



PROJECT MUSE®

## Varieties of Nothing

John Brenkman

SubStance, Volume 50, Number 2, 2021 (Issue 155), pp. 119-140 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2021.0022>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/801940>

# Varieties of Nothing

*John Brenkman*

## **Abstract**

Maurice Blanchot stands at the nexus of modern reflections on nihilism and of nihilism as modernity. Eschewing the simple opposition of Descartes and Pascal, he recognizes that philosophical modernity emerges in the agonistic bond between them. So, too, Nietzsche is at once Pascal's most vocal antagonist and his unacknowledged heir. Blanchot's insights stem from his precept that literature "in truth has meaning and value only as a passion lived by the writer," and in keeping with the vocation of criticism, he approaches these philosophers as writers. The more recent engagement with Nietzsche in the antifoundationalist, postmodern philosophy of Gianni Vattimo, and with Pascal in the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, occasions pertinent comparisons to Blanchot as a reader of Pascal and Nietzsche, all the more so when Blanchot's precept is applied to these later thinkers' work and the passions embodied in their writing.

Maurice Blanchot's thought and criticism lie at the nexus of modern reflections on nihilism. Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé firmly plant the indissociability of nihilism and modernity in modern thought itself. And yet the multiple meanings of nihilism, from wanton enraged destructiveness to joyously ungrounded creativity, unsettle any particular conception of modernity. And that is already the case at the dawn of modern philosophy. For no sooner does Descartes introduce rationality and certitude into modern thought, freeing truth from doctrine and revelation, than Pascal initiates a reflection on nothingness that leads, in his view, not *away from* faith but *beyond* reason *to* faith. Blanchot not only recognizes a certain inseparability of Descartes and Pascal, but broaches the question of nihilism by boldly yoking Pascal and Nietzsche, supposed antipodes of modern thought. That juxtaposition has inspired my own reflections here because Nietzsche and Pascal have so richly, and ambiguously, nourished more recent thinkers, including Gianni Vattimo, for whom "nihilism is our (only) chance" (*End of Modernity* 23), and Pierre Bourdieu, who transmutes Pascalian *divertissement* into the sociological concept of the *illusio* as the stake in the various contests for distinction. Where do Blanchot's reflections stand in relation to Vattimo's engagement with Nietzsche and Bourdieu's with Pascal? That question takes shape for me in its bearing on nihilism and belief in the modern age, in modernity, in modernism.<sup>1</sup>

For the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century antifoundationalist philosopher of postmodernism Gianni Vattimo, as for the early twentieth-century social theorist Max Weber, nihilism is first and foremost the *condition* of modernity. Through the complex, tumultuous, and violent processes by which religion and myth cease to be the glue or binding of social relations and cease to be the source or the ultimate reference of cultural and artistic creations, society becomes to that very extent bereft of—or liberated from—any supreme, organizing value. Weber dubs this condition a new polytheism insofar as individuals and groups are faced with the ordeal and the possibility of deciding among multiple, often contradictory and incompatible values by which to orient their lives. Vattimo dubs this condition postmodern and stresses how plurality and relativism open new possibilities of freedom.

Nietzsche is an essential reference point for both Weber and Vattimo, but unlike the relatively cool analysis by which they observe the unbinding and separation and autonomization, Nietzsche himself explores it—and lived it—as a conceptual-rhetorical-affective ordeal. Blanchot's commentaries on Nietzsche exemplify his own precept that "Literature...in truth has meaning and value only as a passion lived by the writer" (*Work of Fire* 142). Thanks to the peculiar vocation of literary criticism, Blanchot recognizes that the key to Nietzsche's ordeal and to his thought, however much one also takes into account his physical and mental suffering, down to the ultimate perforation and ruin of his mind, is his *writing*. Moreover, faced with the questions Nietzsche poses regarding nihilism, the death of God, and the eternal recurrence, Blanchot is perhaps unique in treating terms like nothingness, negative thought, and absence as ever capable of affirmation.

How to account at once for Nietzsche's lucidity and his fury? Lucid is the diagnosis of nihilism as the tendency for the highest values to turn against and destroy themselves, epitomized by how Christianity and its theology introduce truthfulness and awaken the very powers of rational examination and justification that turn against Christian belief itself to expose its untruths. Furious is the condemnation of Christian morality as itself already a nihilism insofar as the moral values it promotes deny life and project another world beyond and higher than the earthly world of human experience. Blanchot grasps that the diagnosis and the fury send Nietzsche in search of an affirmation of the world and of life that overcomes all forms of nihilism's negations. How can the infuriated critique of Christian nihilism give rise to an unfettered affirmation of life to be lived without transcendently imposed values? Blanchot succinctly states the stumbling block: "Nietzsche (or Zarathustra) said with perfect clarity that when the will becomes liberating it collides with the past. The

rock of accomplished fact that the will (however forceful and willing it may be) cannot displace is what turns all *sentiment* into *ressentiment*: the spirit of revenge consists in the movement that turns the will back into a counter-will, a willing-against, when the will stumbles on the ‘it was’” (*Infinite Conversation* 148). Zarathustra speaking to his disciples (“On Redemption”): “Willing liberates; but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? ‘It was’—that is the name of the will’s gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy.... This, indeed this alone, is what *revenge* is: the will’s ill will against time and its ‘it was’” (251-52). Blanchot need not point out how often Nietzsche’s own prose resounds with the spirit of revenge. The way out of this predicament? “[Man] must, then, no longer be limited in his temporal dimension by the necessity of an irrecoverable past and an irreversible time” (*Infinite* 149). An alternative temporality is required, and it is thus that Blanchot describes the promise held out in Nietzsche’s “ecstatic vision” in Sils Maria and his subsequent articulations of the eternal return. Blanchot senses a cascade of impasses in this expectation that the eternal return overturn nihilism: “The thought of the eternal return... represents the logical vertigo that Nietzsche himself could not escape” and is “able to remind us as to the kind of trap that nihilism is when the mind decides to approach it head on” (148).

There is, I think, a subtle stress to be put on his phrase “when the mind *decides* to approach [nihilism] *head on*.” Does the mind bring the logical vertigo on itself? And if it does, would there be any way to call that a fault or error or misstep in the sense of something avoidable? It is doubtful that Blanchot would make any such judgment. He honors the philosophical vocation’s pursuit of thought to a limit-experience, and he grants the movement of Nietzsche’s thought its utter integrity, though that is not tantamount to embracing it. The cascade of impasses Blanchot formulates as follows: “But what does this return mean? It means what it affirms: that the extreme point of nihilism is precisely there where it reverses itself, that nihilism is this very turning itself, the affirmation that, in passing from the No to the Yes, refutes nihilism, but does nothing other than affirm it, and henceforth extends it to every possible affirmation” (*Infinite* 150). Lest this be construed as the logic of a double negative making a positive, Blanchot adds the flourish of a footnote: “Hence one can conclude that nihilism identifies itself with the will to surmount it *absolutely*” (491 n. 9).

In what counts as the preface to the unfinished project of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche designates himself in the third person. “He that speaks here” is a projection that already marks this speaker as an effect of the speaking, a fiction or virtuality or aspiration of the discourse the writer creates, “a spirit of daring and experiment that has already lost its way

once in every labyrinth of the future; as a soothsayer-bird spirit who *looks back* when relating what will come, as the first perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself" (3). The rhetorico-fictional device of speaking from the future, of having already lived through what has yet to have happened, renders the meaning of the "perfect nihilist," the future's labyrinths, and the apparently variegated "whole of nihilism" utterly enigmatic. That the great work was never completed, never even written as such, leaves the enigma ever within Nietzsche's interpreters' reach but beyond their grasp.

Vattimo, like Blanchot, is concerned with the extreme point where affirmation might arise out of nihilism in recognition "that neither *objective* meanings and values nor *given* structures of Being exist—and that therefore they have to be actively created" (*Dialogue with Nietzsche* 135). Such would be, in the eyes of the antifoundationalist and postmodern philosophy Vattimo espouses, the accomplished nihilism announced in *The Will to Power*. He is, though, also as acutely attuned as Blanchot to the incompleteness and enigma of Nietzsche's account of nihilism. He seeks clarification in "two senses of nihilism" that Nietzsche sketches in notes from 1887, roughly contemporary with the preface. The distinction is between a passive-reactive and an active-creative nihilism. Nietzsche on the passive-reactive:

**Nihilism as a decline and retreat of the spirit's power: passive nihilism:**  
as a sign of weakness: the force of the spirit may be wearied, *exhausted*,  
so that the goals and values that have prevailed so far are no longer  
appropriate and are no longer believed—. (*Writings* 147)

As for active nihilism, it signals a "*power of the spirit*" strong enough to outstrip inherited goals and beliefs but whose "strength is *insufficient* to productively *posit* for oneself a new goal, a 'Why?', a belief" (146). Vattimo overstates the achievement of the active nihilism described here, for Nietzsche calls it an "intermediate" and "pathological" state because it remains stuck in "the inference that *there is no meaning at all*" (146-47). It is active but not, or not yet, creative; it is active-destructive.

Despite the overstatement, Vattimo captures the next level of difficulty in Nietzsche's conception insofar as it gestures beyond the intermediate state. Active nihilism "doesn't stop at unmasking the hollowness of all meanings, structures, and values but goes on to produce and create new values and new structures of meaning, new interpretations" (*Writings* 135). The aspired-to "transvaluation of all values" announced, or prophesied, in *The Will to Power* alternates between a vitalistic and a hermeneutic form. The hermeneutic aspect rotates from the negative hermeneutic of suspicion, critique, unmasking, to the self-positing inter-

pretations creative of new meanings and values. Nietzsche's expresses the vitalistic aspect as follows:

in *valuations, conditions of preservation and growth* express themselves....  
 what's necessary is that something *must* be held to be true; not that something *is true*....

we have projected the conditions of *our* preservation as *predicates of being* in general

we have taken the fact that in order to prosper we have to be stable in our belief, and made of it that the "true" world is not one which changes and becomes, but one which *is*. (*Writings* 147-48)

Vattimo poses a crucial question for which Nietzsche supplies no sure answer. Even as the negative hermeneutic strips away "the ideological projection of a certain form of life," this "active nihilism cannot destroy the ideological masks without creating new ones, new interpretations, that is, that represent the conditions of preservation and growth of another form of life—but what is it then that differentiates these new 'active' values from the soothing disguises of reactive nihilism?" (136). Vattimo's concern is not relativism; his own work quite consistently displays a happy relativism and joyful nihilism as he keeps his antifoundationalism firmly targeted at ideas and institutions that claim objective validity for truth, doctrine, authority, justice, power, hierarchy.

It is perhaps why, here, he emphasizes a generally unrecognized theme that pops up in Nietzsche, namely, the ideal of moderation. He refers to a passage from a section of the late notebooks titled "European Nihilism": "In this process, who will prove to be the *strongest*? The most moderate, those who have no *need* of extreme articles of faith, who not only concede but even love a good deal of contingency and nonsense, who can think of man with a considerable moderation of his value and not therefore become small and weak" (*Writings* 121). The elevation of this passage may be compelling, a promising extrapolation in keeping with Vattimo's own sensibility, but it is not altogether persuasive as a reading of the late notebooks since so much of the force and validity of Nietzsche's thought derives from its own impassioned excesses, its rage against truth on behalf of truth, its whirling from resentment to exuberance. What is "this process" in which Nietzsche says the most moderate will prove the strongest? It seems in context to be that of a general self-destructiveness under way in Europe, which Nietzsche envisions as a kind of provoked self-annihilation of the weak by the strong: "Nihilism is a symptom of the badly off having lost all consolation: that they destroy in order to be destroyed, that once separated from morality they no longer have any reason to 'submit'—that they settle on the ground of the opposite principle and themselves *want* to have *power* by *forcing* the powerful to become their

executioners" (120).<sup>2</sup> Perhaps only the most moderate, he speculates, will succeed in walking through the conflagration of the weak bringing on their own and the strong's destruction. How to map that vision across the actual unfolding of European history is not so clear.

Nietzsche values values if and only if those who posit the value recognize and affirm they are positing it, not merely bending to it. Such an active-creative positing must occur from within "*Nihilism as a normal condition*," that is, the European condition. "What does nihilism mean?—*That the highest values are devaluated. It is ambiguous*" (*Writings* 146). The ambiguity is explored via the, so to speak, ideal types just delineated: the passive nihilism of those exhausted by their loss of belief; the active but pathological and destructive nihilism of those whose "power of the spirit" has overthrown existing values and goals but not yet invented new ones; and the nihilism of the oppressed masses deprived of consolation and become self-destructively destructive. Since none of these is the active-creative nihilist, it is clear that there are not just two senses of nihilism in Nietzsche. The *condition* of nihilism—the modern event by which "*the highest values devalue themselves*" (*Will to Power* 9)—gives rise to various experiences and responses whose typology Nietzsche struggles to specify. The difficulty lies in the fact that he himself, at various moments, suffers and enacts each possibility. Such is the first-person reality behind the third-person fiction of "liv[ing] through the whole of nihilism": "For why has the advent of nihilism become *necessary*? Because...nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals—because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these 'values' really had.—We require, sometime, *new values*" (4).

There is ample evidence that Nietzsche's search for a creative nihilism—that is, creativity within the condition of nihilism—leads him implacably to the artist. Art is the countermovement to nihilism, the *Rausch* in Nietzsche's term that emerges from the paralysis, the immobility, of modern existence that Heidegger calls "attunement to the nothing" (*Angst*).<sup>3</sup> The implications of Nietzsche's thought for aesthetics, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to the fragments on "The Will to Power as Art" in *The Will to Power*, while complex and often contradictory, are always clearer than the implications for politics or ethics. Vattimo's efforts are in part an attempt to square Nietzsche's deepest insights with a democratic and egalitarian vision of society.<sup>4</sup> But even he leaves unanswered the difficult question of whether in a Nietzschean perspective struggles against injustice can free themselves from the reactive affects and destructive and self-destructive deeds of *ressentiment*. As regards morality and ethics, the active-destructive nihilism of the hermeneutics of suspicion organizes *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* and gives them their vitality and validity.

But Nietzsche struggles to articulate an active-creative ethic. The ethical and aesthetic strands have been brought together quite deftly by Alexander Nehamas and Richard Rorty, both of whom elaborate on the theme of making one's life a work of art and express something like the spirit of moderation in the ethical realm. Nietzsche himself, however, is not satisfied with such moderation but pursues his unfinished and daunting vision of the eternal return. Taking our cue from Blanchot it is important to see how the link of the aesthetic and the ethical has to be grasped in Nietzsche's *writing* and its aspiration to art.

The eternal recurrence is sometimes credited with reconciling being and becoming, a quest that goes back to Nietzsche's earliest thinking about Dionysian becoming and Apollonian being in *The Birth of Tragedy*, for in the eternal recurrence, being is rethought as eternally recurring becoming, that is, eternity is realized in and as repetition. This represents what is often called the cosmological or metaphysical version of eternal recurrence—finite causal chains *plus* infinite time *equals* eternal recurrence—which is then easily dismissed as unfounded and absurd and belittled as a pseudo-scientific distortion of a poetico-philosophical image found in Heraclitus. Blanchot has no interest in this choice between validating or mocking Nietzsche's *thought* of the eternal recurrence. Both validation and mockery and even the sketching of impasses tend, in Blanchot's words, "to forget Nietzsche by putting him back into a tradition that he himself was not content simply to put into question (contestation does not suffice; it always keeps one within the horizon of the same interrogation): the tradition of the logical discourse issuing from the *logos*, of thought as a thought of the whole, and of speech as a relation of unity" (*Infinite* 150).

Problems of thought are problems of writing. "There are two kinds of speech in Nietzsche," Blanchot says. "One belongs to philosophical discourse, the coherent discourse he sometimes wished to bring to term by composing a work of great scope, analogous to the great works of the tradition" (*Infinite* 151). In short, our forgetful putting of Nietzsche back in the tradition is partly Nietzsche's own doing. He brings it on himself. The other kind of speech is the fragment, those discursive jabs that Nietzsche admires in Emerson and that Blanchot characterizes as "a non-sufficient speech, but not through insufficiency, unfinished, but because foreign to the category of completion" (153). The fragment has not strayed from a coherent whole, nor does it refer to a whole in the making. And yet it is alien to the maxim or aphorism. As Blanchot puts it: "A speech that is unique, solitary, fragmented, but, by virtue of being a fragment, already complete in the breaking off from which it proceeds, and of being a splinter that does not refer back to any splintered thing" (152, translation modified).

At this point, I want to suggest a perspectival shift and take another angle on the knotting of thought and writing in Nietzsche's eternal return. I start with its ethical formulation, which was the first version of the doctrine to appear in a completed text, *The Gay Science* (§341) (1882). At issue is the *rhetorical action* of this first articulation. For, rhetorically, it is a rejoinder and a provocation expressing the ferocious, deconstructive side of Nietzsche's relentless assault on other-worldliness. The eternal return is meant to rival—and overthrow—the Christian idea of eternal life. For Nietzsche, the promise of the redemptive afterlife exemplifies Christianity's denial and devaluing of *this life*. That is at the heart of what he calls European nihilism.

How, though, to bring to light and affirm mortal existence in *this world* over against eternity? Nietzsche in effect says, *You want to taste eternal life?—that is, an eternity of life—then try this: imagine that every moment of your life, every act and event in it, will recur eternally. Imagine THAT.* That's my paraphrase. Now to quote: "Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth at the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?' would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become toward yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?" (*Gay Science* 273-74).

The first time Nietzsche broaches the eternal recurrence, then, it is as a question at once hypothetical and demonic. A provocation not to entertain the hypothesis, metaphysical or cosmological, of eternal recurrence but to *live* it. In this ethical perspective, do things recur eternally? No. Rather, the eternal recurrence affirms earthly, temporal existence in its rivalry with other-worldly eternity. The affirmation itself, in keeping with the tragic core of Nietzschean prophecy, is intermittent: *have you once experienced; ecstatic: a tremendous moment; and imaginative: when you would have answered him: "You are a god...."* The rhetorical action that is directed outward toward eternity-obsessed believers (a taunting *Everybody wants to go to heaven, nobody wants to die*) also has an inner rhetorical arc. Here I draw on a critic who in my imaginary anthology of modern criticism would be incongruently paired with Blanchot as his incommensurate interlocutor, namely, Kenneth Burke. With his concepts of symbolic action and the rhetoric of motives Burke looks to understand how imagery, metaphor, parable, and so on, effect some transformation on the symbolic plane, a revaluation or transvaluation in a nearly Nietzschean sense, of

an otherwise intractable deadlock in the writer's being-in-the-world, that is, in the "passion lived by the writer" in Blanchot's words. Nietzsche's fabulated demon symbolically transforms the burden of suffering, illness, ennui, resentment, world-weariness, and abjection into the dazzling image of self-assertive affirmation: "What if, someday or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small and great will return to you, all in succession and sequence'" (273). Or, as he puts it in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo*" (68). From the top!

Christian forbearance in hope of redemption is displaced and transmuted into exuberant *amor fati*. Or is it? Does the very persistence of eternity in the idea of eternal return not mark perhaps the still uneradicated tie to European nihilism and Christianity? That question and a larger reflection on the motives of Nietzsche's rhetoric would ultimately require a discussion of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The starting point would have to be the fact that the figure to whom Nietzsche entrusts the vision of the eternal return and the prophecy of Europe transformed, Zarathustra himself, is a pure fiction. A fiction, but not a character. As the modern thinker of *amor fati*, Nietzsche has a novelistic sensibility but lacks the novelistic art. Which is not to say that he is not artistic, a thinker only insofar as he is a writer. Symbolic action is discernible in the rhetorical device of the preface of *The Will to Power* too. "He that speaks here" marks a discourse that the writer *aspires* to inhabit; it issues from him insofar as it projects words that are still beyond his subjective reality and mastery. Such projective prose suits fragmentary writing. By the same token, Nietzsche also produced more than one "work of great scope"—*The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*—all of which are replete with symbolic action and literary expression. In *Ecce Homo* he testifies to the passion he lived in writing such works: "There is something I call the *rancune* of what is great: everything great—a work, a deed—is no sooner accomplished than it turns *against* the man who did it. By doing it, he has become *weak*; he no longer endures his deed, he can no longer face it. Something one was never permitted to will lies *behind* one, something in which the knot in the destiny of humanity is tied—and now one labors *under* it!—It almost crushes one" (*On the Genealogy* 303). Against, behind, under: there is a distinctive choreography and temporal-

ity to this experience: *Something one was never permitted to will lies behind one*. Creativity itself creates its own *It was*. In the process of creation, creating is an act not permitted; the moment the creation is achieved, it is behind one, that is, beyond one, not one's own, and creating must begin anew as an impossible, not-permitted act. The spiral of creativity spins in the opposite direction from eternal recurrence.

\*\*\*

Pascal is easily made to stand as Nietzsche's antipode on account of his pessimism and his faith: "I do not read Pascal but *love* him, as the most instructive victim of Christianity, murdered slowly, first physically, then psychologically—the whole logic of this most gruesome form of inhuman cruelty" (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 243). Pascal exemplifies the devaluation of this world and, like the believers Nietzsche taunts with the demon of eternal recurrence, wants life but not this life: "the only good thing in this life is the hope of another life" (*Pensées* 129) (427/398/194).<sup>5</sup> By the same token, Pascal and Nietzsche share strong opposition to Cartesian rationalism. Moreover, Pascal does not retreat to medieval theology but stakes the modernity of belief on confronting and thinking through nihilism. What distinguishes Pascal's thought from the theology of his tradition is that he thinks eternity and infinity *from* nothingness, whether the infinitesimal human speck in the universe or this life's mere instant before which and after which stretches infinity. He may be as much Nietzsche's intellectual contemporary as his spiritual antagonist.

The resonance of the *Pensées* today is captured by Peter Sloterdijk:

Inspired by Augustinian insights into human brokenness, Pascal began with a remapping of the scope of human greatness and human wretchedness. In the process not only did he uncover—in an original revelation—the correlation of knowledge and interest, which has remained alive down to contemporary discursive constellations, but he also exposed in classic fashion the dialectic between the rise in capacities and the escalating experience of powerlessness. In this regard he has become deeper and more discrete than Descartes, the ancestor of modernity. But while Descartes tends to address his readers in a matutinal temper and in programmatic departures, Pascal is an author for nocturnal reading and an accomplice of our intimately fractured afterthoughts. (34)

Blanchot, ever alert to the ties that make opposing tendencies inseparable, adds a further nuance, arguing that "Pascal is finally still a Cartesian" even as he reverses Descartes and privileges the "hidden intimacy" of the heart over the cogito: "If he discloses the profundity of pure inner life, if he restores its richness, its free movement, it is Descartes he enriches and fortifies. For it is based on the self that Descartes founds objectivity" (*Space of Literature* 217).

Pascal anticipates Nietzsche in probing the psychological and metaphysical implications of a world without God. He evokes the sheer terror of such a vision of the world. It is also the source of his conception of nothingness, infinity, and eternity: "For, after all, what is man in nature? A nothing [*un néant*] compared to the infinite, a whole compared to the nothing [*le néant*], a middle point between all and nothing [*rien*].... What else can he do, then, but perceive some semblance of the middle of things, eternally hopeless of knowing either their principles or their end?" (*Pensées* 61) (199/185/72). Neat separations of Pascal, Descartes, and Nietzsche do not hold. An anti-Cartesian Cartesian and Nietzsche's agonistic forerunner, Pascal lays claim to his modernity even as "modernity" might well define precisely what he finds so despicable about *this life*.

Blanchot's sensitivity and attentiveness to paradox is on a par with Pascal's, but his grasp of Pascalian paradoxes is slightly but tellingly different from Pascal's own. The supreme devaluation of *this life* does not reduce the earthbound mortal to some stark choice between abject hopelessness and spiritual retreat to the cloister: "being unable to know our ambiguous life, will we not be tempted to 'describe' it, to write it? Might not written description be the sole mode of presentation that does not disturb the strange enchantment of appearances and disappearances in which we exist?; a presentation that would not render impurity pure, but would give us the infinite irrealty of our life for what it is: unreal, and yet for all this very real?" (*Infinite* 97-98). Such a temptation to describe is the very one to which Pascal succumbs; as with Nietzsche, Pascal's thought is inseparable from the practice—*writing*—by which it manifests itself.

Pascal's thought is built on absolutes—nothingness and infinity, origin and end, light and opacity—but mortal, earthbound human existence cannot attain or know the absolutes; it merely "perceive[s] some semblance of the middle of things." Blanchot, expanding on Lucien Goldmann's emphasis on tragedy and the *deus absconditus* in Racine and Pascal, stresses that "tragic man," in contrast to "the man of the world," "does not see man as a passable mixture of middling qualities and honest failings, but an unendurable meeting of extreme grandeur and extreme destitution, an incongruous nothingness in which the two infinities collide" (*Infinite* 98-99). Adam embodied absolute greatness before the Fall and, since he had known absolute greatness, absolute wretchedness in the Fall. Incapable of fathoming these absolutes, fallen humankind's greatness is, ever after, inextricable from wretchedness: "Man's greatness comes from knowing he is wretched.... Thus it is wretched to know that one is wretched, but there is greatness in knowing one is wretched" (Pascal, *Pensées* 29) (113/104/348). There results a sense of the emptiness of worldly greatness; it can never attain the "glory" of the unfallen Adam or Christ. Blanchot stresses that

the everyday “equivocacies” that “render life possible” disappear for the tragic man, for whom the “event” of “the union in Christ of divinity and humanity, of all grandeur and all baseness,” exposes “an uninhabitable world in which one is obliged to dwell” (*Infinite* 99). The human predicament lies in the inability to attend steadfastly to the soul and the reality of its wretchedness: “*Wretchedness*. The only thing that consoles us for our miseries is diversion. And yet it is the greatest of our miseries” (Pascal, *Pensées* 120) (414/393/171).

*Divertissement* (diversion, entertainment, distraction) is one of Pascal’s great themes: “Being unable to cure death, wretchedness and ignorance, men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things” (*Pensées* 37) (133/124/169). Happiness does not follow. The goal of the diverting activity—money in gambling, the hare in hunting—is never satisfying, as proved by the test of offering the gambler the money or the hunter the hare without having to gamble or hunt: “What people want is... the agitation that takes our mind off [our unhappy condition] and diverts us. That is why we prefer the hunt to the capture” (38) (136/126/168). Such is the nihil at core of human existence. Yet Pascal does not moralize or condemn diversion, since it defines all human endeavor, creativity, and achievement. As Blanchot wryly notes, “One might perhaps say that in naming and justifying diversion, Pascal gave to the literary art of the future one of its privileged categories” (*Infinite* 97). And as though anticipating Baudelaire, greatness flowers from ill: “The vilest feature of man is the quest for glory, but it is just this that most clearly shows his excellence” (Pascal, *Pensées* 151) (470/435/404). Pascal the writer lives the ordeal of being at once—or vacillating between—tragic man and man of the world, just as he straddles the religious rejection of the world and the philosophico-literary vocation of describing life in the world.

Keeping in mind all the philosophical and literary paradoxes that Blanchot helps bring to light in Pascal, how do Pascalian night thoughts come to inspire and buttress Pierre Bourdieu’s culminating reflections on the aims, methods, and justifications of his social theory? How does Pascal become the patron—or muse—of a project that sees itself as going through and beyond Marx, Husserl, and Lévi-Strauss? My juxtaposition of Blanchot and Bourdieu as readers of Pascal might seem strained in light of the obvious gap between the former’s philosophico-literary preoccupations and latter’s insistence on the agon between sociology and philosophy, an agon signaled by the title of *Pascalian Meditations* itself and its opposition to Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*. At issue is a twofold link. On the one hand, Blanchot and Bourdieu both develop their thinking in relation to modern nihilism, and on the other hand, Bourdieu’s disciplin-

ary protestations notwithstanding, his social theory is inseparable from his philosophical-literary practice.

On the face of it, Bourdieu gravitates not toward Pascal's tragic absolutes but toward the Pascalian *peuple* and the ordinary realm of opinion and habit. Pascal: "Ordinary people have some very sound opinions [*Le peuple a des opinions très saines*]," including "preferring the hunt to the capture," "distinguishing men by external things," "taking offense at a slap on the face," and "taking chances" (*Pensées* 26) (101/93/324). Further, the primacy Pascal accords custom and habit is evoked by Bourdieu in his conception of habitus and the dispositions or internalized competences and orientations thanks to which individuals participate in social practices: "We are as much automaton as mind.... [H]abit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed" (247) (821/671/252). In one of the fragments on the image of the human being as a *thinking reed*, Pascal writes, "Through space the universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck [*un point*]; through thought I grasp it" (29) (113/104/348). Bourdieu glosses the passage as overcoming "the dilemma of objectivism and subjectivism": "The world encompasses me, comprehends me as a thing among things, but I, as a thing for which there are things, comprehend this world" (*Pascalian Meditations* 130). Unlike the Cartesian way of distinguishing *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, Pascal anticipates not only Heidegger's conception of Dasein's immersion in space (being-there, being-in-the-world, dwelling) but also Bourdieu's idea of habitus: "I, as a thing for which there are things, comprehend this world. And I do so (must it be added?) because it encompasses and comprehends me; it is through this material inclusion—often unnoticed or repressed—and what follows from it, the incorporation of social structures in the form of dispositional structures of objective chances in the form of expectations and anticipations, that I acquire a practical knowledge and control of the encompassing space" (130). Physical space is "tacitly expanded" by Bourdieu to the idea of social space; the "occupant" of a social space has a "bodily knowledge" (*connaissance par corps*) in the sense of the body as "felt from inside as opening, energy, tension or desire, and also strength, connivance and familiarity" (133). The living body is not reducible to *res extensa*; it is at once comprehended by the world and comprehending of the world, more than a mere cog in the social mechanism and other than pure rationality. Pascal: "Two excesses: to exclude reason, to admit nothing but reason" (*Pensées* 55) (183/172/253).

Bourdieu's great innovation lay in his radical revision, and expansion, of Marx's concept of capital to include cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, as well as economic capital.<sup>6</sup> Education and credentials;

networks of connection through family, clan, or associates; the prestige that comes in the guise of “glory, honour, credit, reputation, fame” (*Pascalian* 166)<sup>7</sup>—all these are capital in the sense of a value the possession and accumulation of which can produce more value. What Bourdieu means by social space are the arenas within which individuals and groups are positioned relative to one another in relation to the value or form of capital at stake in that particular arena. In *Pascalian Meditations*, he divulges a central tenet of his work, a tenet that the bulk of his devotees and detractors would be unlikely to associate with him, divulged in a parenthesis no less. He explains how sociological analysis needs to proceed via “a social topology”:

(the very one which provided the object for my book *Distinction*, and which, it can be seen, is very far from the misreading of that work—no doubt on the basis of the title alone and despite what is expressly stated within—according to which the quest for distinction is the principle of all human behaviours). (134)

“The quest for distinction is the *principle* of *all* human behaviours”—this amounts to an anthropological universal. No matter the form of social organization, there are forms of capital which the participants, whether individuals or groups, strive to acquire relative to other individuals and groups. Tacit in all Bourdieu’s work, in my view, is a dialectic of *cooperation* and *competition*. For there, to be a form of capital there must be an implicit acknowledgment among the (socialized) participants of what it is, its value, and the means and rules for acquiring it. The cooperation sets the terms of the competition. Bourdieu’s favored metaphor for the means and rules is a game. The cooperation-competition dialectic informs his earliest work as ethnographer and anthropologist, as he challenged the primacy of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s model of kinship exchange by examining matrimonial strategies in premodern societies, strategies pursued not merely to effect an exchange but to gain advantage and prestige.<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu is quite disingenuous in attributing the neglect of the cooperation-competition dialectic to misreadings of *Distinction*. Readers would surely have taken the title to refer to a universal striving for advantage and recognition rather than a rigid structure of hierarchy and unearned privilege, had Bourdieu successfully and “expressly stated” the thesis.

Within this framework, though, lies Bourdieu’s profoundest kinship with Pascal, as he derives a sociological analysis from the concept of *diversissement*. His social topology designates the prize in any particular social space as the *illusio*, defined as “the fundamental belief in the interest of the game [*jeu*] and the value of the stakes [*enjeux*] which is inherent in that membership [*appartenance*].” Of particular concern are those social spaces he calls “fields of cultural production”: “Taking part in the *illusio*—scien-

tific, literary, philosophical or other—means taking seriously (sometimes to the point of making them questions of life and death) stakes which, arising from the logic of the game itself, establish its ‘seriousness,’ even if they may escape or appear ‘disinterested’ or ‘gratuitous’ to those who are sometimes called ‘lay people’ [*les ‘profanes’*] or those who are engaged in other fields (since the independence of the different fields entails a form of noncommunicability between them)” (*Pascalian* 11). In Latin, *illusio* means illusion but also irony or mocking. Both meanings seem at play here: a particular game’s stakes are the participants’ illusion to the extent that nonparticipants may view the commitment to the game with mockery or irony. There is a certain absurdity in “a decision to ‘commit oneself’ to scientific or artistic life (as in any other of the fundamental investments of life—vocation, passion, devotion)” (11). Pascal says the hunter, the billiard player, or scholar “must create some target for his passions and then arouse his desire, anger, fear, for this object he has created, just like children taking fright at a face they have daubed themselves” (*Pensées* 41) (136/126/168).

In Bourdieu’s terms, “The process of differentiation of the social world which leads to the existence of autonomous fields concerns both being and knowledge.... The principle of vision and division and the mode of knowledge (religious, philosophical, juridical, scientific, artistic, etc.)...can only be known and understood in relation to the specific legality of that field as a social microcosm” (*Pascalian* 99). Bourdieu’s understanding of such legality draws on Pascal’s thesis that all law is arbitrary: “Custom is the whole of equity for the sole reason that it is accepted. It is the mystic basis of its authority. Anyone who tries to bring it back to its first principle destroys it.... [I]t is law and nothing more” (*Pensées* 17) (60/56/294). Bourdieu transposes the Pascalian vision of fallen humanity and its restless, relentless *divertissement* into sociological categories: “Arbitrariness is also the basis of all fields, even the ‘purest’ ones like the worlds of art or science. Each of them has its ‘fundamental law,’ its *nomos* (a word that is normally translated as ‘law’ and would be better rendered as ‘constitution,’ a term which better recalls the arbitrary act of institution, or as ‘principle of vision and division,’ which is closer to the etymology)” (*Pascalian* 96). Ungroundedness is thus construed as arbitrariness and so is understood negatively with reference to a missing objective or transcendental foundation. Does the theorist committed to the social sciences’ particular *nomos* and *illusio* secretly yearn for such a foundation? Does reflexive sociology harbor an unstated corollary to Pascal’s absolutes?

It is illuminating to contrast Bourdieu and Max Weber, who draws considerable inspiration from Nietzsche and first made the connection

between sociology and nihilism. What Bourdieu will call autonomous fields, Weber in "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions" (1915) defined as those sites of social activity that have broken loose from the link to religion and differentiated their operative norms and principles from religious imperatives and, just as significantly, from one another's norms and principles. He calls these differentiated sites *cultural spheres* or *value spheres* and identifies in particular the economic, the political, the aesthetic, the erotic, and the intellectual spheres. As these differentiations sharpen, modern society increasingly dissolves the religious and mythological bonds of premodern society: "Viewed from a purely ethical point of view, the world has to appear fragmentary and devalued in all instances when judged in light of the religious postulate of a divine 'meaning' of existence" (357). No divine meaning, no inherent or unified meaning whatsoever informs modern society. It becomes polytheistic not only in the sense that individuals must commit to particular, not universally binding values in conducting their lives but also in the sense that each cultural sphere has a distinctive orientation and ethic not necessarily compatible with that of the others.

Bourdieu, too, recognizes nihilism in the sense of the metaphysical absence of "a reason for being." The void is answered by the social world's games: "With investment in a game and the recognition that can come from cooperative competition with others, the social world offers humans that which they most totally lack: a justification for existing." The "anthropological facts" of mortality and its unbearableness render "man...a being without a reason for being, haunted (*habité*) by the need for justification, legitimation, recognition" (*Pascalien* 239). In this light, Bourdieu considers symbolic capital and its distribution to be especially "unequal" and "cruel": "There is no worse dispossession, no worse privation perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to socially recognized being, in a word, humanity," a privation exemplified by "the stigmatized pariah who, like the Jew in Kafka's time, or, now, the black in the ghetto or the Arab or Turk in the working-class suburbs of European cities, bears the curse of a negative symbolic capital" (241).<sup>9</sup>

The characteristic tension in Bourdieu's thought and the affective complexity of his rhetoric are on full display here. He casts an emphatically cold and realistic eye on the ineluctable fact of human existence that the "symbolic struggle for recognition" is the "*social fiction*" (*Pascalien* 243) without which we would stare, immobilized, into the abyss of meaninglessness; symbolic capital is a value in the service of making life livable, a fiction he delineates with pointed irony and mockery. At the same time, he decries with pathos and protest the inequities and suffering caused by the "cooperative competition with others" for this *illusio*.

Bourdieu's prose vibrates between these two poles, the analytical-ironic gaze on the unalterable conditions of human existence and the impassioned appeal for an alteration of the games played. Unlike Marx, he does not postulate a fulcrum point at which the existing social totality could be overturned into a new totality; the multiple forms of capital and the plurality of fields of cooperation-competition preclude the revolutionary posture. Bourdieu speaks instead of "the margin of freedom" afforded by modern society's games whose "structures," rules and means, *nomos* and *illusio*, the participants have always already internalized but which are "open...to several interpretations" by "the agents, whose sense of the game can express itself or be expressed in various ways or recognize itself in various expressions" (235). And yet, there is always the sense of Bourdieu's dissatisfaction with such attenuated declarations of possibility. The limits and uncertainties of enlightened progressive transformation of the social world, as he himself describes that world, chafe against his thinking and his passions.

In "Science as Vocation" (1919) Weber stresses that the scholarly vocation's commitment to science (*Wissenschaft*) presupposes that its results are something *worth being known*, but that "this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. It can only be *interpreted* with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position towards life" (143). Every discipline can organize its respective field of inquiry in a methodologically consistent manner—what Weber calls intellectualization and rationalization—but it cannot *by those same methods* or by any scientific-scholarly procedure prove that the sphere of inquiry itself is worthwhile. For example, "aesthetics does not ask whether there *should* be works of art.... Juridical thought holds when certain legal rules and certain models of interpretation are recognized as binding. Whether there should be law and whether one should establish just these rules—such questions jurisprudence does not answer" (144). The same holds true for the disciplines that engage Weber himself (as well as Bourdieu): "sociology, history, economics, political science, and those types of cultural philosophy that make it their task to interpret these sciences" (145). His widely misunderstood distinction of fact and value is based on the notion that the methodologies of the social sciences enable the study of values as social facts but do not in themselves authorize affirming or negating particular values. That is, there is not a social-scientific means of grounding adherence to any particular value analyzed social-scientifically. The value the social scientist commits to is...to distinguish facts and values.

Bourdieu neither rejects nor embraces the Weberian distinction. He attempts to evade it. Not only does he tout the superiority of sociology

over philosophy and all other modes of inquiry but he grants it the unique power to understand its own and all other disciplines' social and epistemological ground: "the anthropological sciences are condemned to make their goal not only knowledge of an object, like the natural sciences, but knowledge of the knowledge—practical or scientific—of a given object of knowledge, and indeed of any possible object of knowledge.... They have no choice but to strive to know the modes of knowledge, and to know them historically, to historicize them, while subjecting to historical critique the very knowledge that they apply to them" (*Pascalian* 83). Unlike Macbeth, he does not see that "vaulting ambition / o'erleaps itself." The extravagances—even leaving aside the histrionic evocation of burden in being "condemned to" and having "no choice but to"—betray his thought's aspiration to extricate itself from the very condition of human knowledge that Pascal as well as Weber recognizes.

Blanchot marks the paradox that "Pascal does not condemn diversion because he knows that the thought explaining and judging this movement already belongs to the vicissitudes of a diverted life" (*Infinite* 97). Blanchot refers here to the passage in *Pensées* where Pascal, having enumerated various "vain" diversions, adds, "Then there are others who exhaust themselves observing all these things, not in order to become wiser, but just to show they know them, and these are the biggest fools of the lot, because they know what they are doing, while it is conceivable that the rest would stop being so foolish if they knew too" (40) (136/126/168). Bourdieu's self-serving polemics frequently provoke *ad hominem* criticisms, but those criticisms easily miss the complexity of his rhetoric and motives. Let's address Blanchot's question, now with regard to Bourdieu, concerning the passion by which a writer and thinker experiences thinking and writing. Bourdieu's own quest for glory is shadowed by a suppressed but palpable sense of guilt, since the intellectual achievement on which he stakes his striving for recognition and glory is nothing other than his own double thesis that human existence is meaningless and the prime means of countering that meaninglessness, namely, the striving for recognition and glory, is at once illusory and unjust. That is the unresolvable existential reflexivity that his claims for theoretical reflexivity attempt to vault over. The *illusio* that Bourdieu postulates as his discipline's prize is a reflexivity transcending all other games, a kind of meta-*illusio*. In this he does not fully relinquish the aspiration established by Marx for theory to dictate practice. As a result, he butts his head against an invisible wall within anthropology and sociology themselves. These modern disciplines delineate, often with great precision, social hierarchies and structures of difference, inequality, rank, privilege, dominance, and so on, and

thus tacitly allude to some hypothetical benchmark of equality. But this implied equality is not only hypothetical and abstract, it is conceptually empty. The sociological or anthropological categories cannot in themselves define or prescribe what would practically and meaningfully constitute “equality” within a given set of social relations, for that is not the work of social theory but of politics, the ungrounded realm of differences and strife among the participants in the body politic.

Bourdieu falls short of Weber’s insight that the political realm is, in the same sense as modernity’s other cultural spheres, relatively autonomous and endowed with its own values and exigencies, vocational ethos, and ethical contradictions.<sup>10</sup> There is no meta-*illusio*. Modernity unleashes what Weber called a new “polytheism” in which “the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other” (147). Bourdieu ultimately recoils at the prospect of polytheism and plurality. He wants to master the uncertain strife and the proliferation of *illusiones* by granting his particular game superiority over all others. Both social theorists expressed in a unique manner the anxiety induced by the nihil around which modernity unwinds. Weber saw the continual specialization and fragmentation of knowledge as inexorable, and his worry was that that combination of value-commitment and passion, which for him defined vocation as having a calling, was being hollowed out: “nothing is worthy of man as man unless he can pursue it with passionate devotion” (137). The pathos of Bourdieu’s thought lies in its nearly desperate desire to fuse unflappable lucidity toward life’s intrinsic valuelessness and impassioned persuasiveness against injustices within existing social spaces. These theorists’ anxieties reflect something essential in the philosophers from whom they, respectively, drew guidance. Weber senses that the fragmentation and wearing down of supreme values might simply give rise to Nietzsche’s “last man” who, like the crowd in the marketplace in the fable of the death of God, accepts the material comforts of modern society and gets along quite nicely without value, passion, or calling, while Bourdieu struggles, as does Pascal, with the impossibility of gathering the absolute, the tragic, and the worldly into a single, unified vision.

Neither Nietzsche nor Bourdieu, any more than Pascal, despite their lucidity in seeing the void at the heart of modern existence, can ultimately relinquish the search for some absolute, some transcendent stance, some meta-game. They attempt to overshoot, and so fall short of, the orientation Vattimo finds in those rare moments where Nietzsche asserts the value of moderation in the sense of “those who have no *need* of extreme articles of faith, who not only concede but even love a good deal of contingency and nonsense.” Nihilism is not to be overcome but affirmed as the force dissolv-

ing authoritative interpretations of being. Since interpretation takes place in the form of dialogue, ontological inquiry is decidedly open, unfinished, unending. It is, in Blanchot's words, an infinite conversation. Infinity is not human beings' becoming-miniscule but becoming-plural, a plurality that needs to be ever on guard against interpretations claiming absolute authority. It is striking that Blanchot, for all the severity of his prose and paradoxical thinking, not to mention his bursts of political extremism, far right in the 1930s and far left from 1968, might well exemplify this Nietzschean moderation. For his own engagement with the question of nihilism proceeds, as we saw, with the warning of "the kind of trap nihilism is" if approached "head on." Likewise he recommends "prudence" and being "circumspect" regarding the "provocative notions" of "a new turning of being" that Ernst Jünger evokes in his homage to Heidegger, "Across the Line" (1949). Neither Jünger's image of crossing, as at the equator, from nihilism to something new nor Heidegger's qualification that the end is as yet undecided appeals to Blanchot. He is wary of demarcation lines: "We speak of man's passage through the critical zone, but man is not simply a passerby who would have only a geographical relation with what he crosses; he does not merely hold himself in this zone, he is himself, though not by or for himself alone, this zone and this line" (*Infinite* 150). In an imagined dialogue on the nature of epochal change, the question, "Will you allow as a certainty that we are at a turning point?" is answered, "If it is a certainty it is not a turning" (264). There is prudence and circumspection in Blanchot's unremitting, though understated reserve toward all absolutes metaphysical, literary, or ethical. It is one of the highest values in the art of criticism as he practices it. It allows the singularity of each of the many writers and thinkers to whom he devotes essays to percolate up through the apparent singlemindedness and tonal steadfastness of his own prose. And is his favoring of the fragmentary over the totalizing in Nietzsche's writing not a covert affirmation of polytheism and plurality?

I am inclined to give Nietzsche the last, or almost last, word in the form of the praise-song to polytheism in *The Gay Science* (§143): "In polytheism the free-spiriting and many-spiriting of man attained its first preliminary form—the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes—and ever again new eyes that are even more our own: hence man alone among all animals has no eternal horizons and perspectives" (191). It is not the last word, though, since neither Nietzsche nor Bourdieu, Vattimo, or Blanchot fully grapples with the strife endemic to modern polytheism and the difference between destructive and creative strife—and, indeed, the strife of that difference.

*CUNY Graduate Center and Baruch College*

## Notes

1. See Brenkman, "Nihilism and Belief in Contemporary European Thought."
2. Nietzsche prepares this passage with a crucial insight: "Now, *morality* protected life from despair and from the plunge into nothingness for those men and classes who are violated and oppressed by *men*: for powerlessness against men, *not* powerlessness against nature, is what engenders the most desperate bitterness against existence" (*Writings* 119). In Nietzsche's social diagnosis, once the violated, oppressed, and powerless have "lost all consolation" in morality, they inaugurate the cycle of destruction and self-destruction. Presumably, this is how he understood the revolt of the masses in the nineteenth century.
3. See Brenkman, *Mood and Trope*, 170-200.
4. See Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation*.
5. The first parenthesis gives the page number and the second parenthesis refers to the fragment numbers in, respectively, the Krailsheimer translation (which uses the Lafuma numbering); the Pléiade edition; and the Brunschvicg numbering (to which Bourdieu refers).
6. See Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."
7. Bourdieu approvingly cites Pascal on the vileness and the excellence of the "quest for glory": "For whatever possession [man] may own on earth, whatever essential amenity he may enjoy, he is dissatisfied unless he enjoys the good opinion of his fellows [*l'estime des hommes*]" (*Pensées* 151) (470/435/404).
8. See Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.
9. In the preceding pages, Bourdieu draws on Joseph K's predicament in *The Trial* to illustrate his idea that power relations involve a dominance over the determination of time: "A person can be durably 'held' (so that he can be made to wait, hope, etc.) only to the extent that he is invested in the game so that the complicity of his dispositions can in a sense be counted on" (*Pascalian* 231).
10. See Weber, "Politics as Vocation," *From Max Weber*, 77-128.

## Works Cited

- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Infinite Conversation*. Translated by Susan Hanson, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- . *The Space of Literature*. Translated by Ann Smock, University of Nebraska Press, 1982.
- . *The Work of Fire*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell, Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J.G. Richardson, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 241-58.
- . *Méditations pascaliennes*. Éditions du Seuil, 1997.
- . *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- . *Pascalian Meditations*. Translated by Richard Nice, Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Brenkman, John. *Mood and Trope: The Rhetoric and Poetics of Affect*. University of Chicago Press, 2020.
- . "Nihilism and Belief in Contemporary European Thought." *New German Critique*, no. 119, Summer 2013, pp. 1-29.
- Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 1966. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1989.
- . *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1974.
- . *On the Genealogy of Morals, and Ecce Homo*. 1967. Edited by Walter Kaufmann and translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books, 1989.
- . *Thus Spoke Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche*. 1954. Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann, Penguin Books, 1976.

- . *The Will to Power*. Edited by Walter Kaufmann and translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books, 1968.
- . *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Edited by Rüdiger Bittner and translated by Kate Sturge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Pascal, Blaise. *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2. Edited by Michel Le Guern, Éditions Gallimard, 2000.
- . *Pensées*. Translated by A.J. Krailsheimer, Revised Edition, Penguin Books, 1995.
- Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- . *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. *Philosophical Temperaments: From Plato to Foucault*. Translated by Thomas Dunlap, Columbia University Press, 2013.
- Vattimo, Gianni. *Dialogue with Nietzsche*. Translated by William McCuaig, Columbia University Press, 2006.
- . *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*. Translated by Jon R. Snyder, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.
- . *Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, Law*. Edited by Santiago Zabala and translated by William McCuaig, Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited and translated by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Oxford University Press, 1946.