“The last will of man, his will to nothingness”: Pessimism and Nihilism in Nietzsche

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Abstract: In On The Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche defines nihilism as “the ‘last will’ of man, his will to nothingness” (GM/GM, III, 14). This article argues that this definition is as crucial as others more usually considered. By linking the concept of nihilism to the concept of “will”, this definition first points out the need to understand this concept in connection with Schopenhauer's concept of “will” and “pessimism”. Second, this definition suggests that, for Nietzsche, “nihilism” is not exactly a “doctrine”, but a “physiological” phenomenon. From this point of view, this article seeks to show how the nietzschean concept of “décadence” is fundamental for the proper understanding of the concept of nihilism. By thinking nihilism in connection with the concepts of “pessimism” and “décadence”, I will examine how this concept consists in reducing the world to a “nothingness”.

Keywords: decadence, nihilism, pessimism

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