explicit nihilism of the nineteenth century.” Unfortunately, the story, as elaborated by Gillespie, is in certain respects selective and abstractly constructed.

Gillespie explains that he is only exploring one aspect of the thinkers under consideration, tracing the development of the specific themes of nihilism and leaving aside other themes the value of which he explicitly affirms. So also with Fichte, Hegel and so on. But there are obvious risks involved in this method: the single theme or partial aspect is easily over-emphasized and the whole and complex truth obscured.

I am not here denying any value in Gillespie’s interpretation and analysis of the genesis of nihilism. They contribute an important partial truth. My purpose is rather to point to a number of complicating facts and nuances. In the later chapters, dealing with romanticism and the better-known later development of nihilism, there are undoubtedly illuminating and even brilliant observations. No one can doubt the relevance of the analysis of the early constructionist Fichte and his pure, “thetic” subjectivity (although his later development bears interesting resemblances to the



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later development of Descartes), and of the irrational depths subsequently set free. But to further clarify the theoretical import of my criticism, let me take a final example.

Fichte the subjectivist idealist was certainly for Jacobi one of the paradigms of nihilism. But, as Beiser shows, Jacobi interestingly ranges both Fichte's activist, voluntaristic freedom and Spinoza's contemplative, rationalistic determinism under the common heading of nihilism. Jacobi regarded Fichte's absolute subjectivism as simply inverted Spinozism. Herder, Goethe and Schelling were representatives of a renewed romanticized Spinozism. Many considered Hegel's dialectical rationalism of *Vernunft* to be a new kind of logical pantheism, going much further than the most extreme rationalistic scholasticism in insisting on the possibility of almost total human knowledge of God's objective being. They were all equally dismissed by Jacobi. Order, rational knowledge of objective divine being and nature, substantiality, necessity, reason, and passive contemplation above active will are not enough to save us from nihilism. Quite the contrary; in some forms, according to Jacobi, they are identical with it. Certainly, some of these thinkers also had some understanding of will as *one* of the determinants of the ultimate principle, or tried in various ways to identify it with reason. But it is amazing to see how not even the most uncompromising irrationalists, such as Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, could completely relinquish the theory of ideas or the Logical Idea as the necessary paradigm of the world. Gillespie points out the moral ambigu-

ity of romanticism. But Dionysos is not the same as Ockham's God or the God of the Old Testament. Irrationalistic nihilism, not to speak of satanism, has other sources than voluntarism and nominalism.

The differences between St. Thomas and Spinoza are obvious enough, and the different varieties of modern rationalism clearly do not constitute an unbroken continuation of scholastic rationalism. But then again they cannot all be understood as developments of the Cartesian response to Ockhamism, keeping irrationalist voluntarism hidden under the surface. To understand the true nature of Jacobi's criticism of nihilism we must look more closely at his own philosophical position. From what standpoint does Jacobi undertake his analysis? What is his own alternative to nihilism?

After reading Gillespie's book one would naturally assume that Jacobi—whose analysis and understanding of nihilism Gillespie underscores as against Nietzsche's—must have undertaken his critique of modern philosophical degeneracy from the lofty Gillespian vantage point of the scholastic synthesis. But a closer acquaintance with the philosophy of Jacobi reveals that this is not so. For Jacobi, it is rationalism as such that gives rise to nihilism. Jacobi is an explicit and combative irrationalist, fideist, emotionalist and even partly a voluntarist, according to whom we cannot rationally know anything about God's objective nature. Among his masters and soulmates we find not St. Thomas, but Pascal, Rousseau, Reid, and Hamann. His understanding of faith, under the influence

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of thinkers such as these, is in important respects different from Ockham's. But it seems to be at least partly in the spirit of Ockhamistic fideism, and within the greater tradition of St. Paul and Tertullian, that Jacobi defends suprarational faith, scripture, inner revelation, and commonsense realism, and that he attacks rationalism as the source of scepticism, atheism, and nihilism. For the rising Hegel no less than for the dying Mendelssohn, Jacobi was the epitome and exemplar of the obscurantist intuitionism of romanticism.

Now, where does all this leave us with regard to nihilism? Premodernists and postmodernists alike rightly diagnose nihilism as one of the characteristic ills of modernity. Gillespie does not seem to be a postmodernist and correctly criticizes the postmodernists' use of Nietzsche. What he provides is an interpretation of nihilism that would enable traditionalistic medievalists, blaming nominalism and irrationalism, and postmodernists, assailing "instrumental" reason and subjective "imperialism," to meet. Surely the traditionalist position is the stronger of the two, although, considering its own weaknesses, the prospect of a resurgent neoscholasticism is a bleak one. Valuable postmodernist thinking has precipitated the collapse of positivism, but considered as a positive alternative, it leaves us with a relativism which has already been shown to open anew the abyss of nihilism. The question, then, is whether there exists a third possibility: a modified modernism, one that safeguards a balanced notion of reason and is closely related to a deeper understanding of will and moral character.

There are indispensable insights to be gleaned from the tradition of self-consciousness, subjectivity, and creative imagination. Subjectivity is not necessarily the same as subjectivism. In its highest forms, modern personal idealism has been able to retain the essential traditional objectivism, while at the same time overcoming its rigid generalism. It has also been able to accommodate landmark insights of modernity while at the same time avoiding the nihilistic consequences of both modern rationalism and irrationalism.

There is obvious truth in Gillespie's analyses of irrationalism, relativism, subjectivism, and the demonic, as well as in Jacobi's analyses of rationalism and pantheism. If Gillespie, in my opinion, devotes disproportionate space to the significance of the nominalist God for nihilism, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* still remains an important book about an important subject. The chapters on the demonic potential (and actuality) in romanticism cover much the same ground as the important analyses of romanticism by Irving Babbitt and sometimes reach similar conclusions. Folke Leander termed this kind of romanticism "lower" romanticism, in contradistinction to the "higher" romanticism that, while converging toward classicist moral objectivism, retained the crucial modern insights and values of historicism, personal idealism, and freedom. The strength of Babbitt's analyses as compared to Gillespie's is that Babbitt duly acknowledges the higher will.

In both, however, part of their criticism is due to the lingering influence of exaggerated generalism, and both misrepresent the true significance of the

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thinkers under scrutiny. As I have tried to show, such generalism fails to do justice to a fundamental ingredient in all genuine theistic religion, not only in the understanding of God but of man. Incapable of fully assimilating the insights of St. Augustine, Christianity up to the late Middle Ages managed only imperfectly to break through classical generalism. Modern philosophy has better understood and appreciated St. Augustine's insights, and has also richly developed them. Surely these discoveries, so deeply in tune with ancient spiritual truths, have nothing to do with nihilism. There is truth in Kierkegaard's judgment that generalism is "mere paganism." One-sided generalism, ignoring particular circumstances and failing to acknowledge the individual in his uniqueness as an ultimate value, has certainly perpetrated as much evil as one-sided particularism, substituting a subjectivist relativism for objective standards.

If Gillespie, who defends both modern liberalism and medieval scholasticism, would here like to see the atomistic individualism of the former as supplementing the latter, one has to re-

ply that the two are ill-matched, and that their union would be philosophically both superficial and artificial, compared to the independent organic synthesis of modern personal idealism.

Certainly much that is of value in the modern world is the consequence of the work and thought of the very thinkers whose other ideas Gillespie finds problematic. That Gillespie is aware of this is reassuring. The problem with the present work, a problem which I have here perhaps unjustly emphasized, is that a fairly strong case could be made that even some of the ideas that Gillespie finds problematic have contributed to saving the modern world from bankruptcy. I consider wrong not only Gillespie's depreciation of will and particularity, but also Jacobi's depreciation of reason and generality. Both thinkers have contributed important analyses, but neither seems quite to touch the heart of the matter of nihilism. Neither will nor reason as such is the cause of nihilism, and neither pure fideism nor a liberalism "stepping back" from willing to scholastic rationalism is its cure.