

Nihilism, НИГИЛИЗМ (Russian). *Nihilism*, from Latin *nihil* – nothing. The term *nihilism* in general has a much wider application in many philosophical contexts (especially those concerning Nietzsche’s philosophy), but this entry will only consider its specifically Russian history. In the 19th century Russia *nihilism* is a pejorative term referring to a free-thinker’s attitude of questioning or denying the traditional cultural, political and religious values. In literature, the term was epitomized by the character of Bazarov, in Ivan Turgenev’s highly influential novel “Fathers and Children” (also known as “Fathers and Sons”) (1862). In the novel, Bazarov, a young educated man, presents himself as a *nihilist*, who constantly shocks the representatives of the older generation (“the fathers”) by his apparently irreverent and radical judgments on various subjects. During that period, *nihilism* as a philosophical outlook implied a number of denials: a denial of value of art with the emphasis on purely practical occupations which could bring tangible results; a denial of religion and any idealistic worldview and the adoption of crude materialism; a denial of value of various abstract notions such as honor, morality, patriotism, as well as rejecting the interpersonal relations not based on mutual benefits. However, unlike later western nihilists (e.g., the Nietzscheans), a *nihilist* Bazarov would not share the assumption that human existence is ultimately meaningless, but still retains a modestly optimistic hope of rebuilding the new (and fully meaningful) social order on the purely rational scientific foundation.

Starting from the idea of total denial, *nihilism* in its more developed forms, would offer a positive program for social remodeling and human improvement, and toward the end of the 19th century the term itself would be substituted by an array of concepts referring to radical advocates of political and social reforms, such as *narodniki*, *narodovolci*, socialists, social-democrats and Marxists. Thus *nihilism* can be seen as representing an important evolutionary stage in the development of the later type of a radical revolutionary (both in literature and in real history), that would appear in Russia in the closing decades of the 19th century.

Literature:

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